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CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

THE PROBLEM, THE PARTICIPANTS, THE PANACEA.

**A Capstone in Education with a
Concentration in Educational Leadership**

**Markenya L. Williams
Doctor of Education**

**DePaul University
College of Education**

**© 2020 Markenya L. Williams
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Education
August 2020**

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Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this capstone. Any assistance received in the preparation of this capstone has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this capstone according program guidelines as directed.

Author Signature  Date 7.28.20

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study will examine some of the historical challenges and barriers of chronic absenteeism that has plagued the United States K-12th grade educational system for several centuries. The brutal impact that chronic absenteeism has on students' academic achievement, the school, community, and society will also be described and categorized by various demographics and subgroups. Additionally, the primary stakeholders for overcoming chronic absenteeism will be identified; interventions and accountability measures will also be explored. Furthermore, this study will analyze the current attendance policies/procedures of five school districts from a large Midwestern state, with similar demographics and varying chronic absenteeism rates. Practical strategies and recommendations to reduce chronic absenteeism will be organized into an action plan for districts and schools to implement in highly accountable, inclusive, & cost-efficient manners.

Keywords: chronic absenteeism, truancy, academic achievement, accountability, attendance policy, stakeholders, incentives, family involvement.

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DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this research to my family, friends, and mentors. The strength that flows through our veins is potent, life-giving, and boundless. We must continue to persevere, excel, and change the world around us so that the future can be enhanced for those who are coming behind us.

I dedicate this study to my fellow educators. Your work is not in vain! Our students, staff, families, and the community need you. Keep showing up, giving your best, refining your practice, and never stop learning. The seeds that you plant today will indefinitely grow tomorrow, bigger, stronger, brighter, and better.

I dedicate this research to students. I believe in you, and you are destined for greatness! The challenges that you face today will empower you to defeat giants tomorrow. You are bigger than this current moment, and I am committed to ensuring that you are equipped with everything that you need to lead us through the 21st Century triumphantly. Continue to grow, seek support, and never give up. You matter, your talents are needed, and you are so loved.

I dedicate this study to parents and caregivers. You are not alone! Your presence, experiences, talents, and voice matters. The school community is a place of refuge, and there are resources available to assist you during challenging times. Keep persevering; the storm will soon pass.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

School absenteeism is multifaced, complex, and prevalent within the United States' K - 12th grade settings, and it has a tremendous impact on students' educational outcomes. Many factors contribute to absenteeism, and the reasons vary by states, districts, and schools. However, absenteeism negatively impacts students' academic performance regardless of the number of days that are missed, and despite the patterns of absenteeism that exists among individual students. García & Weiss (2018) conducted a study to provide a national estimate of the negative impact that school absenteeism has on academic performance. The study revealed that academic performance gaps were wider the more frequent students were absent. Students who missed 3-10 days of school or more per month had an academic performance gap that varied between 0.3 standard deviations (SD) to 2/3 SD on standardized assessments compared to students who did not miss any days of school. Additionally, students who were absent 1-2 days a month had an academic performance gap of approximately 0.10 SD on standardized assessments compared to students who had perfect attendance. Furthermore, Nauer (2016) specified that inconsistent attendance patterns can impact children's' reading proficiency levels and retention status by third grade.

The correlation between school absenteeism and academic performance is problematic for all students. However, the degree and impact that absenteeism has on students vary across student subgroups. These subgroups are often classified by students' disabilities, race, gender, socioeconomic status (SES,) ethnicity, or English Language Lerner's (ELL) acquisition. It is critical to examine why students are absent in an effort to address the influences that cause absenteeism (García & Weiss 2018). Even though this problem is prevalent throughout the U.S. the focused attention that is needed to overcome this issue has been substantially inadequate (Goldstein, Little, & Akin-Little, 2003). Historically, very few schools monitored whether individual students were missing extended periods of school, regardless if the absence was excused or unexcused. Traditionally, schools often tracked how many students attended school each day or they only tracked unexcused absences (Chang, 2010).

Although test scores and daily average attendance rates were accessible to stakeholders, chronic absenteeism (CA) data was not assessed or requested, which sometimes revealed that a quarter or more of students within one school were not regularly attending (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Consequently, the presence of sizeable numbers of chronically absent students were often hidden (Chang, 2010). There are stages to CA, and truancy is often the final stage (Reid, 2012). If absenteeism is not rectified in the primary grades, the problem only gets worse as students matriculate through elementary, middle, and high school (Chang & Jordan, 2012).

The reduction of school absenteeism has driven recent educational reform efforts and initiatives at the national level. Policymakers and educators have based their initiatives and research around the ideology that better attendance produces better scores on standardized achievement tests. This assumption is indeed, correct. However, without assessing any data from standardized test scores, CA is the greatest predictor of grade retention, suspensions, and dropout

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rates among K-12th grade students (Robinson, Lee, Dearing, & Rogers, 2018). When the adequate amount of focus is given to unpack the CA crisis that plagues our country, then we can collectively develop systems of support and plans of action to eliminate the problem, identify the participants, and create an effective panacea.

“Poor student attendance has far reaching effects on the individual, the school, and society in general” (Goldstein, Little, & Akin-Little, 2003, p. 127). Kearney (2003) indicated that the terminology and study of school absenteeism has grown and evolved; however, clear, concise definitions have become more fractured as researchers across varying disciplines attempt to define this challenging problem. School absenteeism is the primary factor that links to performance disparities among students, per the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). Additionally, absenteeism rates have been proportionately recognized as a crisis by the DOE (Goldstein et al., 2003). This capstone project seeks to explore the barriers that have contributed to CA, and the impact that it has had on the nation’s K-12th grade educational system for over a century. Additionally, key stakeholders will be identified, and practical action steps to reduce CA will be recommended.

Definitions

Chronic absenteeism (CA): Excessive excused or unexcused absences that total 10% or more school days within an academic school year (Fitzpatrick, 2013; ISBE, 2015).

Truancy: Excessive unexcused absences that total 10% or more school days during one academic year (Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Excused absence: A formal absence that is temporary and does not propose harm to children and has been agreed upon by school districts and parents/caregivers as a legitimate or valid cause absence (Kearney 2003; ISBE, 2015).

Unexcused absence: A full or partial day absence that has not been recognized by districts as a valid cause (ISBE, 2015).

Valid cause: Absences that occur due to illness, religious holiday observance, an immediate family members death, family emergency, situations beyond the students’ control as determined by districts, or other parental concerns that cause reasonable anxieties regarding the students’ safety, emotional, mental, or physical health (ISBE, 2015).

NCLB: The name of the updated Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which became federal law in 2002, was called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB.) This law required states to place a specialized focus on underperforming groups of students such as minorities, English language learners, special education students, and students who lived in poverty, in an effort to close the achievement gap. Although states did not have to observe this mandate, Title I funding would be lost if they did not comply (Education Week, 2011).

ESSA: This federal law replaced the NCLB act in 2015. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates states to project annual school performance indicators. These indicators must include and identify academic measures for standardized tests, low performing schools, high school graduation rates, and one measure of student success or school quality, formally known as the SQSS (Bauer et al., 2018).

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School quality or student success indicator (SQSS): An accountability measure under ESSA, that states independently choose, to identify the quality of schools or the success of students (Bauer et al., 2018).

Title I: Part A of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act which was revised under ESSA. Title I allocates financial assistance to states for students who have been identified as low-income. These funds are designed to help ensure that all students meet their state's academic standards. Four grants are used to allocate Title I dollars: basic grants, concentration grants, targeted grants, and education finance incentive grants. All of these grants contain individualized, specific criteria for districts to qualify for Title I funds (NCES, 2019).

Low income students (LIS): Students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program (FRL). Typically, these students are recipients of Title I funds (NCES, 2019).

Student subgroups: Students who are labeled as minorities, English language learners (ELL,) special education, low income, or homeless. Many of these students often qualify for Title I funds (García & Weiss, 2018; NCES, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Historical Perspectives of Chronic Absenteeism

This literature review will highlight the issues and challenges that are related to the complex problem of chronic absenteeism (CA) within the United States (U.S.) K-12th grade educational system; and intervention strategies will also be explored. First, CA will be defined, and the historical perspective will be described. Next, the impact of CA, and some of the barriers and challenges for overcoming CA will be highlighted. Lastly, CA initiatives and preventions will be discussed. CA and truancy have similar yet distinct meanings. In fact, there are stages to CA, and truancy is often the final stage (Reid, 2012).

CA is often defined as excessive excused or unexcused absences that total 10% or more school days within an academic school year; whereas truancy is defined as excessive unexcused absences (Fitzpatrick, 2013; ISBE, 2015). The complex problem of school absenteeism has been studied for well over a century. It has piqued the interests of professionals from diverse backgrounds, including, but not limited to, psychologists, physicians, social workers, and educators. However, division has erected among these diverse professionals from elite backgrounds because of their different fundamental concepts, definitions, treatments, and assessments for absenteeism. Unfortunately, this division of perspectives and remedies has often stagnated solutions for combating absenteeism (Kearney, 2003). In fact, the national crisis of CA within the K-12th grade public educational setting has not been fully understood until recent years (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

There are several historical factors that have contributed to school absenteeism since the 19th century. During the 19th century European countries and the U.S. began to mandate and enact laws that required adolescents to attend school instead of working. This need grew out of a desire to maintain social order and produce competent citizens. Therefore, child labor laws and compulsory education were instituted as increased immigration, industrialization, and urbanization surfaced. Absenteeism quickly became a severe social and behavioral concern as the compulsory education movement gained momentum. Authors during the 19th century that wrote about the escalating school absenteeism crises were primarily from the psychology and education field. These authors often blended psychological and legal definitions to express their concerns about absenteeism, and they often defaulted to the word truancy. Typically, during this era, truancy was often defined as an absence from school that was willful and unlawful without the consent or approval of parents. Authors also associated truancy with lower intelligence, delinquency, peer pressure, challenging school environments, poor parenting, and lack of motivation (Kearney, 2003).

The issue of CA and truancy has been at the core of school reform policies for several decades (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016). However, it is assumed that students are present every day except for special crisis' or events, occasional doctor's visits, and brief family vacations and compulsory education laws support this expectation (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). For the past twenty-five years, the standards and accountability movement has attempted to magnify the

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declaration that every day of school truly matters. Attendance studies have been utilized as a predictor of academic achievement; however, researchers have not regarded it as a tool to transform and improve schools (Nauer, 2016). Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) highlighted the horrendous state that our nation was in academically because of the negligence that existed for measuring and addressing CA throughout the decades by school leaders. For years, test scores and daily average attendance rates were readily available to parents and community members via school report cards, which are often accessible on districts' and states' websites. However, these same stakeholders were not privy to the CA data, which sometimes revealed that a quarter or more of students within one school were not regularly attending. It is essential that researchers, clinicians, and educators work together to develop a comprehensive plan of action to address the harsh brutality of absenteeism (Kearney, 2003).

The Impact, Barriers, and Challenges, of Chronic Absenteeism

The impact of CA is profound in the U.S. Chronically absent students in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are less likely to be able to be on grade level for reading by the third grade. Furthermore, students who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Goldstein et al. (2003) highlighted that the lack of consistent classroom attendance is one of the dominant barriers to learning that students and teachers face in the U.S. The DOE has acknowledged that school absenteeism is the primary factor that links to performance disparities among students. Additionally, absenteeism rates have been proportionally recognized as a crisis by the DOE (Fitzpatrick, 2013). The crises of CA do not only impact students who are chronically absent or who originate from low SES backgrounds, but it impacts the entire learning community (Kearney, 2003). When students who are frequently absent return to school, teachers' attention is usually diverted to these students, to assist them with learning the content that was missed while absent. Therefore, the academic performance for all students can be impacted by a few students who are chronically absent (Chang, 2010). The correlation between students' achievement and CA is strong. Research has shown that the more frequent students are in school, the greater their academic success will be (Fitzpatrick, 2013).

García & Weiss (2018) conducted a study to provide a national estimate of the negative impact that school absenteeism has on academic performance. The study revealed that academic performance gaps were wider the more frequent students were absent. Students who missed 3-10 days of school or more per month had an academic performance gap that varied between 0.3 standard deviations (SD) to 2/3 SD on standardized assessments compared to students who did not miss any days of school. Additionally, students who were absent 1-2 days a month had an academic performance gap of approximately 0.10 SD on standardized assessments compared to students who had perfect attendance. Even though this problem is prevalent throughout the U.S. the focused attention that is needed to overcome this issue has been substantially inadequate (Goldstein et al., 2003).

Although there is a strong correlation between student achievement and CA, several decades passed before the federal government instituted a school reform law that attempted to

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address the widening achievement gap that often included chronically absent students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was updated in 2002 by the federal government. This updated federal law was called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB.) This law required states to place a specialized focus on underperforming groups of students such as minorities, English language learners (ELL,) special education students, and students who lived in poverty, in an effort to close the achievement gap. Although states did not have to observe this mandate, Title I funds would be lost if they did not comply (Education Week, 2011). The accountability structures of the NCLB school reform act was then changed under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. These new structures empowered states to implement and design their individualized accountability systems. Under ESSA, federal law mandates that states project annual school performance indicators. These indicators must include and identify academic measures for standardized tests, low performing schools, high school graduation rates, and one measure of student success or school quality (SQSS). Thirty-six states chose to adopt CA as their SQSS indicator. Identifying CA as the SQSS gives states, districts, and schools authentic opportunities to address and lower CA, improve academic achievement, and increase high school graduation rates (Bauer, Schanzenbach, Shamburgh, & Brookings Institution, 2018).

This mandate appears to be quite transparent. However, many states are still toiling over the definition of CA (full or half day absences,) and effective tracking methods. Under ESSA, federal dollars can be utilized by states to further develop trainings and effective plans to address the critical component of CA (Adams, 2017). Historically, monitoring absenteeism data has been overlooked by policymakers and educators. Truancy has been clearly defined and analyzed; however, a concise system for tracking and recording CA remains unsolved. Principals have been aware of students' attendance data, but they often regarded tracking it as another task that created more paperwork for them, or they perceived it as an additional operational issue (Nauer, 2016; London et al., 2016).

Attendance has been viewed as a fixed trait, such as income levels, race, or ethnicity (Nauer, 2016). However, during the 2013-14 school year (SY,) the DOE's data records revealed that approximately ninety-eight million school days were missed due to CA; and a combined total of three weeks of schooling were missed approximately for every seventh student in K-12 public institutions. Subsequently, during the 2015-16 SY, thirty percent of students in nearly eight hundred districts nationwide reported that their students missed at least three weeks of school. These same students are at enormously high risks of being below grade level expectations and eventually dropping out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, approximately 11% of kindergartners nationally are suffering from CA. Unfortunately, these are the same students that would have benefited the most from consistent and structured early childhood programs (Ehrlich, Gwynne, Allensworth, Fatani, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2016). Fitzpatrick (2013) stated that the patterns of absenteeism that develops during the early childhood years are often detrimental to later academic achievement and success. When children have excessive absences, developmental and learning experiences are negatively impacted and often lost. Also, when young children indulge in CA, it is often harder to reverse or alter these habits. Young children are dependent on adults to transport them to and from school; therefore, if school attendance is not valued during the early childhood years, students are more likely to become truant during their adolescent years. Unfortunately, CA is most rampant among low income students (LIS) who are recipients of Title I funds (NCES, 2019).

Many LIS and families bear the burdens of unreliable transportation, violence in the community, insufficient access to quality health care, and low paying jobs with nontraditional work hours and limited flexibility on their jobs. Unfortunately, these extreme barriers negatively impact LIS' daily attendance (Chang & Romero, 2008). Certainly, these are the same students who benefit the most from being in school daily. In fact, one of the most effective strategies for overcoming poverty is to commission students who live in poverty-stricken communities to attend school daily. This act alone, even without any transformational or qualitative improvements in the nation's public education system, will increase academic achievement, high school graduation and college attainment rates, which will inevitably enhance students' social progression and economic stability (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Preventions and Initiatives for Combating Chronic Absenteeism

Chang (2010) declared that overcoming CA is possible, and it can be substantially reduced. Principals must prioritize the analysis of attendance data. Principals must also ensure that all staff members are aware of school-based initiatives to reduce CA, and they must also monitor the active participation and support of initiatives from all staff members. The partnerships that principals forge with staff, families, and community members to promote and monitor attendance initiatives can also eradicate the barriers that often hinder students from attending school daily. Disengagement and dropout rates are minimized when absenteeism is detected early, and intervention methods are implemented intentionally, consistently, and effectively (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012).

CA decreases when schools and communities actively and consistently communicate to all students and their parents the importance of coming to school daily. Schools must reach out to families when students begin to show patterns of excessive absences, excused or unexcused (Chang & Romero, 2008). Family engagement and involvement are also critical components for students' academic success and consistent attendance. Schools must consciously reflect on the practices and strategies that are implemented for involving parents throughout their child's academic journey. Schools must understand the dynamic role that families have on combating CA. When schools intentionally and consistently connect with families, absenteeism is minimized, and student achievement is maximized (McConnell & Kubina 2014).

Family connections and interventions can be made in meaningful ways, especially during the early childhood years, even without abundant monetary provisions. The power of early childhood programs and experiences can minimize CA once students enter K-12th grade settings. Early childhood programs and experiences help to support and establish routines for families who may struggle in this area while overcoming their unfortunate realities (Chang & Romero, 2008). Research has revealed that small, direct interventions such as phone calls have been powerful, cost efficient strategies for connecting with families, and preventing CA (McConnell & Kubina 2014). Early intervention is vital to the reduction of CA, and transformations can be made. However, educators must be aware of the stages of absenteeism, in order to intervene strategically and timely. Early interventions have been proven to be far more successful than later interventions which are usually retroactive and ineffective (Reid 2012).

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Schools must consistently implement incentive programs and engagement opportunities as measures to minimize CA and truancy. When students are not captured by the atmosphere within the school, distractions outside of school will certainly influence them and draw them away. Research has revealed that students who lack peer connections, student-staff relationships, participation, and involvement within the school building, will inevitably struggle with low academic achievement, poor attendance, and ultimately drop out. Instructional leaders must consistently implement incentive programs and engagement opportunities as measures to minimize CA and truancy (Cole, 2011). Motivating students through incentives should not be viewed as costly expenditures. Creative and meaningful incentives can be implemented within all schools, especially those suffering from budget deficits. Additional recess time, out of uniform days, homework passes, weekend dances, and extra technology periods are all examples of strategic incentives that are cost efficient and extremely impactful. Increasing students' accountability among their peers and incorporating their unique feedback for incentive ideas can be powerful tools to implement when designing incentive programs (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Furthermore, the campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the National Civic League incorporates strategic intervention models for cities to aid in decreasing CA and to support the belief that all children can be fluent readers by the end of third grade. As a nation, we must develop effective practices for overcoming absenteeism. School attendance directly impacts our ability to thrive and succeed as a nation. Students who are in attendance develop lifelong skills that ultimately empowers them to become global leaders. Highly educated young people lead to the overall improvement of the economy, safe, wealthy neighborhoods, and superb school districts (Chang & Jordan, 2011).

Once we involve all stakeholders: teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, administrators, board members, community members, local officials, and especially the students, CA can be resolved. Additionally, through consistent monitoring, interventions, and timely data analysis CA can be significantly reduced, if not altogether eliminated. We all understand the impact of CA, but we must work together harmoniously to overcome it (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013). There are numerous variables and correlations that are dominant factors for students with poor attendance. However, if we wait until students become truant, to intervene, we have already been defeated. Preventative measure must proactively be in place in order to effectively combat absenteeism, and these measures are often rooted in relationships (Maynard, Salas-Wright, Vaughn, & Peters, 2012).

When students believe and feel that the adults in their world, particularly within the school community, care and are concerned about them they are inclined to attend, perform, and achieve. Students must be assured that they matter. If students possess a bond with teachers and school staff members, they are less likely to misbehave, have chronic absences, and become truant. Students must have connections with the adults in the building, as a result, student's engagement and attendance will increase. However, if these connections are minimal or non-existent students will not attend, and nothing will keep them engaged within the school community. Relationships are essential (Marvul, 2012). No longer can we look at CA as an insurmountable mountain, but rather a challenge that can be conquered through the identification of barriers, strategic monitoring, effective interventions, and collaborative partnerships (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013).

Conclusion

CA and truancy have been at the core of school reform policies for several decades (London et al., 2016). Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) highlighted the horrendous state that our nation was in academically because of the negligence that existed for measuring and addressing CA throughout the decades by school leaders. They also analyzed CA data within the K-12th grade public school settings, and they compared this crisis to the widespread function of bacteria in a hospital. Simply stated, if CA was not addressed, school reform efforts would never come to fruition, and all efforts that were put in place to increase student achievement would be in vain.

Additionally, Goldstein et al. (2003) echoed that student absenteeism is a significant problem confronting schools across America. Even though this problem is prevalent in the U.S., the focused attention that is needed to overcome this issue has been substantially inadequate and overlooked by policymakers. Furthermore, London et al. (2016) stated that when children have excessive absences, developmental and learning experiences are negatively impacted and often lost.

This reality is concerning, considering the massive efforts that are initiated for improving schools, which is contingent on the assumption that students regularly attend school (Nauer, 2016). However, during the 2015-16 SY, thirty percent of students in nearly eight hundred districts nationwide reported that their students missed at least three weeks of school. Consequently, these same students are at enormously high risks of being below grade level expectations and eventually dropping out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The impact that dropouts have within communities is enormous. Students who leave the safety and security of their school communities and resort to dropping out, often create the most havoc and delinquent acts within these same communities (Henry et al., 2012).

There are major barriers and causes for CA. Therefore, several organizations have been established, such as Attendance Works, to develop best practices, nationally, for effective CA interventions. This organization encourage schools to implement individual and school-wide attendance incentives, create partnerships with local community agencies, communicate immediately and consistently with families the first-day students are absent, incorporate meaningful, engaging, and relevant core curriculums, and create clear data management systems to assist with reviewing and interpreting absenteeism patterns (Spradlin, Cierniak, Shi, Chen, & Indiana University, 2012).

Although many professionals are attempting to define absenteeism, significant discrepancies exist in the research because of the massive overgeneralizations and singular vantage point of researchers. Consequently, a minimal consensus has been acquired to define, assess, and treat the full spectrum of school absenteeism (Kearney, 2003). Historically, CA has troubled our K-12th grade educational system, and many stakeholders have become weary with attempting to resolve this matter. My capstone project will analyze existing attendance policies within a large Midwestern State. My findings and recommendations will add to the body of policy research that identifies strategies for combating CA, by providing school leaders with practical action steps that can be implemented within schools to address CA. These action steps can be implemented regardless of their students' race, gender, SES, IEP/504 plans, ELL acquisition levels, and other variables that sometimes prohibit school communities from moving forward. Our 21st-century

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students rely on us to help their generation overcome CA once and for all so that they can triumphantly lead us to a future filled with equality, innovation, creativity, sustainability, hope, peace, and love. I am hopeful that my capstone project will assist with progressing the K-12th grade education system towards this goal.

PROCESS

Project Design/Method

My capstone project will incorporate the combined qualitative methodologies of action research and document analysis research. The combination of these two distinguished qualitative methodologies should yield the greatest results, outcomes, and practical strategies for combating chronic absenteeism within elementary school settings. Action research is an enhanced qualitative methodology that involves the practitioner instead of researching about the practitioner (Huang, 2010). Action research compliments document analysis research because of its rigorous and systematic methodology for evaluating and coding content from written documents (Wach, Ward, & Jacimovic, 2013).

Problem Statement

The issue of chronic absenteeism (CA) and truancy has been at the core of school reform policies for several decades (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016). Absenteeism rates have been proportionally recognized as a crisis by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Approximately ninety-eight million school days were missed due to CA during the 2013- 14 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). School absenteeism is multifaced, complex, and prevalent within the United States' K - 12th grade settings, and it has a tremendous impact on students' educational outcomes. Many factors contribute to absenteeism, and the reasons vary by states, districts, and schools. However, absenteeism negatively impacts students' academic performance regardless of the number of days that are missed, and despite the patterns of absenteeism that exists among individual students. The correlation between school absenteeism and academic performance is problematic for all students. However, the degree and impact that absenteeism has on students vary across student subgroups (García & Weiss 2018).

CA is the greatest predictor of grade retention, suspensions, and dropout rates among K-12th grade students (Robinson, Lee, Dearing, & Rogers, 2018). Historically, monitoring absenteeism data has been overlooked by policymakers and educators. Additionally, attendance has been viewed as a fixed trait, such as income levels, race, or ethnicity (Nauer, 2016). The need to develop a comprehensive action plan to eradicate CA is urgent. My capstone project will seek to answer the following questions:

1. What key factor impact chronic absenteeism?
2. What policies and systems do districts have in place to decrease chronic absenteeism?
3. Which stakeholders are needed to combat chronic absenteeism?

Research Importance

The crises of CA do not only impact students who are chronically absent or who originate from low SES backgrounds, but it impacts the entire learning community (Kearney, 2003). During the 2015-16 school year, thirty percent of students in nearly eight hundred districts nationwide reported that their students missed at least three weeks of school. Consequently, these same students are at enormously high risks of being below grade level expectations and eventually dropping out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The impact that dropouts have within communities is enormous. Students who leave the safety and security of their school communities and resort to dropping out, often create the most havoc and delinquent acts within these same communities (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012). Furthermore, London et al. (2016) stated that when children have excessive absences, developmental and learning experiences are negatively impacted and often lost.

Nauer (2016) specified that inconsistent attendance patterns can impact children's reading proficiency levels and retention status by third grade. Additionally, Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) highlighted the horrendous state that our nation was in academically because of the negligence that existed for measuring and addressing CA throughout the decades by school leaders. They also analyzed CA data within the K-12th grade public school settings, and they compared this crisis to the widespread function of bacteria in a hospital. Simply stated, if CA is not addressed, school reform efforts would never come to fruition, and all efforts that are put in place to increase student achievement would be in vain. Many professionals are attempting to define absenteeism, significant discrepancies exist in the research because of the massive overgeneralizations and singular vantage point of researchers. Consequently, a minimal consensus has been acquired to define, assess, and treat the full spectrum of school absenteeism (Kearney, 2003).

Historically, CA has troubled our K-12th grade educational system, and many stakeholders have become weary with attempting to resolve this matter. My capstone project will analyze existing attendance policies within a large Midwestern State. My findings and recommendations will add to the body of policy research that identifies strategies for combating CA. I will provide elementary school leaders with an attendance action plan. This action plan will include procedural action steps and metrics of accountability for all stakeholder groups. This action plan can be implemented within any elementary school to address CA regardless of students' race, gender, SES, IEP/504 plans, ELL acquisition levels, and other variables that sometimes prohibit school communities from moving forward. Our 21st-century students rely on us to help their generation overcome CA once and for all so that they can triumphantly lead us to a future filled with equality, innovation, creativity, sustainability, hope, peace, and love. The outcome of this project will be the creation of a procedural attendance action plan that will identify metrics of accountability for all stakeholders and outline practical interventions as strategies to reduce CA.

RATIONALE FOR PROJECT DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

A wide range of interventions and approaches that school leaders can implement within elementary schools to reduce or eliminate chronic absenteeism should emerge because of my capstone project. I believe that the fusion of these two qualitative methodologies, action research and document analysis research, will ultimately provide a greater sense of urgency and perspective for addressing chronic absenteeism. Action research and document analysis research have been implemented for several decades. Both of these qualitative methodologies have been vastly used in the field of education and have yielded phenomenal results. During the 1950s, action research emerged within the social-psychology field. In recent years, this style of research has piqued the interest of educators, social workers, healthcare professionals, and international training. Simultaneously, throughout the years, social scientists have experienced many critiques about the fundamental principles of their methodologies for research, even though their practices have led to many groundbreaking phenomena in higher education. Unfortunately, some critics have also downgraded the impact of conventional social scientists' research findings. However, the methods of action research have complemented the studies of social scientists and other professionals (Huang, 2010).

The core of action research incorporates a reflective problem-solving process that often leads to enhanced academic achievement and improved programs. Action research is uniquely designed for educational settings that need systems of support in a specific area through application and collaboration (Howard & Eckhardt, 2005). Furthermore, collaboration between colleagues who are trying to find solutions for the frequent, everyday problems that they encounter is typically the reason why action research is pursued. Action research empowers practitioners with the tools that are needed to make informed decisions that will impact change within their environments through assessments, documentation of inquiry steps, and data analysis (Ferrance, 2000). The complex history of action research is not comprised of one academic discipline, but rather a conglomeration of methodologies from a broad range of research and professions. In fact, strong components of action research can be found throughout the work of John Dewey; his experiments and studies in education, and his philosophical work, often contained foundational elements of action research. Action research confronts the ideology that is usually embedded in positivistic perspectives of knowledge. This viewpoint often echoes a traditional standard for research, which declares that studies must be objective free to be credible. However, action research challenges traditions by promoting models of human interactions and reflection, that confronts undemocratic social, economic, and political practices and systems (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003).

Additionally, document analysis research is a qualitative analytical methodology that utilizes a systematic process for reviewing or assessing electronic and printed documents. This form of research requires the examination and interpretation of data to increase understanding, expand empirical knowledge, and obtain meaning. The forms of documents that can be utilized for systematic analyzation can include, but is not limited to: maps, newspapers, charts, letters, application forms, press releases, television and radio program scripts, survey data, public records,

photo albums, diaries, books, journals, agendas, and advertisements. The analysis process requires the researcher to locate, appraise, and synthesize the data from the documents and then organize the findings into case examples, categories, and major themes (Bowen, 2009).

In fact, document analysis research is often utilized in political science to facilitate an unbiased, consistent assessment of written policies (Wach, Ward, & Jacimovic, 2013). The combined methodologies and unique design that I will implement throughout this study should offer a plethora of resources to school leaders, to assist with policy development and implementation plans for addressing CA.

Data Collection and Analysis

All of the data that will be collected and analyzed, throughout my research, will be public record documents such as chronic absenteeism data, and attendance policies. This data will be gathered electronically from a large midwestern state's department of education website and from 5 school districts' sites located within this large midwestern state. I will first access the statewide chronic absenteeism data set, which is available as a Microsoft Excel document on the state's department of education website. I will apply filters on the document to narrow down the data set. I will utilize the filters to group the CA data by counties, percentages, demographics, and subgroups. After filtering the data, I will select five school districts within the state that contain similar subgroups and population size, but varying CA percentages. The pseudonym names assigned to the selected districts will be District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E. Next, I will disaggregate the CA data by creating charts to analyze the data visually. The graphs will display the CA data by the:

- Average CA percentage by county (entire state).
- Percent ranges of CA rates across districts (entire state).
- CA rates by subgroups for Districts A-E.
- CA rates by subgroups for District A.
- CA rates by subgroups for District B.
- CA rates by subgroups for District C.
- CA rates by subgroups for District D.
- CA rates by subgroups for District E.

Attendance policies will then be generated electronically and analyzed for the selected districts (A-E). These attendance policies will be individually reviewed and coded by the similarities and differences of policy content, accessibility, stakeholders' responsibilities, and intervention methods within each document. Tables will be created to represent the findings visually and comprehensibly.

Ethical Concerns

At this time, I do not foresee any ethical concerns emerging while completing my capstone project. If any ethical concerns arise during the study, my capstone advisor will be notified, and my methodologies will be altered to maintain integrity and ethical practices while conducting research.

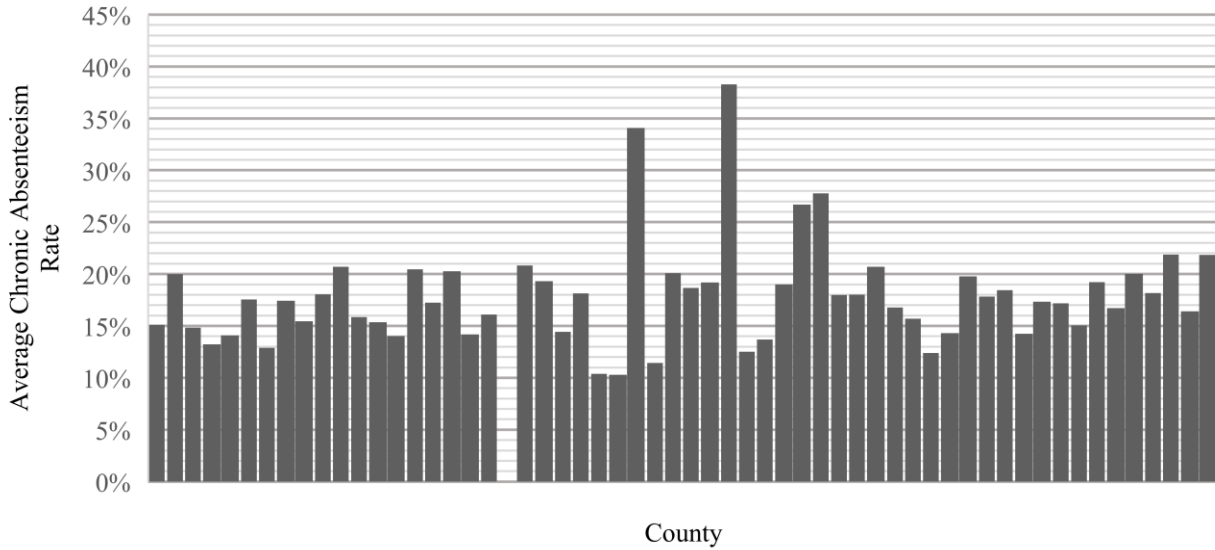
APPLICATION

Outcomes/Findings

Historically, monitoring absenteeism data has been overlooked by policymakers and educators. Additionally, attendance has been viewed as a fixed trait, such as income levels, race, or ethnicity. Furthermore, principals have been aware of students' attendance data, but they often regarded tracking it as another task that created more paperwork for them, or they perceived it as an additional operational issue (Nauer, 2016; London et al., 2016). The need to develop a comprehensive action plan to eradicate CA is urgent and overdue. My capstone project assessed the CA data and current attendance policies of five school districts within a large midwestern state in an effort to answer the following research questions: what key factor impact chronic absenteeism?, what policies and systems do districts have in place to decrease chronic absenteeism?, and which stakeholders are needed to combat chronic absenteeism? The pseudonym names that were assigned to the selected school districts were District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E.

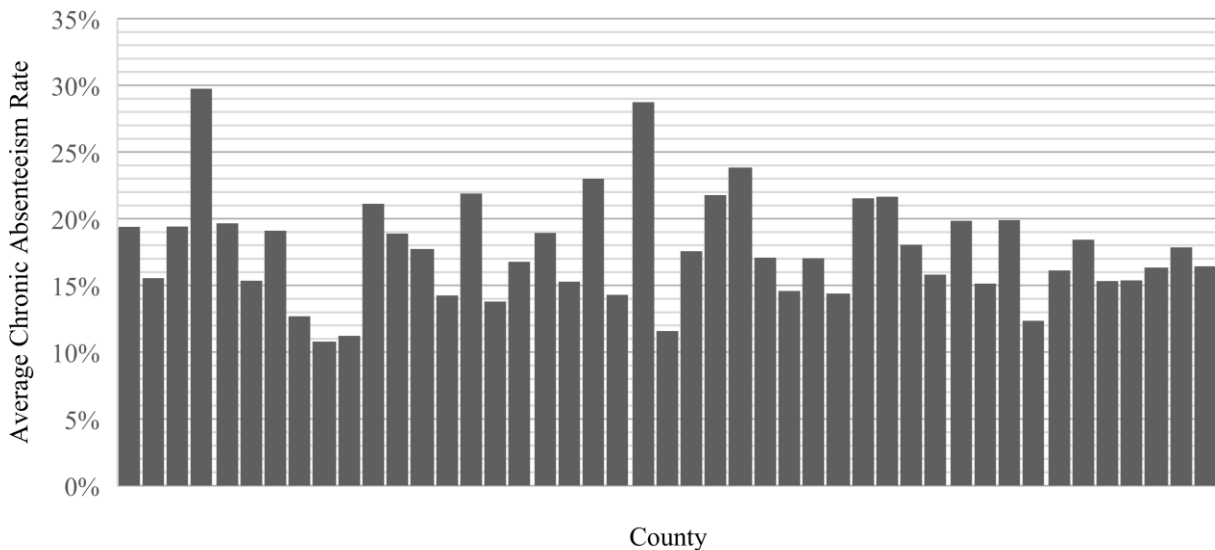
The selected school districts have similar subgroups and population sizes, but varying CA percentages. These five school districts represent a miniscule fraction of the large midwestern state and its CA spectrum. The CA rate for this large midwestern state is approximately 18%, and approximately 13% of the students are truant. This state has approximately 100 counties, 850 school districts, 3,870 schools, 2,000,000 students, 130,000 teachers, and 12,000 administrators. Additionally, within this state, approximately 48% of the students are White, 17% of the students are Black, 26% of the students are Hispanic, 5% of the students are Asian, and 3% of the students identify as having ethnicities that are comprised of two or more races. Further state-wide student subgroups demographics are as follows: approximately 49% of the students are low income, 16% of the students have IEP's, 2% of the students are homeless, and 12% of the students are ELL. Figures 1 and 2 represents the state-wide CA percentages averages by counties. Figure 3 represents the average state-wide CA percentages ranges by districts.

Figure 1
Average Chronic Absenteeism Percentage by County



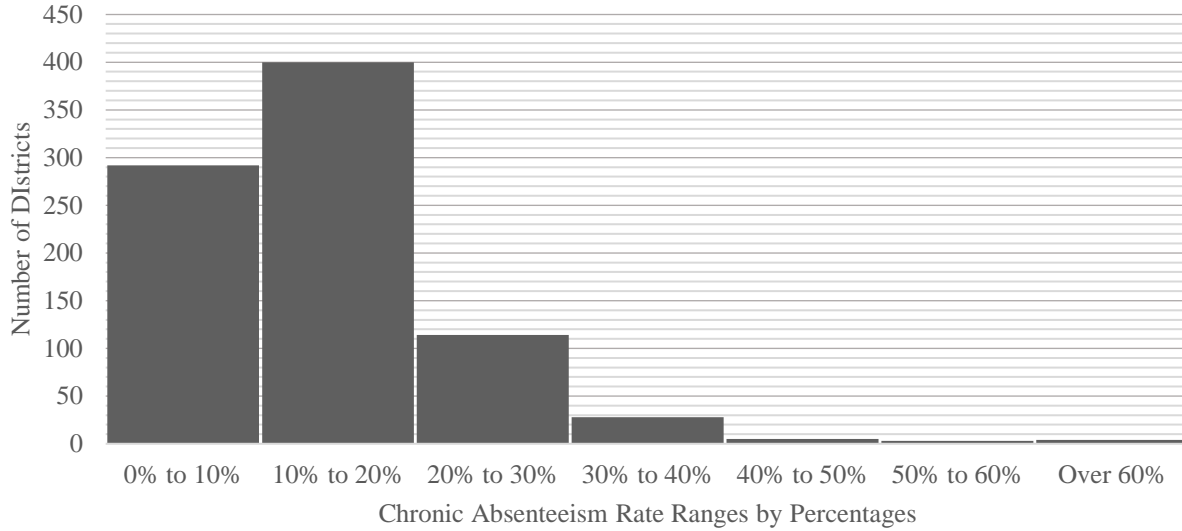
Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data was unavailable for some districts. Average chronic absenteeism rates were calculated by excluding this data.

Figure 2
Average Chronic Absenteeism Percentage by County, cont'd.



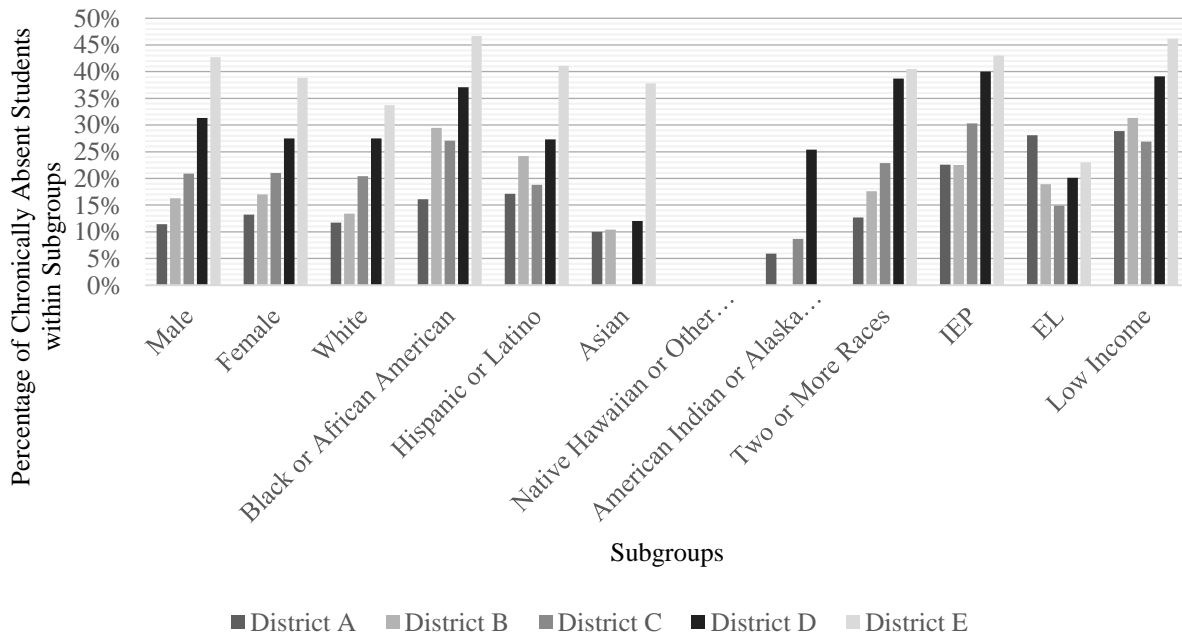
Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data was unavailable for some districts. Average chronic absenteeism rates were calculated by excluding this data.

Figure 3
Percent Ranges of Chronic Absenteeism Rates Across Districts (State-wide)



Districts A-E have similar subgroups and population sizes, yet they have different CA rates. Figure 4 represents the CA rates for District A-E by subgroups. Moreover, Districts A-E will be individually analyzed and represented throughout this section.

Figure 4
Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Subgroups, Districts A-E

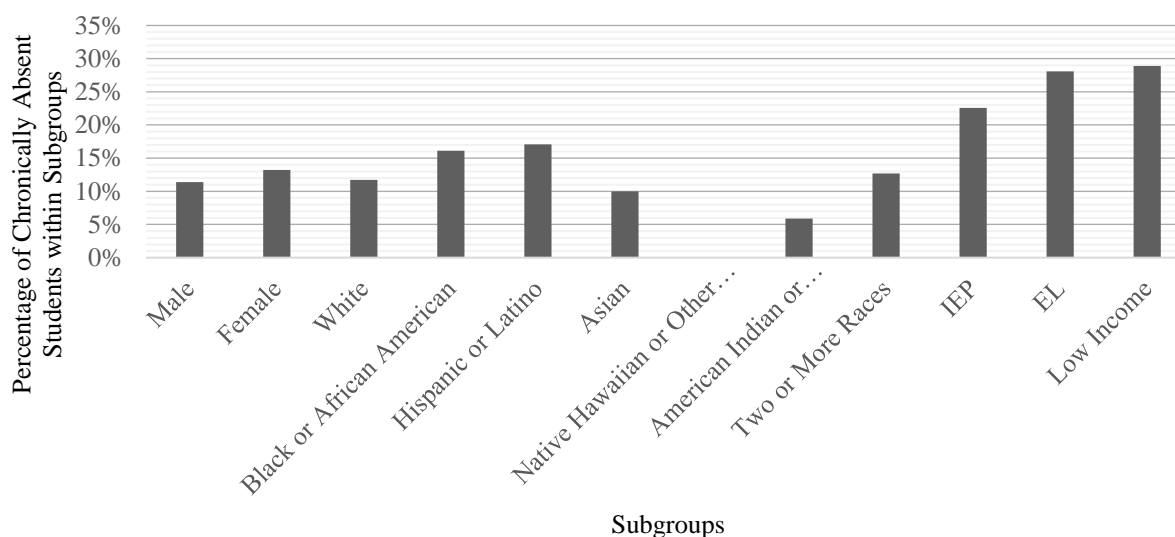


Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data for subgroups marked with an asterisk was unavailable for some districts.

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District A's CA rate is approximately 12% and approximately 3% of the students are truant. There are 13 schools within this district, approximately 7,600 students, 420 teachers, and 30 administrators. Additionally, within this district, approximately 80% of the students are White, 8% of the students are Black, 4% of the students are Hispanic, 3% of the students are Asian, and 6% of the students identify as having ethnicities that are comprised of two or more races. Further district-wide student subgroups demographics are as follows: approximately 19% of the students are low income, 12% of the students have IEP's, 0.5% of the students are homeless, and 1% of the students are ELL. Figure 5 represents the CA rates for District A by subgroups.

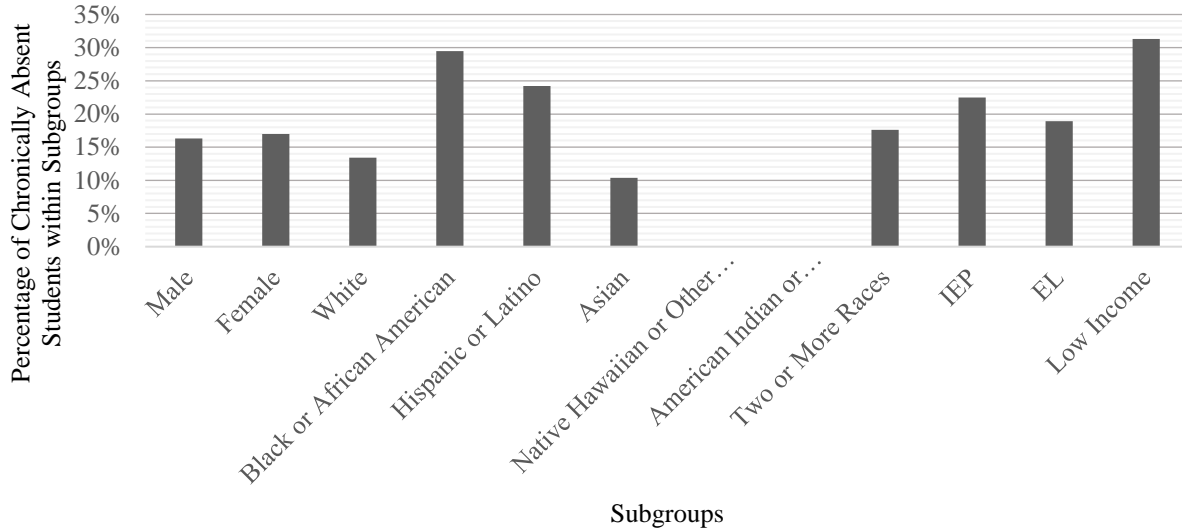
Figure 5
Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Subgroups, District A



Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data for subgroups marked with an asterisk was unavailable.

District B's CA rate is approximately 17% and approximately 5% of the students are truant. There are 9 schools within this district, approximately 6,500 students, 400 teachers, and 35 administrators. Additionally, within this district, approximately 68% of the students are White, 7% of the students are Black, 18% of the students are Hispanic, 2% of the students are Asian, and 9% of the students identify as having ethnicities that are comprised of two or more races. Further district-wide student subgroups demographics are as follows: approximately 19% of the students are low income, 17% of the students have IEP's, 1% of the students are homeless, and 5% of the students are ELL. Figure 6 represents the CA rates for District B by subgroups.

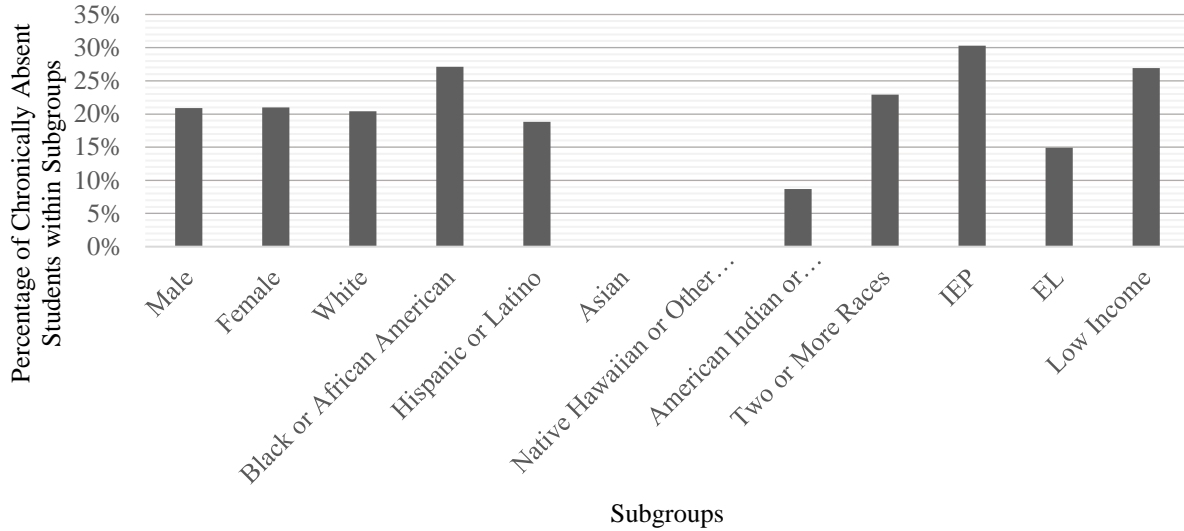
Figure 6
Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Subgroups, District B



Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data for subgroups marked with an asterisk was unavailable.

District C’s CA rate is approximately 21% and approximately 10% of the students are truant. There are 11 schools within this district, approximately 6,500 students, 400 teachers, and 25 administrators. Additionally, within this district, approximately 68% of the students are White, 14% of the students are Black, 24% of the students are Hispanic, 0.5% of the students are Asian, and 5% of the students identify as having ethnicities that are comprised of two or more races. Further district-wide student subgroups demographics are as follows: approximately 60% of the students are low income, 18% of the students have IEP’s, 3% of the students are homeless, and 11% of the students are ELL. Figure 7 represents the CA rates for District C by subgroups.

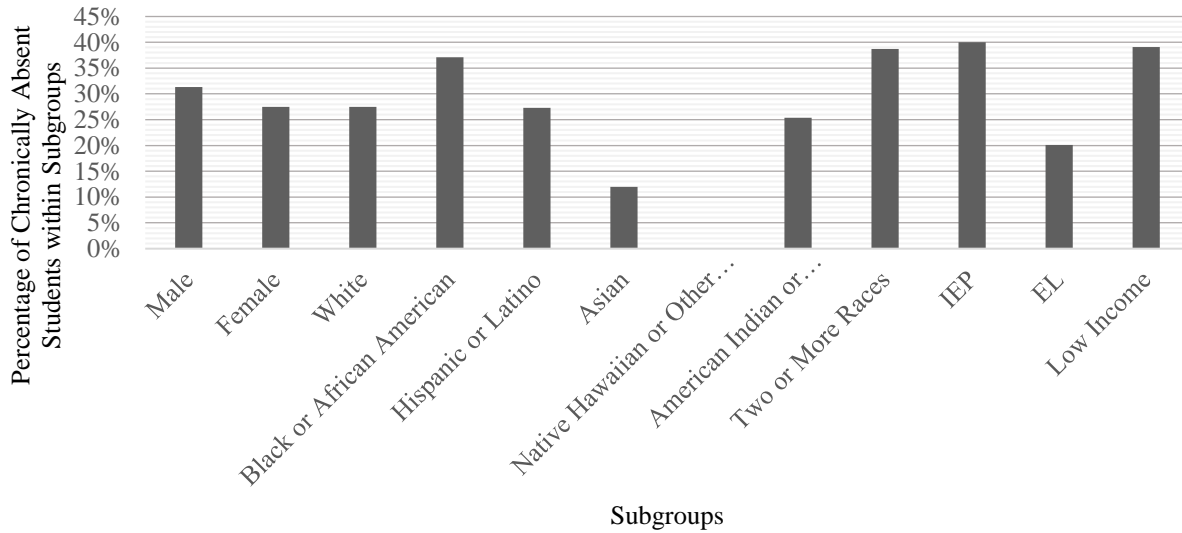
Figure 7
Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Subgroups, District C



Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data for subgroups marked with an asterisk was unavailable.

District D’s CA rate is approximately 30% and approximately 21% of the students are truant. There are 8 schools within this district, approximately 6,100 students, 300 teachers, and 23 administrators. Additionally, within this district, approximately 67% of the students are White, 15% of the students are Black, 11% of the students are Hispanic, 0.5% of the students are Asian, and 6% of the students identify as having ethnicities that are comprised of two or more races. Further district-wide student subgroups demographics are as follows: approximately 56% of the students are low income, 22% of the students have IEP’s, 2% of the students are homeless, and 4% of the students are ELL. Figure 8 represents the CA rates for District D by subgroups.

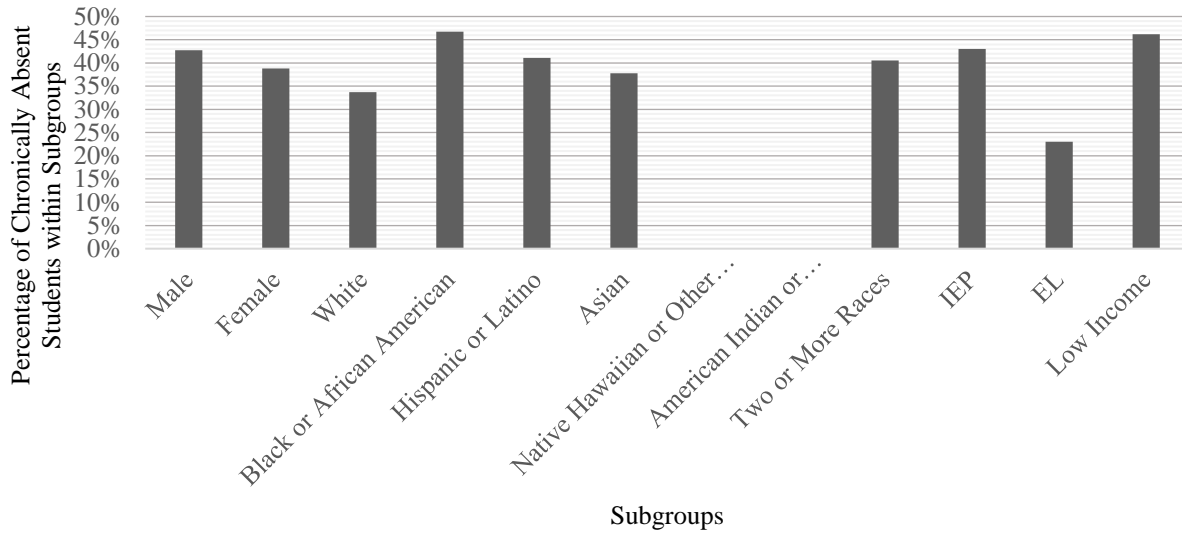
Figure 8
Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Subgroups, District D



Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data for subgroups marked with an asterisk was unavailable.

District E’s CA rate is approximately 41% and approximately 42% of the students are truant. There are 10 schools within this district, approximately 5,500 students, 350 teachers, and 34 administrators. Additionally, within this district, approximately 36% of the students are White, 44% of the students are Black, 10% of the students are Hispanic, 1% of the students are Asian, and 10% of the students identify as having ethnicities that are comprised of two or more races. Further district-wide student subgroups demographics are as follows: approximately 73% of the students are low income, 17% of the students have IEP’s, 2% of the students are homeless, and 3% of the students are ELL. Figure 9 represents the CA rates for District E by subgroups.

Figure 9
Chronic Absenteeism Rates by Subgroups, District E



Note: Chronic absenteeism rate data for subgroups marked with an asterisk was unavailable.

The attendance policies for Districts A-E were individually accessed, reviewed, and coded by the similarities and differences of content for: policy accessibility, stakeholders’ responsibilities/accountability measures, family engagement, and intervention methods within each document. Below are the districts’ individual attendance policies and analysis. Tables 1, 2, & 3 represent the comprehensive findings for Districts A-E.

District A-E’s Attendance Policies

District A’s Attendance Policy

Student Attendance and Health Policy.

The Importance of Regular Attendance.

All students are expected to be in class when school is in session. The importance of regular school attendance cannot be emphasized too strongly. Children miss valuable opportunities for learning and may jeopardize their grades and credits when they are absent or tardy. Parents have the LEGAL responsibility of ensuring that their child attends school regularly. This responsibility requires that parents actively monitor their child’s school attendance. A parent who knowingly permits a child to miss school without valid reason or who gives false information regarding the child’s absence may be in violation of the law. In the event that the student is unable to attend school because of illness or other valid reason, the parent must notify the school. (School phone

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numbers may be found in the directory on pages 3-4.)

Excused and Unexcused Absences.

1. Excused Absences • Illness of the student • Doctor or dental appointment for student • Death in the student's immediate family • Certain religious days • Court appearance • College visits for high school juniors and seniors • Family trip, provided the following guidelines are followed: a. School is notified in advance of the absence b. Student obtains assignments in advance of the absence c. All assigned work is turned in upon returning to school d. All assigned work is made up at direction of individual teachers.

2. Unexcused Absences - All absences not classified as excused will be considered unexcused or truant.

Compliance with Attendance Requirements.

1. All students who leave school for a doctor's appointment must provide written documentation from their health care provider as evidence of attending the appointment for the absence to be considered an excused absence. 2. All students who are absent for five or more consecutive days must provide written documentation from a healthcare provider for the absences to be considered excused absences. 3. Any student who has been absent for 5% or more of the days of student attendance in a semester must provide written documentation from their health care provider stating the cause of the absence for each subsequent day of nonattendance for the absence to be considered an excused absence. 4. Students who suffer from documented chronic or severe acute health issues may seek a waiver of these requirements from the Building Principal. 5. Students whose parent or legal guardian has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting may be granted additional excused absences at the discretion of the Superintendent or his/her designee. The parent or legal guardian should submit written requests related to such absences related to deployment or leave for military service to the Building Principal. Note: Home and Hospital Services may be available for a student who, due to a temporary physical or health impairment, must remain out of school for more than two consecutive weeks as certified by a physician. Contact the building principal to begin the application process.

Attendance Requirements at *District A's* High School.

The following attendance requirements shall apply for students to earn certain privileges. Classroom Driver Education Students' eligibility to take classroom driver education in either their freshman or sophomore year (in birth date order) is dependent upon meeting the following two criteria: • Maintain ten or fewer absences, including both excused, unexcused, partial and full day absences, during their 9th grade year; and • Receive passing grades in all courses that apply toward graduation requirements during their 9th grade year. Parking Privileges 1. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors who have been issued a parking pass must maintain regular school attendance to maintain their parking privileges as follows: • If the student is absent 11 or more days during the current school year, including excused, unexcused, partial and full day absences, the student's

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parking pass will be revoked, and the student will be reissued a parking pass in the Sports Complex lot; and • If the student is absent 18 or more days during the current school year, including excused, unexcused, partial or full day absences, the student's parking pass will be revoked, and the student will have no parking privileges at *District A's* High School. 2. Sophomores, juniors and seniors who seek to obtain a parking pass from *District A's* High School must have maintained ten or fewer absences, including excused, unexcused, partial and full day absences, during the previous school year. Appeals Process Students who suffer from documented chronic or severe acute health issues may seek a waiver of these requirements from the Building Principal. All applications for a waiver must be filed by June 15. Partial Day Absences For purposes of this *District A's* High School attendance procedure, a partial day absence is defined to include any school day a student misses one or more complete class period(s). PLEASE REFER TO INDIVIDUAL BUILDING HANDBOOKS FOR SPECIFIC DETAILS REGARDING ABSENCES.

Truancy.

A truant is defined in the state of Illinois as a child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause from such attendance for a school day or portion thereof. Truancy is an extremely serious situation that can be corrected only through a high degree of cooperation between home and school. Chronic truants as defined by state statute will be referred to the School Resource Officer for follow-up investigation and possible referral to the State's Attorney's Office. PARENTS ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO ENSURE THAT THEIR CHILD ATTENDS SCHOOL. An attempt will be made to notify the parent each time a student is truant. Chronic truancy is defined as absence without valid cause for 5% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days. By law, the names of chronic truants and the person who has custody of them must be provided to the Regional Superintendent of Schools. *District A* offers a number of supportive and preventive services to truants, including an alternative program for eligible high school students. The purpose of these programs is to provide an alternative learning situation to those students who are unable to function in the traditional school. Chronic truants are among those students who may experience greater success in an alternative setting. Interested parents should contact their child's guidance counselor, social worker, or principal for more information about the alternative program. PLEASE REFER TO INDIVIDUAL BUILDING HANDBOOKS FOR SPECIFIC DETAILS ON TRUANCY.

District B's Attendance Policy

Absences - It is the parent's/guardian's responsibility for the student to be in attendance the entire time school is in session. If a student will not be attending school for the entire day or a portion of the day, the parent/guardian must notify the school and provide a specific reason for the absence. School officials, not a parent/guardian, will determine if an absence is excused or unexcused. The office does not accept notes from parents/guardians under most circumstances except as provided by law. The parent/guardian must call the main office at the school before 9 a.m. to explain the reason for the student's absence or it will automatically be considered

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unexcused. For convenience, a voicemail system can accept messages before and after school hours. Administration, or a designee, reserves the right to call and confirm with any parent/guardian the reason for a student's absence. The office will handle requests for homework after two consecutive absences. After three consecutive absences, a note from a licensed healthcare provider will be required.

Anticipated Absences - An anticipated absence form will be issued by the main office to the student following a phone call (notes will not be accepted) from the parent/guardian explaining the reason for the anticipated absence. Anticipated absence forms must be signed by all the student's teachers and a parent/guardian and returned to the main office before the absence. Examples of absences that require an anticipated absence form include, but are not limited to: college visits, business trips with parents/guardians, religious holidays, and school-sponsored state events. Students who expect to miss classes because of a field trip or other school-sponsored activity **MUST** make arrangements for the make-up work with all teachers prior to the anticipated absence. Please refer to the section, Guidelines for Makeup Work due to Absence from School. If a student must be taken out of school for any reason, please notify the school office at least three (3) days in advance. Such notice should also be given in writing to the classroom teacher at least three (3) days in advance if make-up or homework is being requested.

Excused Absences - *District B* will follow the attendance policies established by the State of Illinois in reference to excused/unexcused absences. A student's absence will be considered excused for the following valid reasons: 1. Illness/Injury – Students returning to the school after a doctor or dentist appointment must have a physician's note confirming the time frame that the student was seen by the physician. Students should remain at home until they have had no episodes of vomiting/diarrhea and have been fever free (without the use of fever-reducing medication) for 24 hours. Below are the general guidelines of appropriate reasons for a student's absence: a. temperature over 100 degrees Fahrenheit within the last 24 hours b. vomiting/diarrhea within the last 24 hours c. severe headache, stomachache, earache, sore throat, chills, or allergic reaction d. excessive coughing e. rash of unknown origin f. head lice and scabies g. communicable diseases 2. Death in the immediate family 3. Family emergency 4. Observance of a religious holiday - The parent/guardian of a student who is absent to observe a religious holiday or for religious instruction must provide written notice to the building principal at least five (5) calendar days before the anticipated absence(s). This written notice shall satisfy the notice requirement referenced above. The district provides each student who is absent from school due to the observance of a religious holiday an equal opportunity to make up any school work requirements including exams that are missed due to the absence. 5. Other situations beyond the student's control 6. Other circumstances that cause reasonable concern to the parent/guardian for the student's safety or health 7. Anticipated absence, if appropriate procedures are followed 8. Court appearance - Students returning to school after a court appearance must have documentation confirming the time frame that the student was in court. 9. Other reason as approved by the superintendent or designee.

Unexcused Absences - An unexcused absence is defined as an absence from school for a reason other than those listed above as an Excused Absence and/or an absence not authorized by the superintendent or designee. If the main office has not received a phone call from the student's parent/guardian prior to 9 a.m. on the day of the absence, the student will be considered unexcused. The district considers the following reasons as examples of absences without valid cause, thereby resulting in an unexcused absence. The list is to be used for illustrative purposes only, and includes,

but is not limited to: 1. Oversleeping 2. Car trouble 3. Missing the bus 4. Giving rides to the airport 5. Babysitting 6. Shopping 7. Traffic 8. Extending Prom weekend - Administration reserves the right to require medical documentation for an absence to be considered excused on the school days prior to or following a weekend containing a school dance. 9. Vacations (family or otherwise) - The district believes that students should take family trips during scheduled school breaks and should be in school when school is in session.

The district actively discourages the practice of students being taken out of school for family trips as vacations are recorded as unexcused absences. Leaving the Classroom Students should bring all necessary materials to class and should not find it necessary to leave the classroom to go to their lockers or elsewhere during class time. Students are required to follow the sign-in/out procedures of the classroom when given permission to leave. Sign In/Out Policy for Students Any absence that results from a student signing into the building late or signing out of the building early will be considered excused or unexcused based on the criteria for excused and unexcused absences as. A student must sign in with the main office anytime the student arrives more than five (5) minutes after the official start of the school day, and must sign out with the main office anytime the student leaves prior to the official end of the school day. If this policy is not followed, the student will be marked unexcused and receive the appropriate disciplinary consequences.

A parent/guardian must specify the reason their student is arriving late or leaving early from school. A parent/guardian must meet their student in the office to sign them both in and out of the building. Only the parent/guardian may give permission for a student to sign in/out of school. If a student signs out of school, a written verification may be requested upon the student's return. Students may not sign out for the sole purpose of leaving for lunch. Students who leave school due to illness or injury will be deemed excused or unexcused by the school nurse. Attendance and After School Activities Participants must be in attendance for half a school day in order to practice and/or compete that afternoon/evening in school-sponsored events. Special dispensation can be given by the principal for things such as family emergencies a death in the immediate family, attending funerals, dental and medical appointments, etc. The decision is within the sole discretion of the principal. Excessive Absences The district believes that in order for a student to obtain the most from the educational opportunities provided, it is important that students attend school on a regular basis with every effort made to minimize absences.

Please be aware that whether a student absence is excused or unexcused, excessive absences will have a negative impact on student learning and success. The following procedures are in place to ensure that there is communication between the schools, parents/guardians, and students regarding student absences. 1. A letter will be sent to a parent/guardian regarding attendance (4.5 total days of absences). 2. Administration may request a parent/guardian meeting to discuss attendance patterns. 3. A letter will be sent to a parent/guardian requiring, them to provide medical or court documentation for any absence to be excused (9 total days of absences). Students aged 17 years or older who are absent without valid cause for 20 percent or more of the attendance days for two consecutive semesters may be denied enrollment or not receive credit for enrolled courses. 4. A referral will be sent to *District B's* County Attendance Caseworker (after 9 days of unexcused absences). Guidelines for Make-up Work Due to Absence from School 3 Students who are absent from school will be allowed to make up work for equivalent academic credit. Teachers and school administrators will work with the family to obtain missing assignments as a result of a student absence. Make-up work is to be completed outside of class. Reasonable

time will be provided for students to make up work. Missing summative assessments will be marked with a “Not Complete” (NC). Students will be provided up to two (2) weeks into the next grading period to resolve “Not Complete” grades.

If a significant medical condition impacts student attendance, homebound tutoring may be provided pursuant to Board of Education Policy 6:150. Designation of excused or unexcused absences will be determined by the administration. If a student is unable to attend school due to a medical condition, the student may be eligible for home/hospital instruction pursuant to Board Policy 6:150. Please contact the Student Services Department if this may be applicable. Truancy When a student is absent without valid cause five (5) percent of the previous 180 regular attendance days (9 school days), he/she is considered truant under Illinois law. Interventions to address truancy may include, but are not limited to, parent/guardian contact, parent/guardian conference, home visits, student support services referral, referral to outside agencies, notification to the Regional Office of Education, and notification to local law enforcement.

District C’s Attendance Policy

District C offers and embraces opportunities for everyone to reach his/her fullest potential. One of the keys to receiving an excellent education experience is regular school attendance. *District C’s* attendance plan complies with the *large midwestern state’s* School Code Section 105 ILCS 5/26-2A. In accordance with the requirements of The School Code of the *large midwestern state* and in recognition of the responsibilities imposed upon parents therein, it is the policy of the Board of Education of *District C* that students shall attend school during the entire time school is in session and be on time for classes. The Board believes that regular class attendance fosters successful academic performance and development of punctuality, self-discipline and responsibility. The School Code of the *large midwestern state* defines chronic absenteeism as missing school for five (5) percent of the previous 180 school days. That equates to nine (9) days of absence over a 180-day period. The school will provide three (3) written notifications (to include school and community resources available) before legal action may be taken. The parent and/or student may be subject to legal citation through the courts. Special circumstances such as hospitalization, chronic illness etc. will be considered in this process. *District C* appreciates the cooperation of parents and students on this matter of vital importance to your child’s education.

Absenteeism/absence reporting - In order for an absence to be considered reported, a parent or guardian of a student who is going to be absent from school must notify the school by telephone or the Skyward Family Access account. 1. Calls to the school office should be made no later than 10:00 AM on the date of absence. 2. *District C’s* parents and guardians may also conveniently report a student absence using your Skyward Family Access account or the Skyward App. While you can choose to call your child’s school to report an absence, using Skyward Family Access gives you the ability to report or request an absence 24/7 using your computer or mobile device. How to Report an Absence Using Skyward Family Access 1. Log into Skyward Family Access and select ATTENDANCE from the menu options on the left; 2. Click on ENTER ABSENT REQUEST toward the middle upper right of the Attendance screen; 3. Select the ADD REQUEST link to the 4 right in the Attendance pop-up window; 4. Enter the Start Date and the End Date;

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Check “All Day” OR indicate times for the absence; 5. Choose a reason for the request from the drop-down menu; 6. Add any additional comments for the office; 7. When finished, click SAVE; 8. After clicking SAVE on the previous screen, the absent request will appear as PENDING; 9. You will receive a confirmation email stating the request has been created; 10. Once the school office has processed the absence request, you will receive an additional email with confirmation. To report an absence using the Skyward App: 1. Log into your Skyward App; Click on the menu option in upper right corner of the screen; 2. Choose ATTENDANCE; 3. Select ADD ABSENCE REQUEST; 4. Enter the Start Date and the End Date; Mark “All Day – Yes” OR indicate times for the absence; 5. Choose a reason for the request from the drop-down menu; 6. Add any additional comments for the office; 7. When finished, click SUBMIT; 8. The request will appear as PENDING until it is approved by the school; 9. Once the school office has processed the absence request, you will receive an email confirmation. An absence without proper notification to the School Office will result in an absence being considered as unexcused. The determination as to whether an absence is classified as reported, documented or unexcused is the sole responsibility of the school. The responsibility of the parent is to report the absence.

All requests for reported absences, MUST be reported to the attendance office within five (5) days of the student’s absence. If a student has an appointment with a treating health care provider or physician, they must bring a note from them explaining the absence. At the District’s request, a note from a health care provider may also be required to validate extended or repeated illnesses before being excused. All students who are absent for five or more consecutive days must provide written documentation from a health care provider for the absences to be considered excused (reported/documented). Any student who has been absent 10 or more days in a semester must provide written documentation from their health care provider (with the dates of the absence) for each subsequent day of non-attendance. Students who suffer from documented chronic or severe acute health issues may seek a waiver of these requirements from the Building principal.

Absences - There are three types of absences: reported, documented, and unexcused. Reported Absences: An ‘reported pass’ will be issued for personal illness, serious family illness, court appearance, attending a military honors funeral to sound TAPS, observance of a religious holiday, family emergency, other situations beyond the control of the student and as determined by the Board of Education other such circumstances which cause reasonable concern to the parent for the safety or health of the student. Additionally, a student will be excused for up to 5 days per school year in cases where the student’s parent/guardian is an active duty member of the uniformed services and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support postings. The Board of Education, in its discretion, may excuse a student for additional days relative to such leave or deployment. The student and the student’s parent/guardian shall have the responsibility to contact their teacher(s) concerning a plan for completing make-up work within a reasonable time (this usually means one (1) day for each day of reported or documented absence).

Documented Absences - A documented absence will be issued for personal illness, serious family illness, the death of an immediate family member, court appearance or any absence which is beyond the control of the student (i.e., in the case where a nurse has to send a student home for illness, to include, but not limited to, head lice, fever, and vomiting). The following documentation must be presented to the School Office regarding documented absences: 1) For personal or family illness – a note from a doctor or dentist; 2) For court appearances – a document from the court

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system. Requests by parents/guardians to have an absence recorded as ‘documented’ must present the documentation within five (5) days from the date of return to school. Release Time for Religious Instruction/Observance: A student will be released from school, as an excused absence, to observe a religious holiday or for religious instruction. The student’s parent/guardian must give written notice to the building principal at least 5 calendar days before the student’s anticipated absence(s). Students with Reported or 5 Documented absences or excused for religious reasons will be given an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement within a reasonable time (usually one day for each day of absence).

District D’s Attendance Policy

Absence call-in - If your child is absent from school, please notify the school up to one hour after the designated start time on the day of the absence. Should you not call; an attempt will be made by the school to contact you. This may necessitate a call to your place of employment or to the emergency numbers. If phone contact is not made, a note stating the reason for absence should be sent when your child returns to school.

Attendance - (Policy 7:70; 105 ILCS 5/26-1 SEC. 26-1 Compulsory school age exemptions) Whoever has custody or control of any child between the ages of 6 and 17 years shall cause such child to attend a public school in the district wherein the child resides the entire time it is in session during the regular school term. Children should be at school on time, well rested and ready to learn. Children should not arrive at school for any reason prior to school office hours. BASEP programs are available at all elementary schools which allow parents a change to drop off children as early as 6:30 a.m. with pick up as late as 6:00 p.m.

Release time for religious instruction/observance - (Policy 7:80) A student shall be released from school, as an excused absence to observe a religious holiday or for religious instruction. The student’s parent/guardian must give notice to the Building Principal at least 5 calendar days before the student’s anticipated absences. This notice shall satisfy the District’s requirement for a written excuse when the student returns to school. The Superintendent shall develop and distribute to teacher’s appropriate procedures regarding student absences for religious reasons and include a list of religious holidays on which a student shall be excused from school attendance, how teachers are notified of a student’s impending absence, and the State law requirement that teachers provide the student with an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirement.

District E’s Attendance Policy

Compulsory School Attendance.

This policy applies to individuals who have custody or control of a child: (a) between the ages of six (on or before September 1) and 17 years (unless the child has graduated from high

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school), or (b) who is enrolled in any of grades kindergarten through 12 in the public school regardless of age. Subject to specific requirements in State law, the following children are not required to attend public school: (1) any child attending a private school (including a home school) or parochial school, (2) any child who is physically or mentally unable to attend school (including a pregnant student suffering medical complications as certified by her physician), (3) any child lawfully and necessarily employed, (4) any child over 12 and under 14 years of age while in confirmation classes, (5) any child absent because his or her religion forbids secular activity on a particular day, and (6) any child 16 years of age or older who is employed and is enrolled in a graduation incentives program.

The parent/guardian of a student who is enrolled must authorize all absences from school and notify the school in advance or at the time of the student's absence. A valid cause for absence includes illness, observance of a religious holiday, death in the immediate family, family emergency, other situations beyond the control of the student, other circumstances that cause reasonable concern to the parent/guardian for the student's safety or health, or other reason as approved by the Superintendent or designee.

Absenteeism and Truancy Program - The Superintendent or designee shall manage an absenteeism and truancy program in accordance with the School Code and Board of Education policy. The program shall include but not be limited to: 1. A protocol for excusing a student from attendance who is necessarily and lawfully employed. The Superintendent or designee is authorized to determine when the student's absence is justified. 2. A protocol for excusing a student in grades 6 through 12 from attendance to sound *Taps* at a military honors funeral held in Illinois for a deceased veteran. 3. A protocol for excusing a student from attendance on a particular day(s) or at a particular time of day when his/her parent/guardian is an active duty member of the uniformed services and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat-support postings. 4. A process to telephone, within two hours after the first class, the parents/guardians of students in grade 8 or below who are absent without prior parent/guardian notification. 5. A process to identify and track students who are truants, chronic or habitual truants, or truant minors as defined in the School Code, Section 26-2a. 6. A description of diagnostic procedures for identifying the cause(s) of a student's unexcused absenteeism, including interviews with the student, his or her parent(s)/guardian(s), and staff members or other people who may have information about the reasons for the student's attendance problem. 7. The identification of supportive services that may be offered to truant, chronically truant, or chronically absent students, including parent-teacher conferences, student and/or family counseling, or information about community agency services. See Board policy 6:110, Programs for Students At Risk of Academic Failure and/or Dropping Out of School and Graduation Incentives Program. 8. Reasonable efforts to provide ongoing professional development to teachers, administrators, Board members, school resource officers, and staff on the appropriate and available supportive services for the promotion of student attendance and engagement. 9. A process to request the assistance and resources of outside agencies, such as, the juvenile officer of the local police department or the truant office of the appropriate Regional Office of Education, if truancy continues after supportive services have been offered. 10. A protocol for cooperating with non-District agencies including County or municipal authorities, the Regional Superintendent, truant officers, the Community Truancy Review Board, and a comprehensive community based youth service agency. Any disclosure of school student records must be consistent with Board

policy 7:340, *Student Records*, as well as State and federal law concerning school student records. 11. An acknowledgement that no punitive action, including out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, or court action, shall be taken against a truant minor for his or her truancy unless available supportive services and other school resources have been provided to the student. 12. The criteria to determine whether a student's non-attendance is due to extraordinary circumstances shall include economic or medical necessity or family hardship and such other criteria that the Superintendent believes qualifies. 13. A process for a 17 year old resident to participate in the District's various programs and resources for truants. The student must provide documentation of his/her dropout status for the previous 6 months. A request from an individual 19 years of age or older to reenroll after having dropped out of school is handled according to provisions in 7:50, Students School Admissions and Student Transfers to and from Non-District Schools. 14. A process for the temporary exclusion of a student 17 years of age or older for failing to meet minimum attendance standards according to provisions in State law. A parent/guardian has the right to appeal a decision to exclude a student.

Districts A-E's Policy Analysis

District A's Attendance Policy Analysis

District A's attendance policy was easily located on the school district's website homepage. The attendance policy was included in the district-wide student handbook, and the attendance policy was inserted within each of the individual schools' handbooks, with addendums that were only applicable to that particular school. District A's attendance policy was exhaustive. It clearly outlined the importance of coming to school, caregivers legal responsibility for ensuring that students were in attendance, definitions for excused absences, unexcused absences, and truancy, absence reporting procedures, attendance compliance standards for caregivers, incentives for students, and consequences for poor attendance which included caregivers being reported to the local Regional Office of Education (ROE) truancy officer. However, this policy did not include remediation steps, attendance professional development (PD) for staff members was omitted, procedures for homework/make-up work were not outlined, accommodations and options for before/after school care was not specified, early dismissal/late arrivals procedures and the absence classification types were not listed, and community involvement strategies were also missing.

District B's Attendance Policy Analysis

District B's attendance policy was easily located on the school district's website homepage. District B's attendance policy was exhaustive. It clearly outlined the importance of coming to school, and the impact that absences have on the entire learning community, caregivers legal responsibility for ensuring that students were in attendance, definitions for excused absences, unexcused absences, and truancy, absence reporting procedures, including anticipated absences,

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attendance compliance standards for caregivers, homework/make-up work procedures and time table, early dismissal/late arrivals procedures and the absence classification type, remediation steps, and consequences for poor attendance which included caregivers being referred to the local county's attendance caseworker. However, this policy did not include incentives for students, attendance PD for staff members was omitted, this policy was not added to individual schools' handbooks, accommodations and options for before/after school care was not specified, and community involvement strategies were also missing.

District C's Attendance Policy Analysis

District C's attendance policy was easily located on the school district's website homepage. District C's attendance policy was detailed. It highlighted the importance of coming to school, and caregivers legal responsibility for ensuring that students were in attendance, definitions for reported absences, documented absences, and unexcused absences, absence reporting procedures, attendance compliance standards for caregivers, remediation steps, and consequences for poor attendance which included caregivers being reported to the local ROE truancy officer. However, this policy did not include incentives for students; it was not added to individual schools' handbooks, procedures for homework/make-up work was not outlined, attendance PD for staff members was omitted, accommodations and options for before/after school care was not specified, clear definitions for an excused absence, unexcused absence, and truancy were not present, early dismissal/late arrivals procedures and the absence classification types were not listed, and community involvement strategies were also missing.

District D's Attendance Policy Analysis

District D's attendance policy was easily located on the school district's website homepage. District D's attendance policy was brief. It highlighted caregivers' legal responsibility for ensuring that students were in attendance, absence reporting procedures, accommodations and options for before/after school care, and excused absence procedures for religious observations. However, this policy was not added to individual schools' handbooks, it did not include incentives for students, remediation steps, procedures for homework/make-up work were not outlined, clear definitions for an excused absence, unexcused absence, and truancy were not present, early dismissal/late arrivals procedures and the absence classification types were not listed, attendance PD for staff members was omitted, consequences for poor attendance that acknowledges the district's process for reporting caregivers to the local ROE truancy officer was not stated, and community involvement strategies were also missing.

District E’s Attendance Policy Analysis

District E’s attendance policy was detailed. It clearly outlined caregivers’ legal responsibility for ensuring that students were in attendance, absence reporting procedures, attendance compliance standards for caregivers, remediation steps, attendance PD for staff members, and consequences for poor attendance which included caregivers being reported to the local ROE truancy officer were included in the policy. However, this policy was extremely difficult to locate; it was embedded within the massive Board Policy Document, which was approximately 350 pages. Additionally, it was not added to individual schools’ handbooks, nor did it highlight the importance of coming to school, it did not include incentives for students, procedures for homework/make-up work were not outlined, clear definitions for an excused absence, unexcused absence, and truancy were not present, early dismissal/late arrivals procedures and the absence classification types were not listed, and community involvement strategies were also missing.

Districts A-E had elements of supportive systems for combating CA within their attendance policies as remedies for decreasing CA. However, it was challenging to identify data analysis strategies, stakeholders’ accountability measures, clear interventions for students, and family/community engagement initiatives in all of the attendance policies. The absence of these identifiers within the policies are the key factors that impact CA. Nevertheless, Chang (2010) declared that overcoming CA is possible, and it can be substantially reduced. School leaders must prioritize the analysis of attendance data. Administrators must also ensure that all staff members are aware of school-based initiatives to reduce CA, and they must also monitor the active participation and support of initiatives from all staff members. The partnerships that school leaders forge with staff, families, and community members to promote and monitor attendance initiatives can also eradicate the barriers that often hinder students from attending school daily. Disengagement and dropout rates are minimized when absenteeism is detected early, and intervention methods are implemented intentionally, consistently, and effectively (Henry et al., 2012).

Table 1
District Attendance Policies Ease of Accessibility and Detail At-a-Glance, Districts A-E

	District				
	A	B	C	D	E
The policy is found on the district's website.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The policy is found in the district student handbook.	Yes	No	No	No	No
The policy is found in school student handbooks.	Yes	No	No	No	No
The policy is supplemented by school-specific addendums.	Yes	No	No	No	No
The policy is detailed exhaustively.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

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Table 2

Presence of Intervention Strategies in District Attendance Policies, Districts A-E

	District				
	A	B	C	D	E
The policy details attendance data analysis strategies.	No	No	No	No	No
The policy includes attendance professional development.	No	No	No	No	Yes
The policy highlights the importance of attending school.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
The policy outlines poor attendance remediation steps.	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
The policy outlines student attendance incentives.	Yes	No	No	No	No
The policy outlines the consequences of poor attendance.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
The policy explains caregiver legal responsibilities.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The policy outlines caregiver compliance standards.	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
The policy outlines community involvement strategies.	No	No	No	No	No

Table 3

Presence of Definitions and Accommodations in District Attendance Policies, Districts A-E

	District				
	A	B	C	D	E
The policy clearly defines excused absences.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
The policy clearly defines unexcused absences.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
The policy clearly defines truancy.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
The policy details absence reporting procedures.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
The policy details early dismissal and late arrival procedures.	No	Yes	No	No	No
The policy outlines absence classifications.	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
The policy outlines plans for student make-up work.	No	Yes	No	No	No
The policy includes before/after school care accommodations.	No	No	No	Yes	No

Recommendations/Implications

Preventative measures must proactively be in place in order to effectively combat absenteeism, and these measures are often rooted in relationships (Maynard et al., 2012). When students believe and feel that the adults in their world, particularly within the school community, care and are concerned about them they are inclined to attend, perform, and achieve. Students must be assured that they matter. If students possess a bond with teachers and school staff members, they are less likely to misbehave, have chronic absences, and become truant. Students must have connections with the adults in the building, as a result, student’s engagement and attendance will increase. However, if these connections are minimal or non-existent students will not attend, and nothing will keep them engaged within the school community. Relationships are essential (Marvul, 2012). No longer can we look at CA as an insurmountable mountain, but rather

a challenge that can be conquered through the identification of barriers, strategic monitoring, effective interventions, and collaborative partnerships (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013).

Therefore, the following attendance action plan recommendations seek to support elementary school leaders. Through practical, cost efficient strategies such as: building relationships with stakeholders, consistently reviewing and analyzing attendance data, clearly identifying stakeholders accountability measures, implementing interventions and incentive initiatives, and increasing engagement experiences for families and community members CA can be substantially reduced. This action plan can be implemented within any elementary school district to address CA regardless of students' race, gender, SES, IEP/504 plans, ELL acquisition levels, and other variables that sometimes prohibit school communities from moving forward.

Core Interventions

The following recommendations are presented to elementary school districts and related stakeholder groups as a district-wide “Attendance Matters” campaign. These practical strategies and recommendations aim to reduce chronic absenteeism and have been organized into an action plan for districts and schools to implement in highly accountable, inclusive, and cost-efficient manners. Below are the core intervention recommendations.

1. Under this attendance action plan, a school staff member will be designated as the building’s attendance clerk and tasked with consolidating attendance data in each school within a given district. This attendance data should be submitted to building administration by 10:30 a.m. daily in order to coordinate attendance initiative efforts. In order to support the attendance clerk and campaign initiatives, attendance monitors will follow up with classes when they do not submit attendance data by the expected schoolwide time. *See the “Paraprofessionals” section for more information on designated roles.*
2. At the building’s receipt of daily attendance data, an automatic RCS call would then be queued for the first day of any given student’s absence. On a student’s second cumulative (not necessarily consecutive) day of absence, the designated attendance clerk will call and email the student’s parent(s) or guardian(s) to discuss the absences. Even if the student’s family notifies the school that the absence is excused, a follow-up email from the attendance clerk should be sent in response thanking the parent(s) or guardian(s) for communicating the absence and expressing that the school is eagerly waiting for the return of the student. Building administrators should be copied on these emails. On the third day, the student’s classroom teacher will call, and a “We miss you!” video will be recorded by the class and emailed to both the student and the student’s parent(s) or guardian(s). Upon the student’s fourth absence, the building’s social worker will then call and email the student’s family to discuss the absences. Upon the fifth absence, the school’s building-level administrative staff will call the student/parent(s) to check in and plan an in-person attendance intervention meeting.
3. Attendance action steps for a student’s sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth absences will repeat the actions taken for the first, second, third, and fourth absences, respectively. For the student’s tenth absence, however, both building-level and district-level administration staff, who will have signed up to support attendance interventions in the building during an “Adopt-a-School” campaign prior to the school year, will visit the student’s home with

a care package from the school that includes the following: missing work, socio-emotional books, “Attendance Matters” paraphernalia (i.e., a t-shirt, a hat, socks, rubber band bracelets, a pencil, a button or pin, reusable water bottle, etc.), and a “We miss you!” card from their classmates and the attendance club. During this visit, staff will also invite the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) to plan another attendance intervention meeting, at which they would make further efforts to find out what the student’s barriers to attendance are and determine ways that the school can support them. *See the “District Administrators and Cabinet Members” section for more information on the “Adopt-a-School” campaign, and see the “Students” section for more information on campaign paraphernalia and “We miss you!” cards.*

4. Action steps for a student’s eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth absences will -- like the sixth through ninth absences -- repeat the first four interventions. When the student’s fifteenth absence has been reported by the attendance clerk, the student’s parent(s) or guardian(s) will receive another call and email from building administration staff, again inviting them to an attendance intervention meeting at which they can revise the original support plan. By this stage in the attendance action plan process, the student and their family may also be sent a personalized “We miss you!” video featuring district cabinet members. For this, the school’s assistant superintendent would be tasked with gathering four to five colleagues of their choice to record and email the video to the student and their parent(s) or guardian(s) -- or, preferably, this task can be undertaken by the district leaders who signed up for the school during the “Adopt-a-School” campaign.
5. The student’s sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth reported absences will warrant one last repetition of the first four action steps. Upon the twentieth absence, “Adopt-a-School” administrators, as well as the building administrator, will visit the student’s home again with another care package and a personalized “We miss you!” video (this time, featuring the district superintendent) will be emailed to the student and their family by the superintendent, as well as a card from the district’s board members. Another offer to hold an attendance intervention meeting will be made to the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) during this visit.
6. If the student is then absent for a twenty-first time, the student’s name will be given to the ROE’s truancy officer. The intervention of the truancy officer will be based on the classifications of the absences. Building-level administrators must disaggregate attendance data to determine if a student is “truant” or “chronically absent.” If the student is chronically absent (rather than truant), their parent(s) or guardian(s) should be invited to make another round of revisions to the intervention plan and additional resources should be given to the family at the building and district levels.
7. Chronically absent students and model attendance students in the school will participate in an attendance club. Members will announce the classes which achieve, maintain, or exceed the 97% target average attendance rate over the school’s intercom system daily, and pictures of classrooms which achieve perfect attendance will be posted to school webpages and social media profiles monthly. The attendance club will host attendance award assemblies quarterly or annually (as determined by the school’s individual intervention needs) with the superintendent, cabinet members, and board members invited to attend. They will also design “Attendance Matters” paraphernalia (i.e., t-shirts, hats, socks, rubber

band bracelets, pencils, buttons or pins, reusable water bottles, etc.) that will be made available as both purchasable merchandise and as redemption prizes for classes and students who achieve attendance goals.

8. Classrooms which achieve, maintain, or exceed the 97% target average attendance rate each month will hold themed school spirit days, host a family dance party or family movie night, and/or be granted extra technology time on Fridays (i.e., “Fun Fridays”). They will also earn vouchers to shop at the school store and entries to win large raffle prizes for all of its students at the end-of-the-school-year drawing.
9. Teachers of classrooms which achieve a perfect monthly attendance rate will be awarded a redeemable voucher to order any one item for their classroom, in alignment with school budget allotment. Furthermore, teachers who achieve perfect personal work attendance monthly will have their pictures displayed in the staff lounge, earn one additional plan period for the following month, and be included in a random draw for parking in the administrators’ spot for one full week the following month.
10. Paraprofessionals who achieve perfect personal work attendance monthly will also have their pictures displayed in the staff lounge, earn one additional extended lunch period for the following month, and also be included in the random draw for an administrator parking spot the following month.

Higher attendance rates result in greater academic achievement and increased funding allocations for districts and schools. The sections which follow outline detailed recommendations for accountability measures and incentives/interventions specific to the various stakeholder groups associated with promoting attendance in schools.

Stakeholder Groups, Accountability Measures, and Initiatives/Incentives

Superintendent and Board Members

Measure(s) of Accountability

1. School attendance data will be reviewed as a running agenda item at every board meeting. During these reviews, chronic absenteeism data should be highlighted per school, current initiatives that are being implemented should also be discussed, and funding needs for attendance campaign materials and incentives will be discussed during these meetings.
2. Each school should have a sign-in sheet available for their parents/guardians to sign in at all board meetings to track those who attend. These sign-in sheets should be shared with all building administrators via Google Docs within forty-eight hours of each board meeting.
3. School attendance policies should not only be detailed and easily found in board policy documents but also made so in all student handbooks. Information on the district-wide attendance campaign should be posted and accessible via its own tab on the district’s webpage, and this information should also be posted on individual schools’ websites within the district. The district’s attendance policy; the incentives for various stakeholder groups to support its initiatives; contact information for each school’s attendance clerk; and

attendance campaign paraphernalia available as purchasable merchandise will be outlined on the website. This webpage will also introduce a district-specific social media hashtag (such as #d000attendancematters, wherein “000” can be substituted for the district number) for the campaign. *See the “Incentive(s)/Initiative(s)” sub-sections in each of the following sections for detailed examples of incentives for each stakeholder group, and see the “Students” section for more information on campaign paraphernalia.*

4. A representative should stop by all school-hosted events and/or assemblies for classrooms that achieve, maintain, or exceed the 97% target attendance rate.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. A district-wide incentive should be offered quarterly to schools which achieve the target attendance and chronic absenteeism rates. See the “Incentive(s)/Initiative(s)” sub-sections in the following sections for detailed examples of this stakeholder’s group participation in attendance campaign initiatives and incentives.
2. The superintendent and board members can be on the district-wide sports teams which compete during the attendance campaign’s quarterly sports competitions.

Cabinet Members and District Administrators

Measure(s) of Accountability

1. Assistant superintendents will make discussion of district attendance data a weekly agenda item in meetings with their principals, and this data will then be discussed again at cabinet meetings and school board meetings.
2. An “Adopt-a-School” campaign will be advertised at the beginning of each school year. District leaders will “adopt” one school (in smaller districts) to three schools (in larger districts) and support the associated building administrators to implement attendance action plan initiatives and intervention steps. *Refer back to “Core Interventions” and see the “Building Leaders” section for information on district administrators’ and cabinet members’ roles/responsibilities for the “Adopt-a-School” initiatives and attendance campaign intervention steps.*
3. A representative should stop by all school-hosted events and/or assemblies for classrooms that achieve, maintain, or exceed the 97% target attendance rate.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. The district’s technology and communications departments will visit schools monthly to gather videos and pictures of students and staff members which have reached the target attendance rate and share them on both the district’s website and social media accounts. This media should be updated monthly on all online platforms.
2. District administrators whose adopted schools achieve, maintain, or exceed the target 97%

monthly average attendance rate would be eligible to choose one day the following month to end their work day early (i.e., a half day) without using their benefit time.

3. Assistant superintendents and/or district-level administrators will have the opportunity to cover school buildings of principals selected to be “Superintendent for a Day.”
4. Cabinet members and district administrators can be on the district-wide sports teams which compete during the attendance campaign’s quarterly sports competitions.

Building Leaders

Measure(s) of Accountability

1. Weekly meetings should be held with building administration in order to review attendance data and assess needed interventions, and bi-weekly Google Meet or Zoom meetings should be hosted to convene and review attendance data with building and district administration staff who signed up to adopt the school during the “Adopt-a-School” campaign. Discussion of school attendance rate and chronic absenteeism data, both by classroom and for the building as a whole, should be a running agenda item at monthly staff meetings and weekly PLC meetings.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. Principals whose school-wide attendance achieves, maintains, or exceeds the target average attendance rate of 97% monthly will have the opportunity to become “Superintendent for a Day” by random selection. A district-level administrator will cover the building in their stead.

Teachers

Measure(s) of Accountability

1. All teachers should have access to school-wide attendance data and be knowledgeable of building- and district-level attendance action plan initiatives and incentives.
2. Teachers must submit their attendance data daily by the designated school-wide time.
3. Teachers must reach out to students and families at the third of every five absences for any given student, as outlined in “Core Interventions.”
4. Teachers must review their individual classroom’s attendance data and interventions during their weekly PLC meetings.
5. Teachers should use the district’s attendance campaign hashtag when supporting initiatives and events.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. Teachers who achieve perfect personal work attendance monthly will have their pictures displayed in the staff lounge, earn one additional plan period for the following month, and be included in a random draw for parking in the administrators' spot for one full week the following month.
2. Teachers whose classrooms achieve or maintain the 97% target average attendance rate will have a photo of their class featured on the school's social media platforms and on the district website monthly and displayed on monitors in building hallways.
3. Teachers whose classes have perfect attendance will be awarded a redeemable voucher to order any one item for their classroom, in alignment with school budget allotment.
4. Teachers will have the opportunity to earn extra pay working at district attendance campaign sports competitions and providing childcare to families during practices.

Paraprofessionals

Measure(s) of Accountability

Attendance Clerk.

1. The attendance clerk pulls and consolidates attendance data from the online reporting platform used by the school or district and submits it to all building administrators, organized by classroom. All absent students should be listed on the daily report along with their classroom and grade level, along with how many days each student has been absent from that class, on a running Google Sheet file by 10:30 a.m. daily.
2. School attendance data bi-weekly on a secure platform via the school's website which is accessible by parents/guardians bi-weekly.

Attendance Monitors.

1. If chosen to be an attendance monitor, these staff members will support the attendance clerk by visiting classrooms who have not submitted their daily attendance by the designated schoolwide time.
2. Attendance monitors will also facilitate the attendance club with chronically absent students and model peers. *See the "Students" section for more information on attendance club action steps and related measures of accountability for staff members.*
3. Paraprofessionals can be utilized as "attendance buddies" who are directly assigned to support and work with students who are chronically absent, as well as attendance monitors.
4. Paraprofessionals should use the district's attendance campaign hashtag when supporting initiatives and events.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. Paraprofessionals who achieve perfect personal work attendance monthly will have their pictures displayed in the staff lounge and earn one extended lunch period the following month, and will be included in a random draw for parking in the administrators' spot for one full week the following month.
2. Paraprofessionals will have the opportunity to earn extra pay working at the district's attendance campaign sports competitions and providing childcare to families during practices

Students

Measure(s) of Accountability

1. The attendance club is geared primarily toward chronically absent students and establishing a peer-to-peer accountability partner system for all students.
2. Chronically absent students and model attendance students will participate in an attendance club. Members will announce the classes which achieve, maintain, or exceed the 97% target average attendance rate over the school's intercom system daily, as well as distribute individual attendance awards to classes/students monthly and annually.
3. "Attendance Matters" paraphernalia (i.e., t-shirts, hats, socks, rubber band bracelets, pencils, buttons or pins, reusable water bottles, etc.) will be designed by students in the attendance club and made available as both purchasable merchandise and as redemption prizes for classes and students that achieve attendance goals. These items will also be included in the care bags distributed to chronically absent students.
4. In order to support attendance campaign efforts, pre-designed "We miss you!" card templates should be available in a Google Drive accessible by school staff. The attendance club would create card designs and upload them to this Drive for use by classes and other attendance campaign participants.
5. The attendance club will also be tasked with sending a card and recorded video message to any given absent student for the fourth of every five absences recorded for that student.
6. Paraprofessionals will assist in making the care bags and facilitating the attendance club.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. Classrooms which achieve or maintain the 97% target average attendance rate will have a photo of their class featured on the school's social media platforms and on the district website monthly and displayed on monitors in building hallways.
2. Further weekly/monthly incentives should be voted on by the classroom from the following options.
3. Classrooms can have themed school spirit days, host a family dance party or family movie night, or be granted extra technology or recess time on Fridays (i.e., "Fun Fridays").

4. Classrooms which exceed the target average attendance rate of 97%, will be awarded a redeemable voucher to order any one item for their classroom, in alignment with school budget allotment.
5. Staff and students will earn vouchers to shop at the school store for reaching the 97% monthly attendance rate target.
6. Classrooms that meet campaign goals can also earn entries to win large raffle prizes for all of its students at the end-of-the-school-year drawing. Students should be shown these prizes on the first day of school and encouraged, along with staff, to use the campaign hashtag on social media.
7. Attendance award assemblies can be held quarterly or annually, as determined by the school's individual intervention needs. The superintendent, cabinet members, and board members will be invited to all attendance award assemblies.

Parents/Guardians

Measure(s) of Accountability

1. Parents/Guardians should visit the district's and school's attendance campaign webpage(s) for policies, updates, incentives, and attendance campaign paraphernalia.
2. Parents/Guardians should attend monthly attendance data review meetings, attend bi-weekly board meetings, and access the building's attendance data bi-weekly on a secure platform via the school's website and weekly via calls from teachers and administrators.
3. Parents/Guardians should refer to bi-weekly bulletins for information on attendance intervention initiatives and resources. Parents/Guardians should also attend PTA meetings bi-weekly to forge additional networking opportunities and relationships with other parents/guardians.
4. Parents/Guardians should use the district's attendance campaign hashtag when supporting initiatives and events.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. Parents/Guardians of classrooms that achieve, maintain, or exceed the 97% monthly target attendance rate will be invited to participate in school-hosted "Family Fun Nights" (i.e., dance parties, movie nights, story hour, art exhibitions, craft nights).
2. Schools can also host a parent appreciation night every quarter. Awards can be given to parents who attended bi-weekly data meetings, PTA meetings, and/or board meetings, as well as those who participated in sports competitions.
3. The district's elementary school parents/guardians could form various co-ed volleyball, basketball, and softball #d000attendancematters sports teams.
4. These teams would practice once a month and compete at weekend-long exhibition tournaments hosted by the district quarterly. Childcare and meals will be made available for families participating in practices (i.e., 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the fourth Friday of

every month). The sport that will be played is dependent on the season, and team apparel should be representative of the individual schools. The winner of the best two out of three exhibition games will play the district's sports team at a championship tournament hosted quarterly at one of the district's high schools. The minimum parent/guardian participation number to determine competition feasibility should be ten per school team and sport. Funds raised at tournaments can go towards incentive prizes and attendance clubs.

Community Members

Measure(s) of Accountability

1. A monthly community town hall meeting will be hosted by each school. Attendance data will be reviewed by building administrators. Community members can offer feedback on and suggestions for the campaign's attendance action steps and incentives at these meetings.
2. Community members can support the attendance campaign and interventions by participating in fundraisers, donating gift cards for the action plan's incentives, and promoting the district's attendance campaign by using its #d000attendancematters hashtag on their business/organization social media pages.

Initiative(s)/Incentive(s)

1. Community members can be invited as vendors at school-hosted family night events, back-to-school rallies, sports tournaments, and attendance award assemblies. Local fire departments and police departments will be invited to stop by these events.
2. Schools can host end-of-the-school-year community appreciation nights where community members will be recognized for their participation in campaign efforts throughout the school year.

District-wide attendance policies are essential for combating CA. Stakeholders' accountability measures, absence reporting procedures, remediation steps, family/caregiver engagement, community involvement, procedures for homework/make-up work, clear definitions for an excused absence, unexcused absence, and truancy, incentives, early dismissal/late arrivals procedures and the absence classification types, attendance PD for staff members, and consequences for poor attendance which is typically addressed by a districts' local ROE truancy officer should be standard attendance policy components. However, the action steps that are needed to reduce an individual district's/school's CA data should be tailored to the institution's demographics and funding allocations.

Furthermore, the "Attendance Matters" action plan sought to answer the critical research question: which stakeholders are needed to combat chronic absenteeism? The identification of stakeholders and accountability measures, intervention methods, family/community engagement, and data analysis strategies are essential to combating CA. Practical action steps were provided

throughout the action plan and they can be implemented within any elementary school district to address CA regardless of students' race, gender, SES, IEP/504 plans, ELL acquisition levels, and other variables that sometimes prohibit school communities from moving forward. Our 21st-century students rely on us to help their generation overcome CA once and for all so that they can triumphantly lead us to a future filled with equality, innovation, creativity, sustainability, hope, peace, and love. I firmly believe that the implementation of this attendance action plan will lead us one step closer to this incredible goal.

Acknowledgement of Implementation/Recommendations Limitations

Although this attendance action plan is exhaustive, identifies stakeholders, includes measures of accountability, outlines a plethora of interventions/incentives, invites family/community engagement, and it incorporates data retrieval and analysis strategies, I am aware that there still might be some limitations to the implementations of my recommendations. Some districts/schools may not have the staff capacity to incorporate some of the accountability measures and interventions/incentives. Additionally, some staff members may be resistant to implementing some of the incentives/interventions, which might cause teacher/paraprofessional unions to resist implementations. District administrators and Board members schedules and other obligations might hinder their capacity to support individual schools closely. Furthermore, families and community members may not get involved with the various engagement opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Research Questions that were Raised

Goldstein et al. (2003) highlighted that the lack of consistent classroom attendance is one of the dominant barriers to learning that students and teachers face in the U.S. The DOE has acknowledged that school absenteeism is the primary factor that links to performance disparities among students. Additionally, absenteeism rates have been proportionally recognized as a crisis by the DOE (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Furthermore, CA is the greatest predictor of grade retention, suspensions, and dropout rates among K-12th grade students (Robinson et al., 2018). Historically, monitoring absenteeism data has been overlooked by policymakers and educators. Additionally, attendance has been viewed as a fixed trait, such as income levels, race, or ethnicity (Nauer, 2016). The need to develop a comprehensive action plan to eradicate CA is urgent. My capstone project explored the answers to the following questions:

1. What key factor impact chronic absenteeism?
2. What policies and systems do districts have in place to decrease chronic absenteeism?
3. Which stakeholders are needed to combat chronic absenteeism?

My research revealed that CA data is publicly accessible, and many school districts have written attendance policies that are available to all stakeholders. However, it was challenging to identify data analysis strategies, stakeholders' accountability measures, clear interventions for students, and family/community engagement initiatives in all of the attendance policies that were analyzed. The absence of these identifiers within the policies are the key factors that impact CA. Chang (2010) stated that school leaders must prioritize the analysis of attendance data. Administrators must also ensure that all staff members are aware of school-based initiatives to reduce CA, and they must also monitor the active participation and support of initiatives from all staff members. The partnerships that school leaders forge with staff, families, and community members to promote and monitor attendance initiatives can also eradicate the barriers that often hinder students from attending school daily. Disengagement and dropout rates are minimized when absenteeism is detected early, and intervention methods are implemented intentionally, consistently, and effectively (Henry et al., 2012). Practical action steps were provided throughout the Attendance Matters action plan and they can be implemented within any elementary school district to address CA regardless of students' race, gender, SES, IEP/504 plans, ELL acquisition levels, and other variables that sometimes prohibit school communities from moving forward.

Stated Purpose of the Project

CA has troubled our K-12th grade educational system, and many stakeholders have become weary with attempting to resolve this matter. Historically, monitoring absenteeism data has been overlooked by policymakers and educators. Additionally, attendance has been viewed as a fixed

trait, such as income levels, race, or ethnicity. Furthermore, principals have been aware of students' attendance data, but they often regarded tracking it as another task that created more paperwork for them, or they perceived it as an additional operational issue (Nauer, 2016; London et al., 2016). The need to develop a comprehensive action plan to eradicate CA is urgent and long overdue. My capstone project analyzed existing attendance data and policies within a large Midwestern State to provide systems of support to elementary school leaders to combat CA. Practical action steps to address CA were provided to school leaders throughout my capstone project. The identification of stakeholders and accountability measures, intervention methods, family/community engagement, and data analysis strategies are all key components for combating CA and were included in the Attendance Matters action plan. The outlined action steps can be implemented regardless of students' race, gender, SES, IEP/504 plans, ELL acquisition levels, and other variables that sometimes prohibit school communities from moving forward.

Possible Implications for Educational Policy

Many LIS and families bear the burdens of unreliable transportation, violence in the community, insufficient access to quality health care, and low paying jobs with nontraditional work hours and limited flexibility on their jobs. Unfortunately, these extreme barriers negatively impact LIS' daily attendance (Chang & Romero, 2008). Certainly, these are the same students who benefit the most from being in school daily. In fact, one of the most effective strategies for overcoming poverty is to commission students who live in poverty-stricken communities to attend school daily. This act alone, even without any transformational or qualitative improvements in the nation's public education system, will increase academic achievement, high school graduation and college attainment rates, which will inevitably enhance students' social progression and economic stability (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

The reduction of school absenteeism has driven recent educational reform efforts and initiatives at the national level. Many professionals are attempting to define absenteeism, significant discrepancies exist in the research because of the massive overgeneralizations and singular vantage point of researchers. Consequently, a minimal consensus has been acquired to define, assess, and treat the full spectrum of school absenteeism (Kearney, 2003). Policymakers and educators have based their initiatives and research around the ideology that better attendance produces better scores on standardized achievement tests. This assumption is indeed, correct. However, without assessing any data from standardized test scores, CA is the greatest predictor of grade retention, suspensions, and dropout rates among K-12th grade students (Robinson et al., 2018).

When the adequate amount of focus is given to unpack the CA crisis that plagues our country, then we can collectively develop systems of support and plans of action to eliminate the problem, identify the participants, and create an effective panacea. The outlined action steps that were included in the Attendance Matters action plan provided elementary school leaders with practical action steps to implement by identifying stakeholders and accountability measures, intervention/incentive methods, family/community engagement opportunities, and data analysis strategies for reducing CA. My research will add to the progressive body of policy research that

identifies strategies for combating CA. Our 21st-century students rely on us to help their generation overcome CA once and for all so that they can triumphantly lead all of us to a future filled with equality, innovation, creativity, sustainability, justice, hope, peace, and love. I am confident that my capstone project will assist with progressing the K-12th grade education system towards this incredible goal.

Suggested Areas for Further Analysis/Evaluation

My research provided elementary school leaders with recommendations and strategies for combating CA. Additional studies should be conducted to find systems of support for middle and high school leaders. Stakeholders at middle and high school levels may need to implement different interventions/incentives measures, and family/community engagement opportunities because of the students chronological ages and developmental levels. However, all initiatives must include data analysis strategies, accountability measures, and they must be rooted in positive relationships. When students believe and feel that the adults in their world, particularly within the school community, care and are concerned about them they are inclined to attend, perform, and achieve. Students must be assured that they matter. If students possess a bond with teachers and school staff members, they are less likely to misbehave, have chronic absences, and become truant. Students must have connections with the adults in the building, as a result, student's engagement and attendance will increase. However, if these connections are minimal or non-existent students will not attend, and nothing will keep them engaged within the school community. Relationships are essential (Marvul, 2012).

Furthermore, schools must consistently implement incentive programs and engagement opportunities at all grade levels as measures to minimize CA and truancy. When students are not captured by the atmosphere within the school, distractions outside of school will certainly influence them and draw them away. Research has revealed that students who lack peer connections, student-staff relationships, participation, and involvement within the school building, will inevitably struggle with low academic achievement, poor attendance, and ultimately drop out. The impact that dropouts have within communities is enormous. Students who leave the safety and security of their school communities and resort to dropping out, often create the most havoc and delinquent acts within these same communities, All instructional leaders must consistently implement incentive programs and engagement opportunities as measures to minimize CA and truancy (Cole, 2011; Henry et al.,2012).

Motivating students through incentives should not be viewed as costly expenditures. Creative and meaningful incentives can be implemented within all schools, especially those suffering from budget deficits. Additional recess time, out of uniform days, homework passes, weekend dances, and extra technology periods are all examples of strategic incentives that are cost efficient and extremely impactful. Increasing students' accountability among their peers and incorporating their unique feedback for incentive ideas can be powerful tools to implement when designing incentive programs (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). These strategies can be implemented at all grade levels, and additional action research should be explored to support middle and high school educational communities.

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