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# A Study of Addressing Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy: The Attendance Improvement Program at Emil G. Hirsch High School (Chicago, IL)

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**A Study of Addressing Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy:**

**The Attendance Improvement Program at Emil G. Hirsch High School (Chicago, IL)**

College of Education

DePaul University

A Capstone in Education with a Concentration in Educational Leadership
By
Beverly Taylor-Williams
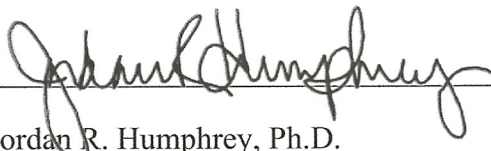
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

June 2022

TRUANCY

Counts only unexcused
absences

VS.

CHRONIC
ABSENCES

Counts all absences:

Excused, unexcused,
and suspensions.
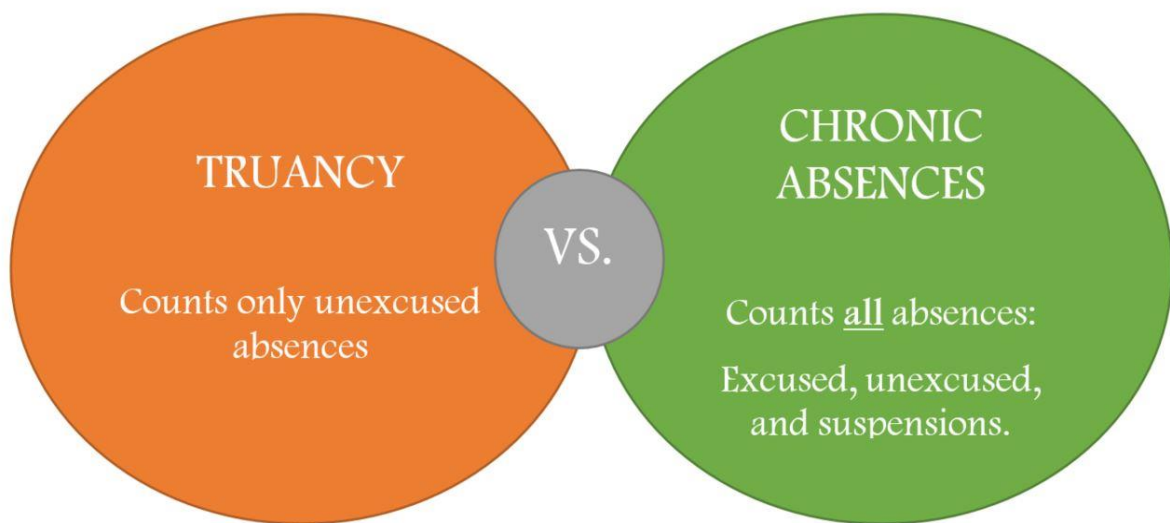
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Date

**Certification of Authorship**

I certify that I am the sole author of this capstone and have 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 to program guidelines.

Author Signature *Beverly Taylor Williams*     Date  May 12, 2022

## Executive Summary

This project examines the historical barriers and challenges of chronic absenteeism and truancy and offers an intervention strategy aimed at reducing these rates at one specific school, Emil G. Hirsch High School in Chicago, IL. The detrimental effects problematic absenteeism has on individual students, schools, the Department of Education, and the community has been researched extensively. Building on this existing literature, this project explores further the mitigating factors for chronic absenteeism and truancy and proposes a new intervention strategy to increase student attendance rates.

The Attendance Improvement Program was designed through this capstone project-draws on elements of social control theory and existing literature on best practices to develop and then implement realizable strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy, that included frequent needs assessments, a reward, and incentive structure, and collaboration between community stakeholders, parents, and teachers.

This pilot program aims to decrease student absenteeism and truancy rates at Emil G. Hirsch High School through programmatic elements that include repeated student/parent needs assessments, reward and incentive structures, and activities offered in collaboration with community stakeholders, parents, and teachers.

The Attendance Improvement Program also has the potential to serve as a model for other low-performing, urban schools facing similar issues with chronic absenteeism and truancy to consider. Practical strategies and recommendations to reduce and eventually end chronic absenteeism and truancy in the institution are derived from a set of best practices identified through a comprehensive literature review. More specifically, needs assessment, rewards, counseling programs, and parent-teacher collaboration will be utilized to reduce truancy and chronic absenteeism in Hirsch High School.

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## Acknowledgment

      I would like to acknowledge the massive support I received from my sergeants and colleagues from the City of Chicago Police Department for their unfettered support and the opportunities they provided me in furthering my research. In addition, I am thankful to my fellow students with whom it was a pleasure studying during the entire program. I must concede that my deceased parents played a crucial role in the completion of this major milestone because they were a constant source of motivation for me throughout the program. I perceive a strong sense of satisfaction in thinking about how proud they will feel about this enormous achievement of mine.

      At the same time, I wish to thank my daughter Charnele Cree Guerrero and Son-in-Law Hector G. Guerrero for always supporting and encouraging me in my endeavors.  Together, I must acknowledge the positive role of my only grandson Ezekiel, who has been a major source of inspiration for me in completing the final stretch of my research. Last but not the least; I would like to thank my husband, Christopher C. Williams for consistently providing me with unyielding support in completing the program and research

**Addressing Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy:**
**The Attendance Improvement Program at Emil G. Hirsch High School (Chicago, IL)**

Chronic absenteeism and truancy are critical challenges plaguing the contemporary American education system. Chronic absenteeism affects approximately 6.5 million students across the country every year (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019). While the problem occurs throughout kindergarten to high school, chronic absenteeism and truancy occur more frequently amongst students at the high school level. Studies indicate that approximately 19% of all high school students can be defined as "chronically absent" (US Department of Education, 2019). This definition applies when a student fails to attend at least 10% of the academic year due to either excused or unexcused absenteeism (US Department of Education, 2016). It is also defined as a student missing an average of two days in a month.

School absenteeism is a multifaceted, complex, and prevalent phenomenon within the United States' K-12 education system, and it has a tremendous impact on students' educational outcomes (Eklund et al., 2020; Patnode et al., 2018). Many factors contribute to absenteeism, and the reasons vary by state, district, and school. However, absenteeism negatively impacts students' academic performance regardless of the number of days missed and the patterns of absenteeism amongst individual students. (García and Weiss, 2018) conducted a study to provide a national estimate of school absenteeism's negative impact on academic performance. The study revealed that academic performance gaps were wider the more frequent students were absent. Students who missed 3-10 days or more of school per month had a significantly higher academic performance gap on standardized assessments when compared to students who did not miss any days of school. Additionally, students who were absent just 1-2 days a month also had a higher academic performance gap when compared to students who had perfect attendance. Additionally, Nauer (2016) specified that inconsistent attendance patterns can impact children's reading proficiency levels and retention status by the third grade. Overall, studies indicate that chronic absenteeism reduces students' math and reading achievement outcomes, educational engagement, and social engagement (Gottfried 2014).

The correlation between school absenteeism and academic performance is problematic for all students. However, the degree and impact of absenteeism for students vary across subgroups. These subgroups are often classified by students' disabilities, race, gender, socioeconomic status (SES,) ethnicity, or English Language Lerner's (ELL) acquisition (García & Weiss, 2018). Therefore, it is critical to examine why students are absent to address these varied causes of absenteeism across subgroups (García & Weiss, 2018). Even though this problem remains prevalent throughout the country, the attention devoted to overcoming absenteeism remains substantially inadequate (Goldstein et al., 2003). Historically, very few schools monitored whether individual students were missing extended periods regardless of whether the absences were excused or unexcused. Instead, schools often only tracked the number of students who attended each day and unexcused absences (Chang, 2010).

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. Chronic Absenteeism often occurs in stages, starting with having several excused absenteeism to continuing to truancy, which serves as the final stage (Reid, 2012). These stages suggest that if absenteeism is not resolved while students are still in the primary grades, this attendance problem escalates as students continue to matriculate through their elementary, middle, and high school educations (Chang & Jordan, 2012).

Chronic absenteeism is associated with various negative student outcomes (Goldstein et al., 2003; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017) and is the greatest predictor of grade retention, suspensions, and dropout rates among K-12th grade students (Robinson et al., 2018). For these reasons, absenteeism rates have been increasingly recognized as a nationwide crisis by the Department of Education (Goldstein et al., 2003). Chronic absenteeism on both achievement and socioemotional outcome.

This capstone project synthesized the existing research and literature on absenteeism and truancy and then used this information to form the foundation for an anti-truancy and absenteeism program developed to target these issues as experienced at one urban high school in Chicago, IL. This new Attendance Improvement Program aims to reduce the escalating problem of chronic absenteeism and truancy experienced at Emil G. High School and may serve as a model for other urban schools battling these same issues.

**The Problem of Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy at Emil G. Hirsch High School**

Truancy and chronic absenteeism affect students in various aspects of their lives. Research conducted by the US Department of Research (2016) indicated that extensive absence from school, whether excused or unexcused, results in students failing to master the knowledge and skills needed to successfully progress from one grade level to the next. Chronic absenteeism and truancy are associated with poor grade retention, suspensions, and dropout rates among K-12th grade students, underscoring this phenomenon as a problem that requires attention (Robinson et al., 2018).

Studies suggest that students who reside in low-income neighborhoods are typically 2-3 times more likely to be chronically absent and truant (Chang & Balfanz, 2016; Reid, 2005). Moreover, findings indicate these same students lack the financial resources needed to compensate for the loss of learning they experience. According to Chang and Balfanz (2016), chronic absenteeism and truancy disproportionately affect students with disabilities and students from predominantly minority communities. In many cases, this chronic absenteeism goes unnoticed because the schools primarily focus on who attends rather than focusing on those who consistently fail to attend and consequently suffer academically.

Emil G. Hirsch High School is a public school located in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood of the South Side of Chicago, Illinois, and is part of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system. The school is also located within the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) 6th Police District, beat 624. Collectively, neighborhood and community observers have noted that Hirsch High School students fail to regularly attend school at higher rates than other high schools within

the CPS system. Additional follow-up conversations with Hirsch High School teachers and administrators confirmed the school's persistent chronic absenteeism and truancy issues.

The CPS system has five levels: 1+, 1, 2+, 2, and 3[A1]. Within this rating, the lower number (e.g., 1+, 1) signifies that the school demonstrates a higher rating on benchmarks such as achievement and attendance rates (Illinois State Board of Education 2019). Conversely, a higher number within this rating system (e.g., 2, 3) indicates a lower rating on the benchmark indicators the lower the quality of the school. In AY19-20 Hirsch High School received a Level 2 rating on this CPS quality indicator, a rating that establishes Hirsch High's need for targeted intervention strategies. (Illinois State Board of Education 2019).

School attendance data gathered by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) highlights further the extreme cases of chronic student absenteeism and truancy occurring annually at Hirsch High School. This data reveals that Hirsch High School experiences chronic absenteeism and truancy at rates higher than both the state and district averages combined (Illinois State Board of Education 2019). Within the last three academic years, Hirsch High School's absenteeism has increased by 100%, 100%, and 52%, respectively, compared to the 23%, 24%, and 13% increases experienced within the district and the 17%, 18%, and 11% experienced throughout the state (Illinois State Board of Education 2019). Hirsch High School also has a record of alarming truancy rates. According to ISBE, the school recorded an overall truancy rate of 65.1% in 2020, while the district and the state recorded truancy rates of 22.3% and 9.6%, respectively (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). Normal student attendance serves as another indicator of the attendance problems plaguing Hirsch High School. During the last 5 years, Hirsch High School reported an average attendance rate of only 83.2%., a rate much lower than the district (95.1%) and state averages of 95.4%, (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020).

Hirsch High School's 2019 School Progress Report identifies several of the factors contributing to its chronic absenteeism and truancy problem. First, this report highlights the Level 2 rating Hirsch High received on the CPS School Quality Rating. The report also reveals the school's below-average student growth rate, which can be attributed to Hirsch students' low PSAT scores. Thus, the school reports student growth and college readiness rates far below the expectations maintained within the CPS system. These data further demonstrate the problems experienced at Hirsch High due to its student truancy and absenteeism rates.

Hirsch students' poor performance on national, state, and district quality indicators also reflects the school's persisting problems with student non-attendance. In (2019), Hirsch High School achieved a 3% APR participation rate. This rate means that the school is performing below the national standards. Additional indicators of Hirsch's poor performance that can be attributed, in large part, to chronic absenteeism and truancy include low proficiency rates in mathematics and reading at 3% respectively, and an overall graduation rate of just 74% (Illinois State Board of Education 2019).

Chronic absenteeism and truancy foment damaging implications for both school and student outcomes. Hirsch High School consistently reports high dropout rates. Between 2016 and 2020, the school reported dropout rates of 16%, 4%, 5%, 27%, and 11% for each year respectively. When compared with the state's average rates of between 2 and 4% for this same period, Hirsch's

significantly higher dropout rates demand the need for more strategic, targeted intervention strategies.

In addition, the school's culture and climate have earned it a classification of "Partially organized for Improvement," which means the school's culture maintains several weaknesses and few strengths. For example, the school's 2019 School Progress Report indicates that the school's connectedness and sense of membership within the surrounding community remain substantially weak. Another factor contributing to Hirsch High's problems with absenteeism and truancy is its lack of any anti-truancy programming within the school. This lack of any program dedicated to curbing chronic absenteeism and truancy means the school does not advance efforts to address its problem of non-attendance. This programming deficit may explain, in part, why Hirsch High School continues to experience its above-average levels of absenteeism and truancy.

Some home-related determinants of chronic absenteeism and truancy that the researcher determined to be important for the non-attendance problems include the prevalence of homelessness and low economic well-being among Students attending Hirsch High School who also experience many of the same home-related determinants of chronic absenteeism and truancy indicated within existing research. In the broader literature, stressful home environments, transportation problems, lack of parental involvement, and poverty contribute to truancy (Baker et al., 2001; Hancock et al., 2018; Teasley, 2004). The prevalence of homelessness and the low SES within the South Side area of Chicago in which Hirsch High School is located fuel student absenteeism and truancy. According to the Illinois State Board of Education, approximately 95% of Hirsch students come from low-income families, and about 18% identify as homeless (US Department of Education, 2019). Additionally, 100% of Hirsch students identify as minorities and 99% report a "poor" SES (Illinois State Board of Education 2019).

As the problem of chronic school absenteeism and truancy continues at Hirsch High School, it must adopt strategies to promote regular, consistent school attendance and deter non-attendance. Hirsch High School, therefore, serves as an ideal site to pilot the attendance program developed through this capstone project. The school's alarming student absenteeism and truancy rates combined with its poor standardized test results and overall academic performance demand that the school implements better strategies to address these problems. Its location within the South Side of Chicago suggests further the need for school-specific intervention strategies that also target the specific needs experienced within this low-income, high-crime area.

This capstone's Attendance Improvement Program aims to deliver targeted invention strategies that incorporate the needs demonstrated by Emil G. Hirsch High School and its student population. It seeks to resolve this problem of chronic absenteeism and truancy through programming targeted at addressing school and home-based factors as well as those presented by individual students. This unique intervention approach also has the potential to serve as a model for other urban schools facing circumstances and factors like those at Hirsch High School and within the South Side of Chicago.

**Theoretical Frameworks for the Attendance Improvement Program**

Hirschi's (1969) social control theory guided the development of the Attendance Improvement Program. This program adopted the theory because it recognizes the social environment's significant role in truancy and absenteeism behavior. The theory recognizes the role individual, home, and school-related variables play within chronic absenteeism and truancy and offers elements important to consider when addressing this problem.

*Social Control Theory*

Hirschi's social control theory proposes that adolescents who lack strong bonds to prosocial people and institutions (including school) are less constrained by prosocial norms and are more likely to engage in problem behavior (Henry & Huizinga, 2007). Involvement or engrossment comprises one of the four central elements of Hirschi's concept of bonding and this lack of bonding between the schools suggest a rationale as to why students may choose to skip school. Hence, the concept of lack of bond with the school is related to social control theory in that those with a low bond with the school are likely to have lower social control to act in ways that adhere to rules and conventions.



**Figure 1. Model of Social Control Theory (Hirschi, T. 1969)**

Hirschi's (1969) social control theory has four main tenets, and all four tenets of the theory are relevant in controlling the problem of truancy in Hirsch High School. Each tenet touches on the personal and social environments influencing learners' behaviors and how to control them. The four tenets of the theory are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first tenet of direct control suggests the strategies for controlling truancy. School leaders and teachers can affect student attendance behavior through punishments and rewards. Some students will respond positively to punishments issued by the school and within their home environment, whereas others will respond more positively to rewards (Oleson & Costello, 2019). Therefore, the pilot Attendance Improvement Program incorporates these ideas related to

punishment and rewards within its strategies for decreasing absenteeism and truancy within Hirsch High School.

The second tenet of indirect control can also be used to address the problem of truancy in Hirsch High School. Indirect control can address truant behavior by offering positive role models who exemplify proper behaviors and conduct (Oleson & Costello, 2019). These behaviors and conduct include following the rules of the school, not cutting classes, and being on time. The Attendance Improvement Program will also incorporate this concept of using positive role models to reinforce appropriate and acceptable school attendance behavior.

The third tenet of internal control suggests that students can be discouraged from engaging in truant behavior based on their values and conscience ((Oleson & Costello, 2019). This tenet suggests that any intervention needs to consider the values and beliefs exhibited by individual students, and this information should be used to tailor intervention strategies to each student. The Attendance Improvement Program incorporates this third tenet by having opportunities to engage in formal and non-formal exercises that discourage absentee and truant behavior through this values and conscience-based strategy.

The fourth and last tenet of Hirschi's (1969) social control theory includes needs satisfaction. Based on this tenet, if all student needs are not met, then we can safely assume that students will be more likely to engage in delinquent activities such as truancy (Oleson & Costello, 2019). Through this tenet, it is important to establish the reasons why students engage in truancy to provide the necessary support and fulfill the student needs not currently being met at school or within the home. For instance, some learners may engage in truancy to earn a living or to attend social gatherings. Therefore, the Attendance Improvement Program considers the unique needs of the students within Hirsch High School and uses strategies targeted at ensuring all these needs are consistently met.

## Conceptual Framework for the Attendance Improvement Program

A conceptual framework based on Hirschi's (1969) social control theory serves as the foundation for the Attendance Improvement Program developed for Hirsch High School. This conceptual framework has three primary dimensions – the individual, the school, and the home. The individual pertains to the child who is committing truancy, school refers to the teachers and other school personnel involved in the individual's life, and home-primarily refers to the parent/s and their interaction with their children.

The Attendance Improvement Program intentionally relies on intervention strategies focused on all three of these dimensions. First, it targets the individual students committing truancy by addressing the causes of this delinquent behavior. The program also targets the school and specifically the teachers and school leaders who have the authority to make decisions that affect these students. The Attendance Improvement Program works directly with Hirsch teachers and administrators to promote attendance strategies based on a rewards system, positive role models and mentoring, and consistent needs assessments. Lastly, the Attendance Improvement Program also includes home-based strategies that support the rewards system and mentoring provided by the school.

**Definition of Terms**

This project relied on the following definitions and terms related to absenteeism and truancy.

**Chronic Absenteeism:** Chronic absenteeism refers to excessive excused or unexcused absences that total 10% or more school days within an academic school year (Fitzpatrick-Doria, 2013).

**Compulsory Attendance Laws:** Compulsory attendance laws refer to a set of laws crafted by individual states to require school attendance for children of a certain age.

**Every Student Succeeds Act (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).

**Excused Absence:** Excused absence refers to a temporary formal absence and does not propose harm to children and has been agreed upon by school districts and parents/caregivers as a legitimate or valid cause of absence (Kearney 2003).

**Intervention:** Intervention refers to support and resources provided to an individual to address factors that contribute to absences, such as low self-esteem, school anxiety, social skills, medical conditions, discipline, parental support, and/or poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

**Low-income Students (LIS):** LIS refers to students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program (FRL). Typically, these students are recipients of Title I funds (Snyder et al., 2019).

**No Child Left Behind (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, to close the achievement gap. Although states did not have to observe this mandate.

**School Quality or Student Success Indicator (SQSS):** SQSS refers to an accountability measure under ESSA that states independently choose, to identify the quality of schools or the success of students (Bauer et al., 2018).

**Student Subgroups:** Student subgroups refer to 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 & Economic Policy Institute, 2018; Snyder et al., 2019).

**Title I:** Part A of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act which was revised under ESSA. Title I financial assistance to states for students who have been identified as low-income. Title 1 funding would be lost if they did not comply (Adams, 2017. 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 these grants contain individualized, specific criteria for districts to qualify for Title I funds (Snyder et al., 2019).

T**ruancy:** Truancy refers to excessive unexcused absences that total 10% or more school days during one academic year (Fitzpatrick-Doria, 2013).

**Unexcused Absence:** Unexcused absence refers to a full or partial day absence that has not been recognized by districts as a valid cause.

**Valid Absences:** Valid absences refer to 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.

## Literature Review

### *Historical Perspectives of Truancy*

This literature review highlights the issues and challenges that are related to the complex problem of chronic absenteeism (CA) within the US K-12th grade educational system. First, CA will be defined, and the historical perspective will be described. Next, the impact of CA, and some of the barriers and challenges to overcoming chronic absenteeism will be highlighted. Lastly, contemporary CA initiatives and preventions will be discussed.

Chronic absenteeism and truancy have similar yet distinct meanings. There are stages to chronic absenteeism, and truancy is often the final stage (Reid, 2012). Chronic absenteeism 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). The issue of chronic absenteeism and truancy has been at the core of school reform policies for several decades (Davis et al., 2019; London et al., 2016; Patnode et al., 2018).

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, disagreement exists among these diverse professionals, because of their differing views on fundamental concepts, definitions, treatments, and assessments for absenteeism. Unfortunately, this division of perspectives and remedies has often stagnated solutions for combating absenteeism (Kearney, 2003). The national crisis of chronic absenteeism within the K-12th grade public educational setting has not been fully understood until recent years (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Several historical factors 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 (Williams, 2020). Therefore, child labor laws and compulsory education were instituted as increased immigration, industrialization, and urbanization surfaced. School absenteeism quickly became a severe social and behavioral concern as the compulsory education movement gained momentum. Authors during the 19th century who wrote about the escalating school absenteeism crises were primarily from the psychology and education

field and often blended psychological and legal definitions to express their concerns about absenteeism. Consequently, they often defaulted to the word truancy. In this era, truancy was often defined as an absence from school that was willful and unlawful without the consent or approval of parents (Patnode et al., 2018).

Chronic absenteeism remains a problem in many United States schools (Davis et al., 2019; Eklund et al., 2020). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) highlighted this horrendous national situation, citing the decades-long negligence by school leaders to measure and address chronic absenteeism. 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 district's and states' websites. However, these same stakeholders were not privy to data on chronic absenteeism, which sometimes revealed that a quarter or more of students within one school were not regularly attending (Patnode et al., 2018; Williams, 2020).

## Determinants of Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism

### *School-based Determinants*

Truancy can be influenced by various school-related factors. These school-related factors include a problematic school environment and culture, the negative influence of peers, and poor academic performance (Abdullah et al., 2018; Saudi, 2021). The high school environment, on its own, has been known to influence truancy among students (Abdullah et al., 2018; Saudi, 2021). Noguera (2003) believed that school factors play a more important role than others in causing truancy and contribute to large numbers of young people dropping out of school.

Within the U.S., educational functioning (e.g., low grades, high rates of being retained in grade or placed in remedial or special programs) was found to be a determinant of truancy amongst students. Due to limited resources, schools tend to have an episodic concern about truant youth. Most often schools treat truancy as a management and disciplinary problem. Consequently, serious attention to the underlying causes of truancy is only given, typically, after a student's absence from school becomes frequent or chronic. By this point, the student has often developed more serious difficulties in school and other areas of psychosocial functioning in addition to not attending classes (Gendron & Pieper, 2005; Halpern, 2007).

Academic performance and involvement with delinquent peers are also determinants of truancy and these two variables form a synergistic relationship in which the relationship between delinquent peer association and truancy is mitigated among students who perform well in school (Gottfredson et al., 2005; Kimberly et al., 2007; Suleman et al., 2017). Other school components such as feelings of social isolation, participation in school sports and extracurricular activities are a change from one school to another, and educational aspirations impact a student's decision to skip school. Kimberly et al. (2007) and Gottfredson et al. (2005) noted that students' perceptions of their environment including school safety, gang activity at school, positive teaching practices, positive student-teacher relationships, and a caring school climate affect truancy amongst students.

A hostile school environment can also cause truancy. Students who lack friends or are being bullied are likely to skip school. This environmental factor is especially applicable to

students who look, act or dress differently. In addition, some kids may face peer pressure to skip class. High truancy rates frequently occur in schools with antagonistic relationships between staff and students and that maintain a poor attendance policy (Jarrett, 2013).

Kimberly et al. (2007) observed that students who performed better in school were truant less often, and students who associated with delinquent peers were truant more often. The researchers also noted that girls skipped more school days than boys (Kimberly et al., 2007). According to Reid (2005), truancy increases with each grade level and students gradually become more disengaged from school. As Reid opined, truancy is influenced by the setup of the curriculum and bullying (Credé et al., 2010; Horn & Jansen, 2009). Students who have poor or conflicting relationships with teachers will avoid school to avoid their teachers. Additionally, students may view the curriculum as too easy or too challenging the latter of which creates a mindset for students that they cannot achieve academic success. If a student does not feel he/she can succeed, then there will be no desire for one to attend school (Teasley, 2004). Students who experience bullying at school often do not inform their parents or teachers about this behavior out of fear of further consequences from the bully. In turn, these students stay away from the bully by choosing not to attend school (Reid, 2005). These studies, however, did not show the extent to which the mentioned school-related determinants influence truancy among learners.

### *Home-related Determinants*

Truancy can also be influenced by various home-related factors. These factors include a stressful home environment, transportation problems, lack of parental involvement, and poverty (Baker et al., 2001; Hancock et al., 2018; Teasley, 2004). Previous researchers showed that truant youths often experienced serious interrelated problems resulting from a stressful home environment (Baker et al., 2001). Within the U.S. many challenges leading to truancy can be traced to troubled families (e.g., parental educational problems, parental history of alcohol/other drug abuse or mental health problems, or involvement in crime) and troubled family relationships, which frequently begin at an early age (Baker, et al., 2001). Unpleasant weather while at home and transportation problems are also truancy determinants that remain largely unrecognized. Severe weather issues such as XXXX contribute to students not being able to leave their homes while transportation issues such as the bus not coming to the home or the car not starting also affect a student's ability to get to school (Teasley, 2004).

Other factors such as an unsupportive family environment or lack of community help contribute to truancy. Family factors such as "parentally condoned absence, not valuing education, domestic problems, inconsistent to inadequate parenting, and economic deprivation" (Reid, 2005) play a large role in truancy. Community attitudes and socio-economic factors put pressure on students which, in turn, do not encourage daily school attendance.

Parents also play a significant role in school attendance (Reid 2005) determined that, in Australia, truants and persistent absentees are most likely to come from disadvantaged home backgrounds and unfavorable social circumstances. Additionally, Reid observed that truant individuals are usually involved with promiscuous activities outside of the home, and this involvement in activities increases the likelihood that students will not attend school regularly.

In a randomized controlled trial, Stanton et al. (2004) found that parental involvement with and support of the adolescent was associated with less truancy and other problem behaviors. Henry (2007) also found a correlation between significant amounts of unsupervised time and truancy. Parental supervision is, therefore, an important determinant of truancy (Muula et al., 2012; Stanton et al., 2004).

In another study, Miller, and Plant (1999) present contradictory results, however, which indicated that parental caring and control are not significantly associated with truancy. Younger learners are more likely than older learners to consistently be under parental supervision and may thus be less likely to be truant than older pupils (Muula, et al., 2012).

In most cases, truant learners reveal that attending school is the last thing on their minds or the last priority of their time (Van Breda, 2006).  A study by Moriasi (2012) of truancy behavior within the City of Chicago revealed that lack of food at home, long distances to school, the drunkenness of parents, and family conflicts were influential factors contributing to students failing to attend school.

The home environment has so many factors that may influence truancy among students. This plethora of factors results, largely, from the socio-economic differences between the students and families. Researchers have determined that students from lower SES backgrounds experience different upbringings, parental attention, and living conditions than their higher SES peers.

### *Individual Student-related Determinants*

Truancy can also be influenced by various individual student-related factors. These factors include gender, alcohol consumption, and lack of academic interest (Best et al., 2006; Siziva et al., 2007; Weden & Zabin, 2005).

Each student has certain attributes that compel them to engage in deviant behaviors such as truancy. In the United States, Weden & Zabin (2005) reported that male adolescents were more likely to engage in problematic behaviors such as truancy. Siziya et al., (2007) also found that students 14 years or older were more likely to be truant than younger students. An earlier study by Baker et al., (2001) gave similar findings.

Truancy can also be associated with alcohol consumption or health problems. Best et al. (2006) reported that excessive alcohol drinking (10 more units of alcohol in one sitting) among 14–16-year-olds in the United Kingdom frequently led to truancy. Health problems are also identified as a major contributor to student absenteeism, whether it is the student's health issues or health issues within the immediate family. Although students should not come to school when severely sick, students with minor ailments often do not attend school even though this ailment would not prohibit the student from learning in the classroom (DeSocio et al., 2007).

Monobe & Khangela (2012) suggested that poor attendance is also related to poor motivation and claim that truancy often reflects more serious problems. These issues include

falling behind in classwork (often following an illness), a dislike or fear of certain lessons such as physical education, tests or examinations, or boredom or inactivity at school. Truancy also occurs more frequently with students who lack confidence in their mental abilities, have learning disabilities, have negative views of their abilities, or lack perseverance (Jarrett, 2013).

## The Impact of Truancy on Academic Performance

Studies demonstrate the various ways in which absenteeism is detrimental to students' achievement, grade promotion, graduation, self-esteem, and employment potential. In a longitudinal study of African American males, Azizi et al. (2010) found that of those students who were often truant in elementary school and truant in high school, 75% failed to graduate.

The paucity of research on school practices to improve attendance and reduce absenteeism is striking because truancy is associated with several important indicators of student failure and poor adjustment to school. Studies of dropouts show that leaving school is merely the culminating act of a long withdrawal process from school forecast by absenteeism in the early grades (Hallfors, et al., 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Finally, research indicates that students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests and that schools with better rates of student attendance tend to have higher passing rates on standardized achievement tests (Hallfors et al., 2002).

## Other Non-Academic Impacts of Truancy

The impact of truancy is not confined just to student academic performance. Henry (2007) indicated that truancy's consequences are extensive, often resulting in negative implications for multiple levels of society. In the short term, truancy can predict maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy. In the long-term, evidence reveals truancy as a predictor of poor adult outcomes, including violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and incarceration. Moreover, truancy exerts a negative effect on the community because it correlates with delinquency, crime, and other negative adult outcomes. Student dropout from school is the most obvious result of chronic absenteeism. According to Rodriguez and Concha (2009), truancy and dropout rates are concentrated more heavily in racially segregated central cities and within large high schools attended by mostly low-income youth of color. Dropout rates in these areas are reported at twice the national average, nearly 20%, and exceed 50-60% in some areas of the United States. In these areas, more students are dropping out than graduating (United States Department of Education 2008).

Another societal implication of truancy is an increase in crime rates and a steadily increasing incarcerated population. The most consistent finding regarding truancy and dropout rates correlates truant behavior with high rates of behavioral delinquency (Mueller & Giacomazzi, 2006). These forms of delinquency often include substance abuse, gang activity, and involvement in criminal activity such as burglary, auto theft, and vandalism. This latter behavior, often

committed as an adult, frequently leads to incarceration. In one cited example, 94% of Rhode Island's juvenile offenders are or have been considered truant from school (Byer & Khun, 2007). In an additional study, researchers determined that, on any given day, one in 10 male dropouts, - one in four black male dropouts, more specifically - are incarcerated or institutionalized in the United States (Dillon, 2009).

According to Spelman (2009), the United States houses in XXXX a greater proportion of its citizens than any other country, and the direct costs of this incarceration exceed $20,000 per prisoner per year. In contrast, the United States Department of Education reported an average spending per pupil in elementary and secondary schools of $9,391. Therefore, it could be argued that the U.S. values (financially) its murderers, rapists, and burglars (some of which are high school dropouts) over its impressionable learner population. This finding suggests the need for the American system of education to shift from its reactive to a more preventative approach to addressing this issue.

The implications of truancy extend to the national economy as well. In a 2009 study, Middleton (2009) determined that if South Carolina's high school dropout population from 2007 graduated with their given classes, their overall economic contribution would be roughly 8 billion dollars throughout their lifetime. Additionally, our nation's dropout students annually cost the nation approximately $260 billion in lost earnings and forgone taxes (Byer & Khun, 2007).

Another correlation between truancy, dropping out, and incarceration is seen through the alarming rates of illiteracy within the nation's prison system. Byer & Khun (2007) stated that 75% of the U.S.' incarcerated population can be considered illiterate.

## Best Practices: Attendance Improvement Strategies

The review of such literature on efforts to improve student attendance generally indicates that educational experts and researchers believe that effective attendance improvement programs typically contain a collection of related strategies rather than one isolated approach or practice.

### *Communication and Outreach Strategies*

Regardless of these selected tardiness policies, school and district administrators must seek feedback from relevant stakeholders regarding the approaches used to enforce school policies. The literature suggests that schools and school districts should adopt two primary approaches for communicating school attendance initiatives and policies throughout the surrounding communities (Taking Attendance Seriously, 2011). This report recommends two approaches that include 1) implementing large-scale outreach programs to educate students and their parents regarding school attendance policies and the consequences of missing school and 2) establishing sustained communication channels to inform students' parents about chronic absenteeism and truancy (Taking Attendance Seriously, 2011).

Programs effective in resolving chronic absenteeism and truancy usually involve significant parent involvement (Yeide & Korbin, 2009). As such, most school attendance initiatives usually begin with schools communicating attendance requirements to both students and parents. According to the Virginia Department of Education (2011), parental outreach sometimes involves schools communicating expectations about student attendance through a clear and concise letter detailing requirements. This type of communication may not be widely effective, however, given literacy and language barriers that may exist with parents. According to Student Advocacy (2008), outreach materials to parents should appear in other languages other than English when there is such a need. Moreover, these materials should be created in low-literacy formats to ensure that even the most critical demographic groups receive and understand the messages communicated.

Student Advocacy also recommends the use of more intensive parental outreach strategies that include schools highlighting and emphasizing parental responsibilities by holding small meetings for new parents and parents whose children have a history of attendance problems, posting attendance policies in areas where parents are likely to see them, and encouraging parents to seek clarifications regarding any unclear aspects of attendance policies.

Schools usually employ a wide range of approaches to communicate student absences throughout the academic year. The Virginia Department of Education, as one example, currently requires that schools within the state notify parents about all unexcused absences, a practice carried out through automated phone calls. When school attendance starts to become problematic for an individual student, educational experts recommend that schools intensify efforts to contact the involved parents by sending personalized letters, calling, or making home visits to highlight the student's absences and reiterate the significance of regular attendance (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

Various districts 'practical experiences highlight the effectiveness of these often-school and district-specific outreach and communication efforts. Administrators at Oregon's Warm Springs Elementary School discovered that periodic distribution of letters highlighting school attendance policies and the consequences of non-attendance was not a valid or sufficient measure of reducing absenteeism within their system. Rather, they discovered more success after sending weekly class activities and syllabi home with students (Railsback, 2005). Similarly, NYC's Department of Education's Interagency Task Force on Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism ensured that communication was the central focus of the district's 2010 attendance improvement program. The district formulated a multimedia outreach and advertising strategy for improving student attendance that included a parental education program. These communication strategies resulted in a 24% increase in school attendance among the city's elementary students (Campaign for Fiscal Equity, 2011).

### Attendance Monitoring and Tracking

Effective attendance improvement initiatives rely on systems for tracking and monitoring attendance (Bruner et al., 2017). While many school systems typically track only the superficial

attendance data as required by state laws, education experts recommend, however, that schools use more comprehensive and complicated systems to monitor both excused and unexcused absences (Chang & Romero, 2008). According to Jones and Lovrich (2011), the most effective systems for tracking and monitoring school attendance provide a comprehensive picture of a student that includes the student's disciplinary issues and records, demographic information, and academic performance data. This more holistic approach to capturing and maintaining student data allows school administrators to identify chronic absenteeism and truancy while also helping recognize the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism and truancy.

At a minimum, the United States Department of Education (2008) recommends that schools and districts try to collect and record reasons for students' absences. Accordingly, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reiterates the importance of establishing a "mutually exclusive yet exhaustive taxonomy" that allows teachers and administrators to record all attendance issues without unnecessarily confounding or overlapping results. According to Snyder et al. (2019), such an attendance system is essential for allowing districts and schools to determine the causes of and any trends related to problematic absences and then also to identify and facilitate targeted interventions for individual students. The NCES recommends the following groupings as a basis for the taxonomic structure under which student attendance is tracked (Snyder et al., 2019):

- Skipping School
- Transportation barrier
- Student Employment
- Family activity
- Judicial or legal requirement
- Family emergency
- Disciplinary action
- Illness, injury, or health treatment
- Religious observation
- Recognized non-instructional activity
- Situation unknown

Ultimately, the success of student attendance data collection efforts relies primarily on teachers because teachers are mandated to maintain attendance records. Since data quality ultimately suffers when there are no definitive collection policies, school administrators and teachers must always be made aware of accepted school and district procedures, either through a comprehensive handbook or through professional development efforts. Moreover, districts and schools must upgrade their existing information technology systems to ensure that data collection processes specific to tracking student attendance are streamlined and automated. This practice for monitoring student attendance, according to Chang and Romero (2008), is essential for ensuring that the monitoring systems accurately track student attendance but not in a way that overburdens teachers.

*Use of Incentives*

Another strategy that school leaders use to improve attendance is through the provision of incentives. These incentives may be offered directly to students for compliance with attendance policies or offered to teachers as a reward for implementing successful attendance programs. Despite some opinions viewing attendance incentives as controversial, many districts and schools across the country have developed attendance incentive programs to promote school attendance and encourage positive student behavior. U.S. cities (Allan & Fryer, 2020) within the Washington, D.C. system, incentives were offered for five specific student behaviors, including completion of classwork, homework completion, wearing an appropriate school uniform, behavior, and school attendance (Allan & Fryer, 2020). Students who met these stated expectations received as much as $10/day.

California's Corona-Norco Unified School District (CNUSD) offers another example of a low-cost incentive program offered to students (Muhlenberg, L. Y., & Berge, Z.L. (2016). This program analyzed student data and information to identify attendance patterns, including days when students were most likely to miss school. With the data, teachers in the district developed incentivized programs for students to attend school within those targeted days. For instance, CNUSD teachers began testing students on Fridays, which, in turn, created a greater incentive for students to attend school during the commonly skipped day (The Broad Prize, n.d.). While the district provides little data available to prove this program's success as relates to increasing student attendance, the initiative still represents a low-cost, low-risk, and easy-to-implement strategy for many districts and schools to consider.

Despite the lack of statistical evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of student incentive programs, these types of programs continue to steadily crop up in schools and districts countrywide. Consequently, trends and consensus regarding the best practices for student incentive programs exist. These best practices include Aligning student, parent, and teacher incentives; (Railsback, 2005). Rewarding aspects of attendance beyond just that of perfect student attendance (i.e., punctuality); (Allan & Fryer, 2020). Using simple, low-cost attendance incentives rather than high-cost, monetary incentives (Railsback, 2005); and deploying comprehensive attendance initiatives rather than implementing single incentives.

*Teacher Incentives.*

While teacher incentive programs are considerably less common than student incentive programs, some schools and districts have developed systems that reward teachers for their efforts in supporting a school's attendance objectives. The Dallas School District introduced school-based incentive programs and found improvement in student performance in Dallas relative to those in other cities. (Ladd, H.F.1999). A study by the Brookings Institute assessed the efficacy of teacher incentive initiatives on specific variables such as student attendance and academic performance and determined the following about the effects of these programs.

*Staff and School.*

Teachers in schools who meet established targets and goals were rewarded $3,000 per teacher, while schools that attained 75% of their targets were awarded $1,500 per teacher. The progress reports used to determine the awards contained three primary areas-- environment, performance, and progress -- but. School attendance constituted just 5% of the total score used to determine school awards.

This study suggests teacher incentivized programs have extraordinarily little impact on how teachers teach and, as such, are unlikely to affect student behaviors such as attendance. Therefore, more thoughtful approaches to shaping teachers' behaviors, such as professional development programs, may be required to create any substantive changes in student attendance patterns.

## Use of Punishments through Truancy Disincentive Programs

While many school attendance initiatives focus on truancy disincentives such as restrictions of non-academic privileges or punitive actions, current literature suggests that such actions are fundamentally ineffective. Research indicates that attendance discipline programs like the "zero-tolerance policies" adopted in many districts might negatively affect student attendance. According to Railsback (2005), zero-tolerance policy programs that involve either suspending or detaining students for tardiness and unexcused absences usually serve to further remove students from important instruction time. Moreover, such practices usually initiate a disconnect between students and their schools, creating negative and combative school environments, especially for low-income and minority students (Railsback, 2005).

A recent study by researchers from UCLA (2020) noted that zero-tolerance policies for school attendance have detrimental effects on student attendance because these policies seem to lower student achievement levels, increase dropout rates and achievement gaps, and facilitate student racial profiling (The University of California, 2020). In turn, educational experts recommend that, in many cases, schools should keep students engaged in some sort of instruction regardless of student wrongdoing. Since existing research demonstrates that missing school is detrimental to future attendance, more and more schools are increasingly adopting in-school suspension policies for student wrongdoing instead of sending students away from school (Sundius & Farneth, 2018).

Other disciplinary systems used to discourage chronic absenteeism and truancy often involve negative academic consequences. This technique is usually ineffective, however, and often results instead in increased absenteeism rates. Additionally, studies indicate that the use of punishment for absenteeism and truancy often disproportionately affects minority students, which can further exacerbate the problem of decreasing chronic absenteeism (Davis et al., 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) cited a practice used by Creekview High School in Cherokee County, Georgia, as a warning about disciplinary practices and school attendance objectives. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), Creekview High

School maintains a policy whereby instructors are required to fail a student upon the accumulation of seven unexcused absences. This disciplinary method, however, is viewed as too punitive and contrary to promoting student academic success since it precludes students from engaging in learning opportunities and promotes, instead, continuing truant behavior (Davis et al., 2019).

## Interventions for the Prevention of Truancy

Much of the literature reviewed on chronic absenteeism and truancy suggests using a tiered structure when developing programs aimed at addressing these problems (Student Advocacy, 2008). This tiered structure begins with universal interventions that comprise preventive measures applied across the entire school. The tiered structure escalates to legal interventions for the most chronically absent students (Stanford University, 2012).

### *Prevention*

Within the first tier – prevention - chronic absenteeism and truancy prevention measures are usually viewed as comprehensive and universal sets of practices designed to stop non-attendance problems before they happen. In many cases, educational experts note that such strategies are intricately connected to a school's culture, generally crossing over into the realms of academic standards and school engagement (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2012). However, experts also warn these strategies should not be limited to pro-attendance practices alone. According to the Virginia Department of Education (n.d.), generally "authoritative" schools and districts with high academic standards and high levels of social and academic support tend to record better attendance outcomes than lenient schools and districts.

These best practices review of truancy prevention indicates that such practices are usually aligned with strategies employed within dropout prevention initiatives (Smink & Reimer, 2005). According to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (2011), some key considerations when developing truancy prevention programs involve making efforts to foster students' engagement both academically and within the greater school community. Types of engagement that might contribute to either attendance or absenteeism include behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (The University of California, n.d.), and common strategies for fostering engagement within these realms include increasing familial involvement in students' learning, forming deep, meaningful relationships with students, tailoring the curriculum and learning opportunities to students' interests a creating an environment in which students believe that they can succeed and where they feel recognized for their efforts (Railsback, 2005).

While student engagement has been recognized as an essential factor for improved academic achievement, less effectively engaged students are at higher risk for truancy, chronic absenteeism, and ultimately dropping out of school (The University of California, n.d.). It is, therefore, essential for schools to ensure that all students have a wide range of academic and social support structures to ensure that students not only succeed in their studies but also decrease the chances of chronic absenteeism and truancy.

This second-tier approach – early and targeted interventions – suggests that chronic absenteeism must be addressed early with students (Ecklund et al., 2020; Patnode et al., 2018). Targeted attendance interventions are different from universal preventions since attendance interventions are typically reserved for students exhibiting problematic school attendance. For instance, attendance interventions typically target those students who have reached or approaching a predetermined threshold that indicates the onset of problematic absenteeism.

If a school determines that the root cause of absenteeism is outside the immediate school environment, school administrators might then decide to develop home-based interventions to combat this problematic absenteeism. Such home interventions are usually implemented when the affected student has either limited or inconsistent parental involvement, lacks a structured home environment, or lacks reliable means of transport to and from school (Railsback, 2005). Some appropriate interventions implemented in this area usually include making home visitations and regular phone calls. Moreover, such instances usually require a dedicated case manager to make sure that legal considerations and best practices are adhered to (Chang & Romero, 2008). It is also essential for districts to be prepared for the wide range of home-based factors that might require more comprehensive and intense measures, such as economic hardships or severe illnesses within the family (Stanford University, 2012).

When families and students are unresponsive to first-tier attendance interventions and targeted students reach a threshold for chronic absenteeism or truancy, schools and districts must then escalate intervention measures to more targeted initiatives (Student Advocacy, 2008). Such targeted interventions are usually deployed at the secondary level and involve a more intensive application of community partnerships and school support services to foster students' and family engagement in education (Railsback, 2005). In some cases, targeted interventions might require the implementation of individualized instructions, the establishment of either adult or peer monitoring systems, or the careful coordination of public agencies, such as child protective services and juvenile justice systems (Stanford University, 2012). Effective targeted interventions should be viewed as iterative processes, maintaining flexibility to adapt practices with positive outcomes or those that have been ineffective at both first and second tiers.

### *Legal Interventions*

When strategies in the first three tiers prove ineffective, a school or district should consider legal intervention. Truancy laws developed by states are in place to address chronic absenteeism among students in schools (Conry & Richards, 2018). Best practices for addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy indicate that the involvement of juvenile justice systems, one example of a legal invention option, should always be considered a strategy of last resort though when dealing with absenteeism issues (Jones & Lovrich, 2011). According to the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention (2012), removing children or parents from their homes usually hurts school attendance. Current evidence also indicates that the threat of punitive actions such as taking children away from their homes does not positively affect absenteeism or truancy.

The Virginia Department of Education (n.d.) has demonstrated, however, that there can still be advantages to involving juvenile justice systems in anti-truancy initiatives. According to

the Department, youth courts can often be powerful means of creating external accountability for truant and chronically absent students and may eventually lead to improved desired behavioral changes. It illustrates this practice by involving the juvenile justice system to aid with solving chronic absenteeism and truancy and thereby removing decision-making responsibility from school administrators. This type of juvenile system involvement, as demonstrated by the Virginia Department of Education, creates a set of responses and sanctions that might be considered more severe than those imposed by a school, but it does also offer a possible solution for addressing these issues.

## Conclusion

This review of research and best practices was developed to explore existing knowledge related to the issues and challenges that arise because of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism was broken down into its varying stages, ending in the final stage: truancy. Educators have been studying truancy for decades yet differing views on the issue persist. There are school and home determinants, such as a hostile social environment or a lack of transportation that influence truancy among youth. Individual characteristics such as the student's character play a role as well, ultimately driving individual student behavior. The research on chronic absenteeism, agrees, however, that chronic absenteeism and truancy most commonly result in low standardized test scores and low graduation rates. (Hallfors, et al., 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Beyond academic outcomes, chronic absenteeism and truancy also are connected to maladjustment, substance use, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy (Henry, 2007). One finding was that programs that were most effective in combating chronic absenteeism and truancy involved a large amount of parental involvement (Yeide & Korbin, 2009). But primarily, tracking systems are necessary to be implemented to truly address and monitor the situation as improvements are made to reduce truancy (Bruner et al., 2017; Chang & Romero, 2008; Jones & Lovrich, 2011). Incentives and other strategies to reduce truancy are being used widely, though more research needs to be done to prove their effectiveness. The remainder of this project presents a pilot intervention program developed at a specific school in Chicago, IL.

## Attendance Improvement Program

The Attendance Improvement Program detailed in this section aims to facilitate the implementation of a unified strategy to address chronic absenteeism and truancy in Hirsch High School. The program and its attendance improvement strategies are informed by Hirschi's (1969) social control theory framework that specifically addresses problematic behaviors such as chronic absenteeism and truancy.

This section focuses on several key topics related to the Attendance Improvement Program and its goals for Hirsch High School. The first subsection presents the Attendance Improvement Program and offers a broad overview of the program, and the second subsection presents the objectives and goals that guided the development of and will continue to guide the implementation of this program. The document's third and fourth sections outline the Attendance Improvement Program's leadership and structure, including the coordinating board responsible for overseeing

this program. The final sub-sections outline the different phases and anticipated milestones metrics for the Program.

## Description of the Program

The Attendance Improvement Program was developed to address the problem of chronic absenteeism and truancy that continues to plague Hirsch High School. The proposed intervention program is intended as a preventive and curative for Hirsch's current problems with its high levels of truancy and chronic absenteeism. Informed, in part, by Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, the Attendance Improvement Program relies on Hirsch's framework as a foundation for the integration of systematic and theory-based strategies designed to reduce truancy and chronic absenteeism among Hirsch High students.

The Attendance Improvement Program is both comprehensive and holistic in its strategies for addressing the chronic absenteeism and truancy among students at Hirsch High School. The intervention is comprehensive because it addresses the different aspects of chronic absenteeism and truancy by considering the role of the home and the school within its conceptualization of the problem and solutions. The Attendance Improvement Program also offers holistic intervention strategies that consider the individual student's life and situations as they might influence the student's absenteeism and truancy.

The Attendance Improvement Program will be piloted at Hirsch High School and its design, while informed in large part by the existing research on this topic, will also be shaped by 4 distinct phases. These four phases of the Attendance Improvement Program included: (a) the pre-assessment phase, (b) the implementation phase, (c) the assessment and evaluation phase, and (d) a finalization phase that integrates the most effective of the program's components at Hirsch High School. Each of these phases and its relationship to the Attendance Program's design is discussed in greater detail within the following subsections.

### Pre-Assessment Phase

The assessment of Hirsch High's student population serves as one of the Attendance Improvement Program's primary and most significant design elements. This component is necessary to have a better understanding of the specific reasons for Hirsch's high chronic absenteeism and truancy rates. The data collected from this pre-assessment phase is key to; (1) understanding accurately the context of the current problem at Hirsch High School and then (2) identifying appropriate intervention strategies to target chronic absenteeism and truancy within this context. Further, this step ensures that the theoretical and research findings on chronic absenteeism and truancy that guided this program's design can be integrated with site-based findings to provide location-specific strategies for addressing these problems.

The purpose of conducting a pre-assessment is twofold. First, it is important to determine the reasons why there is high chronic absenteeism and truancy in a school. This information is needed to identify and define the site-specific problems to target. Second, this pre-assessment is important to establish the current rate of chronic absenteeism and truancy among students. The findings of this assessment phase will be particularly helpful when the program is ready to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention strategies it implemented and create the finalized program by

allowing program leadership to evaluate chronic absenteeism and truancy rates before and after the implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program.

### Implementation Phase

Another important aspect of the Attendance Improvement Program's design is the implementation of the strategies used to address the program's primary goal of reducing chronic absenteeism and truancy at Hirsch High School. The Attendance Improvement Program will rely on specific strategies that include:
(a)        needs assessment:
(b)        giving of rewards or incentives to students:
(c)        giving of rewards to teachers:
(d)        offering rewards or incentives to chronically absent or truant students, families and
(e)        development of parent-school collaboration programs.

### Needs Assessment

The Attendance Improvement Program will examine the needs not currently being met among students who have high chronic absenteeism and truancy rates. The identification of these needs not being fulfilled is important to determine the strategies the program needs to use to impact the school's chronic absenteeism and truancy rates. The program will also use this needs assessment data to identify Hirsch High's "at-risk" and vulnerable students and student populations.

### Student Rewards

The Attendance Improvement Program will offer rewards or incentives to students who demonstrate perfect attendance within a given period. These rewards will include but are not limited to, offering students class credits or bonus points in assignments and exams, and presenting recognition certificates. At the end of each term, students with the best attendance for each grade could win a gift card.

### Teacher Rewards

The Attendance Improvement Program will also reward teachers who demonstrate consistent involvement and willingness to support AIP's activities and objectives. Rewards offered to teachers may include recognition awards, gift cards, or additional time off/vacation days.

### Truant Students and Family Rewards

Beyond implementing attendance rewards for students and teachers, it is important to also consider how to strategically engage with the families of truant students through a similar reward system. A parent/family/guardian reward system might include something like a coupon for a nice meal at a restaurant or a gift card for groceries. It is important to note that in the early stages of

recovering from truancy, perfect attendance cannot be expected. It may be that student rewards at this level should be small and inexpensive but appealing (e.g., candy, beverage rights).

### *Parent-School Collaboration Programs*

Collaboration programs will also be established by AIP between Hirsch High School (e.g., teachers, school administration) and its parent population to develop and support a workable plan for addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy. The AIP effectiveness will rely on opportunities for parents and Hirsch teachers and administrators to come together and work collaboratively to identify the causes and possible solutions specific to Hirsch High and its surrounding community. This outreach to ensure parents will require well-timed and frequent engagement opportunities in which these individuals feel welcomed and equal partners in the process. These collaborative programs aim to increase the involvement of teachers, school officials, and parents as solutions to address chronic absenteeism and truancy in Hirsch High School using strategies that are implemented, evaluated, and then reviewed to ensure practices that are documented and implemented in future cases have some evidence backing their use.

### *Assessment and Evaluation Phase*

To determine the Attendance Improvement Program's effectiveness, each intervention strategy will be assessed and then all findings will be reviewed to determine the overall effectiveness of each strategy and the collective effectiveness of the program. These evaluations will be conducted on a routine systematic basis to ensure that the program remains effective in achieving its intended goals in both the short term and the long term. Short-term improvements will be defined in terms of the objectives that are successfully met after the implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program. Farther out, long-term improvements are then defined in terms of the improvements made to Hirsch's truancy and chronic absenteeism rates over multiple school years with careful attention to data to determine the effects of implementation over time.

The general assessment of the Attendance Improvement Program will entail determining the effectiveness of the program in terms of its reduction of chronic absenteeism and truancy at Hirsch High School. The assessments will focus on determining if truancy and chronic absenteeism rates decreased because of the strategies and activities coordinated by the school through the Attendance Improvement Program. Students will also be surveyed to evaluate their satisfaction with the program and components like its rewards system. These data will be instrumental in providing evidence-based support for the program's continued implementation at Hirsch High School and any possible expansion of the Attendance Improvement Program to different schools within the Chicago Public Schools system.

Each component of the Attendance Improvement Program will be assessed to determine its effectiveness in achieving the program's objectives. One example of an intended assessment is the evaluation of the program's rewards system and its effect on attendance rates among Hirsch High students. Another assessment example is the effectiveness of intervention strategies like student counseling and the effects of counseling activities on student truancy and chronic absenteeism behavior.

*Finalization Phase*

The last component of the Attendance Improvement Program is the finalization phase or the phase during which we refine the program's intervention strategies based on the evaluation results of the data. Within this phase, strategies determined within the prior assessment phase to be effective will be integrated into the final version of the Attendance Improvement Program. Conversely, those strategies found to be ineffective will be removed from the Attendance Improvement Program.

Another important component of this finalization phase includes the creation of a manual that documents the process used by the program's leadership and coordinating board for developing and implementing AIP's intervention strategies. This manual will articulate clearly all the program's participation rules, and process guidelines, and will include recommendations for future delivery of the Attendance Improvement Program. This manual is intended to serve as a key resource for the standardization of the Attendance Improvement Program across years and institutions.

## Program Goals and Objectives

The Attendance Improvement Program has several goals and objectives informed, in large part, by existing theories, literature, and research on chronic absenteeism and truancy as well as the data and experiences identified specifically at Hirsch High School. The primary objectives of the Attendance Improvement Program are:
(a) To reduce Hirsch High's current truancy and chronic absenteeism rates.
(b) To Improve the school's overall student attendance behavior as demonstrated by individual students; and
(c) To identify the program's most effective intervention strategies, so these strategies can be considered by other schools within CPS.

### *Objective 1: Reduce Chronic Absenteeism*

The Attendance Improvement Program's primary objective is to reduce the truancy and chronic absenteeism rates at Hirsch High School. More specifically, the first objective aims to reduce the rates of both excused and unexcused absences occurring within the school. This goal has two levels. First, a needs assessment will identify why Hirsch High students engage in frequent excused and unexcused absences. The results of this needs assessment will then inform the specific intervention strategies the program implements. This bi-level approach to the reduction of truancy and chronic absenteeism rates within Hirsch High School is intended to address the need for both assessment and intervention and the individualization of the program to the needs of Hirsch High School and its students/families.

### *Objective 2: Increase the Rate of Attendance*

Another objective of the Attendance Improvement Program is to increase the overall rate of attendance among students at Hirsch High School. This objective is preventive, meaning that it is designed to include students who do not currently demonstrate problems with chronic absenteeism and truancy. Including this student group within the AIP serves as an opportunity to

celebrate those students demonstrating positive attendance behavior and to encourage this continued positive behavior. This group of students can also serve as important models of positive school attendance behavior for other students to see and emulate. The program aims to achieve this specific objective primarily through its rewards system and the offering of rewards to students and parents/guardians for perfect attendance.

### *Objective 3: Institutionalization of the Program to the School System*

The Attendance Improvement Program's third objective is to institutionalize the program within Hirsch High School. This institutionalization means that elements of the program will be assessed for effectiveness and then the program will institutionalize these proven intervention strategies at Hirsch through offerings in subsequent academic years. These practices will also be documented within a manual that clearly articulates all the program's rules and guidelines as well as recommendations for the adoption of a similar AIP at other CPS schools.

### Membership

The AIP will be led by a task force of individuals who represent Hirsch High as well as the surrounding community. The task force will be co-chaired by the school's principal and the AIP's developer, Beverly Taylor-Williams. The task force will also include representatives, when possible, from the following public offices, agencies, and organizations:
- Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)
- Court Social Services Division (CSSD)
- Department of Behavioral Health (DBH)
- Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Deputy Mayor of Greater Economic Opportunity (DMGEO)
- Deputy Mayor for Public Safety & Justice (DMPSJ)
- Chicago Police Department (CPD)
- Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE)
- State Board of Education (SBOE)
- Public charter school leaders and public advocates.

This list is extensive and reflects the number of state offices and public services stakeholders who vested interest in improving truancy rates. Each bulleted entity represents a critical stakeholder in the implementation of plans to impact the lives of these young people and motivate them toward productive life pathways. The first four organizations on this list share a common objective of addressing the welfare of vulnerable students to ensure the rights of everyone are protected.

### Structure and Approach

The structure and approach of the Attendance Improvement Program are based on a coordinating board that will be responsible for enacting the proposed evaluation. This board will be responsible for implementing several interrelated tasks that include data collection and data

formulation, as well as implementation, and management of the overall AIP. These tasks are described further below.

### Structure

The Attendance Improvement Program's coordinating board will oversee the program's implementation, and this board's work will be divided into responsibilities that include:

### Data Collection Assessment and Reporting

The data collection and assessment responsibilities of coordinating board members involve gathering all the data needed to assess and monitor the effectiveness of the Attendance Improvement Program and then appropriately reporting all data findings. The task of conducting an assessment requires implementing all the necessary evaluations needed to determine the AIP's overall effectiveness as relates to its stated objectives. This task will include pre-intervention and post-intervention assessments to compare truancy and chronic absenteeism rates before and after the implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program as well as a review of these rates in terms of overall changes to student attendance behavior within Hirsch High. The data collection, assessment, and reporting tasks will include, but are not limited to, the formulation of common policies and procedures for data collection, rules, overseeing the integration of any databases, and the preparation of analyses and reports for the coordinating board's routine and systematic review.

### Assessment

The task of conducting an assessment requires implementing all the necessary evaluations needed to determine the AIP's overall effectiveness as relates to its stated objectives. This task will include pre-intervention and post-intervention assessments to compare truancy and chronic absenteeism rates before and after the implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program as well as a review of these rates in terms of overall changes to student attendance behavior within Hirsch High.

### Implementation

The implementation group lead's AIP's efforts specific to its programmatic intervention strategies. The day-to-day execution of these strategies through AIP activities and initiatives led by XXX will consistently provide reports on this implementation process to the broader group, and the board will collectively consider if and how these processes could be improved. The coordinating board led in its efforts here by XXX, will also be responsible for developing the AIP manual that outlines the recommendations, rules, regulations, guidelines, and recommendations that support the Attendance Improvement Program's objectives.

### Management

The Attendance Improvement Program's day-to-day activities must be managed by an individual at Hirsch High. Management and AIP's site-based leadership include overseeing the implementation of the program's intervention strategies as well as managing the program's day-

to-day decision-making. AIP's XXX (executive director, director?) will also be responsible for helping to develop the program's evaluation processes and data reports.

## Approach

The Attendance Improvement Program relies on the leadership of its coordinating board, who will meet bi-monthly to review the program's progress routinely and systematically toward meeting its stated objectives. The leadership model represents an aggressive, data-centric, and problem-solving archetype for the school and its persistent issues with chronic absenteeism and truancy. The AIP coordinating board will also systematically review the different domains affecting Hirsch's students and use the findings from this holistic view to determine solutions for addressing truancy and chronic absenteeism across student populations.

### *Short-term Goals, Metrics, and Targets*

The members of the coordinating board should recognize dual attendance goals that are related to education and safety. For the short-term metrics in education, the academic year 2023, the proposed education goals for the AIP are to reduce the number of chronically absent students as measured by the statewide rate of Chicago by thirty percentage points. Reduce the number of chronically absent students as measured by the statewide rate of Chicago by thirty percentage points (PP) over the next three years. The proposed safety goals are to reduce the number of chronically truant students as measured by the statewide rate of truancy for the district by 10 percentage points in the school year 2024.

Increasing the rate of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and Public Charter School Board compliance will require referrals of eligible students to CFSA and CSSD as measured by the rate at which students eligible for referral are referred by schools by ten percentage points in the school year 2025.

### *Long-Term Metrics*

The previous metrics proposed were based on the immediate future right after the implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program. For long-term metrics, the number of profoundly and severely chronically absent students by segment should be reduced at a sustained level, as measured by the percentage of students who moved from missing more than 20% or 30% of the school year to missing less than 20% or 30%, respectively.

The Attendance Improvement Program should be able to reduce the number of students who are eligible for referral to CFSA or CSSD year to year. This metric will be measured by a reduction in the number of students who were eligible for referral to CFSA or CSSD in the year after a year in which they were eligible for referral to CFSA or CSSD.

## 2023-2025 Strategies and Milestones

The following intervention strategies and activities will be essential in completing several milestones in the development of the Attendance Improvement Program. The different phases of

the program include the following: (a) understanding what works, (b) aligning program activities to what works, and (c) executing what works.

### *Phase 1: Understanding What Works (Jan. 2023- June 2023)*

The first phase of the Attendance Improvement Program is to determine what works by\implementing different strategies based on Hirschi's social control theory. Informed by this theoretical framework, the Attendance Improvement Program will use a combination of strategies that consider the theory's core principles of social control.

Hirschi's theory means this program needs to recruit every student, every day, for a citywide action plan. The role of all public partners necessary for the success of the AIPs will be identified and then each will be invited to engage as a collaborator in this work. Partners will evaluate ways they can work to support Chicago Public Schools as they work to reduce truancy and find benchmarks and outcomes that can be measured.

The second step of phase 1 requires identifying best practices for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) such as the State Board of Education and their schools. This step will entail comparing national and local practices affecting the results and identifying low and high-cost interventions and initiating the necessary cost studies. The efficacy of the current interventions needs to be evaluated. This evaluation will entail mapping current investments, identifying key data questions and conducting analyses, and collecting and analyzing data evaluating investments.

### *Phase 2: Aligning to What Works (August 2023-Dec. 2023)*

This phase specifically considers what works based on the results of the evaluation of phase 1 of the Attendance Improvement Program. The AIP's effectiveness as identified through the phase 1 evaluation will then be aligned to support current Hirsch High and broader practices.
Data collection also needs to be aligned. This means that the quarterly and annual reporting needs to be aligned to reflect key questions related to continuous improvement, evaluation, and best practices.  The members of the coordinating board of the Attendance Improvement Program need to develop a data plan that identifies additional key data points needed to inform policy. Rules around critical metrics need to be set and finalized.  Finally, the members of the coordinating board need to compare school investments with the identified needs and identify misalignment and inefficiencies regarding the implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program.

### *Phase 3: Doing What Works (Jan. 2024- July 2024)*

The third phase simply focuses on implementing within the program what has been determined to be effective. Alternatively, aspects of the Attendance Improvement Program that are ineffective will either be revised or removed from the intervention. Changes in school policy need to be communicated and implemented. The members of the AIP coordinating board will provide technical assistance to school leaders and educators. The coordinating board will also be involved in designing and implementing an attendance campaign based on the Attendance Improvement Program and as stated objectives, launching a public-facing plan to improve attendance in Hirsch High School.

*Phase 4: Advance Implementation of Academic Year (August 2024-Dec.2024)*

Phase 4 entails identifying schoolwide planning. The implementers of the Attendance Improvement Program will identify agency and entity-specific strategies that continue to support schoolwide plans and goals. The budget must also be reviewed and revised if needed to ensure sustained implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program and its activities and objectives. This phase also entails incorporating the input of community youth and student participants by identifying routine and systematic ways for this population to share their voices, opinions, and experiences with AIP and Hirsch leadership.

The community youth and student participants should be supported in leading planning efforts for an Attendance Design Challenge II. This phase also entails aligning the work of AIP's coordinating board. Attendance needs to be integrated into new policies and investments (e.g., School Health Services Program). Existing opportunities also need to be identified to add focus on attendance (e.g., OSSE PD offerings). Finally, coordinating board members need to guide in programmatic areas identified through the prior assessments as unclear in need of improvement to avoid miscommunication or future problems within programs like this Attendance Improvement Program.

*Phase 5: Engage in a Cycle of Continuous Improvement (Jan 2025-June-2025)*

The fifth phase is engaging in a cycle of continuous improvement. This phase requires that a system of assessment and monitoring be established to ensure that the Attendance Improvement Program continues to be relevant and effective in Hirsch High School. The members of the coordinating board should develop and implement a strategic timeline and revisit an annual, if not more routine basis. The coordinating board should also devote time and resources to improve data sharing across education, health, and justice areas. To engage in a cycle of continuous improvements for the Attendance Improvement Program, community outreach should also be increased to solicit feedback. The members of the coordinating board need to add new elements that are appropriate for school-wide campaigns. These campaigns should particularly focus on targeting non-traditional families, homeless students, and others who are in vulnerable situations and family contexts.

*Phase 6: Scale What Works (August 2025-Dec.2025)*

The last phase of the Attendance Improvement Program is to evaluate the program and determine the effectiveness of its strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy in Hirsch High School. This phase ensures that all finalized strategies within the Attendance Improvement Program are effective, and evidence based. This phrase also provides the groundwork for the possible implementation of similar Attendance Improvement Programs at other institutions within the Chicago Public Schools system, the state of Illinois, or beyond. This phase involves focusing on the findings generated within the evaluation and analysis phases of this program and its implementation processes. It is important to continue building the evidence base for truancy and chronic absenteeism intervention programs through a careful routine and systemic examination of these assessment results. Additionally, strategies will continue to be developed and

refined on all findings generated through the assessment and evaluation phrases that have been proven to be effective.

This final phase will also entail communicating and implementing best practices for addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy among students in Hirsch High School. For instance, the members of the coordinating board need to share evidence-based practices with the practitioners across institutions, systems, and states. The coordinating board should also continue planning and maintaining the programmatic and operational budget AIP needs to sustain the effective delivery of its activities and initiatives.

## Discussion

The Attendance Improvement Program is a comprehensive intervention strategy intended to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy among the students at Hirsch High School. Hirschi's (1969) social control theory informed the recommendations and strategies that are included in the Attendance Improvement Program. The previous section has described in full detail the design and phased implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program. This section provides a more detailed discussion of the implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program at Hirsch High and recommendations for practice and future research based, in part, on the program's implication for addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy at Hirsch High School and its potential relevance for the larger Chicago school district.

## Potential for Implementing the Attendance Improvement Program within other CPS Schools

To determine the future steps that can be taken toward implementation of the AIP within other schools and districts, it is important first to establish that the Attendance Improvement Program is effective in reducing chronic absenteeism and truancy among students in Hirsch High School. To determine effectiveness, pre-intervention, and post-intervention data will be collected to have a comparison of the rate of chronic absenteeism (excused and unexcused absences) and truancy (unexcused absences) among the students at Hirsch High School. These pre-test and post-test evaluations will be routinely conducted to track the short-term and long-term progress of the Attendance Improvement Programs towards its stated objective of decreasing both chronic absenteeism and truancy rates at Hirsch High School.

Financial and human resources need to be continually prioritized to ensure that implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program continues to remain viable. Members of the coordinating board in charge of implementing and managing the Attendance Improvement Program's budget need to consider all the resources needed to ensure the sustained effectiveness of the program for both short-term and long-term purposes. These budgetary needs mean effectively partnering in large part with the Hirsch High administration, so the school allocates a sufficient of its budget toward supporting the Attendance Improvement Program.

An additional goal within this phrase is to establish the implementation potential of the Attendance Improvement Program within the larger context of the various other schools within the Chicago Public Schools system. This strategic expansion phase means that implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program could and should be expanded beyond Hirsch High School to further maximize the potential benefit of this intervention strategy in other high schools experiencing problems with chronic absenteeism and truancy like those at Hirsch. Expanding the implementation potential of the Attendance Improvement Program is important for maximizing the benefits that can be attained through this type of targeted and contextualized intervention programming.

Sharing information about the Attendance Improvement Program serves as a crucial next step in the bigger, system-wide battle against chronic absenteeism and truancy. Members of the coordinating board will be charged with the eventual task of disseminating information about the Attendance Improvement Program and their experiences leading this effort with other school administrators within the Chicago district. The phase will rely on sharing all information related to the Attendance Improvement Program's design and implementation as documented within its manual and demonstrated through its assessment and data reporting processes. These replication efforts may also benefit from the development of mentorship or training programs that help guide interested schools and individuals through the process of implementing a similar Attendance Improvement Program.

## Recommendations for Practice

The Attendance Improvement Program intends to decrease chronic absenteeism and truancy rates among students in Hirsch High School, a theory-based, comprehensive approach that incorporates different levels of strategies to achieve this objective. The program's multi-dimensional strategies include the integration of the individual, the school, and the parents of students and this integration of strategies means that the Attendance Improvement Program's success relies, in large part, on the coordination and cooperation of the different individuals, school, and home domains that play an important and contributing role in the social and academic functioning of students at Hirsch High.

There is a need for the Hirsch High School administration to take urgent measures to eliminate all the school-related determinants of truancy to minimize the barriers to school attendance. This goal can be accomplished by implementing the proposed Attendance Improvement Program and its targeted intervention strategies. School policies must also be strengthened if the school-related determinants are to be successful because each school has distinct internal and external policies on this issue. A review of all existing policies is, therefore, necessary to retain only those policies that aid in minimizing truancy within that school-specific context while eliminating those that seem to increase it.

Research also suggests a need for increased parental family involvement in children's education, which includes ensuring that children attend their classes regularly. Parents need to consistently monitor their children's school attendance and maintain a positive attitude towards their child's education to improve school attendance and academic behavior. There remains,

therefore, a great need to have a concerted effort by schools and the government to formulate a policy on how to increase parental involvement that influences truancy and chronic absenteeism behavior among learners.

Another recommendation for practice focuses on the remedial lessons and classes that should be offered to truant and chronically absent learners to improve their academic achievement and performance. The Attendance Improvement Program offers one solution for beginning to address the problem of chronic absenteeism and truancy among students; however, this program should be regarded as only the first step toward helping students have access to quality education. The responsibility of the school must extend beyond ensuring that student attendance rate remains high, but also that students can maximize their academic potential and ability to learn in school.

## Future Research

The Attendance Improvement Program is a theory-based comprehensive system with the primary goal of reducing chronic absenteeism and truancy among high school students in Hirsch High School. Based on the proposed implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program, several areas for future research can are recommended.

### *Examine the Effectiveness of the Different School-Based Strategies for Reducing Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism*

There is a need for a future research study to assess the effectiveness of the different school-based strategies in decreasing truancy and chronic absenteeism among high school students. The Attendance Improvement Program is primarily based on school-based strategies such as the use of needs assessment among students, the use of rewards and incentives, and counseling programs to reduce truancy and chronic absenteeism. Future studies should be conducted using larger sample sizes and more diverse participants to provide more robust evidence about the effectiveness of this kind of school-based strategy for reducing chronic absenteeism and truancy rates.

To further strengthen the Attendance Improvement Program, and similar programs, future researchers could also examine how school-based strategies compare with each other in terms of their overall combined effects in reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism. Research can also be conducted that determines if targeted intervention strategies like those used within the Attendance Improvement Program, provide different results for those students who are only chronically absent compared with those students who are truant. This information about chronically absent versus truant behavior could be useful in determining and developing strategies best for addressing each behavior. These conclusions would then inform programmatic intervention strategies such as those within the Attendance Improvement Program.

### *Examine the Effectiveness of the Different Home-Based Strategies for Reducing Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism*

Future studies should also be conducted that examine the different home-based strategies that have been used in the past to decrease chronic absenteeism and truancy. The Attendance

Improvement Program includes parents as collaborators and partners in its solution to chronic absenteeism and truancy. These home-based strategies include the creation of programs that strengthen the involvement of parents in addressing the truancy and chronic absenteeism of their children. Future research studies should be conducted using a larger sample size and a more diverse population of participants to generate robust evidence that could inform intervention strategies and programs like the Attendance Improvement Program.

To further strengthen the effectiveness and utility of the Attendance Improvement Program, it would also be useful to examine the corresponding strengths of each home-based strategy in reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism among high school students. This study could compare the level of involvement of both parents (versus single parents) in terms of reducing chronic absenteeism and truancy to understand if there are significant differences between levels of parental involvement based on single-parent households versus households with two parents.

### *Examine the Effectiveness of the Different Individual-Centered Strategies for Reducing Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism*

Given that the Attendance Improvement Program is multi-dimensional in its approach to solving truancy and chronic absenteeism, another recommendation for future research that can be conducted is to explore the different individual-based strategies that have been used previously to decrease chronic absenteeism and truancy among high school students. More specifically, individual differences can be further examined by future researchers to generate an individual-based profile of those who have been determined to be most likely to experience high truancy and chronic absenteeism. This information can be useful in identifying individuals who might be at risk of developing truancy and chronic absenteeism behavior before this behavior begins or escalates.

Informed by Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, developing internal control such as the conscience and superego of students can be a factor that can minimize truancy and chronic absenteeism. Future research can strengthen the Attendance Improvement Program by examining the different personality characteristics of high school students who have shown high levels of chronic absenteeism and truancy. This information could be useful in the future modification and revision of the Attendance Improvement Program.

## Assessment of Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy

An accurate assessment is a crucial component of the effectiveness of the Attendance Improvement Program. Based on this premise, there is a need to evaluate the different measures that can be used to mitigate the negative influence of truancy on learners 'academic achievement. This expanded assessment of the possible negative effects of chronic absenteeism and truancy can be particularly useful in having a more complex and nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of the Attendance Improvement Program as it relates to academic performances and achievement.

Moreover, the Attendance Improvement Program also relies on a pre-test and post-test design to determine whether the implementation of its intervention strategies is successful in

achieving its primary objective of reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism rates among the students at Hirsch High School.

The definition of success in decreasing truancy and chronic absenteeism among students can also be further explored in future research studies. The Attendance Improvement Program primarily quantifies success based on the reduction of chronic absenteeism and truancy based on a predefined period using pre-test and post-test analysis. Future researchers can expand the conceptualization of truancy and chronic absenteeism not only in terms of the number of excused and unexcused absences but also in terms of other measures.

## Conclusions

The Attendance Improvement Program was developed to address the problem of high chronic absenteeism and truancy rates among the students at Hirsch High School. The proposed intervention program is both preventive and curative, which means that the program is intended to both prevent and address the problem of truancy and chronic absenteeism among students at Hirsch High. Informed by Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, the Attendance Improvement Program will provide a practical and theory-based approach to addressing truancy and chronic absenteeism.

The Attendance Improvement Program is both comprehensive and holistic in its strategies for addressing the high chronic absenteeism and truancy rates that plague Hirsch High School. The intervention is comprehensive because it focuses on the different aspects of chronic absenteeism and truancy and uses the influence of both teachers and parents to help solve and address these problems. The Attendance Improvement Program is also considered holistic because the intervention strategies it employs considers complex variables that affect the students' life and situation to understand and then attempt to address these high levels of chronic absenteeism and truancy.

This project and the resulting Attendance Improvement Program highlight the complex range of processes that underpin chronic absenteeism and truancy broadly and at Hirsch High School. Improving school attendance thus requires a comprehensive approach that attends both to the social, economic, and institutional context as well as to the multi-sectoral drivers of absenteeism. The Attendance Improvement Program intends to provide a solution and approach toward addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy that is comprehensive and targeted but one that is also practical and effective.

Various school-related strategies can control the problem of chronic absenteeism and truancy among students. One objective of this project was to use school-based strategies to address chronic absenteeism and truancy among students at Hirsch High School. The Attendance Improvement Program aims at addressing chronic absenteeism and truancy using school-related strategies such as rewards, counseling programs, and school-parent collaboration programs. The effectiveness of these strategies toward the program's realization of its primary objectives related to chronic absenteeism and truancy remains to be determined, but the Attendance Improvement Program holds promise in these areas.

The Attendance Improvement Program also integrates home-related strategies to address chronic absenteeism and truancy among the students at Hirsch High School. The use of home-related strategies primarily relies on the involvement of parents in ensuring that their children attend school regularly. This parent/school/program collaboration means the existing relationships between parents and the school needs to be strengthened through the development of programs that target the improvement of parental involvement. More specifically, parents need to be part of the intervention strategies developed to address the problem of chronic absenteeism and truancy among high school students at Hirsch High School.

Efforts to address the inadvertent exclusion of students who are chronically absent and truant from education will also benefit from robust and timely data to increase the visibility of these absentee students. This project has highlighted the dearth of data available from both administrative and survey-based sources, as well as the lack of diversity in absenteeism measures which limits the comparability of patterns across studies, schools, and populations. At the same time, this project has demonstrated the utility of school attendance data—even crudely measured—in establishing a link between current absenteeism and future adverse educational trajectories and has advocated for the development of early warning systems to identify students at risk of future repetition and dropout.

The Attendance Improvement Program has potential benefits outside the main goal of reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism among high school students. Bolstering data collection systems at the local level, raising the profile of irregular attendance in national and international monitoring frameworks, and complementing these with insights from in-depth qualitative studies can help to mobilize attention and resources toward addressing the issue of silent exclusion and inform efforts to effect educational social change. The Attendance Improvement Program can be instrumental in facilitating these conversations and advancements relative to absenteeism and truancy among high school students.

To maximize the benefits of the Attendance Improvement Program, the intervention can also be implemented beyond the initial scope of Hirsch High School. The Attendance Improvement Program has the potential to be implemented in other schools within the Chicago Public Schools system, a system that is currently recording widespread high levels of truancy and chronic absenteeism. This scaled-up implementation of the Attendance Improvement Program maximizes the potential benefits of the programs to a larger school setting beyond that just of Hirsch High School and its student population.

Although ensuring continuous and consistent attendance is a crucial step toward an expanded vision of enhanced educational access for every student, meaningful learning depends on more than the physical presence of students in the classroom. Beyond achieving sustained attendance through the Attendance Improvement Program, continued efforts must be made to ensure that students receive an education that is high quality, inclusive and equitable, and in which they can participate fully. The Attendance Improvement Program is only one mechanism, one small part of a much bigger structure intended to provide all students with access to quality education. Still, for students at Hirsch High School, the Attendance Improvement Program might be the mechanism that helps them reach their academic potential and achieve their educational goals.

*Figure 2. Attendance Matters Even More for Remote Learning (Smith, J. (2020)*

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