8-2015

A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance

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Abstract

Student attendance is one of the most important steps to a student's academic success. Student absenteeism is defined as a student missing 20 or more school days within one academic school year. When students miss school on a consistent basis, they are identified as chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism can lead to a wide variety of issues ranging from tobacco use to alcohol consumption to substance abuse. This study investigated the root causes that impact student attendance in an urban elementary school district from parents' perspectives. Using qualitative methods, interviews were conducted with parents of students who attended schools within a city school district. They provided insight into both the obstacles and solutions that families face regarding attendance. Findings revealed several hindrances and solutions that school districts may want to consider when seeking to improve their daily student attendance rates. Barriers that parents revealed were lack of transportation support and lack of knowing how to access resources and childcare before and after school. Solutions that parents consistently reported were additional transportation support, increased parental involvement, and enhanced communication between home and school. Recommended future studies would include interviewing parents whose child has poor daily attendance rates from the same school but from single-parent households to compare their responses to two-parent households in order to identify the barriers and potential solutions for both groups. The findings would provide districts with a better vii understanding of the needs to remedying student attendance issues from both types of households.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Susan Schultz

Second Supervisor
Ruth Harris

Subject Categories
Education

A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Susan Schultz

Committee Member

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

August 2015

Dedication

I would like to acknowledge so many people who helped make this doctoral degree possible. First and foremost, I would like to honor and thank my Heavenly Father for giving me the ability to do this work and allowing me to have a the mind and spirit for wanting to serve others the way his son, Jesus Christ, did. To my loving and supporting wife, Deborah, thank you for being patient with me throughout this entire journey; without your support, love, and prayers this would not have been possible!

To all of my wonderful children, Stella, Naomi, Emmanuel, Elisha, Moriah, and Gabriel, you all are my inspiration and motivation to do this work. To my friends, Dr. Karen Sangmeister and Ms. Sharon Ryan, thank you for all of your hard work and guidance through this process these past few years. Your assistance and constant encouragement will never be forgotten.

To my mentor and friend, Dr. Guillermo Montes, thank you for the guidance and friendship that you have provided to me throughout this entire process. To Dr. Arthur "Sam" Walton, Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason, and Dr. Michael Wischnowski, thank you for not giving up on me and keeping me to my promise to finish this degree. Thank you to all of my professors for equipping me with the knowledge base to be able to achieve learning at this level.

To my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Susan Schultz, thank you for all of your guidance and support throughout this entire process. I could not have asked for a more encouraging and supportive Chair. You truly were God sent. To my committee member,

Dr. Ruth Harris, you were there for me through the attainment of each of my dissertation milestones, thank you.

To my brothers and sisters, thank you for all of the encouragement along the way, it has been greatly appreciated. Last, but not least, thank you to my parents for not giving up on me when others said that this would not be possible for me and for refusing to accept no for an answer! The reason I have made it this far is because of the sacrifices that you both made on my behalf. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Biographical Sketch

Roshon Bradley is currently the Principal for the Early Childhood School in the Rochester City School District. Mr. Bradley he has worked for the Rochester City School District for the past 15 years. He began his career as a school counselor and then moved into administration where he has been a district administrator for the past 12 years. Mr. Bradley attended the University at Buffalo on a full athletic scholarship from 1996 to 2000, where he completed his bachelor's degree in 2000. He also completed his first Master's Degree in Counseling Education from the University at Buffalo in 2001, and he went on to obtain his second Master's Degree in Educational Leadership from St. John Fisher College in 2004. In the summer of 2006, Mr. Bradley began his doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. In 2008, he suspended his doctoral studies and then resumed them in 2014. Mr. Bradley pursued his research in A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance under the direction of Dr. Susan Schultz and Dr. Ruth Harris and received the Ed.D. Degree in 2015.

Abstract

Student attendance is one of the most important steps to a student's academic success. Student absenteeism is defined as a student missing 20 or more school days within one academic school year. When students miss school on a consistent basis, they are identified as chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism can lead to a wide variety of issues ranging from tobacco use to alcohol consumption to substance abuse.

This study investigated the root causes that impact student attendance in an urban elementary school district from parents' perspectives. Using qualitative methods, interviews were conducted with parents of students who attended schools within a city school district. They provided insight into both the obstacles and solutions that families face regarding attendance.

Findings revealed several hindrances and solutions that school districts may want to consider when seeking to improve their daily student attendance rates. Barriers that parents revealed were lack of transportation support and lack of knowing how to access resources and childcare before and after school. Solutions that parents consistently reported were additional transportation support, increased parental involvement, and enhanced communication between home and school.

Recommended future studies would include interviewing parents whose child has poor daily attendance rates from the same school but from single-parent households to compare their responses to two-parent households in order to identify the barriers and potential solutions for both groups. The findings would provide districts with a better

understanding of the needs to remedying student attendance issues from both types of households.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Students need to be in school every day to be academically successful. In recent years, student absenteeism has become one of the major concerns in urban school districts across the United States. According to Epstein and Sheldon (2002), student absenteeism is one of the most important issues confronting school districts today. Student absenteeism is defined as a student missing 20 or more school days within one academic school year. When students miss school on a consistent basis, they are identified as chronically absent.

Students that are chronically absent from school open the door for a host of larger issues other than just being out of the school room. Chronic absenteeism can lead to a wide variety of issues ranging from tobacco use to alcohol consumption to substance abuse (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

Studies have shown that regularly attending students can also be negatively impacted by chronically absent students. For example, when a teacher diverts a significant amount of attention to chronically absent students in an effort to try to meet the generally absent students' learning and social needs, they often take away teaching from the regularly attending students. Also, when children miss 10% of their total school attendance (or about 20 days) at the early childhood level, it makes it extremely hard for them to be in a position to learn to read at their grade level (Romero & Lee, 2007). One California study found that only 17% of students who were chronically absent in both

kindergarten and first grade were reading proficiently in the third grade, compared to 64% of their peers with good attendance rates (Applied Survey Research, 2011).

One major cause for poor student attendance rates is the breakdown of the home structure. According to McCluskey, Bynum, and Patchin (2004), the family structure plays a major role in a student's attendance rate. The family structure can be identified as the lack of parenting skills, neglect, socioeconomic status, and lack of family support. What is critical to a child's daily attendance rate is parental involvement. Parents and guardians are critical partners in ensuring that a child gets to school on time and every day. Some parents don't fully comprehend the negative consequences associated with chronic absences—particularly in the early grades when many parents may be under the assumption that not much learning is taking place (Douglas, 2010). Other times, parents face real barriers to getting their child to school. Although illness is a big factor in the early grades, the research shows that "parental attitudes" toward attendance and their own comfort level with the school can affect a child's attendance rate significantly. The research has also found that student attendance improved significantly when parents felt that their schools were safe and when they trusted their child's teacher (Ehrlich, Gwynne, Stitziel Pareja, & Allensworth, 2013).

In a study out of Chicago, Ehrlich et al. (2013) found that what parents do with their child while they are at home can also improve their child's attendance rates as well as their academic performance. When parents understand the impact that chronic absence may have on their child's academic performance, they are less likely to allow their child to miss school. Some school districts from around the country have adopted

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slogans such as, "every minute matters," to emphasize the importance of coming to school every day. These types of messages are targeted at students and their parents.

A study out of Los Angeles Unified School District's Attendance Improvement Program 2013 for kindergartners identified common characteristics among the most successful programs: (a) greater levels of parent engagement, (b) a strength-based approach with more positive perceptions of parents and higher expectations of their students and parents, (c) a shared belief that everyone has a role in improving attendance and should work together, and (d) a deeper level of commitment to program implementation and digging into the causes of absenteeism (Duardo, 2013).

A study conducted by Carey, Lewis, and Farris (1998) predicted poor children in kindergarten have lower academic achievement levels by the fifth grade. In another study conducted by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (2011) found that sixth-grade students with severely chronic attendance rates had a 60% chance of dropping out of school (Connolly & Olson, 2012). Further, another study conducted by the University of Chicago in 2005 found that ninth-grade attendance rates were a better graduation predictor than eighth-grade test scores (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). In a similar study conducted by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (2011), the researchers found that students who missed two or more days in September were significantly more likely to be chronically absent for the remainder of the school year. The researchers also found that students who missed two to four days in September were five times more likely to be chronically absent than students who were absent fewer than two days. In addition, students who missed more than four days in September were over 16 times more likely to be chronically absent than students who were absent fewer than

two days in September (Connolly & Olson, 2012). Results suggest that schools need to pay attention to student attendance from the earliest days in September, and they should intervene to get students back on track as quickly as possible. All of these studies conclude how vital it is for a student to have good attendance rates especially in the early elementary years. It is also critical that students/parents monitor their child's daily attendance rates starting from the very first day of school to the very last day of school.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this research is to identify the root causes that impact student attendance in an urban elementary school district from a parent's perspective. Qualitative methods used to extend existing research in ways to improve the daily student attendance rates. There has been extensive research on strategies from experts that school districts can apply to enhance the daily student attendance rates within the field (Sheldon and Epstein, 2002), but there is very little research seeking the advice from parents as to what some of the barriers are that hinder students from having consistent attendance. Additionally, Sheldon and Epstein (2002) found that parental support/involvement is critical for a student's academic success. Most students whose parents were unable or unwilling to provide supervision, guidance, or discipline were less likely to have good attendance rates and less likely to be academically successful. In a later study, Sheldon and Epstein (2004) indicated that parental actions, such as monitoring their child's state of affairs and/or getting involved in their child's school, such as joining the school's Parent Teacher Association/Parent Teacher Organization (PTA/PTO), lowered students' levels of absenteeism. Astone and McLanahan (1991), Duckworth and DeJong (1989), Lee (1994), and McNeal (1999) all stated that when schools develop programs that

focused on family and community partnerships, student absenteeism went down as well. To this end, the researcher explored the parents' perspectives and feedback to help address the issue of chronic student attendance.

Description of being chronically absent and its impact on students.

Chronically absent students are defined as missing 10% or more of school attendance over the course of one academic school year for any reason (excused or unexcused). This may represents two days missed each month for 10 months. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that chronic absenteeism is most prevalent amongst low-income students. They also found that gender and ethnic background does not have a significant impact on absenteeism. But they did uncover that the youngest students, meaning kindergarteners, and the oldest students, being seniors in high school, tend to have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.

Outside of the fact that poor student attendance predicts dropping out of school, chronic absenteeism can also result in other damaging consequences. Leaving school is merely the concluding act of a long withdrawal process from school (Carey et al., 1998). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) also concurred that dropping out of school echoes a long process of disengagement and withdrawal from school. Lamdin (1996) found that students who did not attend class regularly had a much lower opportunity to master the material being taught, and it hurt their ability to be academically successful. Chronically absent students have a long history of facing major academic challenges throughout their educational experience. They often struggle academically from elementary school, onward, if their chronic attendance is not addressed.

While this research focusses on students with chronically high absenteeism rates at the elementary level, the researcher acknowledges that for all students with chronically high absenteeism rates, academics can be negatively impacted if not addressed. According to Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey (1997), attendance patterns as early as elementary school have separated dropouts from graduates. Keeping students in class can help to keep them from engaging in negligent behaviors and facilitate learning through increased exposure to instruction (Sheldon, 2007). Other studies showed that absenteeism is a strong predictor of alcohol, tobacco, and substance use in adolescents (Hallfors, Vevea, Iritani, Cho, Khatapoush, & Saxe, 2002).

Comparing students with good daily attendance rates to students with chronic attendance rates. There is a correlation between students who have chronically high absenteeism rates and academic performance. Lamdin (1996) stated that when students have better attendance rates, they often have higher passing rates on standardized achievement tests (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, 1991). Again, Lamdin (1998), in a later study supported what he revealed in his 1996 study— that students with better attendance scored higher on achievement tests than students who were frequently absent. Consequently, these correlations impact a student's ability to graduate in later years. In a 2011 study with Applied Survey Research, it was found that 64% of the students with good attendance in kindergarten and first grade scored "proficient" on the state's third-grade English Language Arts (ELA) test, compared to 41% of students who were chronically absent during one of those primary years and scored proficiently on the third-grade ELA test. For students who were chronically

absent in both kindergarten and first grade, only 17% scored proficient on the state's third-grade ELA test.

Importance of having good attendance rates. In a nationally representative data set, chronic absence in kindergarten was associated with lower academic performance in first grade. The impact is twice as great for students from low-income families (Romero & Lee, 2007). The Baltimore Education Research Consortium (2011) found a strong correlation between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within one year of their expected high school graduation. Students who are raised in a poverty-stricken environment benefit most from being in school. One of the most effective approaches for helping students out of poverty is to focus all efforts on getting students to school every day. This approach, alone, has been proven to drive up achievement for high school graduation rates and college admissions (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007).

Other significant reasons for having good student attendance rates are the higher social costs that are incurred if students who have dropped out become involved in criminal activities. According to one calculation, the social cost associated with one 30-year-old person's life of crime amounts to over $2 million (Cohen, 1998). A one-year cohort of dropouts costs the nation, in terms of lost income and tax revenue and the replacement costs and damage associated with the crimes themselves, more than $240 billion over their lifetimes (Dembo & Gulledge, 2009; Schoeneberger, 2011).

Theoretical Rationale

The study rests on understanding the foundation of grounded theory, which leads to an understanding that there is a need for primary schools to achieve high daily student

attendance rates. The researcher investigated the literature that emphasizes the connection between student attendance, academic achievement, and parental connections that impact student attendance rates.

Grounded theory. Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory also offers a set of principles, guidelines, strategies, and exploratory devices rather than given instructions (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003). Grounded theory leads the researcher to attend to what is heard, seen, and sensed while gathering data. Additionally, grounded theory data can be collected from a variety of sources, ranging from observations to interactions to and materials that can be gathered from a setting or a topic. Charmaz (2014) stated, "We bring an open mind to what is happening, so that we can learn about the worlds and people we study" (p. 3).

In addition to grounded theory, the researcher also examined the theory of mindsets through the research of Dweck (2006). In the book, *Mindset, The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck identified two types of mindsets. The first mindset is called the "fixed" mindset. People that experience a fixed mindset often have a limited thought process and do not believe in effort. Often times these individuals take on the mindset that if a person does not succeed, then they probably don't have the ability to succeed. Whereas, as a person that has the opposite mindset, which Dweck referred to as the "growth" mindset, a person with a growth mindset tends to focus on developing ideas about challenges, and effort quickly follows. Other characteristics of people who possess a growth mindset are that they believe that their qualities can be cultivated, which can lead to a host of thoughts and actions that can take a person down a totally different path

to success. The growth mindset is often referred to as the "ah-ha experience" by psychologists.

The researcher examined the mindset that commonly emerges with the parents being interviewed. This can be critical insight as to how parents' mindsets can play a major role in their children's daily attendance rates. This insight from parents who have children within the city school district was collected and analyzed to inform future attendance practices and policies district wide.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the barriers that may hinder parents from getting their child to school on a consistent and timely basis. In addition, this study seeks to capture the voice of parents who have children who attend city schools. This study examines the experiences of parents of school-aged children with and without good attendance rates for the purpose of understanding what the barriers and potential solutions are that can improve student absenteeism. Ultimately, this study focuses on the important role parents play in student attendance, subsequently affecting achievement.

Research Questions

This dissertation examines, through the words of parents, the barriers that contribute to students having poor attendance rates. This body of work explores the degree to which parents' input can be valuable information that can lead to improved student attendance rates. The research questions include:

1. What are the obstacles that urban parents of children with low attendance rates encounter that affect their child's attendance at school?

2. What are some possible actions that school districts can implement to help support stronger student attendance rates?

Significance of the Study

Chronic absenteeism is one of the most serious educational issues that this country is facing today. Chronic absenteeism is directly connected to a student dropping out of school. This is not solely a Department of Education problem but a problem for our society, as a whole, as well as for the individual. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 placed a strong emphasis on student attendance by making it an "additional indicator" for the Adequate Yearly Progress Requirements (AYPR) for schools (Railsback, 2004).

When students decide to drop out of school, they face several consequences for their decision, such as higher levels of poverty, unemployment, public assistance, incarceration, and poor health. The causes of chronic absenteeism are very complex and widespread. Dropping out of school is a gradual process that sometimes begins in elementary school. In a study conducted by Hickman, Bartholomew, and Mathwig (2007), they found that students who eventually dropped out of high school had a pattern of poor attendance rates beginning at the kindergarten level, and absenteeism was consistent throughout their high school careers. In comparison, students who had good attendance rates as early as the first grade had higher graduation rates from high school. This study pointed out that not only is good attendance in the early childhood years important, but it is critical to a student's academic success. Any absence, whether it is excused or unexcused, denies a student the opportunity to learn and become academically

successful. The effects of lost school days may cause a student to fall behind academically, and in some cases, it may be very difficult for that student to catch up.

Definition of Terms

Average Daily Attendance – the percentage of enrolled students who arrive at school each day to learn.

Chronic Absence – missing 10% or more days of attendance at school over the course of an academic year for any reason (excused or unexcused), which equals two days of classes missed each month for 10 months.

Grounded Theory Research – a study approach designed to discover what problems exist in a given social environment and how the persons involved handle them; it involves formulation, testing, and reformulation of propositions until a supposition or a system of ideas to explain a phenomenon is developed.

Severe Chronic Absence – missing 20% or more of school days of classes per year; approximately a total of two months of days with no attendance in classes.

Satisfactory Attendance – missing 5% or less days of school classes over the course of an academic year.

Truancy – unexcused absences, which is defined by each state in the U.S.

Dropout Rate – a measure reflecting the amount of students who disengage from their educational institutions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a persuasive rationale for the need to pursue research to gather parents' input as valuable information that can lead to improved student attendance rates at the elementary level. As urban elementary students continue to

experience higher absenteeism rates and lower achievement levels, parental insight may be a way to help improve student attendance rates and, ultimately, improve student achievement. The exploration of gathering input from parents as a means to better understand ways to improve student attendance has not yet been explored. There is a wide body of literature that examines causes, factors, and solutions for improving student attendance rates. These studies are examined with substantial explanation in Chapter 2. The literature review is relevant to the research problem and provides a perspective that speaks to the importance of good student attendance rates especially during the elementary years. Additionally, the research connects how student attendance directly impacts student achievement. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive synopsis of this qualitative study. In addition, it outlines the methodology of the study. The results of this study are presented in Chapter 4, and the author's conclusions are offered in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

      This review of the literature shows how student attendance can directly impact student achievement as well as graduation rates from high school. In this study of the literature, the importance of family, parental involvement, and community partnerships are examined as key elements to improving student attendance across all grade levels. The literature also pinpoints established strategies that have been successful in improving student attendance.

Review of the Literature

      Importance of early childhood school attendance. In the last two decades, researchers have been closely examining the correlation between student attendance and student achievement. Studies show that student achievement is correlated to student attendance in as early as the fourth grade. There is a large body of research that concluded that when students attend school on a consistent basis, the likelihood of them going on to graduate is significantly higher than students who demonstrate chronic attendance issues. The literature reviews in this section support the notion that student attendance is a major factor when looking at student graduation rates from high school.

      Correlation to dropout potential. In 1997, Alexander et al. conducted a study in the city of Baltimore, MD, following students from the fall of 1982 through the spring of 1996, to determine predictors of student dropout rates. Alexander et al. (1997) examined a wide range of predictors, such as school experiences, family context measures,

children's personal resources, and background characteristics. Their study concluded that a wide variety of measures influenced dropout rate, which included student attendance in the earlier years.

The Alexander et al. (1997) study was conducted within the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS). Twenty elementary schools were sampled. Of the sampled students, 97% were positively recruited. After parental consent was obtained, interviews were conducted with students prior to the start of the first grade. The first samples were done in 1981-1982 with kindergarten rosters, but a supplemental sampling from 1982-1983 grade rosters added children who had attended kindergarten in another location. Fifty-five percent (55%) of the sampled students were African American; 45% were White. Forty-seven percent (47%) of those students came from single-parent homes, 67% received free or reduced-fee meals, and 38% had mothers who did not complete high school. The data was collected and analyzed for the students who dropped out through self-reports, which were administered in the spring of the ninth project year.

The results indicated that tardiness, absences, and classroom behavior all had a significant influence on whether a student would drop out. Students who dropped out of school before graduation were absent, on average, 16 days in the first grade, and students who graduated averaged only 10 days of absence in the first grade. Each day absent from class was estimated to increase the possibility of dropping out by about 5%. The six-day difference in absenteeism implicated that the odds of a student dropping out increased by 30%. The highest predictor of a student dropping out was when that student was held back a grade level, which had strong correlations to a student's reading ability. The

reading data could not be closely analyzed because 20% of the samples of the reading-group level data went missing.

Alexander et al. (1997) concluded that, to some degree, individuals could direct their own development with the understanding that individual experiences could also be shaped by major institutional settings. Individuals can, and do, have the ability to change his or her life's trajectory by shedding old identities and acquiring new ones. The researchers also stated that further research in this area needs to be examined.

Correlation to student achievement. Lamdin (1996) studied 97 public elementary schools located in the city of Baltimore, but he correlated attendance to academic achievement rather than to dropout potential. The goal of Lamdin's research was to highlight the attendance/performance relationship based on data collected from Baltimore's public elementary schools, the 14th largest public school district in the United States. Lamdin's research provided evidence that good student attendance had a significant correlation to student performance on standardized achievement tests.

The 97 public schools from which Lamdin (1996) gathered his data measured student performance on standardized tests in the areas of reading and mathematics. Lamdin was able to measure how student attendance impacted how well a student was able to perform on standardized reading and mathematics examinations.

Lamdin (1996) gathered data at the school level, and he concluded that results gathered at that level should be interpreted at that level. He expressed that one cannot presume that student-level analyses would reveal such strong results. In addition, aggregated data have less unpredictability than the underlying data measured at the student or classroom level. He further explained that data collected and examined with a

multi-level modeling approach would provide more of a solid foundation for future research.

Lamdin (1996) concluded and supported previous literature that indicates that the higher the daily student attendance rate, the higher the students performed on standardized tests. He also identified that dedicating resources is an essential component to increasing student attendance rates. Finally, Lamdin recommended that future studies should examine the cost for programs that seek to influence student attendance rates.

Gottfried (2009) conducted a quantitative study of educational achievement on a longitudinal multi-level data set of all second- through fourth-grade students in the School District of Philadelphia. The study was conducted over a six-year period. From 1994 to 2000, Gottfried examined how unexcused absences directly impacted low academic performance in the area of reading and mathematics. In his research, Gottfried found that the higher the percentage of unexcused absences an elementary school students had, the more ineffective the students became academically, particularly in the areas of reading and mathematics.

Gottfried's (2009) sample consisted of 97,007 student observations, within 201 elementary schools within the School District of Philadelphia, ranging from 1994 to 2000. Gottfried analyzed absences and student achievement with data sets of classroom, teacher, student, and neighborhood observations. Gottfried placed students into five cohorts, and every student was tracked by grade, classroom, and their tenure year. If a student left the Philadelphia School District during the time of the study, they were no longer tracked.

The results indicate that students who had more excused absences, as opposed to unexcused absences, showed better results on standardized tests. The study also concluded that regardless of the absences, excused or unexcused, those absences still had the potential of placing students into a category of having at-risk behavior that would negatively impact student achievement. In other words, excused or unexcused absences, the more school days students missed, the greater their chances of having a negative impact on their academic performance with the result of lower reading ability and lower mathematics achievement.

One limitation to his study was that the data did not reflect the year a student was absent nor was a detailed reason given why a student was absent beyond the absence being labeled excused or unexcused. Gottfried (2009) recommended that future research examine, in further detail, why students were absent. He felt that this information could add greater depth to the research.

In another study conducted by Gottfried, published in 2010, was a longitudinal study that evaluated the relationship between individual student attendance and student achievement for elementary and middle school students in the School District of Philadelphia from academic years 1994-1995 through 2000-2001. Gottfried's research concluded that the number of days students were present indicated positive, significant relationships between individual attendance and student-level achievement. In other words, students who attended school more frequently had higher grade point averages (GPAs) in comparison to students who did not attend school on a regular basis.

Gottfried's 2010 research also utilized an inclusive data set of student and neighborhood observations in the School District of Philadelphia, which was also

compiled from all elementary and middle schools during the 1994-1995 through 2000-2001 school years. Records were obtained for this study from the District's Personnel Office. Neighborhood data were obtained from the 2000 Census. Two hundred twenty-three (223) elementary and middle schools were examined for this study. Eighty-six thousand (86,000) students in kindergarten through eighth grade were also examined, which totaled 332,000 student-year observations. Gottfried (2010) organized the student data into five cohorts of students. The primary variable that he used in his study was students' GPAs. The independent variables that he used ranged from examining students' daily attendance rate, neighborhood characteristics, and student demographics.

Results from Gottfried's 2010 research concluded that there existed a statistically significant correlation between student attendance and student achievement. A limitation that Gottfried identified in his research was that he only focused on one single urban school district, and he stated that different results could be found in other school districts of fluctuating urbanity. In addition, Gottfried (2010) concluded that future research should include a longitudinal study that encompassed elementary, middle, and high school observations, which could provide valuable insight on the association between early attendance and both current and future academic performance.

Roby published a powerful study in 2004 and established a correlation between student attendance and student achievement at four different grade levels in the State of Ohio. Roby (2004) examined 3,171 schools in Ohio that housed grades four, six, nine, and 12 to determine if student achievement was affected by student attendance. His results concluded that there was a statistically significant relationship between student attendance and student achievement. His study also concluded that in large, elementary

urban school districts, student attendance averages and student achievement showed significant difference when comparing the two.

In Roby's 2004 study, he closely examined all schools that reported grade averages for the fourth-, fifth-, ninth-, and 12th-grade Ohio Proficiency Test—Roby analyzed the relationship between student achievement and the attendance variable. Roby's sample size consisted of 1,946 fourth graders, 1,292 sixth graders, 711 ninth graders, and 691 12th graders.

Roby's (2004) initial findings revealed that the ninth-grade students had the most significantly positive relationship of all the comparisons to attendance than other grade levels. In other words, ninth graders showed the largest impact of how well a student performed on the Ohio Proficiency Test when comparing their success with their daily attendance rate. The results indicated that the better the students' daily attendance rates, the better chances they were able to perform on the proficiency tests across all four of the grade levels examined. Roby (2004) suggested that school districts should focus on offering incentives for improving daily student attendance rates. He also suggested that schools with lower daily attendance rates should contact schools with high daily student attendance rates to learn about how they could incorporate specific programs and incentives to improve their school's daily student attendance rates.

Roby (2004) concluded that future studies should consider surveying school personnel to obtain their opinions as to the causes of student absenteeism. He also recommended a study of parental attitudes toward student attendance that would offer some good insight into the research of student attendance and academic achievement.

Another study was conducted by Devadoss and Foltz (1996) that examined the effects of student behavior, teacher attributes, and course characteristics on class attendance and performance. The results indicate that there was strong empirical evidence of the positive influence of class attendance on student performance. Data for this study were collected from four universities during the 1994 spring semester from 12 classes of instructors with a total of approximately 400 college students. The students were surveyed and their performance was measured by assignments, projects, and exams as well as quizzes.

Results from the study indicate that one of the major factors that improved student attendance was motivation. When students were motivated, they attended class more frequently. Motivation surfaced in many different ways, such as required attendance policies that would impacted students' overall grade in the course. Devadoss and Foltz's (1996) study revealed that required class attendance led to a 12.7% higher overall attendance rate.

One limitation that Devadoss and Foltz (1996) identified in their study was that they were unable to collect data from freshman. The course they were examining was not offered to freshman, because the freshman had to first take an introductory course, and the introductory course was not offered during the semester of their study.

Devadoss and Foltz (1996) concluded that there was a significant relationship between absenteeism and class performance. They suggested that at the beginning of each semester, the instructors should stress to students the importance of attendance and how it impacts their overall performance. Additionally, students should be made aware of the way poor attendance can impact the type of job they are able to obtain after

college. Furthermore, Devadoss and Foltz suggested that universities refrain from prescribing a mandatory attendance requirement in which a student may be forced out of a course if they miss beyond a minimum number of class periods. They explained that while attendance, alone, does not ensure that students are learning, it helps for student to be present in their classes. They also noted that students had to be actively engaged in the material being presented in order for them to gain the benefits from their presence. This work reiterated that students of all ages need to be in the classroom and engaged in order to learn.

Strategies to improve student attendance. Many studies offered tested solutions to low student attendance. These included increasing parental involvement, establishing community partnerships, and providing incentive programs.

In a study conducted by Lehr, Sinclair, and Christenson (2004), they explored the effectiveness of the Check and Connect program as a strategy to reduce student absenteeism beginning at the elementary level and continuing through high school. Check and Connect is a dropout-prevention program for high school students with learning, emotional, and/or behavioral disabilities. Students typically enter the program in ninth grade, and they are assigned a "monitor" (e.g., a graduate student, special education teacher, or community member with experience in human services), who works with them year-round as a mentor, advisor, and service coordinator. Lehr et al. (2004) found that students who participated in the Check and Connect program for a period of two years showed a decrease in absenteeism.

In September 1997, Lehr et al. (2004) examined 11 elementary schools within five suburban school districts, which were located near a large urban area in the

Midwestern United States. The study was a collaboration effort between a county, its school districts, and the University of Minnesota. The focus of the study examined students that exhibited a history of poor attendance. Participants were absent or tardy 12% or more during the previous school year or months prior to the referral. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the student participants had European-American origins with comparatively even male and female student distribution. They designed the Check and Connect program to promote student engagement in school, and it focused on students that were at risk for dropping out of school. The goal of the program was intended to assist students to attend school on a regular basis, actively participate in school, and head down the path toward graduation.

Findings from this study indicated that the students that participated in Check and Connect had increased levels of engagement in school as well substantial improvement in their attendance. Evidence showed that student absences dropped to or below 5%. This research provided evidence that the Check and Connect program was one model that could be effectively applied at the elementary level, and it supports student engagement, which can reduce the dropout rate.

Lehr et al. (2004) recommended examining the influences of a school's environment and its multi-faceted interaction with student-level variables and the success of interventions. In other words, school environments play a critical role in enhancing opportunities for student engagement; therefore, Lehr et al. recommended that future studies should focus more on what those influences are and what they look like up close. Lehr et al. (2004) concluded that efforts to decrease the dropout rate need to begin with a proactive approach in the early developmental years. They also suggested that schools

adopt and implement more programs like Check and Connect at the elementary level, because the results could mean higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates.

The study presented by Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, and Dalicandro (1998), during the 1993-1994 school year, examined the relationship between student attendance and the personal characteristics of the student, the student's family relations, and the school. The results indicated that school absence was a complex problem and understanding such behavior warranted investigating and treatment for effectiveness.

The Corville-Smith et al. (1998) study consisted of 54 students from two high schools in a small city in southern Ontario, Canada. Two hundred ninety-five (295) students met the criteria for inclusion in their study. The study consisted of two groups of students who attended school regularly and had good attendance compared to students who displayed chronic attendance issues. Students who were identified as having chronic attendance issues missed 15 or more classes during the fall semester and 10 or more classes during the spring semester in any one course. The students were grouped by grade level, school, and sex. Each student was given a questionnaire to complete in the areas of personal characteristics, family relations, and school variables. Also, one teacher for each student completed a questionnaire to assess the student's characteristics in the classroom.

The results indicated that students who had chronic attendance issues scored lower in all three areas of personal characteristics, family relations, and school variables than the regular attenders. In other words, students who viewed themselves as having negative issues in all three areas of their lives had poorer attendance rates. The researchers concluded that in order to improve the attendance for the students with

chronic attendance concerns, the school needed to work collaboratively with the students and their families to improve attendance. Corville-Smith et al. (1998) stated that in order for schools and families to be effective at working together, they must first understand the child's perception of the problem. Corville-Smith et al. (1998) recommended that future researchers develop measures that permit the interface of assessment and treatment, thus, improving the mental health of the individuals being examined.

  Increasing parental involvement. Jeyenes (2003) conducted a meta-analysis that examined 21 studies ranging from 1992-1999 that determined the impact of parental involvement on the academic achievement of minority children. What Jeyenes was able to conclude from his meta-analysis was that parental involvement, overall, had a significant impact on academic achievement for all minority students. Jeyenes (2003) also determined that parental involvement did not only positively impact minority students' academic achievement, but all students, no matter their racial heritage, benefited from parental involvement.

  Jeyenes (2003) researched every major database that had studies examining the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement for children in grades K-12. He also searched journal articles on parental involvement, especially articles that concentrated on minority children. Jeyenes conducted a statistical analysis to determine the overall effects of parental involvement as well as a wide variety of detailed components of parental involvement. The detailed components included parental expectations for academic attainment, parental communication with their child regarding school, whether parents were checking their child's homework, parents' attendance at school functions, whether parents were encouraging their children to do outside reading,

and it examined parental style and temperament. In addition, other detailed parental involvement measures were examined. Jeyenes (2003) focused on three groups of minority students in this particular study: African Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian Americans.

Four different types of academic achievement measures were used in Jeyenes's (2003) study to assess the effects of parental involvement. The academic achievement measures included standardized tests, teacher rating scales, grades, and academic behaviors and attitudes. The results indicate that parental involvement, overall, had a significant impact on academic achievement for all minority students. Other findings indicate that when parents read to their child, it positively impacts their child's academic achievement. Jeyenes (2003) discovered that African American and Latino American students benefited more from parental involvement than Asian American students. However, African American students benefited from all types of parental involvement.

In closing, Jeyenes (2003) concluded that further studies needed to examine why certain types of parental involvement strategies were more effective for certain racial groups than others. Jeyenes suggested that future researchers examine a broader range of parental involvement measures, as well as gain more understanding as to why intact families and communication play such a vital role in parental involvement.

Community partnerships to increase parental involvement. Epstein and Sheldon (2002), during the 1996-1997 school year, collected data on 12 elementary schools: five from a rural district and seven from an urban district. They performed a longitudinal study that examined the schools' daily attendance rates for students who had chronic absenteeism. Their study included particular partnerships that had a positive impact on

their daily student attendance rate. Their study concluded that when school, family, and community partnerships worked collaboratively, they can positively impact the daily student attendance rate. Sheldon and Epstein (2002) identified a wide variety of strategies that proved to be effective when looking at the school and family connections. These strategies involved a school personnel representative who performed home visits. Another effective strategy identified in their research was rewarding students for improved attendance through a wide variety of rewards. Other effective strategies included establishing a contact person at the school for parents to call. And, finally, follow-up phone calls to students' homes were helpful, when the students were absent. All of these strategies supported the increase of the daily student attendance rate.

Other significant findings identified by Sheldon and Epstein's (2002) research were: (a) schools taking a comprehensive approach, when looking to increase student attendance, made substantial improvement; and (b) schools taking a proactive approach to attendance, as opposed to a reactive approach to absenteeism, can help sustain good attendance over time.

One limitation that Sheldon and Epstein (2002) identified in their research was the exclusion of suburban school districts. They also felt that their study pool, because it was limited to a small number of elementary schools, the results were to be interpreted cautiously.

In 2001, Sheldon and Epstein (2004) performed a follow-up study, where they researched 39 schools with chronic absenteeism. In this study, Sheldon and Epstein examined schools that utilized a wide variety of strategies to improve student attendance. Some of the strategies examined were parental involvement and building/connecting

community partnerships to families. They conducted an extensive longitudinal study that was conducted over a two-year period from 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. The samples included 29 elementary schools and 10 high schools.

Baseline surveys were sent to schools seeking participation if those schools utilized partnership activities to improve student attendance; follow-up surveys were sent out a year later to the participating schools. In return for the schools' participation, the schools received materials to support their schools, families, and community partnerships.

Sheldon and Epstein (2004) concluded that in order for schools to improve student attendance, schools, students, families, and the community needed to work collaboratively. Two major findings identified from their study were: (a) schools need to take a comprehensive approach to involving families and the community, and (b) frequent and positive communication with parents about attendance is essential.

One limitation that Sheldon and Epstein (2004) identified from their 2001 study was the fact that the number of secondary schools in their sample was too small to test whether particular involvement activities had different effects in elementary, middle, and high schools. For future studies, they recommended using 20 schools at each level to identify effective practices when increasing student attendance.

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) was established in 1996 at Johns Hopkins University to improve strategies to develop and sustain goal-oriented school programs, family, and community partnerships to increase student achievement and student attendance at the K-12 school level. In the spring of 2002, 888 schools, which were a part of the NNPS received an annual UPDATE survey to complete. Seven

hundred thirty-nine (739) schools responded, but only 565 elementary schools were examined for this study. More than half of the surveys completed were returned with input from the building principals. Almost half of the schools were located in large urban school districts. Over 80% of the schools received Title I funding. A four-point Likert scale was given to all participants. The primary dependent variable in the study was measured by parental involvement at all the school levels. Independent variables examined partnership program quality, external district support, internal collegial support, and program implementation.

The results indicate that schools in large urban districts, serving low-income families, were more likely to receive support from their partnership programs instead of from the district leadership. District leaders were found to have implemented basic aspects of the NNPS program. Results also indicate that schools that were organized into committees were more likely to help all families become involved in their children's education. Lastly, districts that served low-income families that did not implement structures or partnership programs were more likely not to have good parental involvement.

Sheldon (2005) compared NNPS schools to non-NNPS schools that did not develop programs around student attendance. During the 2000-2001 school year, Sheldon surveyed NNPS schools to identify characteristics of their partnership programs and the implementation of their involvement activities. Sheldon discovered that the NNPS schools received resources, as well as guidance for launching, preserving, and cultivating school-wide partnership programs, which reached out to all students' families.

In 2005, Sheldon (2007) conducted another study that examined 565 schools from the NNPS and its relationship with the implementation of school programs, family, and community partnerships in elementary schools. Sheldon's research concluded that when school programs, family, and community partnerships in elementary schools work collaboratively, parental involvement at the school level increases.

Sheldon (2005) concluded that it was important for schools to work collaboratively with partnerships to improve parental involvement. He posited that school districts that valued and embraced community partnerships had a higher percentage of parents becoming involved at all school level.

Sheldon (2007) examined 69 elementary schools in the State of Ohio during the 2000-2001 school year that had developed school-wide programs (NNPS) that focused on school, family, and community partnerships to improve daily student attendance. Sheldon's studies concluded that the NNPS, along with schools working to implement school, family, and community partnerships, had improved student attendance an average of .5% over the non-NNPS schools from one year to the next. In addition, Sheldon also discovered that schools that had strong implementation of programs, school, family, and community partnerships, overall, were more likely to have better attendance than schools with weaker implementation of programs. Other significant factors that Sheldon's 2007 research concluded was that schools that reached out to families and engaged parents to become active in their child's education also experienced an increase in student attendance.

Sheldon's 2007 research provided evidence that the concrete application of school, family, and community partnerships can support the increase in student

attendance. In addition, these partnership increased the probabilities for students to perform better on standardized achievement tests, decreased the likelihood of students dropping out of school, and reduced the likelihood of students using illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.

Sheldon (2007) recommended that future researchers could benefit from having more information about detailed activities that schools could utilize to include families and community members. He felt that such information would be significant for explaining why NNPS schools were able to have a positive effect on student attendance.

In their 2006 research article, by Epstein and Sanders explored the preparation of future teachers and administrators to conduct school, family, and community partnerships. The sample consisted of 161 schools, colleges, departments of education (SCDE) throughout the United States. The surveys were distributed to prospective educators, and the results revealed that collegial institutions need to do a better job at equipping future educators with the tools to effectively conduct family and community involvement programs and practices.

Five hundred (500) random samples were sent to deans of colleges and universities across the United States that granted degrees in education. The samples were made up of both private and public institutions. One hundred and sixty-one (161) surveys of deans in education within the SCDE were utilized for the study.

The results indicated that 70% of the surveyed respondents strongly agreed that all teachers should know how to conduct practices of school, family, and community partnerships. The results of the study supported previous studies that concluded that school, family, and community partnerships are key components to enhancing student

achievement across all grade levels. While most SCDE offer at least one course, and some cover topics on partnerships, there is not nearly enough done to adequately prepare future educators to conduct meaningful programs and practices of school, family, and community partnerships. However, the study supported that some SCDE are touching on the topic of family and community partnerships at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

One limitation to Epstein and Sanders's (2006) study is that the SCDE leaders may have been more acquainted with, and attracted to, the topic of partnership than were those missing from the sample. Therefore, the results should be interpreted to generalize to other SCDE where leaders are aware of the significance of partnerships. Epstein and Sanders recommended that future studies examine how graduates are best prepared to effectively involve families and communities in student education by taking a full course on partnership or by embedding partnership information in a variety of courses throughout their educational studies.

In a research article by Van Voorhis and Sheldon (2004), they described a longitudinal study of 320 U.S. schools by exploring the significance of the principal to the development of programs of school, family, and community partnerships. The results indicate that it is essential to engage school principals in establishing partnership efforts and developing strong support for partnerships between teachers, parents, and community members that promote student success and development.

The focus of Van Voorhis and Sheldon's 2004 study was based on longitudinal data from schools within the United States during the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years. Data were collected from the NNPS surveys from 327 schools in 27 states.

Thirty-seven percent (37%) represented large urban districts, 17% represented small urban districts, 28% represented suburban districts, and 18% represented rural districts. Eighty percent (80%) of the schools in the study were elementary schools. The objective of Van Voorhis and Sheldon's (2004) research was to examine the role of the school principal in developing partnership programs with the crucial elements that promote and increase program quality in addition to monitoring principal turnover. It was hypothesized that principals could impact the quality of particular partnership programs.

The results from the study supported the hypothesis that school principals can have a significant positive effect on the quality partnership programs. The results also indicate that principals are vital to the process of starting programs. Schools need to actively involve their principals in the creation of partnership programs. Results also reflected that schools that had frequent principal turnover were significantly less likely to report support coming from the sitting principal. Van Voorhis and Sheldon (2004) recommended that districts that have frequent principal turnover must be proactive in engaging the new principal in the support of establishing partnerships with the school, families, and the community. They also recommended that future studies would benefit from the use of observation or interview data from multiple sources including principals, teachers, community members, parents, and students. This approach would allow for a closer look at enhancing future partnerships that could ultimately enrich student achievement and student growth.

Incentive programs. Ford and Sutphen (1996) described the development and evaluation of a two-pronged attendance-incentive program. Three social worker, bachelor's degree candidates implemented the two-part program that included a positive-

reinforcement component for regular attenders and an individual intervention component for low attenders. The individualized intervention included one-on-one time for children with the student social worker and the introduction of family supports based on the reasons the children gave for their non-attendance. School-wide attendance did not subjectively increase. However, teachers viewed the program positively. Individual students often back-slid to previous behaviors when the daily intensive attention was removed. The project was most effective in helping the helpers—the social workers and the teachers—develop a more realistic understanding of why children did not attend school.

This was a small pilot program addressing the needs of nine children. The study suggested that a multi-faceted approach to absentee issues is most effective, because there is no one reason for all children to be absent from school. The study did not specify whether the school was urban, suburban, or rural, nor did the authors did mention high school mobility.

Conclusion

This literature review presented why student attendance is important to student performance and how it is directly correlates to student dropout rates. This literature review presented research that identified how parental involvement, community partnerships, and school programs all have a positive impact on student attendance. The various research articles supported the body of research that stated that student attendance is a major issue that needs to be addressed when examining student academic success and graduation rates. In order for schools to improve student attendance, they need to

consider a multi-faceted approach that involves a wide variety of stakeholders who are invested in supporting student achievement and student success.

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive synopsis of this qualitative study. In addition, it outlines the methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 is a summation of the qualitative methodology that was active in this research. The research design and methodology are described for a qualitative study that examined the causes and solutions that impact student attendance from parents' perspectives. The connection between the problem statement, research question, and study design is explained.

When little research has been conducted on a particular phenomenon, such as the parental perspective of student school attendance, the exploratory nature of a qualitative inquiry is useful (Creswell, 2009). The purpose of this exploratory study was to gain more precise knowledge about the root causes and solutions that impact student attendance in an urban elementary school from parents' perspectives. The qualitative study was intended to help increase daily student attendance rates within an urban elementary school—despite the barriers that may exist. According to Maxwell (2005), qualitative research stems mainly from the inductive approach; it focuses on particular situations or people, and its emphasis is on words rather than numbers. The research plan was to interview parents, who were within the researcher's local city school district in Western New York, to gather strategies that could be explored as a variety of methods to improve the school's daily student attendance rate. Interviews focused on understanding the challenges that parents regularly face that may hinder their child from attending

school on a daily basis. Hence, this study defined and evaluated parental interviews as a means to improve the daily student attendance rate within the city school district.

This study sought to enhance the understanding of how school districts can improve daily student attendance rates from the perspective of the parent. The opinions of the parents were used to assist in the identification of problems that prevent students from having proficient attendance rates at the elementary level. By interviewing parents who are concerned about increasing the city school district's daily student attendance rate, this study provides insights that may be applied as solutions within the city school district and provide direction for further studies. The goal of the interviews were to provide the data necessary to determine whether the parents' recommendations and insight could improve the daily student attendance rate.

Qualitative research is a collection of data, and theories are developed based on that data. This dissertation examined, through the words of parents in an urban district, how schools can support the improvement of student attendance, which may also improve student achievement. According to Lamdin (1996), the higher the daily student attendance rate, the higher the students performed on standardized tests. The problem statement asks, "What are the root causes and solutions that impact student attendance in an urban elementary school from a parent's perspective?"

Maxwell (2005) described reflexivity as the fact that the investigator is a part of the entity that is being studied. Subsequently, Maxwell noted that there is an undeniable disadvantage for influence or bias in the research. In this study, the researcher is an urban school principal as well as the parent of young, school-aged children. The researcher also has 15 years of extensive experience working with urban families from all

across the city. Moreover, the researcher has been the principal of a school that has had chronically low attendance rates for a four-year period, and the school is in desperate need of improvement. Thereby, the researcher was both an insider and outsider, as described by Herr and Anderson (2005), regarding positionality. The researcher was an insider because he is a principal within the city school district, but he was an outsider because he is not the principal at the school in which the study took place. According to Herr and Anderson (2005), insiders are known to have a hidden agenda for solving problems. During the investigation, the researcher safeguarded against personal bias by developing open-ended interview questions that were outlined within a questionnaire, as well as each interview was recorded and each participant was allowed to maintain his or her own voice. The researcher was aware that a relationship could develop among the investigator and interviewees, as described by Maxwell (2005).

Maxwell (2005) pointed out that there are five key research purposes for qualitative studies: (a) understanding the meaning for the participants in the study of the events, situations, and actions they are involved in, and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences; (b) understanding the particular context within which the participants act and the influence that this context has on their actions; (c) identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences and creating new grounded theories about the latter; (d) understanding the process by which events and actions take place; and (e) developing casual explanations. For research purposes, open-ended strategies give qualitative research an advantage in addressing results and theories that are comprehensible and reliable. Qualitative research also allows the researcher to conduct

formative evaluations and engage in collaborative-action research with the research participants.

Research Context

Each participant was the parent of a child or children within the city school district. Interviewees (or parent participants) were from a wide variety of circumstances; however, the majority of the parents were from African American or Hispanic/Latino backgrounds.

The researcher set the tone for establishing direct and candid discussions with each participant. The interview questions focused on two major categories of analysis:

1. What are some of the obstacles that urban parents might face that cause their child(ren) to have low attendance rates?

2. If parents had the opportunity to design an attendance program to assist in improving the daily student attendance rate, what would they do?

Access to the parental population was coordinated with the building principal, and the researcher presented the purpose of the study to the families during a school-wide event, a parent workshop. The researcher gave a presentation to the parents, for approximately 10 to 15 minutes to explain the nature of the study. Parents who were interested in participating in the study signed their names on a list, and they included their contact information. The sign-up sheet was made available at a side table after the presentation ended. With the sign-up sheet completed, the researcher reached out to the parents by phone or by e-mail in order to further elaborate the details of the study and to set up interview times. A conference room at the local library was provided for the researcher to conduct interviews during the designated interview dates.

Research Participants

The sample population was selected based on a determined-selection instrument from parents who had a child or children who attended the research site school. The data for this study was generated from interviews from 13 separate families. The researcher presented the study to a group of parents at the school's kindergarten graduation ceremony. Present at this event were parents, relatives, and friends of the families. The presentation indicated that participants were required, at that time, to have a child attending a school within the city school district or to previously have a child or children who had attended schools within the city school district. During this event, the researcher also presented the purpose of the study and recruited families who were interested in participating in the study. In addition, the researcher shared with the families who volunteered to participate in the study that they would receive a free gift card to a local department store for their participation. The researcher gave an informed consent form (Appendix A) to all participants.

The purposeful selection criterion was a strategy that researchers use when they are consciously choosing individuals to participate in a study—to collect information for the research. This approach is the best way to acquire the necessary data that would be challenging to obtain through and other methodologies (Maxwell, 2005). The purposeful selection criterion was obtained to gather a cross section of individuals of gender, race, and socioeconomic status to capture a broad range of perspectives.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The instrument that was used for the purpose of this research was an in-depth interview questionnaire (Appendix B). This instrument was appropriate for the parent

population and the school setting. The purpose of conducting face-to-face interviews was

to gather parents' opinions and perspectives in their own words. Through a purposeful

selection process, the interviewees were asked a wide variety of questions from a

collection of 21 questions, which included follow-up questions regarding their knowledge

about attendance issues at the school and strategies to solve the low student daily

attendance rate. Goodman (2001) noted that interview questions should be asked in a

homogeneous, open-ended format. In addition, there was flexibility incorporated into the

interviewing process to allow for electronic recording of the interviews and written

documentation of unexpected disclosures that emerged during the interviews. The

researcher developed the interview questionnaire by utilizing a wide variety of sources,

such as feedback from the parent focus session, as well as researching other dissertations

within the same topic area and creating questions from the ideas in the various studies.

The researcher ensured that the questionnaire provided clear wording so that it was

sufficient for participant responses, was of appropriate length and time, and contained

questions that were pertinent to the subject of the research.

A pre-test questionnaire was tested with one parent from the researcher's district

location. The parent and the interview served as a pilot participant activity. The parent

in the pilot session was not one of the 13 individuals who were engaged in the actual

study. The pilot session approach ensured that the quality and consistency that was

necessary regarding the interview questions was based on the focus/pilot participant's

responses. In addition, this approach enhanced the quality of the interview. The

feedback that was provided to the researcher was critical for establishing questions that

highlighted certain aspects of this study, such as home culture, parents comfort level with the school district, and the importance of student attendance.

In this qualitative study, 13 parents/families were interviewed. This research design utilized quality interview questions that fostered descriptive responses, which lead to quality responses. The rationale for the selection of the interview method centered on efficiency in gathering data in a qualitative research, as stated by Patton (1990), and to effectively obtain the views of the research participants. Additionally, the researcher sought to gather the opinions and insights of the participants regarding their parental experiences and knowledge.

The one parent's participation in the focus-group setting provided data that enabled the researcher to establish triangulation. Patton (2009) indicated that triangulation is a method that establishes dependability and reliability by collecting data through multiple methods. Therefore, the data from face-to-face, individual, in-depth interviews and from the participant focus session interview were used to validate the questionnaire, which was administered by the researcher. The responses were placed into categories for coding purposes. Patton (2009) described coding as subcategories that are grouped by themes.

Grounded theory was found to be the best approach for this research because the methodology yields reliable and permissible results. The analysis of the data was direct from the parents who had children who attend the city school district.

The pre-test focus session with the parent from the researcher's current district provided valuable insight as to how the interview questions should be formulated. The interview with the focus session participant was confidential, and the participant's

identity is not included in the dissertation. The data collected was taken from the responses of a comprehensive questionnaire consisting of a wide variety of questions with follow-up questions. The pre-test focus session consisted of one parent who has children within the local school district. The one parent was interviewed by the researcher in a one-on-one meeting. During the interview, the researcher took ample notes. The researcher followed the suggestion of Roberts (2004) regarding the recording of the data through keeping careful records of informed consents, questionnaires, interview schedules, and data charts.

This study used the collected data from the participants to pull out themes that provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of the participants' attitudes, preferences, and opinions so that their perceptions of what was valuable to them could be appropriately interpreted. Themes were generated from the quotes that were generated from the transcripts and that appeared frequently during the course of the interviews.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher utilized the grounded theory with the participants of the study, along with the use of the cut-and-sort method for coding during the examination of the transcripts for distinct and separate segments, including ideas or experiences of each participant (Patton, 2009). The creation of the data from the qualitative interviews relied upon the expertise of the interviewer and the interviewer's ability to pose questions. Kvale and Brinkmann (1996) noted that by using the interviewing method, valuable information can be generated that is ascertained through a connection that is formed between the researcher and participant. Grounded theory, designed and developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, was explored by the researcher.

Theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, open coding, selective coding, axial coding, basic social processes, conditions, and consequences are original to grounded theory. "Theoretical sampling involves selecting informants and/or settings so that the developing concepts and theories are elaborated to as full an extent possible" (Gilgun, 2001, p. 348). According to Gilgun (2001), grounded theory can provide researchers with significant knowledgeable descriptions of a client's personal point of view. Gilgun also stated that, "grounded theory lends itself to research that begins where the clients are" (Gilgun, 2001, p. 345).

The coding method was most effective because it preserved the words of the interviewees. Coding in a qualitative study seeks to rearrange the data into categories that assist in the comparison of data within and between categories, and coding supports in the development of theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 2006). Transcripts provided data for identifying relationships between categories and running themes. According to Patton (2009), grounded theory research notes can be referred to as an inductive method of analysis, which can lead to theories of behavior through consideration and analysis of the data and by systematically developing categories based on their properties and dimensions. The researcher collected, organized, and analyzed the data to report the results of this study.

Summary of the Methodology

The research design that the researcher utilized was the interview instrument. The questions that were developed served as verbal probes (Willis, 1999) to elicit deeper and more detailed information. The rationale for the selection of this instrument was because it is a valuable tool in a qualitative research project. Face-to-face interviewing is an

effective method for gathering data, and the sessions were electronically recorded, as well as the interviewer could read the participants' body language to get a more detailed and comprehensive response during the interviews.

The population and sample participants included parents from the city school district. The sample size consisted of 13 participants who were interviewed at a local library site. The study utilized a purposeful selection measure. The interview instrument was field tested with a focus session of one parent from the researcher's school. The researcher is a school principal, which made him an insider and an outsider (positionality), and he is a part of the world that was studied (reflexivity) (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Thereby, there could have been concerns for bias, which were addressed by allowing the parents to have their own voice in responding to open-ended questions. The researcher believes that his background provided an advantage while interviewing the parents. Following all of the procedures for ethical studies and permissions (Creswell, 2007), the study took place with one participant at a time, in face-to-face interviews. The data was collected at a school location through electronic recording and note taking. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher chose identify participants by numbers. Each participant signed a consent form that encompassed a statement of confidentiality, permission for recording the interviews, and permission for the researcher to use the data collected during the interviews. Grounded theory was the method that the researcher utilized for the data collection. Creswell (2007) stated that this approach is referred to in research as being grounded in the data. The researcher collected, coded, organized, and analyzed the data to report the results of this study.

In summary, this chapter provided a recipe for the replication of the actions of other investigators. It visibly outlined and supported the qualitative methodology. Each step in the research design was clear and explained in full detail (Roberts, 2004). The methodology was the blueprint for the research study, which was direct and methodical.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter discloses the findings of a qualitative research method. This qualitative study examined the perspectives of 13 parents of students who either, at the time of the study or previously, attended schools within the city school district. One participant reported that all four of her children graduated from the city school district, which is reflected in Table 4.1. She did not have a child that was enrolled in the city school district at the time of the interview, but she was present during the researcher's presentation and indicated that she wanted to participate in the study. One hundred percent (100%) of the participants reported having one or more children who attended the city school district.

Table 4.1

Number of Participant Children in the City School District

Participant Number	Number of Children
1	1
2	2
3	1
	3 graduated
4	2
5	1
	1 graduated
6	1
7	3
8	5
9	1
	1 graduated
10	0
	4 graduated
11	6
12	1
13	2

The city school district provides educational services to over 30,000 students who range from Pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade. There are over 6,000 employees in the city school district, and it has an operating budget of over $700 million. The average class size ranges from 18 to 24 students. The city school district posts below-average results in the area of academics when compared to other New York State school districts. Currently, the city school district is faced with numerous challenges that threaten school closures due to declining enrollment, low graduation rates, and low daily attendance rates. However, the city school district is actively pursuing the means to closing the achievement gap with a goal to increasing the graduation rate through aggressive efforts. Increasing the daily attendance rate across the district has become a top priority. The attendance rate across the city school district is around 90%, in comparison to another neighboring school district whose attendance rate is approximately 96%. The district reported that more than 10,000 students missed more than 20% of the school year. As a result, the city school district has dedicated an entire department to improving the daily student attendance rate. As the principal of one of the schools that has had one of the lowest attendance rates in the entire district, I wanted to actively become a part of the solution to improve the daily student attendance rates.

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the barriers that hinder parents from getting their child to school on a consistent and timely basis. Qualitative methods were used to extend the existing research on the correlation of student attendance and student achievement. This study sought to (a) capture the voice of the parents who had, at the time of the research, children who either were attending or had attended the city school district, with and without good attendance rates, for the

purpose of understanding the barriers that exist; and to (b) help the city school district to formulate potential solutions that could help improve student absenteeism. Ultimately, this study focused on the important role parents play in student attendance, which subsequently affects achievement.

The 13 participants who were interviewed individually in this study consisted of three males and 10 females. The participants had children ranging from five to 39 years of age. The participant that had a 39-year-old child was also the participant that did not have any children enrolled in the city school district at the time of the study. As previously stated, all of her children graduated from the city school district. The participants' education level ranged from the 10th grade up to a master's degree, as shown in Table 4.2. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the participants reported having some college education. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the participants had at least a high school education. Only two participants, 15%, reported that they dropped out of high school and never continued their education. Those two participants disclosed that they did not have a good home life; both had strained relationships with their parents and felt that it played a major role in their decision to drop out of school. Both parents indicated that they regretted dropping out of school. One of the parents shared that "if I could have done it all over again, I would have pushed through and graduated from high school." Both of the parents revealed that they had several children out of wedlock; one reported having five children, and the other parent reported having three children. Both participants indicated that they felt that the city school district was not sensitive to their home culture. One participant felt this way because his children attend different schools that are located in different parts of the city. He also stated that some of his children's

schools have different starting times. This makes it difficult for him when he is trying to attend school events or getting the children off to school every day. He also stated that there are different bus pickup times that add to the daily confusion. He indicated that it would be easier if all of his children could attend the same school.

Table 4.2

Participants' Highest Level of Education

Participant Number	Education Level
1	GED, dropped out of school
2	Some college
3	Some college
4	High school diploma
5	Master's degree
6	High school diploma
7	11th grade
8	10th grade
9	Associate degree
10	Some college
11	High school diploma
12	Associate degree
13	Some college

All 13 of the participants in the study felt that attendance was an important correlation to their child's academic success. When reflecting back on their own school attendance, 92% of the participants reported it was "really good." Seventy-five percent (75%) of the participants indicated that they came from a structured home life where attending school was a top priority, as shown in Table 4.3. Some of them shared that attending school or not was not an option that was available to them. The majority of the participants' parents forced them to go to school every day—even if they said they were sick. All of the participants who indicated that they had strong parental influence in their attendance went on to at least graduate from high school. Many of the participants felt

that they have or had a plan to continue to carry on the same legacy of their parents of keeping their children attending school and ultimately graduating from high school.

Table 4.3

Participants' Own School Attendance as a Youth in School

Participant Number	Good Participant Attendance
1	Yes, perfect until dropped out
2	Yes, really good and had parental influence
3	Yes, great and had parental influence
4	Yes, perfect attendance
5	Yes, didn't miss school and had parental influence
6	Yes, but missed classes in high school
7	Yes, but didn't finish school and had a bad relationship with parents
8	No, had poor attendance and issues with mother
9	Yes, had parental influence
10	Yes, very good and parental influence
11	Yes, went every day and had parental influence
12	Yes, 100% attendance rate and had parental influence
13	Yes, went every day and had parental influence

The Study

The instrument utilized in this qualitative research was an in-depth questionnaire. The interview questionnaire was shared with one individual who participated in the focus session. Some of the questions were altered and/or enhanced to make for more meaningful interview questions and a rich dialog. The percentages in the tables are the total number of responses for all of the study participants. With this questionnaire, the researcher sought to answer the following two questions:

1. What are some of the obstacles that urban parents might face that cause their child(ren) to have low attendance rates?

2. If parents had the opportunity to design an attendance program to assist in improving the daily student attendance rate, what would they do?

50

The investigator conducted 13 individual interviews and one focus session interview. The individual interviews proved to provide positive insight to the study. The individual interviews were straightforward and contained insightful dialogues. The participants were asked to reflect on their past experience when they were students attending primary and secondary school. They were also asked to share their experience with the city school district. Several of the participants were pleased with their experience within the city school district. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the parents interviewed felt that they were treated with respect by the city school district administration, as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Participants Feel Respected by the School Administration

Participant Number	Feel Respected
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes
5	N/A
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	Yes
9	Yes
10	Yes
11	Yes
12	Yes
13	Yes

The parents also expressed that teachers were polite (Table 4.5) and respectful to the children and parents as well. The majority of the parents (85%) reported that their child or children enjoyed going to school, as shown in Table 4.6. However, some parents

reported that they found that the older a child grows, the less excited he or she was about going to school.

Table 4.5

Participants Feel Teachers are Polite to the Students and the Parents

Participant Number	Teachers Polite to Students
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes
5	Yes
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	It varies; some do and some don't
9	Yes
10	Yes
11	Yes, but it varies according to the teacher
12	Yes, 90% of the time
13	Yes

Table 4.6

Participants Report Their Children Like School

Participant Number	Children Like School
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes
5	Yes, usually until 3rd grade
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	Yes, for young children
9	Yes
10	Yes
11	Yes
12	Yes
13	Yes

While some of the themes from the interviews overlapped, the researcher also discovered several differences in the responses; some of the responses were conflicting from the answer of previous questions asked. For example, when asked by the interviewer if they were notified by the school when their child misses school, all of the participants responded with "yes," which would mean that had received a "robo" call or a letter regarding their child's attendance (Table 4.7). Where the difference in their responses did not correlate with previous responses was in the interview process where the participants were asked, on a scale of 1–10, 10 meaning that their child had perfect attendance, seven out of the 13 participants indicated that their child's attendance rate was at a 10, perfect, which would mean that they had NOT received a robo call or a letter regarding their child's attendance. Only one participant indicated, because her child was always present for school, she did not require and had not received any such notification.

Table 4.7

Participants Notified by School When Their Child Was Not in Attendance

Participant Number	Notified by School
1	Child never missed school
2	Yes, Robo call
3	Yes, Office
4	Yes, Robo call
5	Yes, Robo call
6	Yes, Robo call
7	Yes, Letter mailed to home
8	Yes, Letter mailed to home
9	Yes, Robo call
10	Yes
11	Yes, Robo call
12	Yes, Letter mailed to home
13	Yes, Robo call

Individual in-depth interviews. The researcher interviewed 13 parents in in-depth individual interviews. To keep the participants identity anonymous, they were identified by one- and two-digit numbers consisting of one through 13. Of the 13 participants interviewed, 12 were African American, and one identified herself as Hispanic. There were three males and 10 female participants. Fifty-four percent (54%) rated their child as having perfect attendance at a rating of 10. Fifteen percent (15%) indicated that their child had pretty good attendance at a rating of 9. Twenty-three percent (23%) indicated that their child had good attendance at a rating of 8. Lastly, 8% indicated that their child's attendance was above average at a rating of 7. No one indicated anything lower than an attendance rating of 7, as shown in Table 4.8. The following are the responses to the research questions, which were gathered through individual interview discussions.

Table 4.8

Parental Rating of Child's Daily Attendance

Participant Number	Attendance Rating
1	10
2	8
3	10
4	10
5	9
6	10
7	8
8	10
9	10
10	9
11	8
12	7
13	10

Question 1. What are some of the barriers that parents today face in regards to their child's daily attendance rate? Participant 3 stated:

> I believe that transportation is an issue, even though you have the buses, my daughter lives less than the 1½ miles from school and she'll be gone, she'll be walking and I don't have a car, so it's she's like on the cusp of missing, being able to catch the bus. We're like a house away. So me, personally, she's still going to be there, she's going to be on time if I have to get up and walk her myself on my way to work. That's a sure way she'll be on time 'cause she'll go to school across the street from where I work. So we'll walk it together, 'cause I'm not going to be late.

Participant 4 stated:

> I think some parents may have issues with transportation and maybe, I don't have that issue at all. Some parents may have issues with transportation, may not have money to get to where they have to go or whatever.

Participant 5 stated:

> Some parents, they don't view education as important, but we have working parents that have a goal in mind, they want to see their children attend, even some parents they want their children to do good, but I think a lot of it is the parents sit at home. Well, it's like I said, a lot of parents might need the transportation or they don't know how to get the resources, well I don't know if they don't know how or they don't care to get the resources, not quite sure.

> Participant 8 stated, "Oh, lack of childcare can be one that that's something, and maybe support, someone helping." Participant 9 stated:

Well, I know me being a nurse and being a divorced mother of two, my work schedule fluctuates and then with the busing issue, before care and after care, it makes it kind of hard to know where your kids are once they reach a certain age. Because my older son had to catch the RTS bus and my younger son, the bus would pull up in front of the house to pick him up, but it's not going to be like that this year, so I'm actually trying to figure out what I'm going to do as far as this school year with him, getting him back and forth to school.

Participant 10 stated:

I think that some parents that don't have enough support at home because there's so many single moms now. I think that has a great impact on a lot of the kids attending or not attending school. Not for all kids, because some kids try to have the attitude of I don't want to be the way so and so is, or such and such, but overall, I think that's the main problem is having parental support for a lot of the young parents especially with our young men.

Question 2. What are some possible solutions as a way to improve attendance issues within the city school district?

Participant 4 stated:

Maybe I know they have, I think they have a program where kids get bus passes, or something, maybe try a program where you can give the kids bus passes and the parents' bus passes to make sure the kids get to school. If they're older or whatever, and probably, I don't know, help people get a car or, I don't know, something like that.

Table 4.9 reflects the frequency of themes that parents indicated as barriers that hinder children from having good daily attendance rates.

Table 4.9

Ranking of Reoccurring Themes as Barriers to Getting Children to School on Time

Theme	Sub Themes	Response Percent
Lack of support	• Transportation • How to access resources • Childcare before/after school	54
Lack of parental skills	• Young immature parents • Lack of boundaries with children • Coping with conflict • Limited education • Not understanding the importance of education	23
Single-parent households	• Difficult for 1 parent to manage a household alone with all the various issues that may arise • Lack of financial resources • Single mothers struggling raising young males	15
Lack of parental involvement	• At the school level • With their child's educational experience • With their child personally	8

Participant 5 stated:

> I think they need to go back to making sure they have buses for late students. This is not going to violate late buses, they need to find some in house where they can get the kids to school. And certainly when a child needs the aid they can certainly pop them in a car and take them home, there should be something to get them to school if the parents have the transportation.

Table 4.10 reflects the frequency of themes that parents indicated as to solutions to improve children's daily attendance rates.

Table 4.10

Ranking of Reoccurring Themes as Solutions Identified for Getting Children to School on Time

Theme	Sub Themes	Response Percent
More Transportation Support	- Late buses - Send a staff member to pick up late students - Assist parents with the purchase of a vehicle - Make the buses 7r for students to ride	38
Increase Parental Involvement	- Have more parents events at the school to engage parents such as Cookouts/Movie Nights - Help parents get more involved with their child's education - Parent workshops that focus on parenting skills development	31
Enhance Communication	- Making sure home and school are on the same page: – Send home letters regarding their child's attendance – Have staff connect more with parents through means of intermittent phone calls home regarding their child's attendance - Share with the community issues around attendance and solicit their support	23
Other Random Ideas	- Make school more fun for students by increasing sports programs - Utilize character education lessons - Require uniforms at all schools - Enhance stronger collaboration amongst school staff	8

Participant 8 stated:

> They need to have like, you know, how they have like truancy that pick up, like, the bad kids and stuff, they need to have more of those or as far as the parent liaison, just somebody in the school that can pick up the kids that aren't able to get the bus or running late, or parents are not able to get them to school. So I think a little extra transportation will help.

Participant 9 stated:

> Transportation is a big one and now all the issues with the transit center, I'm not sure what I'm kind of sort of think I'm going to lean towards is dropping my son off in the morning, but I don't know what I'm going to do as far as getting him home in the afternoon because my younger son is not familiar with catching the bus at all, period.

Data Analysis and Findings

The researcher asked 21 interview questions that supported the findings in this study, and they were the areas that received the largest responses to the interview questions. The findings were reinforced through coded theme tables. There are two major categories that determine if a student would have a high daily attendance rate. These two indicators are: (a) parents who are highly involved with their child's education, and (b) the parent's ability to effectively communicate with key stakeholders, inside and outside of the school setting, to obtain the necessary resources for support.

The study revealed that parents who had access to resources, such as a vehicle, could be very beneficial to a child's ability to have a high daily attendance rate. For instance, for a child who may have gotten up late and missed his or her bus, the parent

with access to a vehicle had the ability to drive the child to school so he or she did not miss school that day. Also, when parents have the ability to effectively communicate their needs, often times their requests are met. As shown in Table 4.11, 100% of the parents shared that they felt that they had someone at the school they speak to someone at their child's school about his or her difficulties.

Table 4.11

Participants' Ability to Speak to Someone at School About Children's Difficulties

Participant Number	Able to Speak to Someone
1	Yes, Teacher
2	Yes, Teacher
3	Yes, Teacher & Principal
4	Yes
5	Yes
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	Yes
9	Yes, Teacher
10	Yes, Teacher
11	Yes, Teacher
12	Yes
13	Yes, Teacher

For example, one of the participants shared that even though she was a single parent, she was enrolled full time in nursing school while working a full-time job. She desperately needed before and after school childcare that allowed her to be able to balance work and school. She was able to work something out with her child's school administrator, and she was able to drop her child off at school early. She was also pointed by someone within the school to enroll her child into an afterschool program. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the parents indicated that they were treated with respect by the school's administration (Table 4.4). The respect that parents indicated they received

is revealing in the single mother's need to work out something with the school and her needs as a parent were met. This fact also correlates with Tables 4.12 and 4.13 that show that the majority of the parents (62%) indicated that they felt that communication was available with their children's school, and the school district was sensitive to their home culture, respectively.

Table 4.12

Participants Feel Communication is Available with Their Children's School

Participant Number	Communication Available
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes
5	No
6	Yes
7	Yes, but it is confusing at times
8	Yes
9	Yes, for elementary schools but not so much for the high schools
10	Yes
11	Yes
12	No
13	Yes

These two examples demonstrate the difference between average, good, and excellent daily attendance rates for a student. This may not always be the case; however, the researcher found that the parents that valued their child's education and understood the importance of attendance were willing to go to any lengths to get their child to school every day. Those parents also indicated that some of their older children successfully graduated from the city school district and went on to lead successful lives. One parent went on to share that one of her children was selected to go to Washington, D.C. to meet the President of the United States while attending a city school.

Table 4.13

Participants Feel the School District is Sensitive to Their Home Culture

Participant Number	Sensitive to Home Culture
1	Yes
2	Yes/No
3	Yes
4	Yes
5	No, lack of knowledge
6	Yes
7	No, not sensitive to large families
8	Yes/No, could do better at connecting
9	Yes, depends on the school
10	Yes
11	Yes
12	No
13	Yes

The research questions that drove this study centered on the *barriers* and *solutions* that impacted student attendance. In their words, participants felt that transportation issues played a vital role in a child's daily attendance rate success. The participants were also able to articulate a few potential solutions that could support families with transportation issues, such as the distribution of public bus passes provided to students and parents, also providing a late bus that would pick up late students and bring them to school was suggested as a solution to support families in their good-attendance effort.

Summary of Results

The participants revealed how vital parental involvement is when determining a child's daily attendance rate—especially at the elementary level. All of the participants felt that student attendance has a direct impact on a student's academic achievement, which is shown in Table 4.14. This qualitative study sought to determine, from a parent's perspective, the root causes that impact student attendance in an urban elementary school

district. Not only were the root causes identified but solid solutions were provided by the parents who participated in this study. Based on the interviews conducted, there were valid recommendations and solutions provided by the participants that can impact student attendance rates in most urban elementary school districts around the country. Moreover, parental feedback and input has been shown to be critical to school districts when determining future policies that directly or indirectly impact student achievement. It was the researcher's intentions to gain a deeper understanding of what factors aided or hindered daily student attendance rates. In addition, the researcher's objective was to provide urban school districts with a comprehensive understanding of those factors that will help increase the daily student attendance rates.

Table 4.14

Participants' View that Attendance is an Important Aspect of Academic Success

Participant Number	Attendance Important for Academic Success
1	Yes
2	Yes
3	Yes
4	Yes
5	Yes
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	Yes
9	Yes
10	Yes
11	Yes
12	Yes
13	Yes

Through an in-depth investigation of 13 individual interviews, the researcher received rich textural data in which two major themes emerged, including the fundamental and extrinsic responses, to what aided and/or hindered students from having

high daily attendance rates. While no two interviews were the same, reoccurring themes continued to emerge through the 13 interviews. The majority (75%) of the participants indicated that when growing up and attending school, they lived in structured home environments where their parents' influence was substantial to their daily attendance rates and academic success. It can be said that the participants adopted a similar philosophy in the way they approached their own children's attendance and education.

While the majority (85%) of the participants articulated that their child enjoyed going to school (Table 4.5), they also shared that liking school changes as the child gets older. One parent indicated that, "the joy that my child once experienced going to school began to decline as early as the third grade" (Participant 5). A recommendation that was shared by another parent was to, "make school a more fun place for kids by incorporating more sporting activities/events for students to partake in" (Participant 12).

As indicated earlier in Table 4.7, all of the parents who experienced their child missing school, for whatever reason, reported that the school communicated with them either through an automatic calling system and leaving a message at their home or by a letter being mailed to the home. Letters that were mailed home were sent home that their child missed school. Effective communication between the home and the school revealed a critical role in the area of student attendance. As school district administrators are searching for methods to improve their daily attendance rates, they must consider keeping their students engaged and their families well informed along the way. Interviews with the participants indicated that the more communication between the school and the home only benefited in improving students' daily attendance rate.

In closing, strong communication lines established between the home and the school could significantly improve the student's daily attendance rates. This is substantial information for school district personnel to consider when seeking to improve overall attendance rates.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This study sought to identify the root causes and solutions that impact student attendance in an urban elementary school district from a parent's perspective. Moreover, parents shared the barriers to attendance and potential solutions that school districts could adopt in order to increase their daily student attendance rates. Addressing the need to increase student attendance was selected as the focus of this study, because for the past several years, the average daily attendance rate for this school has steadily hovered around 89%. Specifically, this study considered the following research questions:

1. What are some of the obstacles that urban parents might face that cause their child(ren) to have low attendance rates?

2. If parents had the opportunity to design an attendance program to assist in improving the daily student attendance rate, what would they do?

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Based on the findings from this research, the parent participants were able to identify barriers and viable solutions to address student attendance issues within an urban school district. In addition, this study also revealed the significant impact that parental involvement plays in a student's daily attendance rate.

This study connected with the factors in the 1998 study of Corville-Smith et al. that are associated with students dropping out of school. The Corville-Smith et al. research indicated that students who had chronic attendance issues scored lower in all

three areas of personal characteristics, family relations, and school variables, than the

regular attenders. Just as in the Corville-Smith et al. study, two of the parents that

participated in this study disclosed that they came from broken homes with negative

family relationships that led them to drop out of school. Also, according to Alexander et

al. (1997), attendance patterns as early as elementary school separate dropouts from

graduates. This finding was clearly supported in this study. McCluskey et al. (2004) also

found that family structure plays a major role in a student's attendance rate. The family

structure can be identified as the lack of parenting skills, neglect, socioeconomic status,

and the lack of family support. The findings from this study were also consistent with the

work of Sheldon and Epstein (2004) who found that in order for schools to improve

student attendance, the schools, students, families, and community need to work

collaboratively. Two major findings identified from their study were: (a) schools need to

take a comprehensive approach to involving families and the community, and (b)

frequent and positive communication with parents about attendance is essential. The

researcher found that the participants shared that a collaborative approach between home

and school is most effective when it comes to improving daily student attendance rates.

They also reiterated that the community needs to be aware of the attendance problems

that schools may be facing and to solicit the community's support. Lastly, this research

was also consistent with the work of Jeyenes's (2003) meta-analysis. Jeyenes found that

parental involvement, overall, had a significant impact on academic achievement for all

minority students. Jeyenes's study was congruent with other studies that indicated that

parental involvement plays a significant role in the academic success of students.

Previous research has supported parental influence as one of the strongest and most

important reasons why students come to school (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Reid, 2006a). The parents that participated in this study graduated from high school and a large majority went on to college when their parents were actively involved in their academic careers. According to Ouellette and Wilkerson (2008) and Smink and Reimer (2005), parental involvement is one of the most accurate predictors for a student's academic success in school.

The researcher was able to make several connections to the existing literature in the area of student attendance. This study also provided support to the body of literature that focusses on the significant role that parental involvement plays in a student's academic career.

Discussion of the Results

Drawn from the perspectives of 13 parents, this chapter discusses recommendations for increasing the daily student attendance rates—despite what the circumstances may be. The implications of the findings are discussed in this chapter, which provide insight on the barriers and factors that contribute to the various ways to increase student daily attendance rates within an urban school district setting.

The two theories that were put into practice for the purpose of this study were grounded theory and theory of mindsets by Carol Dweck (2006). The mindset theory emerged with the majority of the parents that participated in this study. According to Dr. Dweck's work, a person displays one of two different mindsets, and they are revealed in either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. When analyzing the responses of the parents to the 21 questions, the researcher concluded that the majority of the parents displayed a growth mindset. There were several examples of how the growth mindset was prevalent

in the majority of the parents. As parents explained potential barriers that hindered a

great deal of the parents from getting their child to school every day, they indicated how

that was not a deterrent for them. For example, one parent indicated that if her child

missed the bus to school, she would find other means to get her child to school, even if

that meant that they had to walk to school together. Another parent indicated that she

walked her child to school every day, regardless of the weather conditions, to ensure that

her child did not miss school. The majority of the parents revealed how they understood

that their child's attendance could impact their academic performance. Lastly, one of the

parents indicated how she would use all of the resources that were made available to her,

such as before and after school care, to make sure that her child was going to school

every day and that he had a safe place to go when school was not in session.

The researcher found that for the parents that displayed a growth mindset, their

children had very good daily attendance rates. After analyzing the responses of the

parents that displayed a fixed mindset, the researcher noticed a pattern of less positive

comments about their child's school and the city school district as a whole. They often

expressed that there was not enough support coming from the city school district to meet

their families' needs. Participants also perceived that some of their issues were created

by district polices and its lack of ability to support their individual situations. This group

of parents often lacked the ability to reflect their own personal lack of input or their own

ability to solve some of their own issues.

The parent participants also revealed that when their children felt safe and

respected by their teachers, they wanted to go to school to learn. This is also confirmed

in the study conducted by Ehrlich et al. (2013). This researcher's study also found that

student attendance improved significantly when parents felt that schools were safe and when they trusted their children's teachers. As revealed in this study, parents overwhelmingly felt that their child enjoyed going to school on a daily basis. One parent shared that his children missed school when school it is closed for summer recess, and they cannot wait until September when school reopens.

Moreover, this study revealed that parents not only had good strategies but could be part of the solution if school districts were willing to embrace their support and ideas. Hence, when parents, students, teachers, staff members, and community members all seek to embrace the growth mindset way of thinking, student attendance and achievement can significantly be improved.

Limitations

One of the limitations to this study was that the researcher was unable to secure a larger focus group as originally planned. A focus group would have allowed the researcher the opportunity to triangulate the data between the individual interviews and the focus group interviews. Just having one parent participate in the focus group limited the level of feedback and input into the study. Another limitation to this study was that the parents that were interviewed, for the most part, expressed that their child had pretty good daily attendance rates. It is possible that if there were more parents that participated in this study whose child did not have really good daily attendance rates, the responses and feedback could have been different. In addition, the researcher could have been able to identify the mindset of these parents to see if they, too, possessed a fixed mindset as opposed to a growth mindset. For the most part, the majority of the parents in this study had a growth mindset and it was reflected in their child's daily attendance rate.

A final limitation that the researcher found was the sample size of the study. The study only consisted of 13 parents, and that may not be a reflection of the opinions of all of the parents in the entire district.

Recommendations for Further Research

Through an extensive review of the data, future research could add to, and build upon, this study by seeking to interview parents whose child does not have good daily attendance rates from the same school but from single-parent households in order to compare their responses to two-parent households, and in order to identify the barriers and potential solutions for both groups. The findings would provide districts with a better understanding of the needs to remedying student attendance issues from both types of households where children have poor daily attendance rates. The feedback could lead to very different support systems that would need to be established to support a more extensive amount of parents' needs.

Other recommendations to build on this study would be to look at students' tardiness and how it affects academic achievement. It would be of great value to see if students who came consistently late to school were also negatively impacted in their academic achievement scores and their ability to succeed in the classroom. For example, at the elementary level, if a student came into school an hour late every day, he or she would miss either the math block of instruction or the ELA block of instruction. Missing out on two critical subjects could be devastating to a child's academic success.

The final recommendation for future study was suggested by one of the participating parents who felt that the school districts should have more nonacademic social events at school that focus on strengthening the relationships between families and

the school community. These events would be open to all the staff members, students, and their families as well as local community members. A few examples of these events would be cookouts, family movie nights, and BINGO nights. These are all events that people would feel comfortable attending in a relaxed environment. The goal would be to have fun, get to know one another, and enjoy each other's company.

Suggestion from the Results for Practice

Student attendance is a priority when it comes to the academic success for children within an urban school district setting. As one of the parents clearly stated, "If a child is not present in school, then how are they expected to learn?" The population in this study consisted of parents of students who, at the time of the study, attended the city school district, or they were parents of children who had attended the city school district in the past. While only 13 parents were interviewed for the purpose of this study, their feedback was critical when considering future attendance polices. Some of the feedback/recommendations provided from this study can be implemented straight away, while some of the feedback will need to be considered when planning for the long term. The recommendations came from parents' experiences or from the experiences of other parents whom they are in close relationship. The parents' perspectives and feedback were honest as well as enlightening.

A recommendation that frequently presented itself was the use of late buses for students that missed the morning bus. A vast majority of the parents indicated that they wanted their child in school every day if they could help it, but sometimes things happen, such as alarm clocks not going off or parents sleeping through their alarm clocks. Whatever the case may be, if parents do not have other means to transport their child to

school except for the school bus, their child ends up staying home for the day. An instructional day is wasted when the children are willing to go to school but can't get there. This might present itself as a large cost to the school district, but it very well may be an investment that is worth exploring further. School districts would need to view this approach as a long-term investment. Short-term strategies can often be ineffective, and for continued success, long-term systemic models are highly recommended (Kay, 2010). In addition, long-term investments for increased student attendance can lead to improved academics with the focus on decreasing the student dropout rates in later grades. This approach can boost graduation rates, hence inspire more families to want to move into a particular neighborhood and choose such a school for their children. Other benefits would mean more productive citizens infused into our society. Also, there would be a larger pool of mentors that could connect with the current generation of students to help them make it through their schooling experiences. Lastly, this could also lower the prison population because there would be more eligible young people working and contributing to society in a positive manner as opposed to a negative manner. Society would be able to focus more on building less prisons and building/expanding more businesses. This would generate more dollars circulating throughout the economy and help to stabilize the economy.

A recommendation that the city school district may want to consider is finding more ways to get parents more involved in their child's school community. Martinez (2004) reviewed over 30 years of research and identified one of the most powerful and effective strategies to increasing student achievement is to have the students' parents become actively engaged and involved in their child's education. Sheldon and Epstein

(2004) stated, "Educators have a responsibility to help families and communities become involved in reducing student absenteeism" (p. 41). The school district should not only expect or assume families and communities will become involved, but they should encourage, support, and facilitate this connection. Parents who were aggressively involved with their child's education resulted in their child having better attendance rates as well as higher graduation rates. Several involved parents shared that they were so involved in their child's school that they knew the principal, teachers, and office staff by first and last name and vice versa. One parent shared that she was so involved that she became the PTA president at her child's school. These parents felt that they were a part of their child's school community. They also shared how they volunteered their time at the school whenever they were available. As discussed earlier, Sheldon and Epstein (2004) lead the way in parental and community school engagement, and they identified how the engagement is a collective responsibility (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). They shared that, "educators have a responsibility to help families and communities become involved in reducing student absenteeism" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 41). The effects of developing the relationships and providing the applicable systems could create paths to decrease student absenteeism and increase schools' attendance rates.

Each school is different, so finding the right intervention to successfully motivate students and ease challenges for the parents is vital to improving attendance. In order to increase student attendance rates, which can lead to increased student academic success (i.e., higher graduation rates), school districts need to understand that authentic, systemic change is needed for continuous success and growth. Due to the positive interactions with school personnel, a vast majority of the parent participants felt that the school

district does care about their child's educational success. This led to the parents feeling good about their child's school experience and academic success. Growth can be made in the area between students and their families' understanding that the schools are all on the same page with the intentions to fully support their child's academic success. When a student is able to successfully graduate from high school and go on to become a productive member of society, we all win. That is why we, as a society, really need to get behind the notion that if one student is successful, then we all are successful. "Policy and practice must now evolve so schools, families, and communities are working together to develop approaches that reflect the complexity of attendance problems" (Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2006, p. 13).

Reflections

When reflecting back on the study, there were some things that stood out as significant in addition to the results. One was the "honesty factor." One of the participants appeared to have been either nervous or was disinterested in participating in the study and wanted only to participate for the opportunity to receive the gift card. The researcher was suspicious of the interviewee because she provided very short and direct responses, and she failed to elaborate on her responses.

Another reflection item was the consideration to reword question number 20. It was originally worded: "Do you feel the school district is sensitive to your home culture? Can you give an example?" The preferred wording would be: "Do you feel that the city school district is sensitive to meeting the needs within your home? If not, how?"

An unexpected finding from this study was how participants reflected back to their school experience and indicated that they grew up in a structured/supportive home

environments where attending school was of the utmost importance, and they achieved at least a high school diploma. This stood out to the researcher because when parental involvement was high, the participants had been more successful in school, themselves, and a higher percentage of those parents exhibited a growth mindset. This also played a significant role in how they, as parents, felt about their own child's daily attendance rate.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: _A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance_

Name(s) of researcher(s): _Roshon R. Bradley_

Faculty Supervisor: _Dr. Susan Schultz_ Phone for further information: _(585) 385-7296_

Purpose of study: _The purpose of this research is to seek methods that will increase the daily student attendance rates within an urban elementary school._

Place of study: _Rochester City School District_ Length of participation: _1.5 hours_

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

The risks and benefits are attached

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: _Please see the attachment_

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant)	Signature	Date

Print name (Investigator)	Signature	Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Health & Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathbun 585-385-8012. She will direct your call to a member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.

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Appendix B

Face-to-Face or Participant Interview Questionnaire

1. Can you share a little about your experience with the city school district?

2. How many children do you have in the city school district?

3. What is your highest level of education?

4. On a scale from 1-10 with ten having perfect attendance and a one being that your child never attends school, where would you rate your child/children daily attendance rate?

5. Tell me about the support that you receive from your child's school?

6. Are you treated with respect by the school's administration? Can you give me an example?

7. Do you feel that teachers are polite and respectful to children and parents? Can you give me an example?

8. Do you see attendance as being an issue in your child's school? If so, how?

9. Do you feel that student attendance is an important aspect to your child's academic success? Why?

10. How was your attendance when you attended school growing up? Were there any barriers that you faced as a youth attending school?

11. If you could change anything about your attendance in your educational experience what would you have changed?

12. What are some of the barriers that parents today face in regards to their child's daily attendance rate?

13. What are some possible solutions as a way to improve attendance issues within the city school district?

14. Do you feel that there are enough parent-teacher conferences being held?

15. Do you feel parents have someone or a group they can talk with about their concerns?

16. Does your child usually like to go to school? If not, why do you think this is?

17. Does your child feel safe at school?

18. Does someone talk to you when your child is having difficulties at school?

19. Does someone connect with you when your child is missing school (i.e., teacher, parent liaison, administration)?

20. Do you feel the school district is sensitive to your home culture? Can you give an example?

21. If you are a single parent, what would you tell other single parents that you found to be an effective strategy to overcome school issues and attendance?