

The Impact of Individualized Interventions for Chronically Absent Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether providing individualized interventions would help to reduce absences for chronically absent high school students. This study used a post-test only control group design to compare attendance of groups to whom individualized interventions intended to improve attendance were offered or not. The researcher hypothesized that the individualized intervention strategies that were implemented would lessen the students' absenteeism rate. Thirty 12th grade students in an affluent suburban high school participated in the study, all of whom had at least five or more absences at the midpoint of the school year. These students were randomly assigned to either the treatment condition, wherein they received support and interventions intended to address the causes of their absences, or the comparison group, wherein they received no special or individualized support beyond those associated with typical school policy to address their absences. Each group consisted of 15 students. Results comparing the absence rates of the treatment and control group indicated the mean difference of -.267 days absent during the 15-day intervention was not statistically significant ($t = -.493$, $p < .626$), hence the null hypothesis was retained. Despite these statistical findings, the researcher's experience and the literature indicate further research on how to help students choose and be able to attend school regularly appears warranted.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Nationwide, chronic absenteeism has become an increasing concern among educators. High absence rates have a negative impact on students' academic performance, standardized test scores, and college and career readiness. Remarkably, over seven million students missed 15 or more days of school in the 2013-2014 school year (Blad, 2017). Chronic absenteeism is defined in various ways. For example, the state legislature in California defines a chronic absentee as occurring when a student is repeatedly absent for 10 days or more in a single school year (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016).

Throughout prior years, researchers have been able to identify reasons why students are chronically absent and have alluded to the impact of absences on student achievement, but there is little existing research on what interventions would prevent students from missing school or the specific influence of absences on student achievement. If chronic absences can be identified as a contributing factor to poor student achievement, then more research is needed to support students from missing school. More efforts are needed to help school systems, educators, students, and families understand the true consequence of chronic absenteeism on a student's success.

The researcher became interested in learning more about the causes of chronic absenteeism and ways to improve student attendance in her role as a high school teacher. She became concerned about the increasing rates of absenteeism among students in her school. She

wished to determine the reasons behind students' absences as well as investigate if individualized interventions might be effective in reducing them.

In order to determine the effect of chronic absenteeism on students' achievement at her high school, the researcher acquired anecdotal evidence from student responses to a Likert scale survey and brief questionnaire to develop a rationale for why students were chronically absent. Then, the researcher implemented a brief intervention and assessed its results to determine whether the strategies implemented helped lessen chronic absences during the period of the study.

Participants in the study were placed into two groups; one group received individualized interventions intended to reduce absences while the other, which served as a control group, did not. Students in the control group continued to have access to their school counselors and Pupil Personnel Worker resources during the study. Attendance rates during the study were compared to determine if the interventions were effective.

Statement of Problem

Researchers, teachers, administrators, and parents are aware that chronic student absenteeism can limit a student's achievement. This study assessed reasons for absences at the researcher's school and tested the effectiveness of specific strategies with a target population of chronically absent students for lessening absences, with the goal of promoting growth in student achievement.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis tested follows:

ho: attendance rates of chronically absent students who are provided individualized interventions (during intervention period) = attendance rates of chronically absent students who

are not provided individualized interventions (during intervention period)

Descriptive analyses will also be conducted to summarize and compare student perceptions of interventions offered or which could be offered to improve attendance.

Operational Definitions

Chronic absentee: a student with 10 or more absences in a school year

Home and Hospital services: maintains instructional continuity only during a student's temporary disability with the support of the school curriculum and a home teacher

504 services: Plans set in place that offer students the supports that they need to achieve success in school if they have a disability

Incentives: Rewards or acknowledgements offered to participants in the study that improve attendance.

Individualized interventions: Strategies implemented to each student individually based on his or her needs and responses to the initial survey to reduce the student's absence rates. Examples of interventions include literature on absenteeism, counseling, and referrals for outside services.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review explores issues related to chronic student absenteeism in schools. Section one provides a definition of chronic absenteeism, discusses its effect on student achievement, and presents issues related to tracking student attendance. Section two describes existing research on chronic absenteeism. Ways to take action against chronic absenteeism are explained in section three, and a rationale for why more research should be conducted on this growing issue in education is discussed in section four.

Chronic Absenteeism and Its Effect on Student Achievement

Chronic absenteeism has been and will continue to be a pressing issue in schools, and in particular, high schools. Students' frequent absences can impact their academic achievement and opportunities to experience success both in school and after their school career is complete. The state legislature of California defined chronic absenteeism as occurring when a student is absent for any reason, for at least 10 percent of the year, or approximately 18 days (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016). As a typical school year includes 180 days, one can infer that missing 18 or more days of school can have negative consequences on a student's achievement and ability to perform successfully on assessments such as standardized tests. According to Blad (2017), over seven million students nationwide missed 15 or more days of school in 2013-2014.

Throughout prior years, many researchers focused primarily on the issue of truancy in high schools. Currently, principals, teachers, and researchers have begun to recognize the detrimental effects of frequent absences from elementary grades through the high school level. Chorneau (2012), states that there is a growing body of research which indicates that poor attendance in early grades is linked to lower performance at the middle and high school level.

However, many states and school systems have not formulated effective ways to track, monitor, or act to prevent the absences from occurring. London et. al (2016) state that although teachers or principals might know a student is chronically absent, most have not established a formalized system to respond to or prevent the absences.

Chronic absenteeism is linked to a variety of factors related to school success. Blad (2017) identifies several indicators that can impact chronic absenteeism rates in a school. Among these indicators are student engagement, school climate, and use of exclusionary discipline such as suspensions. Another indicator is how well schools address students' nonacademic needs with interventions such as food pantries and other supports for families. Researchers concur that chronic absences have a detrimental effect on student achievement; however, there are various ways that absences can be tracked, and most often absences are tracked ineffectively.

When considering school improvement efforts, Sparks (2010) points out that attendance frequently is not given priority in determining how the learning environment of school culture can be improved. According to Sundius, as cited in Sparks, educators often view student attendance in isolation without realizing that attendance is a noteworthy indicator of school and student success, and a predictor for student achievement (Sparks). Sparks emphasizes that poor attendance among young students is an early warning sign of low achievement that should be recognized and addressed as soon as possible.

Most states track absence rates and receive funding for tracking daily attendance rates. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) point out flaws in tracking only daily attendance and emphasize the difference between truancy and chronic absenteeism. They elaborate on this concern, stating "A school can have average daily attendance of 90% and still have 40% of its students chronically absent, because on different days, different students make up that 90%" (p. 5). The inability to

track student absences effectively in order to implement strategies to improve students' attendance can create barriers to the students' school success. More research is needed to determine ways attendance data can be tracked most effectively, who should be responsible for tracking the data, and what educational positions are needed to help eliminate the growing problem of chronic absenteeism.

Existing Research on Chronic Absenteeism

As of 2012, only six states addressed and tracked the issue of chronic absenteeism. Those states are Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, and Rhode Island (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Because very few states track their chronic absences systematically, there is little research on the reasons for absenteeism or strategies to combat frequent absences. However, researchers have been able to identify the main underlying factors behind chronic absenteeism. These factors include illness and family responsibilities, housing instability, bullying and harassment, students' and families' failure to understand the value in education, involvement with the juvenile justice system, and students' need to work to support the family or self (Balfanz & Byrnes).

Additionally, with technological advances and changes in the ways that schools function, as well as how students communicate with one another, Reid (2012) identified additional reasons for chronic absences such as cyber-bullying, boredom, the growth of ADHD and related syndromes, and mental health disorders (Reid 2008a (as cited in Reid, 2012). London et. al (2016) found that demographic characteristics were correlated with chronic absenteeism, but the most significant indicators were prior chronic absences and excessive tardiness.

The causes listed above could be addressed or eliminated with more research and efforts by educational groups to identify ways to reduce chronic absences. For example, bullying and harassment programs have been implemented nationwide to prevent bullying and cyberbullying.

Less bullying in schools should correlate with fewer chronic absences (Reid, 2012). Existing research also suggests that another cause for chronic absences that could be eliminated would be changing the perception of families and students that education lacks value. Developing public service campaigns in the community, state, and nation to emphasize the benefits and value of an education might also help reducing chronic absences.

Establishing programs to eliminate reasons students avoid school and are chronically absent is essential as teachers, school leaders, families, and community members work to close the achievement gap. According to Reid (2012), students with a high number of absences score lower than their peers on achievement tests. They also are less engaged in the classroom and have higher rates of dropping out during their high school years. Reid also noted in his research that students who are consistently absent have “statistically lower academic self-concepts and general levels of self-esteem than their counterparts” who attend school regularly (p.212).

The Center for New York City Affairs analyzed attendance data in New York City elementary schools. After tracking attendance data from 2010-2013, analysts found that a school’s chronic absentee rates were a better predictor of school success than were standardized test scores and that chronic absences can have a significant effect on a school. Statistically, the Center found that the pass rate for standardized tests is lowered by 1.3% for every percentage increase in the chronic absenteeism rates (Nauer, 2016). London, et. al (2016) found the students at the elementary level whom they tracked who had one year of chronic absences had significantly lower scores on standardized tests in math and English Language Arts than students who were not chronically absent. This finding emphasizes the critical need to lessen or eliminate chronic absenteeism at all academic levels.

Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

While much work has been completed to determine the causes behind chronic absenteeism, there is limited research available regarding strategies to prevent or lessen chronic absenteeism. However, some researchers have offered suggestions for strategies that have been effective in small case studies that could be beneficial if implemented in other situations. Suttell, (as cited in Nauer, 2016), states that principals should take seriously the “detective work” of learning about the causes of student absences as this can help to alleviate future problems for students. For example, school districts such as Baltimore City Public Schools, Maryland, have programs such as a Community Schools model to coordinate additional student services like health care, as well as mentorship programs involving students and families (Blad, 2017).

Upon realizing that her elementary school in Queens, New York had one of the largest chronic absenteeism rates in the city, Principal Patricia Mitchell and her staff took action which resulted in an almost 10 percent decrease in chronic absenteeism from June 2011-June 2012 (Nauer, 2016). Educators tracked student absences, communicated with families, and held families accountable for their students missing school. Nauer noted that Mitchell observed an increase in chronic absences when the Common Core Standards came about, perhaps as her focus shifted (Nauer).

London, et. al (2016) also discuss the significance of tracking and monitoring student attendance. However, London et. al tracked attendance across multiple school years to identify trends in the data and determine how students were affected by chronic absenteeism in comparison to their peers. They also identified the limitations in school data on attendance, because the data often do not provide clear information on the reasons behind the absences such as family situations, health issues, or motivation.

Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland partnered with the Baltimore

Education Research Consortium and several other foundations to establish the Baltimore City Student Attendance Workgroup. This group studies the problem of chronic absenteeism and offers potential solutions (Sparks, 2010). The researchers from this project found that students who dropped out in 2009 had exhibited steady decreases in their attendance for three years while those who graduated had maintained regular attendance. In addition, the Chief Educational Officer (CEO) for Baltimore City Schools, Andres Alonso, shared data that chronically absent students scored 15-20% lower on state assessments than those who attended school more regularly. Alonso reflected that this was a larger achievement gap than the gaps between students in poverty and English language learners and the general student population. This shocking finding has resulted in the establishment of an attendance monitor for every school and districtwide incentives for improved attendance (Sparks).

Rather than a strategic, districtwide plan, Balfanz and Bynes (2012) offer several suggestions for attendance incentives that can be implemented more easily. These suggestions include such practices as offering positive comments to parents and children, “rewards” such as pencils, pens, and stickers, certificates, an attendance wall, recognition on the school announcements, food rewards, and other prizes. Alternatively, Gage, Sugai, Lunde, and DeLoreto (2013) researched chronic absenteeism and focused on the effect of a zero-tolerance policy for absences. They found that a zero-tolerance policy likely would not serve as a beneficial solution to the problem of chronic absenteeism. The rationale presented for this conclusion was that the practice of zero tolerance has a negative connotation, especially with students and families who already might be identified as at-risk or in need of the most help. They suggest implementing a school wide positive behavior support system to make it clear that high expectations for both attendance and behavior have been implemented for everyone.

Duckworth and deJung (1986) reviewed attendance policies at multiple high schools and identified many issues with which schools struggle such as students forging their absence letters and differentiating excused and unexcused absences. Duckworth and deJung advise schools to become stricter regarding their attendance policies in collaboration with efforts to improve teacher quality and improve the quality and relevance of courses for students, particularly low-achieving students. They advise that these measures will result in students gaining additional skills and reduce absenteeism rates. Further, they assert that holding students accountable as well as implementing strategies to meet students' needs may help prepare them to be college and career ready.

Finally, a key factor found to help eliminate or lessen the issue of chronic absenteeism is family involvement. Sheldon and Epstein (2002), researched the importance and the impact of involving families when their students are chronically absent. Statistically, chronically absent students are the most likely to drop out of school, so Sheldon and Epstein desired to learn about how family involvement can affect a chronically absent student. On finding that family involvement can help to keep students in school, Sheldon and Epstein recommend that schools intentionally involve families and the community to help reduce chronic absenteeism. Frequent and positive interactions and communications between and among families, students, and the school also are encouraged by Sheldon and Epstein.

Regardless of the strategies implemented, Reid (2012) emphasizes the need for early intervention in discouraging chronic absences and the causes behind them. According to Reid, there are many things that can be done to address this issue such as facilitating and raising the self-esteem of all vulnerable pupils, having parents involved in the planning team for the child's schooling, and encouraging students and parents to value schooling, learning, and achievement.

Importance of Acting to Prevent Chronic Absenteeism

As discussed above, research such as that reported by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) has shown that chronic absenteeism has detrimental effects on student achievement. Balfanz and Byrnes call for the federal government and state education departments to measure and report rates of attendance and absenteeism on a regular basis. The need for such regular measurement and reporting is why the current version of Every Student Succeeds Act now requires states to track how many students miss 15 or more days of school, including excused and unexcused absences (Blad, 2017). Tracking absenteeism is essential to student success as it enables school personnel to identify early warning indicators for failure, such as chronic absenteeism, especially among younger students, as they strive to close the achievement gap.

Despite some recent progress made to address chronic student absenteeism, more research is needed to identify effective strategies to support chronically absent students nationwide. London et. al (2016) point out the need for new programs to be implemented to support students and families to reduce chronic absenteeism. They recommend a program that takes a comprehensive approach and provides student, family, and community supports. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) also recognize and emphasize that attendance incentives are most beneficial only when they are part of a “comprehensive approach” that supports families as well as addressing the underlying challenges that result in frequent absences. Sheldon and Epstein (2012) state in their research on family involvement and chronic absenteeism that larger and more comparative samples need to be analyzed in order to identify best practices for family and community involvement in the effort toward reducing chronic absences amongst students nationwide.

Summary

Chronic absenteeism has been and will continue to be a pressing issue in schools, and in particular, high schools. Students' frequent absences can impact their academic achievement and opportunities to experience success both in school and after their school career is complete. Researchers have been able to identify an array of reasons why a chronically absent student misses 10 or more school days. However, existing research to identify solutions to chronic student absenteeism and help students attend school more regularly is insufficient. Researchers in the educational field should consider the implications of chronic absenteeism and focus on studies that identify interventions and solutions.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The purpose of this research study was to identify the effect of a short-term intervention on chronic absenteeism among high school students. This study used a post-test only control group design to compare attendance of groups to whom individualized interventions intended to improve attendance were offered or not. The interventions were developed to address the reasons for students' absences, which they reported on a pre-intervention survey, located in Appendix A. The independent variables of the study were the strategies implemented to help prevent chronic absenteeism and encourage or reward attendance. The dependent variables were the attendance rates of the participants in the study. The post-test data were the absence rates during the intervention. These were compared to determine if the interventions were effective for the recipients. Results of the rating scales were used to help determine if the current research available on chronic absenteeism was supported by the results of this study.

Participants

Participants included chronically or frequently absent 12th grade students who were identified through eSchoolPlus and the school counseling office. For purposes of this study, as of February 2019, the students who participated had been absent five or more times thus far in the school year to be identified as a chronically absent student.

Instrument

Pre-Intervention Survey (copy in Appendix A): All participants completed a rating scale survey that included short answer and Likert scale items to determine why they were frequently absent and gather suggestions about what incentives or support might increase their attendance at

school.

Individualized interventions: Students who indicated their absences were due to illness were not included in the study. In addition to phone calls home, the following interventions were implemented to the students depending on their responses to the pre-survey. These interventions were provided by the researcher and the school counseling team with support from the administration and Pupil Personnel Worker.

1. Students who were struggling with transportation received supports through community resources, one-on-one counseling, and literature on chronic absenteeism.
2. Students who missed school due to oversleeping received resources on time management, literature on chronic absenteeism, and one-on-one counseling.
3. Students who were caring for a family member or sibling received literature on chronic absenteeism, one-on-one counseling, and appropriate connections with community resources.
4. Students who were struggling with their emotional health received access to appropriate community resources and one-on-one counseling with the school counselors
5. Students with families struggling with housing and food received access to community resources, one-on-one counseling, and literature on chronic absenteeism.

Post-Intervention Surveys (copies in Appendix B and C): After the intervention period, all participants completed a rating scale survey including short answer and Likert scale items.

The study included two versions of the post-assessment surveys, one for the experimental group and one for the control group. The experimental group's post-intervention survey (APPENDIX B) was intended to determine if the student/participant felt that the interventions he or she received were associated with reducing their absences. The control group's survey

(APPENDIX C) asked the student/participant to consider reasons for his or her absences during the intervention period and whether the interventions listed above would have made the individual less likely to be absent had they been provided.

The results of the surveys were summarized via descriptive statistics and the number of absences for each student in both the control and experimental group. These data were computed and compared to test the null hypothesis.

Procedure

The researcher initiated the study by collaborating with the school counseling department to identify students who had been absent five or more times as of February 2019. These students could be identified as chronically absent and were potential participants in the study. The researcher identified 50 possible candidates to participate in the study. Some students were eliminated from the sample population if they were unable to take the initial survey or responded that they were often absent due to illness. The researcher selected a total of 30 students from the eligible respondent pool. Fifteen students were placed randomly in the control group and 15 in the experimental group.

The second stage of the study included a brief collection of anecdotal evidence using the Pre-Intervention survey (Appendix A) which asked each student/participant to share reasons why they were frequently absent from school and describe what factors prevented their attendance. This information helped the researcher determine whether the student was a valid participant for the study as the researcher chose to focus on students who were chronically absent by choice and family circumstances rather than those who missed school for reasons such as illness.

Based on results of the Pre-Intervention survey, students were randomly placed in two groups, a control group and a non-control experimental group. The experimental group received

several interventions and supports based on their individual pre-survey replies. For example, those students needing more family support received literature on the impact of frequent school absences. They also received additional supports in the form of referrals to community resources, if needed. Students struggling with intrinsic motivation and academic success received supports such as phone calls home when the students were absent, literature on the impact of school absences, and one on one meetings with the students to motivate them and build resilience to help them increase their academic achievement and improve their attendance.

After the strategies were implemented for each subgroup for one month, the participants completed a Post-Assessment survey containing Likert scale and short answer items. (Copies of the survey are located in Appendix B for the treatment group and Appendix C for the control group). The post-assessment/follow-up survey asked participants to consider whether the strategies implemented affected their attendance or might have done so. Finally, the researcher compared absence rates of the two groups during the intervention period to determine whether the intervention was successful and summarized the survey responses using descriptive statistics. Results follow in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether providing individualized interventions would help to reduce absences for chronically absent high school students. This study used a post-test only control group design to compare attendance of groups to whom individualized interventions intended to improve attendance were offered or not.

Descriptive Statistics regarding Absences

Initially, descriptive statistics regarding the participants' absence rates were computed to compare the treatment and control groups' absences (out of 111 school days for the pre-intervention measure and out of 15 days for the during intervention measure) to ensure the groups were statistically similar before the study and then to compare the pre-intervention rates with the during intervention rates to test the null hypothesis of the study. Those statistics follow in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for absences before and during intervention disaggregated by groups

Absences	Group	n	Mean	Percentage of Absences	Standard Deviation	Range for all 30 participants
Before Intervention (out of 111 school days)	Treatment	15	11.23	10%	8.05	5-37.5
	Control	15	13.3	12%	10.27	
During Intervention (out of 15 days)	Treatment	15	1.43	10%	1.32	0-5.5
	Control	15	1.7	11%	1.62	

Table 2 contains results of t-tests for independent samples which compared the treatment and control groups' mean absences before and during the intervention. The results indicated that the groups' mean absences were not statistically significantly different before or after the

individualized interventions were provided to the treatment group.

Table 2

Results of t-tests for independent samples comparing mean absences for the treatment and control group before and during intervention (equal variances assumed)

Absences	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed) (p)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Pre-Intervention (Out of 111 school days)	-.613	28	.545	-2.067	3.369	-8.97	4.83
During Intervention (out of 15 of school days)	-.493	28	.626	-.267	.540	-1.37	.84

Although the treatment group mean was lower before and after the intervention, the mean differences of -2.067 days absent before the intervention and -.267 days absent during the intervention resulted in t statistics of -.613 and -.493, respectively, which were not statistically significant for before ($p < .545$) or during the intervention ($p < .626$). Hence, the null hypothesis that the attendance rates of chronically absent students who were provided individualized interventions during the intervention period would equal the attendance rates of chronically absent students who were not provided individualized interventions during intervention period was retained.

Survey Responses

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics which summarize the pre-intervention survey responses to items one through seven for all participants. These statistics were collected prior to

establishing the treatment and control groups. The descriptive statistics provided anecdotal evidence of the possible reasons for student absences. These data and possible reasons were used to develop the individualized interventions offered to the participants in the treatment group.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for pre-intervention survey items one through seven (reasons for missing school)

Item	I frequently miss school:	N	Mean	SEM	Standard Deviation	Range
1	due to issues with my transportation	30	1.3	.137	.750	1-4
2	due to oversleeping	30	3.1	.264	1.457	1-5
3	because I help to care for a family member or sibling	30	1.57	.196	1.073	1-5
4	to go to work instead	30	1.47	.164	.900	1-4
5	because my family is having trouble with food or housing	30	1.33	.079	.434	1-3
6	because I am struggling with my emotional health	30	2.30	.240	1.317	1-5
7	due to illness	30	3.03	.212	1.159	1-5

This table indicates that the most commonly reported reasons for absences were oversleeping, illness, and students struggling with their emotional health respectively. The findings reported above are consistent with the anecdotal evidence from the pre-survey that students often miss school because of oversleeping, emotional health struggles, and illness.

Table 4, below, lists tallies of the frequencies with which students gave particular responses to survey items eight to 11. These responses also were intended to help the researcher

develop helpful interventions to promote attendance at school. Most responses included the desire for a later school start time, more engaging classroom instruction, and the need for mental and emotional health supports. Students also responded that some of the main factors that deter them from attending school regularly are vacations, college visits, mental health, and poor time management skills.

Table 4

Tallies of frequencies of reasons or ways schools can help or hinder attendance based on the post intervention survey from both the treatment and control groups.

ITEM 8 Category or Code for replies:	Delay the start time of school	Provide more engaging instruction	Teachers should establish more positive relationships with students	Nothing or factors outside of school prevent me from coming to school
What can the school do to help you to improve your attendance? Please list 2-3 specific things that would help.	9	5	4	12
ITEM 9 Category or Code for replies:	Better teacher and student relationships	Delay the start time of school and/or adjust the school lateness policy	Provide more engaging instructions, incentives for learning, and help with learning content	Mental/emotional health supports
What supports would help you to attend school more consistently?	3	4	10	4

ITEM 10 Category or Code for replies:	Poor relationships with teachers and peers	Poor time management	The need for motivational/mental health supports	Vacations, college visits, missing school for sports
Other than the ones listed above, what additional factors impact your attendance negatively?	4	8	10	7
ITEM 11	Nothing	Provide more engaging instruction, improve relationships with teachers, friends, grades and college motivation	my schedule/time management skills	Motivation
Other than the ones listed above, what additional factors impact your attendance positively?	7	12	4	3

The following services were offered to students in the treatment group based on the familiarity of the researcher and guidance counselor with the students' situation and their pre-intervention survey results. Students in the treatment group received two to four supportive interventions each.

Table 5

Tallies of individualized interventions provided to the treatment group

Number of Students in Treatment Group to whom these Individualized Interventions were provided				
Time management resources	CALLS HOME	literature, etc.	community resources	one-one counseling
10	11	11	0*	14

The interventions provided included the following actions: providing time management resources, offering information about chronic absenteeism, providing one-on-one counseling, and offering community resources and supports. Respondents did not respond in a way that indicated a need for outside resources, so outside resources were not offered during this brief study, even though the literature indicated this is not always the case. This finding is discussed further in Chapter V.

All participants completed parallel post-intervention surveys after the interventions were offered to the participants in the treatment group for 15 school days. These surveys assessed how helpful students felt the interventions might have been for improving attendance and solicited suggestions about what might help or hinder their future attendance. Those results are summarized by group in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6

Descriptive statistics for post-intervention survey items 1-12, disaggregated by group

Item	Item/Question	Group (n=15/ both)	Mean	s.d.	SEM	Range
1	The supports I received to help prevent absences were beneficial to me.	Treatment	3.73	.961	.248	1-5
		Control	2.13	1.302	.336	1-4
2	I appreciated learning about how my frequent absences can impact my academic achievement.	Treatment	3.67	1.113	.287	1-5
		Control	2.33	1.900	.232	1-4
3	The supports I received motivated me to attend school.	Treatment	3.13	1.246	.322	1-5
		Control	2.27	1.033	.267	1-4
4	My family pushed me to make attendance a priority after learning about the impact of being absent and academic achievement.	Treatment	3.47	1.356	.350	1-5
		Control	2.87	1.187	.307	1-5
5	The phone calls home when I was absent made me want to attend school the next day.	Treatment	2.73	1.534	.396	1-5
		Control	1.80	.862	.223	1-3
6	The information about frequently missing school and grades made me want to attend school.	Treatment	3.47	1.060	.274	1-5
		Control	2.67	1.175	.303	1-4
7	My grades improved while I attended school more during the study.	Treatment	3.80	1.474	.380	1-5
		Control	3.40	1.454	.375	1-5
8	The one-on-one conferencing made me feel validated and supported.	Treatment	4.13	1.125	.291	1-5
		Control	2.87	.990	.256	1-4

9	Knowing that someone cared about why I was absent from school made me want to attend school more.	Treatment	3.73	1.223	.316	1-5
		Control	2.60	.986	.254	1-4
10	After participating in the study, I feel empowered to attend school more regularly.	Treatment	3.87	.990	.256	2-5
		Control	2.73	1.223	.316	1-5
11	The intervention helped me to miss less school.	Treatment	3.53	.990	.256	1-5
		Control	2.40	.828	.214	1-3
12	After the intervention is complete, I will continue to attend school more regularly.	Treatment	3.73	.122	.316	1-5
		Control	2.67	1.047	.270	1-4

Students in the treatment group responded more positively to all items as reflected by their having higher mean scores on each item than the control group. Additionally, the highest mean for the treatment group was 3.87 for item 10 which suggested that many participants realized the benefits and intent of the intervention.

Finally, Table 7 lists the frequencies with which students in the treatment group indicated interventions were or were not helpful in terms of improving attendance

Table 7

Summary of reported post-survey responses indicating potentially beneficial or detrimental interventions for improving attendance (Treatment Group only, items 13-15)

Item	Categories or Codes for replies

Item 13: What intervention you received helped you most to prevent more absences from school? Why?	One on one counseling/meetings with a teacher about my absences	Motivation to earn good grades/get accepted into college	Nothing	Having more resources during the study
	14	5	6	2
Item 14: What intervention did not help you improve attendance? Why?	Receiving literature on chronic absenteeism	Phone calls home	One on one counseling sessions	Indifferent
	4	11	2	8
Item 15: What intervention (from those listed or provided or ANY intervention) would help you attend school most of all?	One on one counseling	The literature on chronic absenteeism	Time management resources	Help with grades/motivation
	9	2	3	4

The majority of students' responses indicates a desire for one-on-one counseling or meetings with a teacher about the students' absences. This suggests that students may prioritize relationships with their teacher over other interventions.

The post survey asked students to consider why they felt certain interventions were more helpful or hurtful than others. Students responded that the one-on-one sessions were most helpful because they were able to explain their absences and receive strategies to support them in attending school more regularly rather than just being accused of skipping school or exhibiting laziness. Other students shared that they felt intrinsically motivated to attend school as much as

possible due to their desire to be accepted into the college of their choice or remain academically eligible for sports.

On the other hand, 11 students responded that the school making phone calls home was not a beneficial intervention when they were absent. Students responded that many of their parents already knew they were absent, so there was no need for the phone call as an intervention. Additionally, eight students responded apathetically to item 10 on the post survey, which may have indicated that they did not feel any of the interventions were beneficial or meaningful to them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether providing individualized interventions would help to reduce absences for chronically absent students. The results of the study were not statistically significant, so the null hypothesis was retained. However, data were collected to determine how the interventions were perceived and students' responses generated connections to past studies and suggestions for future research about strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism. These findings are discussed below.

Implications of Results

Although the results did not indicate statistically significant differences in absence rates between the treatment and control groups during the intervention period, anecdotal data collected did uncover some of the reasons for absences at the researcher's school. These reasons included illness, difficulties with mental and emotional health, transportation issues, oversleeping, and poor time management. Post-intervention surveys also demonstrated that the students/participants in both the treatment and control groups felt that one-on-one counseling or meetings with a teacher about their absences did or would have positively affected their attendance. These responses suggest that students value individual relationships with their teachers. Students responded in the post-survey that they appreciated the conferencing because it meant someone at school cared about them and why they were not present regularly.

Theoretical Consequences

Although there is a plethora of existing research available on why students are chronically absent, reasons could vary across samples and demographic variables and, surprisingly, little research exists on what "best practices" are available to assist a chronically absent student and

help them to prevent further absences. While this study attempted to determine if customizing and offering individualized interventions would help to reduce students' absences, the post-survey results did not indicate a statistically significant difference between the absence rates of the treatment group, which received the interventions, and the absence rates of the comparison group, which did not. It is noted that although the surveys were not compared statistically, they did provide a rationale for understanding why the absences occur and what interventions might address them. As the achievement gap continues to grow, it is essential that more research is conducted to determine the most appropriate methods to reduce chronic absenteeism. In addition, it is important that teachers receive information about issues related to chronic absenteeism among students, and that teachers attempt to establish more positive relationships with students to support their regular school attendance.

Threats to Validity

There are several limitations that could be identified as threats to the validity of this study's conclusions and the ability for the interventions to be implemented successfully in other settings or populations. One threat to validity is the brief time frame in which the study was conducted. Treatment group participants received the interventions for only 15 consecutive school days. It is unclear whether the interventions provided will or could have yielded positive long-term results. There were times in which the study seemed rushed, and student absences during the 15 days of the study may have affected the data more than these absences would have if the study had been conducted over a longer period, such as a full marking period or semester. A longer interval for implementing the study may have influenced the researcher-student connections as well, which consequently may have improved the outcomes.

Additionally, the small sample size of 30 students, with 15 each in the treatment and control

groups, may have affected the validity of the study. With a longer timeframe and larger sample, the results of the study may have been different and likely more generalizable to different populations.

Connections to Previous Studies and Existing Literature

Past researchers have linked chronic absenteeism to a variety of factors related to school success. Blad (2017) identified student engagement, school climate, use of exclusionary discipline such as suspensions, and the ways in which schools address nonacademic needs with interventions to support students and their families as indicators that can affect chronic absenteeism. Additionally, Reid (2012) states that cyber-bullying, boredom, and mental health disorders are among the growing reasons behind chronic absenteeism. Lastly, London, et. al. (2016) identify demographic characteristics, prior chronic absences, and excessive tardiness as factors which are predictive of future absences. These findings motivated this researcher to investigate the reasons students were chronically absent in her school and to conduct this action research to determine what might be done to reduce chronic absences.

London, et. al. (2016) shared findings that suggest that although teachers or administrators might be aware of the chronic absences, they most often have not established an effective formalized system to respond to or prevent them. Researchers concur that while chronic absences have a detrimental effect on student achievement, there is limited research on methods to prevent absences.

There are many factors that can result in chronic absenteeism, but although each of the studies cited above studies have identified the reasons for the absences, the studies have not offered solutions. However, according to Blad (2017), successful attempts have been made in the Baltimore City School system to alleviate problems with chronic absenteeism by providing

mentorship programs and healthcare.

This study attempted to use the research available to determine what possible interventions might result in improved attendance for students in her school.

Implications for Further Research

The results of this study suggest several implications for future research on developing interventions to address the issue of chronic student absenteeism. According to Sundius (as cited in Sparks, 2010), educators often view student attendance in isolation and do not always recognize that attendance can be an important indicator of school success, student success, and a predictor of students' achievement. Given the potential benefits of increased understanding of the implications of attendance patterns, it appears that further study is warranted regarding the effectiveness of various attendance tracking methods, the data collected through tracking attendance, and how these data are used to improve student attendance. This information could assist schools in attaining the most accurate information regarding students and their absences and help them generate effective interventions to target the root causes of chronic absenteeism. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) noted that this inability to track student absences effectively for purposes of implementing strategies to improve student attendance is detrimental to lessening chronic absences.

Another opportunity for further research on chronic absenteeism would be to identify links between attendance and achievement. Reid (2012) stated that students with high numbers of absences scored lower than their peers on achievement tests. These students were also less engaged in the classroom and had higher dropout rates. The Center for New York City Affairs found that the pass rate for standardized tests is lowered by 1.3% for every percentage increase

in absenteeism rates (Nauer, 2016). These findings linking chronic absences with detrimental effects on standardized testing and dropout rates indicate that further research should be conducted to determine the relationships between chronic absences and a student's academic achievements, thereby helping to break the cycle of chronic absence and poor achievement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, many factors affect students' school attendance. The anecdotal evidence from this study suggest that in the target school, reasons for chronic absenteeism included illness, difficulties with mental and emotional health, transportation issues, and oversleeping or poor time management. Survey results from students who were and were not provided individualized interventions indicated that students would prefer, and their attendance would benefit most from, building positive relationships with their teachers versus punitive consequences or family intervention. One-on-one conferencing was the highest rated intervention from both the treatment and control groups participating in the study. It is reasonable to assume that establishing relationships with secondary students about their attendance, tracking attendance, and providing students with individualized supports would benefit students and help to eliminate the achievement gap in chronically absent students. Future research appears warranted to clarify what interventions work best with specific students and which of these interventions are most feasible for schools to implement.

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Appendix A
Pre-Intervention Survey (all complete)

Please complete the following items by selecting the rating from 1 to 5 which describes your feelings best:

- 1= strongly disagree
- 2= disagree
- 3= neither agree nor disagree
- 4= agree
- 5= strongly agree

1. _____ I frequently miss school due to issues with my transportation.
2. _____ I frequently miss school due to oversleeping.
3. _____ I frequently miss school because I help to care for a family member or sibling.
4. _____ I frequently miss school to go to work instead.
5. _____ I frequently miss school because my family is having trouble with food or housing.
6. _____ I frequently miss school because I am struggling with my emotional health.
7. _____ I frequently miss school due to illness.

Please answer the following questions in 1-2 sentences.

8. What can the school do to help you to improve your attendance? Please list 2-3 specific things that would help.
9. What supports would help you to attend school more consistently?
10. Other than the ones listed above, what additional factors impact your attendance negatively?
11. . Other than the ones listed above, what additional factors impact your attendance positively?

Appendix B
Post intervention Survey
Treatment Group

Post-Test Likert Scales
Experimental Group Survey

Please complete the following items by selecting the rating from 1 to 5 which describes your feelings best:

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= neither agree nor disagree

4= agree

5= strongly agree

1. _____The supports I received to help prevent absences were beneficial to me.
2. _____I appreciated learning about how my frequent absences can impact my academic achievement.
3. _____The supports I received motivated me to attend school.
4. _____My family pushed me to make attendance a priority after learning about the impact of being absent and academic achievement.
5. _____The phone calls home when I was absent made me want to attend school the next day.
6. _____The information about frequently missing school and grades made me want to attend school.

7. _____My grades improved while I attended school more during the study.
8. _____The one-on-one conferencing made me feel validated and supported.
9. _____Knowing that someone cared about why I was absent from school made me want to attend school more.
10. _____After participating in the study, I feel empowered to attend school more regularly.
11. _____The intervention helped me to miss less school.
12. _____After the intervention is complete, I will continue to attend school more regularly.

Please answer the questions below in 1-2 sentences.

13. What intervention you received helped you most to prevent more absences from school?

Why?

14. What intervention did not help you improve attendance? Why?

15. What intervention (from those listed or provided or ANY intervention) would help you attend school most of all?

Appendix C
Post-Intervention Survey
Control group

Please complete the following items by selecting the rating from 1 to 5 which describes your feelings best:

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= neither agree nor disagree

4= agree

5= strongly agree

1. _____The supports I could have received such as phone calls home, counseling, resources, etc. to help prevent absences would have been beneficial to me.

2. _____I would have appreciated learning about how my frequent absences can impact my academic achievement.

3. _____The supports I could have received such as phone calls home, counseling, resources, etc. would have motivated me to attend school.

4. _____My family would have pushed me to make attendance a priority after learning about the impact of being absent and academic achievement.

5. _____Phone calls home when I was absent would have made me want to attend school the next day.

6. _____The information about frequently missing school and grades would have made me want to attend school.

7. _____ My grades would have improved while I attended school more during the study.
8. _____ The one-on-one conferencing would have made me feel validated and supported.
9. _____ Knowing that someone cared about why I was absent from school would have made me want to attend school more.
10. _____ After participating in the study, I would have felt more empowered to attend school more regularly.
11. _____ Individualized interventions would have helped me to miss less school.

_____ After the interventions, I would have continued to attend school more regularly.

Please answer the following questions in 1-2 sentences.

What intervention in the items above would have helped you most to prevent more absences from school? Why?

1. What intervention in the items above would NOT help you improve attendance? Why?
2. What other intervention (besides those mentioned on this survey) would help you attend school most of all?

Appendix D
Rubric to determine interventions based on Pre-Survey responses

In addition to phone calls home, the following interventions will be implemented and individualized to the student depending on their responses to the pre-survey:

1. Students struggling with transportation will receive supports through community resources, one-on-one counseling, and literature on chronic absenteeism.
2. Students that miss school due to oversleeping will receive resources on time management, literature on chronic absenteeism and one-on-one counseling.
3. Students that care for a family member or sibling will receive literature on chronic absenteeism, one-on-one counseling and appropriate connections with community resources.
4. Students struggling with their emotional health will receive access to appropriate community resources and one-on-one counseling.
5. Students with families struggling with housing and food will receive access to community resources, one-on-one counseling, and literature on chronic absenteeism.