STUDENT ABSENTEEISM: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

OF THEIR ROLE IN IMPROVING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine teachers' perceptions of their role and responsibilities in improving student attendance. The study was conducted in a large, rural East Tennessee school district. Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews with secondary teachers and triangulated with an online survey of 121 secondary classroom teachers and interviews with four secondary administrators who oversee attendance programs in their schools. Analysis of the data revealed that teachers hold the belief that they have a significant role in the improvement of student attendance. However, they asserted that their role is secondary to the efforts of administrators. Teachers perceived their role to include forming and maintaining personal teacher-student relationships, communicating with parent(s) and administrators, and consistently enforcing policies and procedures related to student attendance.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my husband and our two amazing boys. You three are my heart, my inspiration, and my motivation. I love you.

I would also like to dedicate this study to my former student, Bailey Steger. You taught me the significance of the teacher-student relationship; you will forever be in my heart.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Eighty percent of success is showing up." –Woody Allen

On a weekday morning in early fall, the school doors opened and students began to flood the hallways; the bell rang and classrooms filled with students ready to start the school day. The teacher gazed across the room and took note of the empty desks belonging to students absent from school. This scenario, unfortunate as it may sound, illustrates the staggering amount of empty desks across the United States.

The value of education is undeniable; it is an avenue to meet the needs of students, and continues to play a vital role in shaping opportunities into adulthood. The school building is able to meet students' basic needs, such as hunger and safety, as well as students' social-emotional needs (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The academic opportunities at school also provide students opportunities to meet their full potential (Cao, 2005). The education obtained at school can provide insight into areas of high-interest that are beneficial in making decisions for students' futures and serve as a stepping stone for many individuals in their quest to attend college or technical school. Once a student gains his/her high school diploma, the value of education continues into adulthood.

The importance of an education persists into adulthood; adults who earn their high school diplomas are less likely to be unemployed and live in poverty (Bickelhaupt, 2011; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; Garry, 1996; Schoeneberger, 2012). The U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2017) reported the unemployment rate to be 7.7% for high school dropouts, 5.3% for high school graduates who chose not to pursue higher education, 3.9% for students with some college, and only 2.5% for those earning a Bachelor's degree or higher. As of 2012, students who did not earn their high school diplomas earned an average of $10,386 less than a high school

graduate and $36,424 less than a college graduate (Breslow, 2012). The importance of completing a high school education not only affects a person into adulthood, but also has societal impacts (Schoeneberger, 2012). The value of education is high with long-lasting implications; it is essential stakeholders and policymakers take an interest in the causes of students leaving high school early and interventions to increase student attendance and completion of their education.

The value of the teacher in the journey to encourage student attendance and obtainment of their high school diplomas cannot be overlooked. Teachers are in close contact with students on a daily basis, and they frequently know the areas of strengths and weaknesses for each student. Teachers have valuable insight as to which students are at a heightened risk for dropping out. Positive teacher-student relationships contribute to students' academic and social-emotional needs, which can increase the likelihood of a student earning a high school diploma (Phillippo & Stone, 2013).

Unfortunately, many students are missing the opportunities school provides due to high rates of absenteeism. Student absenteeism plagues schools throughout the nation, and it is a leading risk-factor for dropping out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The teacher-student relationship can play a significant role influencing students to attend school. It is vital for all stakeholders, especially teachers, to take carefully consider their role in influencing student attendance.

Research Problem

In the 2013-14 school year, over 6 million students in the United States missed 15 or more school days (United States Department of Education, 2016). The correlation between school achievement and attendance rates has been reported for decades; however, a cure for student absenteeism has yet to be found. Student non-attendance ravages through school districts

affecting every grade level, gender, and ethnicity. Chronic absenteeism, which is missing 10% or more of school days for any reason, affected 14% of the student population in the United States during the 2013-14 school year, which equates to about one in seven students (United States Department of Education, 2016). Missing three weeks of school or more poses detrimental risks to the students and their futures, including a heightened risk for dropping out of school (Balfanz, 2016a, 2016b; United States Department of Education, 2016).

Research has just begun to enhance understanding of chronic absenteeism and the role of school leaders and teachers in combating the student absenteeism. Research on absenteeism has mostly focused on truancy, an excessive number of unexcused absences. However, recent research has demonstrated that the number of days a student misses school matters more than the reasons why they miss (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). With this knowledge, the emphasis at the federal and district levels has begun to focus on interventions for both excused and unexcused absences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand teachers' perspectives of their role in improving chronic absenteeism. The teacher-student relationship has been highlighted as an indispensable asset to influence student attendance and academic achievement. However, there is little documentation outlining the teacher's specific role and responsibilities to increase student attendance. This study aimed to better understand the experiences and perspectives of secondary teachers related to chronic absenteeism, as well as the secondary teachers' perspectives of their role in understanding and improving student absenteeism.

Research Questions

The researcher sought to explore the issue of student absenteeism through the experiences and perceptions of the teacher. More specifically, if teachers perceive their role to include improving student attendance, then what responsibilities do teachers perceive as associated with their roles. The research study focused on the following questions:

1. Do secondary teachers believe they have a role in improving student attendance?

2. What responsibilities do secondary teachers perceive to be associated with their role in improving student attendance?

Rationale for the Study

After a thorough review of the literature on student absenteeism, the researcher observed the recent shift of focus away from truancy and toward chronic absenteeism. While the attention on chronic absenteeism is relatively new, a majority of studies concerning student absenteeism focus on early grades, associated risk factors, and the role of the school leader. The researcher felt the need to examine chronic absenteeism at the secondary level, where chronic absenteeism is most prominent. The secondary level was also chosen due to the age group of the students. Since chronic absenteeism is closely correlated with dropping out of school, the researcher determined that it was necessary to focus on students approaching the age in which school attendance is not mandatory.

Furthermore, the researcher desired to explore the role of the teacher. The influence of the teacher-student relationship is well documented. Due to the fact that teachers spend more time with students than any other adult in the building, exploring the role of the teacher was necessary in understanding the phenomenon of student absenteeism and strategies to discontinue it. Sculles (2013) explored chronic absenteeism from the perspective of school leaders, parents,

and students. Upon reflection of her study, Sculles noted the need to further explore the teacher role in chronic absenteeism. She stated, "I would consider interviewing teachers as a means to gain further insight into the relationships and interactions among students and staff in the classroom setting. I would also like to better understand their role in responding to student absenteeism concerns" (p. 98). Sculles' desire to look at the role of the teacher concerning student absenteeism supports the rationale for this study.

The frequency of chronic absenteeism in the United States and the associated high-risk implications make this study a valuable asset to educational research. Given the significance of the teacher-student relationship, insight into the perspective of teachers in their role to improve student attendance can increase knowledge on intervention methods from within the school.

The Researcher

As a secondary teacher, the researcher has witnessed the negative effects of student absenteeism on academic success. The researcher's exposure to absenteeism increased when asked to take the role of truancy coordinator. In this role, the researcher has observed success and failures concerning student attendance. The researcher has witnessed students become propelled to change attendance behavior and improve academics, while other cases have resulted in students choosing to drop out of high school. Each time a student dropped out of school, the researcher's drive to uncover strategies to improve student attendance amplified.

The researcher has experienced the importance of the teacher-student relationship as both the student and teacher. These relationships have led the researcher to believe in the significance of the teacher role. These cultivating experiences have prompted the desire to further explore student absenteeism and the influence of the teacher at improving student attendance.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this qualitative study concerning teacher perception of the teacher's role of improving student attendance.

1. *Absolute Performance for Chronically Out of School Indicator:* Percent of students who are chronically absent in the school district (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a).

2. *AMO Target for Chronically Out of School Indicator.* Target to reduce the percent of students who are chronically absent in the district (cohort-comparison) (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a).

3. *Average daily attendance rate.* The percent of enrolled students who attend school each day. (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b).

4. *Chronic absenteeism.* A student missing 10% or more of instructional days for any reason, including excused absences, unexcused absences, and out of school suspensions (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b).

5. *in loco parentis.* Latin for "in place of a parent"; the teacher stands, in relation to the student, in the position of a caring parent, as an unofficial guardian, with added responsibilities for the protection of students. (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2013). An ethical metaphor for the role of professional teachers (Hall & Manins, 2001).

6. *Secondary teachers.* According to the Tennessee Department of Education (2014), a teacher with a secondary licensure teaches in grades 6-12. Due to the structure of the schools evaluated, this study focused on grades 9-12.

7. *Student attendance.* During the regular school year, the average percentage of days that students are present for school. Students should not be considered present for excused absences, unexcused absences, or any period of time that they are out of their regularly

assigned classrooms due to discipline measures (United States Department of Education, 2012).

8. *Truancy.* A legal term that refers only to unexcused absences. In Tennessee a student is considered truant at five unexcused absences and may be subject to legal intervention (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b).

9. *Value-Added for Chronically Out of School Indicator*. Student-level comparison to measure reduction in chronic absenteeism for specific students who were chronically absent in previous year (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a).

Summary

The importance of attending school and graduating with a high school diploma is undeniable. With approximately 6 million students chronically absent in the U.S. each year, it is essential to gain a depth of knowledge on student absenteeism. Previous studies focusing on absenteeism have concentrated on perceptions of students, parents, and school leaders; however, there is little research to understand teachers' perceptions. Due to the value of the student-teacher relationship, it is important to understand the perception teachers hold of their own role in this daunting task. The following study examined teacher experiences and perceptions to better understand the teacher's role of improving student absenteeism at the secondary level.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Compulsory education laws were enacted throughout the United States 100 years ago. Although school attendance is mandated, student absenteeism is a rising issue in schools across the nation. Many school districts have monitored student attendance using the average daily attendance rate, but very few schools have examined chronic absenteeism. A student is considered chronically absent if he/she misses 10% or more of instructional days, which includes both excused and unexcused absences. In the 2013-14 school year, over 6 million students in the United States were chronically absent (United States Department of Education, 2016). These students have a heightened risk for poor academic outcomes, including dropping out of school. Considering these statistics, it is essential that school leaders, teachers, parents, and community members further examine the issue of student absenteeism.

Purpose of Education

To understand the significance of school attendance, it is essential to understand the magnitude of education. While one may assume the purpose of public education is to teach the basic subject areas: reading, writing and math; it seems the perception of the purpose in today's society has evolved to hold much more weight. To better understand this perception, over 300 participants were surveyed to answer the following question, "What is the purpose of public education?" Only one response elicited that the purpose was to teach reading, writing, and math (Wolpert-Gawron, 2010).

The purpose of education is multifaceted and expands past teaching the skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. Education is perceived to create lifelong learners who can think critically and compete on a global scale. Education is also deemed to foster a sense of responsibility and advocacy for oneself and to others. Public education is believed to aid in

preparing students to be civilized citizens who are able to participate in democracy and contribute to society (Mahoney, 2015; Siegel, 2009; Wolpert-Gawron, 2010). Education can also develop the academic and social skills which students need in order to have options in life and achieve their professional goals (Wolpert-Gawron, 2010).

The purpose of education is much more than teaching the prescribed curriculum. However, teachers cannot teach students who are absent. When students are chronically absent, they are missing instruction as well as the opportunity to fully absorb the additional, and perhaps even more significant, advantages of education (Mahoney, 2015).

Attendance Laws and Policies

Many laws have been established to enforce school attendance; however, the issue of student attendance is still a focus nationwide. School attendance laws were first passed in 1852 by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, with other states eventually following suit. The Tennessee Compulsory Attendance law (T.C.A. §49-6-3001) requires any parent(s)/guardian(s) responsible for a child between the ages of six and 17 to ensure the child attends school. The Tennessee Code Annotated also outlines exemptions from the law as well as permitted excuses for absences.

Many states have developed laws in response to truancy, the term used for unexcused absences. In Tennessee, a student is considered truant after five unexcused absences (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b). The Tennessee Department of Education Division of Data and Research (2015) stated that parents or guardians must be provided written notice after a student has reached five unexcused absences. Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A) §49-6-3010 (2016) grants juvenile or general sessions court judges the power to hear truancy cases. A violation of the compulsory attendance law by any parent or guardian may result in education neglect, a

Class C misdemeanor. As motivation for students to adhere to attendance policies, T.C.A. §49-6-3017 prohibits students with 10 consecutive or 15 cumulative unexcused absences in a semester from receiving a motor vehicle permit or license; these students also may have the permit or license revoked. Despite national and state laws enacted to combat truancy, insufficient results have been reported (Balfanz, 2016a).

In 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which requires states to include a "broader measure of student performance in their accountability systems beyond test scores" (ASCD, 2016). The non-academic indicator selected by each state must be used in all schools and "meaningfully differentiate" between schools. Many states have outlined chronic absenteeism to fulfill this measure in their state ESSA plans (Adams, 2016; Attendance Works, 2017). The Tennessee Department of Education (2017a) has selected chronic absenteeism to measure school quality and success as outlined in the State ESSA Plan. Tennessee school districts will now be held accountable for chronic absenteeism in the 2017-18 school year with the implementation of the *Chronically Out of School* indicator.

In response to the emphasis on chronic absenteeism, the research district has altered the attendance policy for the 2017-18 school year. Similar to previous school years, the new policy allots five parent notes per semester to excuse student absences. The previous policy allowed each parent note to cover up to three consecutive days, while the new policy limits each parent note to one day. Both policies accept doctor notes to excuse student attendance.

Changes in policy concerning attendance are forthcoming throughout the nation. However, it is important to note reporting absenteeism is not new to public school systems. Prior to the increased focus on chronic absenteeism, schools heavily relied on other methods, such as average daily attendance rate, to report attendance data.

History of Reporting Attendance Data

For many years, schools across the nation have relied heavily on average daily attendance rate, with some schools also reporting truancy rates, to measure student attendance. The average daily attendance rate calculates the percent of students who attend school each day (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b). Researchers have recently shown how the use of average daily attendance rate alone conceals significant attendance problems (Balfanz, 2016a; Bruner, Discher, & Chang, 2011; Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a; Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b). The Tennessee Department of Education (2017b) used actual data from a small, rural school district in East Tennessee to provide insight into the masking effects of solely measuring average daily attendance rates. The study examined four schools - referred to as School A, B, C, and D - to maintain confidentiality. School A had an average daily attendance rate of 93.8%, which is considered acceptable, yet still had 17.9% of students chronically absent. School B had an average daily attendance rate of 94.7%, but 12.1% of students were chronically absent; School C had an average daily attendance rate of 95% and 9.9% of students chronically absent. School D had the highest average daily attendance rate of 96.3%, but still had 6.7% of students chronically absent. For this reason, policymakers and school leaders nationwide began to realize the average daily attendance rate did not provide an accurate account of individual student's attendance issues.

With the implementation of the *Chronically Out of School* indicator, schools throughout Tennessee will now be accountable for reporting chronic absenteeism data in addition to the average daily attendance rate. The *Chronically Out of School* indicator is one of six performance areas that will be measured by either absolute performance or AMO target, and value-added (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a). The school district can choose either the absolute

performance pathway or the AMO target to account for 50% of the performance area score. The absolute performance calculates the district's percentage of chronically absent students, and the AMO target relies on a cohort-comparison to decrease the district's percent of students who are chronically absent (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a). The remaining 50% of the performance score will come from value-added, a comparison to measure the reduction among students who were previously chronically absent (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a). Districts will be scored on a zero to four scale, with a zero equating to lowest performance/no progress, and a four linked to exemplary performance/expected growth. With federal and state initiatives focusing on student attendance, it is essential school districts, administrators, and teachers evaluate best practices to motivate students to come to school.

Theoretical Lens and Related Theoretical Literature

The importance of school to a child's academic enrichment is well documented; however, school also offers a variety of benefits that meet the social and emotional needs of the child. In many ways, schools serve as a resource to meet the child's basic, psychological, self-actualization needs. Therefore, student absenteeism can potentially threaten the value of the school experience in meeting the needs of the whole child. This study utilized Abraham Maslow's Theory of Motivation, referred to as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as the theoretical framework to better understand the importance of school, student absenteeism, and the teacher-student relationship.

Theory of Motivation: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, Abraham Maslow wrote *A Theory of Human Motivation* outlining human needs as a hierarchy in which one need relies on the satisfaction of another more important need. The first set of needs is considered fundamental. Basic needs, as described by Maslow, are the

physiological needs and safety needs: food, water, rest, safety, and security. Physiological needs

must be satisfied before a person can focus on safety, love, esteem, and self-fulfillment; these

needs are considered part of the psychological needs. The need for love includes both the need to

give and receive love. Esteem needs are also categorized as psychological needs; people have a

desire for self-respect and the respect of others. The need for self-actualization sits atop

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow defines this term as the desire to fulfill one's potential

(1943).

Maslow also found the importance of intellectual abilities in conjunction with the desire

to meet certain needs. Maslow (1943) stated cognitive abilities are tools to satisfy one's basic

needs, and any danger to those abilities indirectly threaten one's basic needs.

Importance of School in Addressing Student Needs

In 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act became a federal program outlining eight

national goals for students and schools in response to the report, *A Nation At Risk*. The first goal

proposed all students must arrive at school ready to learn (Heise, 1994). Unfortunately, this goal

is still not a reality for many students throughout the nation. Many students are still walking

through the school doors with poor health, hunger, and low self-esteem (Prince & Howard,

2002).

Physiological needs. Many students throughout the nation enter the school building

hungry. Schools have been able to address the need of hunger through federally-funded breakfast

and lunch programs, which provide free and reduced prices for breakfast and lunch to millions of

students throughout the nation (Burleson & Thoron, 2014; Prince & Howard, 2002). By

providing students with two well-balanced meals, schools are able to support student nutrition

and strive to meet the basic need of hunger. In 2010-2011, over 23 million students in the United

States were eligible for free or reduced lunch prices, equating to 48.1% of students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

In some instances, the school also fulfills the basic need of safety. A child's inability to meet his or her need for safety can be found in a variety of contexts: a bad home life, dangerous neighborhoods, or unpredictability in their world (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The school building can provide a sense of safety as a place of peace away from parents who are always fighting, drug-addicted or absent; or it may serve as an outlet away from the drugs, violence, and crime overtaking neighborhoods. Just as the structure of the school building can provide a sense of safety, the relationships made within the school walls may make an even larger impact. Supportive teacher and student relationships can provide students with a sense of safety (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Teachers can construct a safe environment within the school for students by providing a respectful environment built on trust where students feel safe to actively learn without fear of ridicule (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). For other students, the school may serve the need for safety by providing consistency and predictability. Teachers can help meet the need of safety by establishing routines, defining procedures and rules, and providing an agenda for the day.

Psychological Needs. Many students come to school in search of love and belonging (Burleson & Thoron, 2014; Prince & Howard, 2002). It is an avenue for students to socialize and form peer relationships. Friendship and supportive peer relationships provide students with a sense of belonging (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Teachers also have the opportunity to meet students' psychological needs by recognizing each student's worth, reinforcing positive learning behavior, and acknowledging student effort (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). Much of the literature ties a

student's sense of belonging at school to his or her attendance. Altogether, teachers and peers have a great deal of influence on a student's sense of belonging (Uslu & Gizir, 2017).

Self-actualization. Self-actualization is defined as fulfilling one's full potential (Cao, 2005; Maslow, 1943). The school is able to aid in student actualization by providing students with extensive exposure to general knowledge through their course work. Once a student finds an area of high-interest, teachers can encourage self-actualization by providing learning opportunities to further the student's abilities within the area of interest (Cao, 2005).

The school and the people within it play an important role in meeting the needs of the students. However, when a student misses an excessive number of school days, the school is not able to meet the needs of the student to his or her full potential.

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism knows no boundaries; it is an issue that has seeped through all parts of the country affecting all ages, genders and races. In the 2013-2014 school year, more than 6 million students were chronically absent from school, approximately one of every seven students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In the same year, researchers found one in 10 schools had extreme chronic absenteeism with more than 30% of students chronically absent; an additional 11% of schools had high levels of chronic absenteeism, with 20-29% of students chronically absent (Attendance Works, 2017). Chronic absenteeism haunts many school systems, as the negative risk factors associated with student absenteeism can have negative effects on academic outcomes and an increased risk for students dropping out of high school. Schools are faced with the responsibility to address chronic absenteeism in hopes of providing a better future for our nation's students.

Demographic Characteristics Associated with Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism affects all grade levels, ethnicities, socioeconomic levels, and achievement abilities. However, certain subgroups are overrepresented. To effectively develop interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism, school stakeholders must take a closer look at the overrepresented populations (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b).

Grade level. Chronic absenteeism affects all grade levels. For example, chronic absenteeism peaks during the early years of schooling and then again during the latter years, with high school students at the highest-risk (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017b; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; University of Utah, 2012). Chronic absenteeism affects almost one in five high school students, which equates to 2,624,357 high school students during the 2013-14 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In the 2014-15 school year 23.6% of preschool- 4th grade students were chronically absent, and 25.4% of high school seniors were chronically absent in Tennessee (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a). During the same school year, 62% of 9th grade students in Tennessee were chronically absent. All grade levels are affected and interventions for each age group must be considered.

Race and ethnicity. Chronic absenteeism affects every race and ethnicity; however, some student groups are overrepresented. In the United States, American Indian students have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism nationally. During the 2013-14 school year, students of American Indian or Pacific Islander descent were over 65% more likely to be chronically absent from school in comparison to their white peers. Tennessee attendance data from 2014-15 reported 17% of African American students as chronically absent, which is consistent with the national data from 2013-14 (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a). About 13% of Caucasian students were chronically absent during this same school year. Students of Asian

descent were less likely than any other race or ethnic group to be chronically absent, with only

7.1% being chronically absent in 2013-14 (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Gender. Males and females are equally likely to be chronically absent (United States

Department of Education, 2016; University of Utah, 2012). Roughly 14% of males and females

in the United States were considered chronically absent in 2013-14. The percent of males and

females considered chronically absent increased at the high school level, with 18.2% of males

being chronically absent in high school and 19.7% of females (United States Department of

Education, 2016).

Disability status. Across the nation students with disabilities are approximately 50%

more likely to be chronically absent than their peers (United States Department of Education,

2016). In Tennessee, over 12% of 3rd grade students with a disability were chronically absent, as

opposed to 7% of 3rd grade students without a disability (Tennessee Department of Education,

2017a). Students with disabilities are at a high-risk for chronic absenteeism.

English Language Learner status. Overall, English learners (11%) were less likely to

be chronically absent than their peers who are non-English learners (14%). However, among

high school students there was a dramatic shift and ELL students were more likely to be

chronically absent than their non-English learning peers. In 2013-14, 21.2% of ELL high school

students were chronically absent in U.S. schools (United States Department of Education, 2016).

However, one of the highest demographic factors associated with chronic absenteeism was a

student's socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic status. Students who are economically disadvantaged are

overrepresented. Elementary students who are economically disadvantaged students are three

times more likely to be chronically absent than their peers (Tennessee Department of Education,

2016). Students receiving free or reduced lunch are 90% more likely to be chronically absent than their peers (University of Utah, 2012).

Reasons for Student Absenteeism

Accumulating enough absences to be considered chronically absent may be easier than one may believe. Chronic absenteeism is not solely a result of students missing many consecutive days; chronic absenteeism can occur from sporadic absences. A student who misses at least two days per month would be considered chronically absent by the end of the school year (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). There are many reasons why students are absent. Three broad categories for student absenteeism have emerged in previous research, including student factors, family factors, and school factors.

Student factors. Student factors affecting student absenteeism may include: illness, lack of interest, or school phobia. The majority of student absences result from physical symptoms or illness (Eaton, Brener, Kann, 2008; Havik, Bru, Ertesvag, 2015; Kearney, 2008). Absences resulting from illness may include subjective or somatic health complaints. Subjective health complaints, such as headache, stomach ache, muscle pain, and fatigue, tend to be the leading reason for student absences. Somatic health complaints were also highly reported as reasons for student absenteeism. These included cold, flu, nausea, vomiting, or fever (Havik, Bru, & Ertesvag, 2015). Students suffering from psychiatric conditions such as anxiety, depression, or school phobia are more likely to suffer from chronic absenteeism (Kearney, 2008; Ingul, Klockner, Silverman, & Nordahl, 2012).

Aside from illness, student nonattendance may also result from lack of interest in school or feeling that school is of little value (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balkis, Arslan, Duru, 2016; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015; Kearney, 2008). An additional student-related factor

affecting attendance is academic difficulty. Many studies have cited chronic absenteeism as a predictive factor of poor academic outcomes; however, a possible inverse relationship may also exist. Poor academic outcomes can also be predictive of high rates of absenteeism. Students who struggle to succeed at school are less likely to be motivated to attend school and more likely to miss excessive school days (Balkis, Arslan, & Duru, 2016).

Family factors. Students may also miss school due to factors outside of their control. Issues stemming from a child's home life may contribute to absences; these issues may include family structure, family relations, or parental problems (Ingul et al., 2012). The parent may prevent the child from attending school due to financial obligations that require the child to work or assist with siblings while the parent is at work (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015; Garry, 1996). During times of economic struggles, parents and students may believe that assisting in providing basic needs, such as food and shelter, are more important than school attendance. Other economic factors can include transient families, unemployment, lack of transportation, or parents working multiple jobs (Peek, 2009). Family factors such as of lack of parental support, parental illness, alcohol or drug dependency within the home, or parental belief that school holds little value can also cause a student to accrue excessive absences (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Garry, 1996; Ingul et al., 2012; Peek, 2009).

School factors. Absenteeism may also stem from factors associated with school. Students may avoid school due to inconsistent enforcement of attendance policies, dislike for school, being bullied or harassed at school, or feelings of isolation and discomfort (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015; Ingul et al., 2012). One of the most noted reasons for a student to stop attending school is a sense of not belonging (Prince & Howard, 2002).

School curriculum and instructional styles have been cited as reasons for student absenteeism. When students do not enjoy school and find their classes boring or unrelated to their future, student motivation to attend school can be minimal. Students cited lack of interest in material, irrelevant content, and difficulty of subject matters as school factors relating to their absenteeism (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016). Another school-related factor indirectly affecting absenteeism is the negative interaction with teachers and peers.

Implications Associated with Chronic Absenteeism

The focus on chronic absenteeism, including both excused and unexcused student absences, is fairly new. The call to comprehensively explore absenteeism has exposed a link between missing school for any reason and at-risk behaviors (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008). Students missing a substantial number of school days are not only missing learning opportunities at school, but they are also at a higher risk for lower academic outcomes, dropping out of school, criminal behaviors, drug-use, and lasting issues persisting into adulthood (Balfanz, 2016a; Eaton et al., 2008, Gleich-Bope, 2014; Henry, 2007, Rasasingham, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Subsequent absenteeism. Students who are chronically absent in previous school years are more likely to be chronically absent during the current school year. In fact, once a student is chronically absent his/her odds for repeating the same attendance pattern the subsequent year increases by nearly 13 times (University of Utah, 2012). Absenteeism patterns are likely to repeat themselves, leading to cumulative effects (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016). A study evaluating students chronically absent in the 3rd grade found over 67% had been chronically absent during one school year leading up to the 3rd grade year, and 50% of those students chronically absent for two or more school years (Tennessee Department of Education,

2016, p.7). Research shows the predictive nature of chronic absenteeism stretches across all grade levels.

Lower academic outcomes. Chronic absenteeism peaks in the early stages and then again at the later stages of a student's schooling. Absenteeism in the early years puts a child at risk for lowered academic outcomes. Chronic absenteeism has been cited as the most important factor linked to achievement gaps among students (Goldstein, Little, & Akin-Little, 2003). Ultimately, attendance is linked to grades, achievement tests, and standardized test scores.

The race to increase standardized test scores is a trending topic in education. There is a clear link between absenteeism and test scores. This achievement gap linked to attendance begins at an early age; students chronically absent in the 3rd grade were less likely to be proficient on standardized tests in Math and English Language Arts (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016).When outside factors, such as teacher to student ratio and socioeconomic status, were held constant, achievement on state test scores, as well as math and reading grade level scores were all correlated with student attendance (Goldstein et al., 2003).

Chronic absenteeism not only threatens the academic potential of the student missing school, but also the student's peers. Students in classrooms with a high percent of chronically absent students are more likely to have low test scores (Gottfried, 2015). An explanation to the negative spillover effect of chronic absenteeism may be found in the time teachers address the missed instruction for the absent student as a cause to decrease the pace of instruction for the entire class.

Chronic absenteeism negatively affects academic courses at all grade levels. Students who experience chronic absenteeism during the early years of schooling are less likely to read on grade level by 3rd grade (Attendance Works, 2014; Balfanz, 2016b). Third grade students unable

to read at grade level are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers (Balfanz, 2017b). Lower academic outcomes lead to an increase risk for dropping out of school. One study in Chicago evaluated the relationship between attendance, course failure, and high school graduation, and found 9th grade course performance was more predictive of a student's likelihood to graduate than any other demographic factor, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, and previous academic achievement combined (Allensworth & Evans, 2016).

Dropping out of school. Many negative behaviors are associated with student absenteeism. Students who miss school frequently are more likely to fall behind in their school work than their peers. Many of these students are more likely to drop out of school, viewing it as an easier alternative to making up their school work (Garry, 1996; Kearney, 2008; Ingul, Klockner, Silverman, Nordahl, 2012; Rasasingham, 2015; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Research suggests student attendance is a better indicator for dropping out of school than performance on standardized testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Chronic absenteeism is most prominent for high school-aged students. Students chronically absent beginning at the 8th grade are 7.4 times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers (University of Utah, 2012). A student leaving high school without obtaining a diploma is at an increased risk for negative effects into adulthood, including a higher incidence of living in poverty, unemployment, and incarceration (Peek, 2009; Schoeneberger, 2012).

Drug use and criminal behaviors. The majority of research associating absenteeism with high risk behaviors has focused on unexcused absences; however, more recent research has shifted to include both excused and unexcused absences. Researchers often cite absenteeism as a key risk factor for alcohol, tobacco, and drug use (Eaton et al., 2008; Kearney, 2008). Excessive unexcused absences have been identified as a more precise indicator of drug use than academic

standing or sexual activity (Morgan, 2004). Despite the association between both excused and unexcused absences and high-risk behaviors, it is important to note students without permission for their absences were twice as likely to participate in high-risk behaviors as those students who had permission for their absences (Eaton et al., 2008).

Chronic absenteeism is suggested to be one of the most powerful indicators for criminal behaviors, including tobacco use, alcohol use, marijuana use, other drug use, violence, and risky sexual behaviors (Balkis, Arslan, Duru, 2016; Eaton et al., 2008; Garry, 1996). Juvenile crime typically takes place during school hours; over half of criminal activities linked to truant students, such as shoplifting, burglary, vandalism, and assault, occur during the school day (Baker et al., 2001; Garry, 1996). When students are in school they are less likely to participate in criminal activity (Garry, 1996; Peek, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education (1996) cited truancy as a strong predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior. Chronic truancy has been linked to criminal behavior in children as young as 12 (Peek, 2009). Truant behavior increases a student's risk for involvement with the justice system and increases the probability of a later arrest; these actions are likely to have lasting effects into adulthood.

Effects into adulthood. Effects of student absenteeism may seep into a student's adulthood. Absenteeism and school dropout are predictors for social, financial, and health related problems in adulthood (Ingul et al., 2012). Students suffering from high rates of absenteeism are at an increased risk of unemployment and poverty as adults (Bickelhaupt, 2011; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2016; Garry, 1996; Schoeneberger, 2012). Adults who were chronically absent in school are also more likely to have poor health, including mental health (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Schoeneberger, 2012). Chronic absenteeism is linked to negative long-term implications affecting the individual as well as society.

Societal implications. Chronic absenteeism resulting in school dropout is costly to society; school districts lose funding associated with attendance rates (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Garry, 1996). Chronic absenteeism is also associated with reduced earning capacity. It has been estimated that the loss of revenue for male dropouts between the ages of 25 and 34 equates to $944 billion (Schoeneberger, 2012). Chronic absenteeism can also lead to other associated losses. Criminal behaviors and declining health relating to school dropout have resulted in losses approximating near $24 billion. Lower-income jobs and higher occurrences of unemployment linked to chronic absenteeism have also reduced the potential contributions to the tax base in the United States. Due to the severity of these implications, it is essential educators work together to uncover effective interventions to improve student absenteeism.

Interventions to Address Absenteeism

Interventions to address chronic absenteeism are beginning to surface. Previously, the majority of absenteeism interventions focused on unexcused absences, known as truancy. It is important to differentiate between the causes of the absenteeism when finding the best intervention. Not all cases of chronic absenteeism require the same interventions. Truancy interventions target students with excessive unexcused absences; these interventions typically lead to disciplinary measures (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016). Absenteeism interventions are not uniform. It is important that all interventions include the whole family and uncover the root of absenteeism to provide an individualized approach for each student.

Parental involvement. Many studies have pointed to interventions involving the whole family as a vital first step to addressing student absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Garry, 1996; London, Sanchez, Castrechini, 2016; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). In the quest to improve parental involvement, schools must work to effectively communicate with students' families.

Schools should communicate the attendance laws and policies with parents and follow up with parents after a student has missed school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Students have indicated the lack of parental knowledge of attendance laws and the procrastination, or lack of follow-up between schools and parents concerning unexcused absences, as factors which enabled their truant behavior (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016). Principals and teachers must take the initiative to ensure parents are aware of the attendance laws and inform parents of their student's unexcused absences. Open lines of communication between the school and the family provide school leaders and teachers with knowledge of how to best meet the needs of students (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Family involvement strategies, such as parent communication concerning attendance, celebrating success with the family, and hosting attendance-focused activities have proven to greatly reduce absences (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Family involvement is crucial to increasing student attendance.

Family, school, and community partnerships. It is also important for school leaders, guidance counselors, and teachers to take the time to better understand the root causes of student absenteeism (Attendance Works, 2015). One study reported students' desire for school members to take interest in their personal struggles and put interventions in place to address the root causes (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016). The school may be able to assist in partnering the student with the proper community resources to help address the primary reason for student nonattendance.

Beneficial partnerships can occur through mentors. Establishing a mentor for students with chronic absenteeism has proven to be beneficial; mentor relationships can instill feelings of school support and can dissuade students from missing school (DeSocio et al., 2007). A study by DeSocio, et al., (2007) utilized an intervention system which paired students with excessive

absences with a teacher mentor from their school. The role of the mentor was to build a relationship with the student through daily check-ins, timely follow-ups after an absence, and tutoring. In addition to providing a mentor, the school required students to sign up with the comprehensive health services provided within the school. The intervention program reported significantly better attendance among student participants, as well as increased school engagement. Intervention programs utilizing mentors has proven to be a best practice in addressing chronic absenteeism.

Incentive programs. Celebrating student attendance has a positive correlation with improved school attendance. Publicly praising students for strong attendance can help promote a school culture emphasizing importance of attendance (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Some schools have found the use of rewards as an effective method to encourage student attendance. Rewards for improved attendance have included school parties, gift certificates or recognition at school assemblies (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Punitive consequences. Unfortunately, some scenarios may require school leaders to turn to more punitive consequences as a last resort to address student absenteeism. School leaders must increase parental awareness and involvement in student attendance as well as set clear and firm consequences for truant students. Truant youth expressed the need for teachers and administrators to consistently follow through with punishments associated with truancy. When students knew punishment was unlikely to occur, the truant behavior was more likely to continue (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016).

School leaders must establish clear consequences and be consistent in enforcing them. Parents and students may be more likely to abide by attendance laws when they know the consequences are severe. Many states, including Tennessee, have linked attendance to student

driver's permit and driver's license privileges in hopes of motivating students to go to school. The fear of truancy court has also been linked to a decrease in excessive absences with some families (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gleich-Bope, 2014). Once specific and appropriate interventions are in place, there is potential for the student's school attendance and achievement to improve.

A comprehensive approach. Intervention programs nationwide have been cited for effectively reducing absenteeism and positively affecting associated risk factors. The common link among these programs is a comprehensive approach that includes involvement from the student, family, school, and community (Baker et al., 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). When all stakeholders are invested in student absenteeism, the intervention is more likely to result in a positive outcome. Many of the effective comprehensive programs also utilized meaningful penalties, including the court system, as a last resort to combat chronic absenteeism (Baker at al., 2001). Comprehensive approaches are vital in improving student attendance.

Evidence from one study has shown students who improve their attendance can get back on track with an increased likelihood of improving their academic achievement and grade point averages (Balfanz, 2016a). Positive relationships and beliefs can benefit students by reducing the negative impacts of absenteeism or changing the way students respond to the risk factors associated with absenteeism; this can lead to an increase in school attendance and positive gains in the classroom (Garry, 1996).

Potential to Defy the Odds: Whole School Approach

The risks are high and the statistics are troublesome; however, there is still hope for students who are far behind. A study entitled *Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground* (2005)

examined characteristics and practices at high-impact secondary schools that are effective at accelerating learning of low-performing students. Over the course of the study, five "spheres" which influenced school practice, emerged: culture, academic core, support, teachers, and time and other resources.

Culture. The culture of high-impact schools was found to be centered on academics, college, and career-readiness after high school. A significant difference between high-impact and average-impact high schools was the focus of the mission, goals, and attitude. Average-impact schools tended to focus on graduation, while high-impact schools tended to focus on life after graduation, specifically college and career (Education Trust, 2005). The faculty in high-impact schools has shared goals concerning student achievement, and academics are emphasized over rules and regulations. High-impact schools also share the belief all students are capable of success.

Academic core. In high-impact schools, all students are held to high expectations and encouraged to take high-level courses regardless of previous achievement. In high-impact schools, Advanced Placements courses are offered to any student who can maintain a C average; there are no prerequisites to gain approval to take these difficult courses. Each student is encouraged to take risks and challenge himself/herself academically. All faculty members at high-impact schools felt responsible for student success and utilized assessment data for future planning. Principals, teachers, and counselors all believed they had a role in preparing each student for life after high school. In order to better prepare students, high-impact schools utilize test data. Instead of test data being a descriptor of the past, it becomes a window into the future. The school is invested in each student's individual growth; administrators and teachers take time

to study test data of individual students to set in place resources to strengthen the student's areas of weakness.

Support. In high-impact schools, early warning systems are in place to identify students at-risk. School staff takes responsibility to ensure these students are provided the support necessary to succeed. Within high-impact schools, students who were previously low-achieving are provided supplemental courses in English and math without sacrificing college preparatory requirements. Supplemental help at high-impact schools can include mandatory before or after school tutoring for students falling behind, optional Saturday tutorials prior to state exams, and optional tutoring before and after school as well as during lunch (Education Trust, 2005). Both high-impact and average-impact high schools form partnerships with community organizations; however, average-impact partnerships focus on dropout and drug prevention and high-impact partnerships focus on college and career readiness.

Teachers. In high-impact schools, teacher assignment is not made based on convenience or teacher requests, but made with the strengths of the teacher and the needs of the students in mind. Class sizes are determined based on the needs of the students within the class. Administrators will inflate the size of honors courses to be able to provide smaller class sizes for those students who need it most (Education Trust, 2005). This presents an opportunity for teachers to provide more individualized attention to students who are behind. High-impact schools strategize to provide the best environment for their students and their incoming teachers. In high-impact schools, administrators take the initiative to recruit the best teachers possible. Once a new teacher is hired, administration ensures he/she is supported in curriculum and instruction.

Time and other resources. High-impact schools are cautious with instructional time, specifically ensuring all students spend majority of their time in college preparatory courses. Students who enter academically behind their peers are provided supplemental courses with a focus on reading. High-impact schools guard instructional time and have expectations for teachers to provide instruction for the entire length of the class period (Education Trust, 2005).

These high-impact schools were able to produce gains in academic growth for students significantly behind in their academics. Schools can utilize these practices to combat the implications associated with chronic absenteeism. Proactive methods such as early warning systems, smaller class sizes, supplemental academic services, and a shared responsibility for student success can be implemented to help students defy the odds associated with chronic absenteeism.

The Value of the Teacher-Student Relationship

The teacher is the sole individual in the school who communicates with the student on a daily basis, has knowledge of the student's strengths and weaknesses within the classroom, and is familiar with the frequency of a student's absences. In many instances the teacher is also the individual who knows the student's interests, is aware of the student's home situation, and is someone the student spends time with. Marvul (2012) found the teacher-student relationship to be key in a student's commitment to school (as cited in Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2015, p. 66).

Research has demonstrated the impact of a positive teacher-student relationship on academic success. Teachers' perceptions and attitudes significantly impact the academic progress of their students (Muller, 2001). Positive, supportive relationships between students and teachers influence student motivation, sense of belonging, school engagement, and academic performance (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, n.d.; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). The teacher-student

relationship has been found to be the most powerful predictive influence of a student's sense of belonging (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Teachers no longer serve academic needs alone; the expectations to serve students social and emotional needs are becoming more evident in the teacher role.

The perception that a teachers' impact on a student is limited to academia misses the influence teachers have on student learning and development. Recent research suggests the teacher's role in the teacher-student relationship is significant in addressing students' social and emotional needs. Social and emotional concerns can negatively affect students' attendance and performance. (Phillippo & Stone, 2013).

The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher has continually evolved from solely focusing on curriculum to now encompassing social and emotional needs of students. This study evaluates the role of the teacher through the lens of role theory, which allows experiences and beliefs to shape the definition of roles. By utilizing role theory, one is able to comprehend how the same role may be met with differing perspectives of responsibilities and behaviors due to personal experiences and ideas. Role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload are also addressed to better understand the intricacies of the teacher role.

Role Theory

Role theory explains roles, or behavior patterns, with the idea that people are members of social positions and have expectations for the behavior of themselves and others (Biddle, 1986). In relation to the workforce, role theory emphasizes the importance of how an employee's role is defined to their actual practices (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Roles are often formed from expectations and experiences (Biddle, 1986). Roles are not concrete and can be interpreted

differently. Individual's perceptions of the role based on their background, influences, and beliefs aid in defining the role. The role of the teacher may also be interpreted differently, even among teachers within the same school building due to the teacher's individual interpretation of his/her role (Phillippo & Stone, 2013).

There are times when expectations and views of a role are incompatible, in such instances there is a role conflict (Biddle, 1986). Role conflict occurs when two or more individuals have different ideas and expectations for the behavior associated with a certain role. Role conflict has been associated with high stress, poor job performance, and a decrease in commitment to the workplace. A variation in perspective of role definition can lead to negative effects in schoolhouse. Phillippo and Stone (2013) found teachers without a clearly defined role in regards to student support are more likely to have varying practices and effectiveness based on the teacher's skill and personality. Role conflict in defining the responsibilities of the teacher may result in disproportionate support for the students.

Role theorists have also proposed conditions such as role ambiguity and role overload. Role ambiguity occurs when expectations for a role are unclear, incomplete, or inadequate to guide behavior (Biddle, 1986). As the role of the teacher evolves to meet the needs of the students, policies and expectations are not always clear. Role overload occurs when an individual is faced with an overwhelming amount of expectations. With increasing expectations of the teacher in classrooms throughout the nation, many teachers feel overwhelmed and unsupported (Phillippo & Stone, 2013).

Role theory supports the claim that individuals within the same role may have different definitions and expectations of the role due to individual experiences, perceptions, and ideas. Instances of role conflict occur when individuals have different expectations of the

responsibilities of a certain role. The role of the teacher is evolving to expand from solely focusing on curriculum to also encompassing support of students' social and emotional needs.

Evolving Role of the Teacher

Teacher roles in the United States have typically encompassed curriculum and instruction; however, there has been a shift in the role of the teacher to include the social and emotional needs of the child (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). The teacher's role of facilitating positive relationships in the classroom has been found to be as important as the teacher's role in delivering effective instruction and supporting positive learning communities (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Although there is a shift to support the needs of the students outside of the delivery of instruction, little professional development in this area has been documented. Despite the lack of training to tend to the needs of the whole child, many teachers do this anyway (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). This expansion of the teacher role has shifted away from solely focusing on instruction, and has evolved to include the teacher-student relationship.

Strong teacher-student relationships. It is essential teachers believe their relationships with students can make a difference in the students' lives; furthermore, this teacher belief strongly correlates to the success of their students (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Teacher support can be described as kindness, encouragement, willingness to help, interest in the student, and high expectations for the student. The support of the teacher has proven to shield the student's academic achievement against negative effects of limited parental support, poverty, depression, and dangerous neighborhoods. Strong teacher-student relationships are related to increased resiliency, academic engagement, and achievement (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). This strong bond between the teacher and the student also increases the likelihood of a student graduating on time.

***In loco parentis*.** The term *in loco parentis* stands for "in place of a parent". A variety of definitions can be linked to the term *in loco parentis*, even within the realm of education. For the purpose of this research, *in loco parentis* is defined as an ethical metaphor for the role of professional teachers who maintain added responsibilities for the care, support, and protection of students (Alberta Teaches' Association, 2017; Hall & Manins, 2001).

One indicator of highly effective schools for students is a homelike environment based on care and respect for all students mimicking that of an extended family relationship (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). "While initial work in attachment theory focused on the mother-child relationships, the teacher-student relationship has been investigated with the emerging view: a caring and supportive teacher can make similar, meaningful impacts in shaping youth outcomes" (Mason, Hajovsky, McCune, & Turek, 2017). This is not to support the notion the teacher-student relationship is capable of fulfilling the role of an effective parent, but to highlight the importance of the teacher-student relationship and the teachers' role in the care, support and protection of students (Hall & Manins, 2001).

Role of the teacher to motivate students. The role of the teacher has also expanded to include student motivation. Some may even argue one of the most important tasks of a teacher is to create an environment to develop and sustain student motivation (Hornstra, Mansfield, van der Veen, Peetsma, & Volman, 2015). The methods teachers employ to instill motivation within their students varies. While many teachers find it beneficial to utilize autonomy-supportive strategies, others may find controlling strategies easier to use in the classroom. Autonomy-supportive strategies are linked to fostering intrinsic motivation while controlling strategies are linked to extrinsic strategies. More often than not, a combination of both motivational strategies is utilized to increase student motivation. Motivational strategies are employed to propel learning

outcomes; however, one model seeks to motivate students with the intention of meeting students' needs simultaneously.

The Three Levels of Motivation in Instruction (3LOM) outlined by Cao (2005) is a model which explores the teacher's role in motivating students. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) serves as the basis of the 3LOM model, because the purpose of this model is to meet the needs of the student. The model is based upon values which speak to the need for the teacher to understand student needs and help each student achieve his/her full potential. The model outlines three levels of motivation: inclusion, entertainment, and edification.

The first level, inclusion, highlights the importance of the teacher role in ensuring that all students feel welcome in the classroom. Student motivation blossoms when the student's social and emotional needs have been met. This can be accomplished by the teacher's knowledge of student names and individual abilities, as well as acts of compassion, appreciation, and understanding (Cao, 2005). Entertainment as a level of motivation is predicated upon the teacher working to ensure instruction is fun through careful selection of class materials, lesson delivery, and teaching style. The use of humor in the classroom is one strategy teachers may use to intrinsically motivate students while keeping student interest in the lesson (AbdAli, Ashur, Ghazi, & Muslim, 2016). The use of humor can increase student engagement and lead to more positive teacher-student relationships (AbdAli, Ashur, Ghazi, & Muslim, 2016; Kosiczky & Mullen, 2013). The third level of motivation in the 3LOM method is edification. In many ways, edification is synonymous to self-actualization described by Maslow. As self-actualization seeks to fulfill one's potential, edification aids in improving one's intellectual, moral or spiritual understandings. The teacher's role can support student self-actualization by exposing learners to an extensive amount of general knowledge and then encouraging students to gain further insight

into an area of expertise. Cao (2005) suggested teachers be knowledgeable of students, encourage students in their areas of strengths, and increase parental and family involvement in the student's education.

Teachers utilize a variety of strategies to instill motivation in students. The Three Levels of Motivation in Instruction seeks to motivate students while meeting their basic needs as outlined by Maslow. The teacher's role has evolved to include fostering teacher-student relationships, meeting the social-emotional needs of students, and motivating students. With chronic absenteeism at the forefront of topics in education, it is presumed the role of the teacher will evolve to address student absenteeism.

The Role of the Teacher in Addressing Student Absenteeism

The teacher-student relationship can influence attendance, social-emotional needs of the student, and academic outcomes. When the school community takes a collective responsibility for the attendance and achievement of all children in the school building, attendance is likely to improve (Allensworth & Evans, 2016). The teacher plays an important role in this village.

The teacher relationship is at the focal point of many students' school experiences and impacts student attendance (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016). Practice has shown that monitoring attendance can no longer be the sole job of secretaries in the school building. Every teacher plays an important role (Allensworth & Evans, 2016). Teachers who actively monitor attendance and make an effort to uncover the root issues behind student absences in an encouraging and caring way are able to make a positive impact on student attendance (Allensworth & Evans, 2016; Gase et al., 2016). This effort by the teacher sends the message that the student's absences matter, and in turn makes the student feel cared for by the teacher. When students feel cared for, they are more motivated to attend class. It is unquestionable that the role

of the teacher within the school community is vital in addressing student achievement and attendance. However, the question remains, "Do teachers perceive strategies to improve student attendance within their role as a teacher?"

Summary

Schools are able to provide advantages beyond skills in reading, writing, and math. However, students who are chronically absent are missing learning opportunities as well as additional benefits tied to education. Chronic absenteeism is a problem nationwide with risk factors too costly to ignore. Policymakers have taken note to this pressing issue, and have instituted measures to ensure chronic absenteeism is now reported. School systems across Tennessee are now using the Chronic Absenteeism indicator to measure chronic absenteeism. This new component of legislation attached to the Every Student Succeeds Act has urged superintendents and school leaders to search for ways to improve student absenteeism. To address the attendance issue, local school systems have revisited system-wide attendance policies. Although policy changes are needed for remediating student non-attendance, the personal connection between teachers, students, and families is also critical. Interventions that take a comprehensive approach to include the family, school, and community are shown to be best practices in addressing student attendance and achievement. Research also indicates that positive teacher-student relationships are crucial to supporting student needs, which can lead to increased attendance and achievement. With this knowledge, it is understandable that the role of the teacher has evolved to include aspects outside of instruction alone, and now include the social-emotional needs of students. Due to the significance of the teacher-student relationship, research points to the role of the teacher as an important avenue to address chronic absenteeism;

however, the teacher's perspective of the responsibilities associated with his or her role is not

well documented.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand teachers' perspectives on their roles and responsibilities of improving student attendance. In order to better understand teachers' experiences and perspectives, this study used teacher surveys, teacher interviews, and administrator interviews. This chapter outlines the methodology of this qualitative study and includes descriptions of qualitative research, phenomenology, participants and setting, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and data analysis procedures.

With new accountability standards focusing on chronic absenteeism, Tennessee school districts face increased pressure to scrutinize student attendance. Due to the influence and importance of the teacher, as well as the teacher-student relationship, this study examined teachers' perceptions of their roles in improving student attendance. In order to do so, the study focused on the following research questions:

1. Do secondary teachers believe they have a role in improving student attendance?

2. What responsibilities do secondary teachers perceive to be associated with their role in improving student attendance?

Description of Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers often aim to reveal a holistic picture of a person's experiences and perceptions. Furthermore, qualitative researchers have been known for striving to better understand participants' perspectives and behaviors (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2013). A qualitative research design was selected to better understand teachers' perceptions on their role in improving student attendance. In order to gain a holistic insight into teacher experiences, understandings, and perceptions of student absenteeism, the researcher utilized surveys in the form of a teacher questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

A survey is a data collection instrument that allows the researcher to gain knowledge of a specific population's perceptions (Ary et al., 2013; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Serving as a commonly distributed survey tool, a questionnaire contains written survey questions that can be emailed to potential participants. Online questionnaires are a cost efficient method that allows anonymity and convenience for the respondents (Ary et al., 2013). By contrast, interviews provide a more in-depth look into participants' experiences and beliefs of the particular phenomenon being studied (Gay et al., 2009). Interviews often take form of a conversation in which the focus is to better understand the participants' views (deMarrais, 2004).

Research Approach

A phenomenological study was employed to interpret the meaning of the teachers' experiences of improving student attendance while also providing a rich description of the perceptions teachers hold of their responsibilities in improving student attendance. Phenomenology allows researchers to examine the details of every day human experience (deMarrais, 2004). Through the use of phenomenology, this study aimed to explore the experiences from the perspective of the participants and then find common meanings from those experiences (Alase, 2017; Ary et al., 2013; deMarrais, 2004). By better understanding the experiences of individuals, a more complex meaning arose.

Description of the Study Participants and Setting

This study explored student absenteeism in a rural East Tennessee school district. The participants in this qualitative study worked in a large public school district that educated students in grades K-12 (TN Department of Education, n.d.). Additionally, a majority of the student population in the research district was white (85.7%), with Hispanic or Latino students

comprising 10.2% of the student population, African American students 2.1% of the student population, and Asian students 1.4% of the student population.

Since students who are economically disadvantaged are at a higher risk for chronic absenteeism, this mandates a thorough examination of the district's student population classified as economically disadvantaged. In the 2014-15 school year, 63.3% of the district's student population was considered economically disadvantaged, while only 33.9% of the student population was considered economically disadvantaged in the 2015-16 school year. The dramatic difference is due to the recent change in the definition of "economically disadvantaged" for accountability purposes. Prior to the 2015-16 school year, "economically disadvantaged" was defined by eligibility for the National School Lunch Program, which provided free or reduced lunch to students from families with incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level (Wilson, 2016). During the 2015-16 school year, the definition for "economically disadvantaged" changed to only include:

> children who are directly identified as receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (or food stamps), those whose families participate in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, students who experience homelessness and are on the local school district liaison's list of homeless students, Head Start participants, migrant youth, runaways, foster children, and others who may be certified by state or local officials. (Wilson, 2016, p.42-43)

While district data is not available to examine chronic absenteeism of economically disadvantaged students specifically, student attendance, as measured by the average daily attendance rate, showed a decrease of attendance in the economically disadvantaged subgroup. In grades 9-12, the research district reported a 92% attendance rate for the student body, and 89.6%

attendance rate for students considered economically disadvantaged (Tennessee Department of Education, n.d.).

Sampling

A sample is defined as a number of individuals that represent a larger population of whom the study is applicable (Ary et al., 2013; deMarrais, 2004). In an effort to better understand chronic absenteeism from the teacher perspective, the sample in the study included secondary teachers and administrators serving students in grades 9-12 from five different schools in the previously described East Tennessee school district. The participants in the study voluntarily participated in the survey and interview process. Permission was granted to conduct the research from the Carson-Newman's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the assistant superintendent of the school district, and principals of the participating schools.

In the first phase of the research, convenience sampling was used to better understand the teachers' experiences and perceptions in the district in which the researcher is employed. Convenience sampling is based on accessibility and proximity (Ary et al., 2013). The researcher used convenience sampling due to ease of access as well as particular interest in the selected district. The researcher emailed the principals of the secondary schools in the research district to inform them of the nature of the study and request they forward the questionnaire to their teachers. The second phase of research used purposive sampling and included a group of six secondary teachers and four administrators. Purposive sampling is requires the participants to meet specific criteria at the time of the study (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The sample included secondary teachers currently teaching in grades 9-12, who believe they have a role in monitoring student attendance. These criterion were formulated to ensure the study explored the perceptions

of teachers who have a common experience in improving student absenteeism. The second set of interviews included a sample of administrators who play a role in monitoring student attendance.

Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative study focused on the role of teachers improving student absenteeism. Prior to collecting data, a small sample of middle school teachers participated in a pilot study in which they were asked to complete the survey. The purpose of this survey was to test the clarity of the prompts. Pilot studies are a valuable element of research design and allow the researcher to test the appropriateness of the research instruments, identify potential problems, and estimate variability of responses (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Prior to beginning the interview process, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview. A bracketing interview is a process in which the researcher is interviewed using the research questions he/she plans to use in the study. The purpose of the bracketing interview is to identify the researcher's beliefs and assumptions (deMarrais, 2004). The researcher then used a survey and two sets of interviews to collect data on teacher perceptions of their role in improving student attendance.

Survey

An online survey was the first form of data collection used to examine common themes, strategies, and perceptions among secondary teachers concerning their role in improving student attendance. The survey also served as a means for triangulation for the qualitative study and to identify the purposive sample for the interview process. Also, the prompts were created following an extensive review of the literature. The prompts were field-tested for clarity by middle school educators not involved in the study. The initial questions were demographic in nature, including grade level taught and years of experience. The instrument used a four point Likert scale ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree*, (2) *Disagree Somewhat*, (3) *Agree Somewhat*,

and (4) *Strongly Agree* for the six prompts. Principals of the districts' five high schools were sent a questionnaire and asked to distribute it to their teachers via email. Six teachers and four administrators were then asked to participate in the interview process of the study; the participants selected the interview location. The survey was administered using Google Forms; the data from the survey was automatically organized into a Google Sheets spreadsheet. The items in the Google Forms survey are located in Appendix A.

Interviews

The most common and appropriate form of data collection for phenomenological research is the interview (Ary et al., 2013; Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Interviews provide a more in-depth understanding of the experience and perceptions of a small, targeted sample of teachers. The semi-structured interview was scheduled with each participant at a time and place of their convenience. The researcher followed the suggestions outlined by Alase (2017) in utilizing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); the researcher should:

- Conduct semi-structured and unstructured interviews with the sample ranging from 2-25 participants.

- Conduct an interview with a 60-minute to 90-minute duration period.

- Interview each participant one time unless there is a need for a follow-up interview.

- Allow the participants to decide the date, time, and place for the interview; with the researcher's preference being the participants' place of comfort.

- Utilize a variety of data collection tools, such as a recording devices and note-taking.

The researcher followed these suggestions while collecting data throughout the interview process.

The first set of semi-structured interviews included secondary teachers in order to gain insight into their experiences and perspectives of their role in improving student attendance. The second set of interviews included administrators familiar with policies associated with student attendance. The second set of interviews provided insight into administrators' perceptions of the teacher role in improving student attendance. The interview questions were modified from Sculles' (2013) study that investigated chronic absenteeism from the perspectives of the student, parent, and school leader. The interview guides can be located in Appendix B and C. Individual interviews were conducted at a location chosen by each participant. The researcher took notes and recorded the interviews in order to ensure accuracy. The researcher used a semi-structured interview method to allow the participant to take the lead in describing their experiences and perceptions in improving student attendance. Next, the researcher reviewed and transcribed the interview recordings and the field notes taken during the interviews. During data analysis, coding was used to identify recurring themes in order to better understand common perceptions teachers hold.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher carefully fulfilled the responsibility and obligation to obtain proper permission before conducting the qualitative research with human subjects. Permission was obtained by Carson-Newman University's IRB, the assistant superintendent of the research district, and school administrators. The researcher took precautionary measures to ensure informed consent was obtained by each participant and to protect participants' identities, perspectives, and their affiliated place of work. Informed consent is central to ethical

considerations; it is based upon the idea that participants have the authority to decide if they want to participate in the study. In order to make an informed decision, participants must be knowledgeable about the role and expectations of the participants within the research (Howe & Moses, 1999). The informed consent form, located in Appendix D, reminded participants their participation was voluntary and they could quit at any time. It also advised that no incentives would be offered to them for their participation, the interviews would be audio-recorded, and all materials related to the study would be secured on a password protected computer. Confidentiality of the participants was maintained by providing pseudonyms for participants and their affiliated school would not be identified.

Trustworthiness Techniques.

A variety of techniques were used to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation supports credibility, dependability and confirmability of the study. Triangulation is used within research to ensure the phenomenon is viewed from multiple perspectives, while also ensuring each form of data collection yields supporting results (Ary et al., 2013). To achieve triangulation, the study used a questionnaire and two sets of interviews. Member checks is a method to support credibility of the study and demonstrates consideration to the participants (Ary et al., 2013; Padilla-Diaz, 2015). After collecting data, the participants were asked to complete member checks by reviewing the field notes and transcripts from the interview, as well as the researcher's interpretations for accuracy. Peer debriefing was used to support credibility and confirmability of the study. The researcher provided raw data along with the interpretation of that data to peers to assess if the interpretation was reasonable given the evidence. An audit trail was used throughout the study to establish dependability and confirmability within the study. The audit trail included raw data gathered during data collection,

records of the researcher's thought processes and decisions, findings of the study, and other well-organized notes. Detailed descriptions of the context were used throughout the study to support transferability with regard to the confidentiality of the participants.

Limitations/Delimitations.

Limitations to the study can be found in the data-collection methods. The survey method of data collection relied on participants to self-report. The participants' perspectives are not observable when utilizing a survey and must be inferred from the responses (Ary et al., 2013). To alleviate this limitation, the researcher utilized data triangulation by using interviews in addition to the survey. The presence of the researcher during the interview proved to be a limitation in the study, as the researcher could have influenced the response and behavior of the participants. Social desirability bias may result in participants reporting what they think the interviewer wants or expects to hear. The researcher assured the participants their responses were confidential, and each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interview for accuracy. The researcher used a small pilot study to evaluate the clarity of the questions and the absence of any bias, as well as peer debriefing, member checks, and an audit trail to limit any personal bias.

Delimitations, characteristics in the researcher's control that may limit the study, can be found in the sampling techniques. The researcher used convenience sampling when administering the survey and purposive samples for the interview. Convenience sampling and purposive sampling can limit the generalizability of a study (Ary et al., 2013; Simon, 2011). The research was conducted within one school district in East Tennessee. Another limitation that stemmed from the sample is the researcher's employment within the district of the population studied. To decrease the potential bias due to the researcher's position within the school system,

the survey responses were anonymous, with the exception of the e-mail addresses provided by participants willing to participate in the interview. The researcher did not select interview participants who worked within the same school as the researcher to decrease potential bias.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in phenomenological research is characterized by identifying common meanings of the experiences as perceived by the participants (Ary et al., 2013; Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The researcher collected data in the form of an online teacher survey and interviews.

Survey

The survey was designed to gather participants' perceptions from a broader sample. The survey provided insight into teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities related to student attendance. A Google Form survey was created with demographic information and six prompts specific to the teacher and student attendance. A Likert scale ranging from (1) *Strongly Disagree,* (2) *Disagree Somewhat*, (3) *Agree Somewhat*, and (4) *Strongly Agree,* was used to measure teacher perception. The information obtained through Google Form survey was automatically generated into a Google Sheets spreadsheet. The Google Sheets included percentages of each of the four Likert responses for each prompt. The frequency and mean of the four responses was also calculated for each prompt by the researcher.

Interviews

To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher chose to use the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The IPA approach provides researchers the opportunity to explore the experiences' of the research participants in detail (Alase, 2017). Data coding is essential to data analysis. Data coding sorts the data into categories that can be used for comparison of the data and to formulate theoretical concepts (Ary et al., 2013). The researcher

began the data coding process by reading through the notes and transcripts from the interviews. This process was conducted at least three times each to identify common themes and repeated words or phrases in the participants' responses. The researcher used the initial codes to develop a manageable set of categories. The process of condensing helps the researcher uncover the 'core essence' of the participants' perspectives (Alase, 2017). During the third cycle of the data coding process, the researcher aims to capture the core essence of the participants' experiences in a few words.

The researcher used the common method of 'bracketing'. This allows researchers to separate themselves and their preconceived ideas from the participants' experiences. Creswell, as cited by Alase (2017), advised researchers to describe their own experiences related to the study. Then, the researcher should take essential statements made by the participants and categorize them into themes or 'meaning units'. Next, the researcher uncovered the textual descriptions, a description of what the participants experienced including verbatim examples. Subsequently, the researcher wrote a description of how the experience happened, referred to as the structural description. Using the textual and structural descriptions, as well as the researcher's own experiences, a composite description was written to communicate the overall essence of the phenomenon (Alase, 2017; Ary et al., 2013).

Summary

The phenomenological qualitative research design provided the opportunity to evaluate the experiences and perceptions of teachers in their quest to decrease student absenteeism. The researcher used surveys and interviews to better understand the core essence of the participants' lived experiences. The survey targeted a larger sample of secondary teachers through convenience sampling and aided in gathering a broader knowledge of perceptions and

experiences. The survey fostered the purposive sampling of the teacher interviews. The interviews were used to target a small number of secondary teachers and administrators to better understand their perception of the teacher role in improving student absenteeism. These forms of data collection provided an in-depth look at the teachers' perceptions, experiences, and actions concerning student absenteeism. The data was coded and analyzed for common themes and the overall essence of a teacher's role to improve student attendance.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine if teachers perceive they have a role in improving student attendance, and if so, what responsibilities teachers perceive as associated with their role. This qualitative study analyzed three pieces of data to provide triangulation. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews with teachers to better understand teachers' perception of their role and responsibilities to improve student attendance. The researcher also collected data from an online survey and semi-structured interviews with administrators to inform the analysis of the teacher interviews.

The online survey was created using Google Forms and included six prompts to which the secondary teachers in the research district rated their agreement or disagreement using a four-point Likert scare. The Google Form survey was emailed to secondary principals who subsequently sent the link to the survey to their teachers using the school district email addresses. One hundred and twenty-one secondary teachers in the district completed the online survey. The Google Form included an optional response item that asked participants interested in a confidential, individual interview to submit their email address. Six secondary teachers were then selected to participate in a semi-structured interview. Next, four administrators from secondary schools in the research district who work closely with attendance were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The analysis of data was used to answer the following research questions:

1. Do secondary teachers believe they have a role in improving student attendance?
2. What responsibilities do secondary teachers perceive to be associated with their role in improving student attendance?

Presentation of Participants

The online survey was sent to all the teachers in the research district who taught in grades 9-12 in one of the five high schools. Of the accessible population, 121 respondents participated in the survey. The survey included an optional response item asking for individuals interested in participating in an interview. The sample selection for the teacher interviews was then narrowed by using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to use his/her knowledge and experiences to select a sample of participants who can provide the information necessary to gain maximum insight about the topic (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2013). Potential participants in the first set of interviews must be secondary teachers and cannot work in the school of the researcher. An individual, semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the six teacher participants. The researcher also used purposeful sampling to select participants for the administrator interviews. Potential participants in the second set of interviews must be administrators of a high school within the research district, must work closely with student attendance, and cannot work in the school of the researcher. Four participants were selected for the administrator interviews. An individual, semi-structured interview was also conducted with each of the four administrator participants.

Presentation of Results: Survey Prompts and Responses

At the close of the survey, 121 responses had been collected. The participants answered six different prompts regarding their perception on the role and responsibilities of the teacher in improving student attendance. Participants included teachers currently teaching grades 9-12 in one of the five high schools in the research district. Of the 121 survey participants, 23 teachers had 0-5 years of experience, 45 teachers had 6-15 years of experience, 31 teachers had 16-25

years of experience, and 22 teachers had 26 or more years of experience. Table 4.1 presents the

survey participants years of experience.

Table 4.1
Survey Participants Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Number of Participants	%
0-5	23	19.0
6-15	45	37.2
16-25	31	25.6
26+	22	18.2
Totals (N=121)		

The Google Form used to collect survey responses organized the data from each prompt into a

pie chart of frequency and percentages of each answer.

Prompt 1. The Teacher Has a Role in Monitoring Student Attendance.

The majority of teacher participants agreed the teacher has a role monitoring student

attendance with an average Likert score of 3.46. Of the 121 participants, 91.8% ($n = 111$)

indicated they agreed with 58.7% ($n = 71$) having selected they (4) *Strongly Agree* and 33.1% ($n = 40$) choosing they (3) *Agree Somewhat*. Choices (1) *Strongly Disagree* and (2) *Agree Somewhat* had the same number of responses totaling 4.1% each ($n = 5$). Table 4.2 presents the

data from prompt one.

Table 4.2
Prompt 1. The Teacher Has a Role in Monitoring Student Attendance

Likert Score	Number of Participants	%
(1) Strongly Disagree	5	4.1
(2) Disagree Somewhat	5	4.1
(3) Agree Somewhat	40	33.1
(4) Strongly Agree	71	58.7
Totals (N=121)		

Prompt 2. The Teacher Has a Role in Improving Student Attendance.

The teachers' perceptions of their role in improving student attendance was

predominately positive. A majority of the participants, 73.6% ($n = 89$) agreed the teacher has a

role in improving student attendance. (3) *Agree Somewhat* was chosen most frequently, with

57.9% (*n* = 70) teachers selecting this category, and (4) *Strongly Agree* was chosen by 15.7% (*n*

= 19) teachers. (2) *Disagree Somewhat* was selected by 17.4% (*n* = 21) teachers and (1) *Strongly*

Disagree chosen by 9.0% (*n* = 11) teachers. The average Likert score was 2.80. Table 4.3

displays the data from prompt two.

Table 4.3
Prompt 2. The Teacher Has a Role in Improving Student Attendance

Likert Score	Number of Participants	%
(1) Strongly Disagree	11	9.0
(2) Disagree Somewhat	21	17.4
(3) Agree Somewhat	70	57.9
(4) Strongly Agree	19	15.7
Totals (N=121)		

Prompt 3. The Teacher Has an Influence on a Student's Desire to Attend School.

Teacher respondents reported the teacher is influential in a student's desire to attend

school. The mean Likert score equaled 3.40. Of the 121 teacher respondents, 115 were in

agreeance. (3) *Agree Somewhat* was chosen by 49.6% (*n* = 60) teachers, and (4) *Strongly Agree*

was selected by 45.5% (*n* = 55) of teachers. Only 4.1% (*n* = 5) of teachers reported they (2)

Disagree Somewhat and 0.8% (*n* = 1) chose (1) *Strongly Disagree*. Table 4.4 exhibits the data

from prompt three.

Table 4.4
Prompt 3. The Teacher Has an Influence on a Student's Desire to Attend School

Likert Score	Number of Participants	%
(1) Strongly Disagree	1	0.8
(2) Disagree Somewhat	5	4.1
(3) Agree Somewhat	60	49.6
(4) Strongly Agree	55	45.5
Totals (N=121)		

Prompt 4. The Teacher Has a Responsibility to Call Home When a Student Has Missed Several Days of School.

Teacher perceptions on the teacher's responsibility to call home when a student has several absences were varied. This prompt has the lowest average Likert score, 2.47. In agreeance were 52.1% of respondents, with 47.9% of teachers in disagreement. In the agreeance categories, 14.9% ($n = 18$) chose (4) *Strongly Agree* and 37.2% ($n = 45$) of teachers selected (3) *Agree Somewhat*. In the disagreement categories, 19.8% ($n = 24$) of teachers responded (1) *Strongly Disagree* and 28.1% ($n = 34$) of teachers selected (2) *Disagree Somewhat*. Table 4.5 displays the data for prompt four.

Table 4.5
Prompt 4. The Teacher Has a Responsibility to Call Home When a Student Has Missed Several Days of School

Likert Score	Number of Participants	%
(1) Strongly Disagree	24	19.8
(2) Disagree Somewhat	34	28.1
(3) Agree Somewhat	45	37.2
(4) Strongly Agree	18	14.9
Totals (N=121)		

Prompt 5. The Teacher Has a Responsibility to Call Home When a Student's Absences are Hindering the Student's Achievement.

Majority of teachers agreed the teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student's absences hindered his/her achievement. The average Likert score was 3.18. Of the 121 teacher responses collected, 101 teachers were in agreeance. (4) *Strongly Agree* was selected by 39.6% ($n = 48$) and 43.8% ($n = 53$) chose (3) *Agree Somewhat*. Five percent ($n = 6$) chose (1) *Strongly Disagree*, while 11.6% ($n = 14$) chose (2) *Disagree Somewhat*. Table 4.6 displays the data for prompt five.

Table 4.6
Prompt 5. The Teacher Has a Responsibility to Call Home When a Student's Absences are Hindering the Student's Achievement

Likert Score	Number of Participants	%
(1) Strongly Disagree	6	5.0
(2) Disagree Somewhat	14	11.6
(3) Agree Somewhat	53	43.8
(4) Strongly Agree	48	39.6
Totals (N=121)		

Prompt 6. The Teacher Has a Responsibility to Notify an Administrator and/or School Counselor When a Student Has Missed Several Days of School.

Most teacher responses indicated teachers have a responsibility to notify an administrator or school counselor when a student has missed several days of school. The average Likert score equaled 3.17. Over three-fourths of teacher responses were in agreeance; 48.8% ($n = 59$) of the teachers chose (4) *Strongly Agree* and 29.7% ($n = 36$) of teachers chose (3) *Agree Somewhat.* A smaller percentage of teachers disagreed, 11.6% ($n = 14$) of the teachers selected (2) *Disagree Somewhat* and only 9.9% ($n = 12$) of teachers chose (1) *Strongly Disagree.* Table 4.7 exhibits the data from prompt six.

Table 4.7
Prompt 6. The Teacher Has a Responsibility to Notify an Administrator and/or School Counselor When a Student Has Missed Several Days of School

Likert Score	Number of Participants	%
(1) Strongly Disagree	12	9.9
(2) Disagree Somewhat	14	11.6
(3) Agree Somewhat	36	29.7
(4) Strongly Agree	59	48.8
Totals (N=121)		

Table 4.8 displays the percent summary of Likert responses for each of the six prompts.

Table 4.8

Percentage Summary of All Likert Responses

Prompt	(1) SD	(2) DS	(3) AS	(4) SA
(1) The teacher has a role in monitoring student attendance.	4.1	4.1	33.1	58.7
(2) The teacher has a role in improving student attendance.	9.1	17.4	57.9	15.7
(3) The teacher has an influence on a student's desire to attend school.	0.8	4.1	49.6	45.5
(4) The teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student has missed several days of school.	19.8	28.1	37.2	14.9
(5) The teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student's absences are hindering the student's achievement.	5.0	11.6	43.8	39.7
(6) The teacher has a responsibility to notify an administrator and/or school counselor when a student has missed several days of school.	9.9	11.6	29.8	48.8

Note. SD= strongly disagree; DS= disagree somewhat; AS= agree somewhat; SA= strongly agree.

Presentation of Results: Analysis of Teacher Interview Data

A 13-question interview guide was used to collect data from the six teacher participants to better understand teachers' perceptions of their role in improving student attendance. To gain a stronger insight into the foundation of teachers' beliefs concerning student attendance, the researcher asked the following two questions:

1. How would you describe the overall attendance of students in your school?

2. Why do you believe students are absent?

During analysis of the participants' responses, a common theme surfaced to reveal student attendance to be an area in need of improvement. Participant 1 affirmed "way too many students" are absent from school. Participant 3 described attendance as an area in which the

school struggles, and Participant 4 stated attendance has been "problemsome." Participants 2, 3, 4, and 5 agreed student attendance was improving with the new school board policy that limited the number of days a parent note could excuse a student absence. Participant 3 stated, "It [student attendance] seems to be a little better right now with the new attendance policies." Participant 4 indicated students "don't use notes as frequent as they were before because they can't use them for as many days." Participant 2 hoped the new policy would "inspire better attendance." A trend in the participants' data showed student attendance to be an area in need of improvement.

Before exploring teacher beliefs of their role in improving student attendance, the research sought to better understand the participants' perceptions of why students are absent. Three common themes emerged from the participants' responses: parental influence, lack of motivation, and health concerns. Five of the six participants identified parental influence as a reason for student absences.

The most common cited answer as to why students are absent from school revolved around parental influence. Five of the six participants affirmed the influence from home played a role in student attendance. Participant 2 identified parental influence as crucial to whether students attend school. The participant also pointed out various aspects of parental influence by stating, "If I'm a parent, and I don't have a good education, or I didn't have a good school experience, then I would want my child to [have a good experience]. You have that, but then you also have the people that didn't value it, so why should my child value it, that is huge." Participant 1 stated, "Most of it [student absences] falls back to the home life and the lack of encouragement or the lack of structure in the home." Participants 3, 5, and 6 both attributed student attendance to parents who do not see the importance of making their child come to school.

Many participants stated health concerns as a reason students miss school. Four of the six participants mentioned a reason for student absences is the child being sick or having legitimate health issues.

Another commonality among participants was the belief that lack of motivation attributed to student absences. Participant 2 expressed that some of student absences were due to apathy and laziness. Participant 4 attributed lack of motivation as the number one reason students are absent.

Other reasons participants cited as causes for student absences were lack of success in school and working to help support their family. Participant 3 stated, "If they're successful, they're more likely to come to school. If they are not successful, they don't want to come to school because nobody wants to feel unsuccessful and stupid." Participant 2 discussed an experience in which a student was living with his mother, who is disabled, and his younger sister. The student worked almost full-time while going to school to help support his family. The student confided in Participant 2 and explained that he frequently misses school because he is tired from working the previous night.

The questions detailed above provided insight into the foundational beliefs teacher participants held regarding student attendance. The research found that the majority of participants shared that student attendance was an area in need of improvement. The participants also stated various reasons for student absences. The teacher participants most frequently noted parental influence, health issues, and lack of motivation as reasons students miss school. The researcher then focused the interview questions toward the teacher's role and responsibilities in improving student attendance. The data analysis process identified four themes and sub-themes related to the teacher's role and responsibilities in improving student attendance. The themes

included shared ownership, teacher-student relationship, communication, and inconsistent application of policy.

Shared Ownership

To further understand if teachers believe they have a role in improving student attendance, the researcher asked the teacher participants, "Who is responsible for addressing student attendance concerns in your school? What are their responsibilities?" Five out of six teacher participants stated administration, more specifically the assistant principal was responsible for addressing student attendance concerns. One participant indicated the teacher was responsible for addressing student attendance concerns.

The administrator as the lead role. Most teacher participants first identified administrators as being responsible for student attendance concerns; four of the five specifically stated the assistant principal was responsible. Participants 1, 3, and 6 described the assistant principal's responsibilities as tracking student attendance, sending letters home concerning unexcused absences, meeting with parents, and attending truancy court.

Participant 5 stated the administrative staff as a whole was responsible for improving student attendance, explaining his/her school utilized a team approach among administration. Participant 5 indicated one administrator would organize attendance data for all students and the other administrators would divide the students' names and call home to find out why the student has accrued multiple unexcused absences. Following the phone call home, the teacher participant reported not knowing what the administrators do other than going to truancy court.

The teacher as the lead role. When asked who is responsible for addressing student attendance concerns within the school, one participant indicated the teacher was responsible. Participant 2 replied, "I think it starts with the teacher." Participant 2 further explained by

describing a line of command; the teacher must be aware of student attendance, and then if the teacher has concerns or questions, he/she would seek out information from the attendance secretaries or the assistant principal who monitors truancy.

The teacher as a supplemental role. Although most teacher participants indicated an administrator was responsible for addressing student attendance concerns, all participants stated the teacher did have a role in this task. Participant 2 said, "It takes a village to raise a child; I really do think the entire school and all the teachers can help every kid with their attendance." The researcher asked the teacher participants how they saw their role in responding to student attendance concerns. All six participants used terms and phrases such as personal connection, relationships, encourage, getting to know your kids, let them know you care, call home, and communication. Each participant also mentioned district and school policies associated with student attendance and the inconsistencies in enforcing these policies. The frequency of these terms and phrases noted during the data analysis process led to the identification of the three additional themes concerning the teacher's role in improving student attendance. These themes included teacher-student relationship, communication, and inconsistent application of policy.

Teacher-Student Relationship

Teacher participants perceived the teacher-student relationship as an essential component of their role in improving student attendance. The data analysis revealed three sub-themes relative to the teacher-student relationship: personal relationships, knowledge of students, and caring and encouragement.

Personal Relationships. Three of the six teacher participants specifically mentioned the importance of a personal relationship between the teacher and the students as part of their role to improve student attendance. Participant 1 stated, "As an educator, it's my role to have a personal

connection with these children." In like manner, Participant 5 said, "I think that forming relationships is the most important thing being a teacher. So if your students feel that you want them there, then they are going to be there, and they are going to be successful or attempt to be for you." Participant 5 further explained a personal relationship with students lets students know the teacher cares. Participant 2 discussed how a personal relationship sometimes personifies a parental role, stating that when a teacher cares and "kind of parents the student a little bit," the students responds in a positive way.

Knowledge of Students. Four of the six teacher participants recognized having knowledge of their students was an essential component of the teacher's role of improving student attendance. Participants 1 and 4 both declared it was their job to know the students. Participant 1 said, "As an educator it's my job to get to know these children and how they are and where they are in their lives. I think as you get to know them, you celebrate their successes." Participant 1 explained in her classroom she does not always begin class with academics, but takes the time to talk with students and discuss life. She stated, "You've got to get to know these children other than academics, and that is where we are losing it." Participant 3 stated if teachers would do a little work and find out why students are not attending, then these teachers could start to work on solutions to help students improve their attendance. Participant 2 affirmed it was vital for teachers to know their students. He further explained part of knowing students was seeking to understand their goals beyond high school. Participants 1 and 2 asserted part of improving student attendance was aligning the importance of earning a high school diploma to students' future goals. Participant 2 shared with his students that they can achieve anything they set their minds to, but they have to attend school and obtain their high school diploma.

Caring and Encouragement. When asked about the teacher role in improving student attendance, all of the teacher participants either mentioned the importance of showing students they cared or encouraging students. Participant 3 affirmed the teacher's role in responding to student attendance was crucial. She explained, "If I don't care if my kids are here or not, then why would they care. If I say, 'Wow, I missed you yesterday, what happened, what's going on', then they know that somebody cares that they are here, somebody notices." Teacher participants 1, 2, and 4 echoed the sentiment that if teachers showed they cared about the student and his/her attendance, the student was more likely to care as well. Participant 1 provided an example of how she shows students she cares by asking students how their life is going, how their family is doing, and by asking the students if they need anything.

Three participants specifically mentioned the term "encourage". However, the importance of encouraging students emerged in all of the teacher interviews. Participant 2 stated, "I think the teacher's role is very crucial in encouraging them to improve their attendance." Participant 1 shared that she tries to encourage student attendance through the use of humor in her classroom and discussing topics the students are interested in. Participant 3 discussed a time in which a student came to her class with a history of poor attendance and class participation. As Participant 3 was able to encourage the student and help her be successful in school, the student's attendance improved. Participant 3 shared when the student was encouraged and learned she could be successful in school, this success subsequently began to drive the student to improve her attendance. Participant 6 stated she always encourages her students to attend school by reminding them the importance of instructional time, particularly for hands-on classes. Throughout all the interviews, the teacher participants detailed encouraging their students through communication.

Communication

Communication was a theme which emerged in all six participant interviews when discussing the teacher's role in improving student attendance. During the data analysis process, three sub-themes emerged: student communication, parent communication, and administrator communication.

Student Communication. All six participants discussed the importance communication played in their role of improving student attendance. Two different types of teacher-student communication emerged in the data analysis process. One type of communication was focused on the specific individual and was rooted in a relationship with the student, while the other communication was more of a routine, one-size-fits all approach. While communication rooted in a teacher-student relationship was previously discussed, this section focuses more on the daily communication between teachers and students.

Two of the participants shared how they try to use communication to improve student attendance before attendance becomes problematic. Participant 1 described how she used student communication to encourage student attendance by trying to make students want to come to school. She stated, "I want them to look forward to walking in that door. I tell them every morning, 'Hey, good morning. I am glad you are here. Good to see you. Your hair looks good'." Participant 5 shared she uses communication within her classes to stress the correlation of attendance and grades.

Teacher participants discussed the importance of communicating with students when they return to school after being absent for several days. Participant 4 stated he asks the student why he/she was absent and hassles him/her, but it is his way of showing the students he cares about them and their attendance. He stated it was important to acknowledge the student's absence and

not ignore it, and continue to remind the students that attendance is important for success. Participant 2 also agreed it was important to acknowledge a student's absence and stated he tried to talk to students when they come back to school from being absent to determine the reasons for these absences. Participant 6 discussed how accidental student communication can sometimes prove to be effective at improving student attendance. She explained that when she tries to call home to inquire about a student's absences, she has more success getting the student to return to school when she makes contact with the student instead of the parent.

Parent Communication. When discussing the role of the teacher in improving student attendance, all six participants mentioned the importance of communicating with parents and revealed they do call home when they believe a student's absences are becoming problematic. Participant 3 stated she calls home if a student has missed more than one day, Participant 6 stated she calls home if a student misses more than three days, and the other four participants stated they do call home after an extended amount of time or when a student's attendance is negatively affecting his/her grades, but did not specify a particular number of days that warranted a phone call home.

Many of the teacher participants further explained their opinions on the teacher's role of communicating with parents in an effort to improve student attendance. Participant 4 affirmed it was important to call the parents and ask them to encourage their student to attend school regularly. He explained in some cases it is important to review the attendance policies with the parents. He stated if teachers call the parent with the right attitude, it is likely to improve student attendance because the parents want to see their child succeed. Participant 3 asserted calling home demonstrated to the parents that she cared. She declared, "Every parent I have has my phone number, and they've never abused it. I think if parents know the teacher cares, those

personal relationships make a difference. You have to make personal contact, and it's not easy. It takes time and it's difficult, but I took this job because I want to teach kids and so if I want to teach kids, they've got to be here."

Participants 3 and 6 shared experiences in which calling the parent proved effective in improving student attendance. Participant 3 shared a story in which a student was not coming to school. Participant 3 called home and the parent was unaware of the student's absences. The parent came to school and met with the student's teachers. Participant 3 stated:

I think just the fact that this parent became aware that maybe he had a son who was skipping school, and what the attendance requirements were, and that he would be held accountable and could go to court made a huge difference. Now he asks if his son is not at school to let him know immediately.

Participant 6 shared a similar situation in which she notified the student's grandmother of her grandson's poor attendance; the grandmother was completely unaware that her grandson had been missing school. The grandmother came to school and met with all of his teachers. After the meeting, the grandmother did not allow him to ride the school bus for a while. The grandmother drove the student to school and walked him to the front door. The student's attendance improved, and he graduated on time. Participant 2 shared an experience in which he called home several times to try to improve a student's attendance, but he was disappointed when it did not seem to help.

Three of the six teacher participants stated the phone call home made a difference. One participant stated the phone call home made a difference sometimes, and another participant stated the phone call home made a difference maybe half of the time.

Administration Communication. Half of the teacher participants expressed their role in improving student attendance included communicating with administration. Participant 5 stated she emailed the principal if a student had frequent absences. Participant 6 said teachers at her school were expected to notify the principal if a student has missed nine consecutive days, but she hoped all teachers communicated with the assistant principal and keeping her posted if a student was frequently absent. Participant 2 affirmed it was important to communicate with the attendance secretaries and the assistant principal when a student is consecutively absent from school.

Inconsistent Application of Policy and Procedures

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher noticed a common theme among the teacher participants; almost all participants mentioned policies or procedures related to student attendance practices, but they each stated the policies were inconsistently put into practice. Five of six participants mentioned inconsistency of teachers' application of policies and procedures related to student attendance. Participant 4 stated, "There is trouble with inconsistency. I know what I do, but I do not necessarily know what the other teachers do. Sometimes it's not explained thoroughly." When speaking of procedures and policies that are not enforced regularly, teacher participants most frequently mentioned calling home, student admit slips, and deducting points for unexcused absences.

Participants 3 and 6 discussed a policy that was in place to call home after a student was absent for three days. Participant 6 stated she follows the policy and hopes others follow this policy, but she does not know what her peers do. Participant 3 explained she follows the policy and checks home frequently, but she knew that not all of her colleagues followed this policy.

Four of the six participants mentioned an implemented procedure in which a student is required to get an admit when he/she returns from being absent. The admit slip distinguishes between an excused absence and an unexcused absence. The teacher is to sign the admit slip and differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. However, three of the participants stated that teachers inconsistently enforce this policy. Participant 2 affirmed, "That is another thing, getting everyone on board. I always ask for an admit slip, but often times a student won't have one stating their first period teacher didn't ask for one." Participant 4 shared similar views, stating, "Students are supposed to get an admit slip and a lot of teachers are lax on that."

Participants 2 and 5 discussed the school board policy that provided teachers the option to deduct points off a student's daily grade for each unexcused absence or deny the student the opportunity to make-up the work from day(s) the student acquires unexcused absences. Participant 2 stated enforcing the policy inspires better attendance because the student's grade can suffer. Participant 5 shared the same feelings, "I know that some teachers are taking the points off and some are not. I think once students realize that their absences have negative repercussions, such as failing the class, it helps them see the importance of being there and can influence the student to improve their attendance." Both of these participants agreed if teachers consistently enforced the policy, it would improve school attendance for those students who cared about their grades.

Presentation of Results: Analysis of Administrator Interview Data

A 12-question interview guide was used to collect data from four administrator participants to better comprehend the administrator's perception of the teacher's role in improving student attendance. The researcher posed questions to understand teachers' thoughts concerning current student attendance, reasons for student absences, responsibility for improving

attendance, and the teacher's role in improving student attendance concerns. Data analysis revealed student attendance to be an area of concern.

Four administrators were asked to describe the current student attendance in their schools. All four administrators stated student attendance could be better. Three of the four administrators stated student attendance was fair, with one administrator referring to attendance as poor. When asked why they thought students were absent, he administrators all noted parental influence and lack of motivation. Administrator D stated, "We've got a good chunk of our student population, as well as parents, who do not see school attendance as very important. It starts with parents and their own attitudes towards education and school attendance." Administrator A shared similar feelings, reporting if school was not a priority for the parents, it was frequently not a priority for the student. Administrator B noted there were an increasing number of situations in which parents would rather "let the student stay home than have to argue with their child and try to get them to go to school." Administrators A, B, and C each declared the majority of students are absent because they "don't want to come to school." Administrator A contributed students' lack of drive to attend school to students not being motivated by the instruction they receive, being bored at school, and not seeing the value of being in there every day. Administrator B stated those students chose not to attend because of bad grade school experiences, not liking someone to tell them what to do, and sheer laziness.

After learning the administrator's fundamental beliefs about student attendance and the reasons why students are absent from school, the researcher altered the questions to better understand the administrators' beliefs on who is responsible for improving student attendance and their perceptions of the teachers' responsibilities in improving student attendance. During

the data analysis process, three themes emerged: sole ownership, the teacher's role, and student attendance motivators.

Sole Ownership

To further explore the perception of the teacher's role in improving student attendance, the researcher asked the administrator participants who was responsible for improving student attendance; in response to the researcher's question, each of the administrator participants responded that a person in administration or the administrative team was responsible for improving student attendance. Administrator A stated, "Fixing poor attendance is mainly left on my shoulders. There is no one else that seems to play a significant role in students who are not attending on a regular basis." Administrator B agreed that the administrator was responsible. When asked, "What ways, if any, do you think teachers can better address attendance concerns?" Administrator B replied, "I don't. We take care of consequences and truancy and that sort of stuff in the office. Those are not things the teachers have to worry about." Administrator D also affirmed improving student attendance was the administrators' role and not the teachers' role. Although he stated it needed to be a team approach, the teacher was not included within that team. Administrator D said:

> I think it has to be a team approach. Now I've struggled with bringing it down to the classroom teacher. There's a wide variance in how much time and attention each teacher puts towards student attendance with the general prevailing thought it that they've got more important things to do.

The administrator participants unanimously agreed an administrator or administrative team was solely responsible for improving student attendance; however, Administrator A said "the

teachers should have a significant role" in improving student attendance, but she did not believe that role was always taken seriously by the teachers.

The Teacher's Role and Responsibilities

The researcher sought to understand if the administrator participants perceived teachers to have any responsibilities to improve student attendance; four responsibilities emerged from data analysis: keeping accurate attendance records, deducting points for unexcused absences, communication, and developing positive teacher-student relationships.

Accurate Attendance Records. Two of the four administrator participants stated teachers had a responsibility to keep accurate attendance records for each of their classes. Administrators A and B both specified keeping student attendance as the responsibility of the teacher. Administrator A stated, "I think it is the teacher's responsibility to know if their student is in class or not, and what I mean by that is they need to keep accurate attendance records. That is one responsibility of the teachers that should be a priority."

Deduct Points for Unexcused Absences. Three of the four administrator participants declared it was the responsibility of the teacher to deduct points from a student's daily average for unexcused absences. Administrators A, B, and C stated teachers were bound by school board policy to deduct three points from the daily average for every unexcused absence. However, Administrators A and C both stipulated the teachers did not universally follow this policy. They both indicated that any of the teachers did not enforce the policy because many of the students who are chronically absent cannot afford to lose those points anyway. Administrator A did not agree that the policy had a major effect on student attendance; however, Administrator C opined it did make a difference to those students who cared about their grades.

Communication. All of the administrative participants affirmed the teacher had a responsibility to communicate to a parent and/or administrator once a student began to miss several days of school. Three of the four participants said the teacher was responsible for contacting the parent concerning a student's attendance, and 75% of administrator participants also stipulated the teacher had a responsibility to contact an administrator if a student is missing a significant number of days.

Parent. Seventy-five percent of administrator participants stated the teachers should be responsible for contacting parents if a student had missed a significant number of days or if the student's attendance was negatively affecting the student's grade. Administrator A declared, "Parent contact is vital to improving our attendance rate and showing parents and kids that the teachers truly care whether they are there or not." Administrator D affirmed teachers should ideally be the first line of defense by calling and checking if a student is not attending. He declared teachers could best help by contacting parents in a non-punitive way that seeks to understand the student's situation and offer suggestions. He stated parents were impressed when a teacher was concerned with a student's attendance and said that is almost always had a positive impact. Administrator B said teachers should at least email the parents if the students' attendance was affecting their grades. Although the administrators noted the teachers were responsible for contacting parents, two administrative participants explained why teachers were not consistently communicating with parents about student attendance. Administrators A and D stated that a majority of teachers have a large population of students and a lot of instructional responsibilities, so they find it overwhelming to get involved in why students are not attending school.

Administrator. Three of the four participants declared it was the teacher's responsibility to communicate with the administration if the teacher was concerned about a student's attendance. Administrator A said, "If teachers see that a student is missing a significant percentage of instruction, I think it is imperative that they contact the attendance office or administration to find out if someone on the school level knows why the student is not in school." Administrator C agreed it was important for the teacher to let an administrator know if a student has not been in class for several days, but reported he wished more teachers would communicate with him concerning student attendance and do so more frequently. Administrator B agreed it was the responsibility of the teacher to let him know if a student's attendance was unsatisfactory.

Teacher-Student Relationship. The teacher-student relationship was highlighted by all four administrator participants when discussing the teacher's responsibility to improve student attendance. Administrator B said, "The biggest thing a teacher can do is to help to motivate the child by encouraging them to come, showing them when they are present that they can make progress while they're there, and trying to build a positive relationship with the student." Administrator C affirmed the teacher's demeanor in class was influential on student attendance. Administrator B agreed, stating if a student has a poor relationship with his/her teachers he/she is not as likely to be motivated to come to school. Administrator C indicated it would be helpful if the teacher would demonstrate caring by taking the time to let students know they were missed while they are absent. Administrator D shared similar feelings by indicating teachers could encourage student attendance by talking to students with more of a conferencing approach as opposed to nagging the student. Administrator A spoke of a time that a teacher invested in a student's well-being and helped improve the student's attendance; Administrator A said:

A teacher was concerned about a student and continued to talk to the student and to call

every time the student was absent because she had an interest in his well-being and did

not believe that he was in the best home environment. Because she showed him that she

cared about him and wanted him in class they established an appropriate student-teacher

relationship that later led to him being removed from the home by recommendation of his

guardian ad litem and in a much better home environment where he attends on a regular

basis.

All four administrator participants indicated teachers could encourage student attendance by

taking the time to form professional teacher-student relationships, discovering what motivates

students, and investing in the student.

Student Attendance Motivators: Negative Reinforcement

Each of the administrators mentioned at least one form of negative reinforcement as a

motivator for student attendance. Administrator D stated, "You can in some instances improve

attendance through negative reinforcement or negative consequences." The administrator

participants mentioned two types of negative reinforcement as student attendance motivators:

truancy court and disciplinary actions.

Truancy Court. The four administrator participants all discussed truancy court as a

motivating factor in student attendance. Administrator A detailed time in which the only

motivating factor to improve a student's attendance was truancy court. She explained that once

the student was in truancy court and the judge was serious, then the student came to school

regularly and graduated on time. The participants agreed truancy court can be effective, but did

not feel it was effective in every case. Administrator C said truancy court was effective at

improving student attendance at least 50% of the time. Administrator A said "truancy court has a

positive effect on a few kids, but the process has to start at a very young age to be effective." She also said that students who have had attendance issues for several years without intervention struggled to become successful. Typically, these students do not have the skills necessary to succeed in their classes, often leading to frustration and lack of motivation to attend school. Administrator B believed once at student went to truancy court he/she would "do just enough to avoid incurring the wrath of the advocate, but they do not attempt to do more than that." Although all four administrative participants believed truancy court to be effective, they all agreed it was not a motivating factor for every student.

Disciplinary Actions. Two of the four administrative participants stated disciplinary actions were sometimes helpful at improving student attendance. Administrators B and C both explained students can receive in-school detention or multiple days at the alternative school for unexcused absences. Administrator B said disciplinary actions were effective for some students, but not for every student. He explained students who do not care about school and lack parental support are not influenced by disciplinary action. Those consequences tend to work for families who are fairly responsible people.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In response to the question of secondary teachers' beliefs regarding their impact on student attendance, 73.6% of teacher survey respondents agreed that teachers have a role in improving student attendance, with 57.9% stating they Agree Somewhat and 15.7% selecting they Strongly Agreed. The six teachers who participated in interviews also agreed the teacher does have a role in improving student attendance. While one interviewed teacher expressed that the teacher held a lead role in improving student attendance, the other five participants stated the teacher's role was supplemental to the role of the administrators. The four administrator

participants stipulated the role of improving student attendance was primarily held by an administrator or the administrative team; however, each administrator did affirm the teacher had some responsibility in improving student attendance.

The second research question sought to determine teachers' perceptions regarding their roles in improving student attendance. The majority of teacher survey participants agreed the teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student's absences are hindering his/her achievement and the teacher has a responsibility to notify an administrator and/or school counselor when a student has missed several days of school. Approximately half of the survey participants (52.1%) stated the teacher had a responsibility to call home when a student had missed several days of school. The teacher interview participants affirmed the teacher's role in improving student attendance included maintaining a professional teacher-student relationship that supports personal relationships, knowledge of students, acts of caring and encouragement, as well as communication with students, parents, and administrators. Another theme that emerged was teacher inconsistency in enforcing policies and procedures related to student attendance. Many of the participants said teachers could use their role to improve student attendance if the policies and procedures relating to student attendance were followed more consistently. The administrator interview data analysis process indicated our responsibilities administrators perceived to be associated with the teacher's role in improving student attendance. Those four responsibilities are keeping accurate attendance records, deducting points for unexcused absences, communication, and developing positive teacher-student relationships. Overall, the teacher participants and the administrator participants agreed the teacher is responsible for developing positive teacher-student relationships, communicating with parents and administration, and following policies and procedures related to student attendance.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although compulsory attendance laws have been established to enforce school attendance, student absenteeism continues to be an issue nationwide. During the 2013-14 school year, over six million students in the United States were considered chronically absent (United States Department of Education, 2016). There is strong evidence that student absenteeism has a profound influence on student achievement. Student absences have been linked to poor achievement and an increase in the likelihood of a student dropping out of school (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a). Research has shown the influence of the teacher-student relationship to be influential on a student's commitment to school, motivation, and academic performance (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, n.d.; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Due to the potential influence of a teacher on student attendance, the researcher sought to investigate the teacher's perception of his/her role and responsibilities to improve student attendance.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to acquire feedback from secondary teachers and determine their perceptions of the teacher's role and responsibilities to improve student attendance. To guide the study, the researcher utilized semi-structured teacher interviews. To achieve triangulation and to inform the analysis of the teacher interviews, the researcher also collected data through the use of an online survey and semi-structured administrator interviews. One hundred and twenty-one secondary teachers in the research district completed the online survey, and six of those participants agreed to complete an individual interview. Four secondary school administrators participated in the administrator individual interviews. The analysis of data from this study provides greater understanding of teachers' perception of their role and responsibilities to improve student attendance. The researcher conducted the qualitative study to examine teachers' perceptions related to the following research questions:

1. Do secondary teachers believe they have a role in improving student attendance?

2. What responsibilities do secondary teachers perceive to be associated with their role in improving student attendance?

Findings

All of the participants in this study work in a rural public school system in East Tennessee. Additionally, all participants work in secondary schools. Data analysis of the online survey, individual teacher interviews, and individual administrator interviews provided answers for the research questions of this qualitative study. The findings of this study are based upon triangulation of the teacher interviews, online survey, and administrator interviews. To enhance credibility of the study, the researcher used triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks. The following is a summary of the findings related to each research question and the themes that emerged from the transcripts, field notes, and online survey.

Research Question One: The Teacher's Role

The role of the teacher has evolved to include more than instruction alone; the teacher's role now includes responsibilities to address the social and emotional needs of students (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Within the social and emotional needs of the student lies student attendance. When administrators and teachers share in responsibility for the attendance of students, student absenteeism is likely to improve (Allensworth & Evans, 2016). Although research has shown teachers can improve student attendance, limited research has explored teachers' perceptions of their role in these efforts. Understanding teacher perceptions is essential because teacher attitudes and actions are significant in a student's progress (Muller, 2001). Perceptions, values, and beliefs of teachers drive their actions and ultimately, student outcomes. Research supporting the influence of the teacher on a student's attendance prompted the

researcher to evaluate teachers' perceptions of their role in improving student absenteeism. The researcher aspired to answer the question, "Do secondary teachers believe they have a role in improving student attendance?" The majority of research participants indicated teachers have a role in improving student attendance. An online survey was distributed to all secondary teachers in the research district; 73.6% of survey participants indicated the teacher has a role in improving student attendance. All of the teacher interview participants affirmed the teacher has a role in improving student attendance; however, five of the six participants indicated that the primary responsibility of improving student attendance belonged to the administrators. The administrator interview participants all agreed the role of improving student attendance belonged to administration, but administrator participants stated teachers did have responsibilities to aid in the efforts. Although teacher and administrator interview participants did not find improving student attendance to be the primary role of the teacher, the majority of the participants stated the teacher had a supplemental role and a responsibility to improve student attendance.

Research Question Two: The Teacher's Responsibilities

The majority of teacher participants agreed that the responsibility to improve student attendance was encompassed in the role of the teacher, and agreed that the teacher was influential on a student's desire to attend school. Approximately 95% of teacher survey participants stated the teacher had an influence on a student's desire to attend school. Since teacher participants stipulated they had shared ownership in the role of improving student attendance and indicated that teachers were influential on a student's desire to attend school, the researcher yearned to better understand what responsibilities teachers perceived to be associated with their role. The researcher posed the question, "What responsibilities do secondary teachers perceive to be associated with their role in improving student attendance?" When analyzing the

data, three major themes emerged: teacher-student relationship, communication, and application of policy and procedures.

Teacher-Student Relationship. The teacher's role in facilitating positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom has been found to be as important as his/her role in delivering classroom instruction. The teacher-student relationship is also a powerful influence on a student's sense of belonging and the desire to attend school (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Teacher interview participants affirmed the teacher-student relationship was essential to their role in improving student attendance. Teacher interview participants described the components of a teacher-student relationship to include personal relationships, knowledge of students, and caring and encouragement. Fifty percent of teacher interview participants specifically mentioned the value of a personal relationship with students, and teacher participants also stated their role included the responsibility to know their students. This responsibility encompassed knowing students' likes and dislikes outside of the classroom, knowing their goals for the future, and taking time to better understand the reasons for student absences. Participants linked knowing and communicating with students to caring for students. All of the teacher interview participants stated encouraging students and showing the students they cared was vital to their role in improving student attendance. All of the administrator participants confirmed the teacher-student relationship was essential to the teacher's responsibility to improve student attendance. The administrator participants described the teacher-student relationship to include communication, discovering unique ways to motivate each child, and encouragement. The teacher and administrator interview participants stated forming and maintaining professional teacher-student relationships were an essential responsibility of the teachers.

Communication. Communication was a significant theme highlighted in all three data collection methods. Teacher and administrator participants all agreed communication was a responsibility of the teacher in the quest to improve student attendance. The importance of communication as an intervention to student absenteeism is well documented within the research. When there is open communication and involvement from the student, family, school and community, a positive outcome is more likely (Baker et al., 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Teacher and administrator participants stated it is the teacher's responsibility to communicate with parents and administrators in their efforts to improve student attendance.

Parent. Communicating with parents is essential to improving student attendance. Teachers and administration must communicate attendance laws and policies, follow up after a student has accrued several absences, and seek to uncover the reasons behind student absences through the use of communication (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). Teacher survey participants' results indicated that 52.1% agreed that the teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student has missed several days of school, and 83.4% of teachers indicated the teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student's absences are hindering the student's achievement. All of the teacher interview participants stated parent communication was included within their responsibilities to improve student attendance. Half of the teacher participants stated communicating with parents concerning attendance was effective in reducing student absenteeism, with two other participants stating it was only sometimes effective. Three of four administrator interview participants agreed the teacher was responsible for communicating with parents concerning a student's absences if a student had missed several days or if the absences were negatively affecting the student's grades. The teacher's responsibility to communicate with

parents concerning student attendance was a consistent theme throughout the data analysis process.

Administration. To effectively reduce student absenteeism, teachers and administrators must communicate and collaborate. Administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors must work together to understand the reasons behind student absences (Attendance Works, 2015). Seventy-eight percent of teacher survey participants agreed the teacher has a role to notify an administrator and/or school counselor when a student has missed several days of school. Of the teacher interview participants, 50% stated it was their responsibility to communicate with administrators concerning student attendance. However, 75% of administrators affirmed it was the teacher's responsibility to communicate with administrators if a teacher was concerned about a student's attendance.

Application of Policy and Procedures. Research participants discussed policies and procedures related to the teacher's role of improving student attendance. The policies and procedures that surfaced during data analysis included monitoring student attendance and enforcing the school board policy that establishes parameters for teacher grading regarding unexcused absences.

Monitoring Student Attendance. Allensworth & Evans (2016) stated teachers can positively impact school attendance when they actively monitor attendance and attempt to understand the reasons behind a student's absences. The data analysis of the online survey revealed 91.8% of the participants indicated they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the teacher has a role in monitoring student attendance. Although many teachers document if a student is present or absent in their classroom, teacher interview participants stated many teachers do not consistently follow the procedures for student admit slips. District policy and

school procedures require the teacher to ask a student for an admit slip that denotes either an excused or unexcused absence. Subsequently, these admit slips allow teachers to keep a record of the type of absence. While asking a student for the admit and recording the type of absence may not directly decrease absenteeism, it is one way teachers can stay knowledgeable of student attendance and can also increase communication between the teacher and student regarding student absences. Two of the four administrator interview participants stated teachers have a responsibility to monitor student attendance by keeping accurate attendance records.

Deduct Points for Unexcused Absences. The school board policy in the research district states when a student's absence is unexcused, then the student will not be permitted to make up work, excluding tests. It also states if the teacher did not assign daily work on the day of the student's unexcused absence, then the teacher will deduct three points off the student's daily grade. One-third of teacher interview participants discussed this school board policy and said they consistently enforced the policy. Further, these participants agreed the policy is an effective means to improve school attendance, but stated the policy is inconsistently enforced among teachers. The teacher participants stipulated if the policy was consistently enforced, it would reduce absences for those students who care about their grades. A larger percent (75%) of administrator participants asserted it was the responsibility of the teacher to follow the school board policy and deduct points for unexcused absences. The administrator participants agreed the school board policy was inconsistently enforced and had conflicting opinions on the effectiveness of the policy to reduce student absenteeism.

Conclusions of the Findings

The results of this qualitative study led to a deeper understanding of teacher perception of the teacher's role and the responsibilities related to improving student attendance. The majority

of participants agreed teachers have a role in improving student attendance. The research identified that although teachers do have a role in improving student absenteeism, that role is supplemental to the administrator's role. The conclusions of this study also revealed responsibilities teachers perceived to be encompassed within their role of improving student attendance. These responsibilities include maintaining teacher-student relationships, communication, and application of policies and procedures. The teacher-student relationship must include teacher knowledge of students in and out of the classroom, encouragement of students, and care for students. Teachers are responsible for communicating with parents and administration concerning student attendance in an effort to increase awareness of attendance laws and policies and uncover reasons behind the absences. The study also found teachers to be responsible for monitoring student attendance and enforcing policies and procedures related to attendance. The research revealed many policies and procedures are inconsistently enforced. District and school leaders seeking to improve student attendance may benefit from this research. By clearly defining the responsibilities of classroom teachers, it may motivate teachers to consistency in enforcing the attendance policies and procedures of the district and school. Such actions will provide benefits for students and teachers.

While many of the participants discussed responsibilities of the teacher to improve student attendance, the researcher noticed successful interventions mentioned in the research that were not discussed by the participants; these interventions include teacher mentors, positive reinforcements, and motivating instruction. Studies on successful intervention programs for absenteeism reported the significance of community partnerships and teacher mentor programs. Providing mentors to students with excessive absences has proven to increase student attendance and school engagement (DeSocio et al., 2007). Celebrating student attendance through praise and

rewards has also demonstrated to be an effective method of improving student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). However, participants mentioned punitive consequences more than positive incentives. Of the participants in the study, only one administrator participant suggested implementing positive reinforcements for improving student attendance. A study on the effectiveness of positive reinforcements as a strategy to improve student attendance may complement the current research on student attendance. Teachers who motivate students through instruction are likely to have a positive impact on student attendance. Cao (2005) stated the importance of providing fun and insightful instruction through the careful selection of materials, lesson delivery, and style of teaching. Teacher participants did not mention the influence of the quality of instruction on a student's attendance. Only one of the administrator participants stated providing valuable teacher instruction was essential to the teacher's role in improving student attendance.

Limitations/ Delimitations

This qualitative study was not without limitations. The researcher relied on survey participants to self-report, which may be viewed as a limitation. The presence of the researcher during the interviews could also be viewed as a limitation; however, the researcher ensured confidentiality, and member checks and peer debriefing were completed. The researcher also utilized triangulation in an effort to alleviate any bias of the individual data collection methods.

The study focused on secondary teachers' perceptions of their role and responsibilities concerning student attendance in one school system in East Tennessee. The sampling techniques may serve as a delimitation to the study. The researcher used convenience sampling for the survey and purposive sampling for the interviews. The researcher suggests duplicating the research in other school districts and grade levels to increase the generalizability of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

With the increased focus on chronic absenteeism and the limited research of teacher's role and responsibilities in improving absenteeism, the opportunity for future research is immense. This study focused on secondary teachers' perceptions of their role and responsibilities in improving student attendance. Future research should evaluate the differences that exist between the perceptions of elementary teachers and high school teachers in their role and responsibilities in improving student attendance. It would be beneficial to ascertain if teachers across the grade spectrum have similar perceptions of their role and responsibilities or if those perceptions differ based upon age of their student population.

Many of the teacher interview participants stated their responsibilities in relation to improving student attendance were not clearly communicated. Participants highlighted policies relating to the teacher's role in improving student attendance were not explained thoroughly and were enforced inconsistently. Due to this finding, the researcher recommends a study to evaluate the difference of the chronic absenteeism rate in schools with clear teacher expectations in regards to student attendance in comparison to schools without clear teacher expectations and responsibilities. This would illuminate if clear and specific teacher guidelines increased the consistency of enforcement and if chronic absenteeism was better in schools with well-defined and explicit policies.

While identifying the teacher's perceptions of their own role and responsibilities is important to understanding the teacher's role in improving student attendance, there is also a need to explore the students' perceptions of influences on student attendance. There is a need for a qualitative study with chronically absent student participants to obtain their insights and perspectives. To add to the current research, this study could explore students' perceptions of the

role of teachers, quality of instruction, the role of the family, and the role of their peers in improving student attendance.

There is an increased focus on teacher attendance, as well as student attendance. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of Tennessee has emphasized the significance of both student and teacher attendance. Teacher absenteeism can negatively impact students, both academically and emotionally (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017a). Due to the increased attention on teacher absenteeism, another recommendation for further research would be to conduct a study investigating the relationship between teacher absenteeism and student absenteeism. Additionally, a quantitative study should be conducted to determine if a correlation exists between student attendance and teacher attendance. Continued research focusing on perceptions and strategies to improve student attendance are likely to positively impact teachers and students in the quest to provide students with an education to prepare them for their future.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine secondary teachers' perceptions of their role and responsibilities to improve student attendance. Overall, 73.6% of survey participants and 100% of the teacher interview participants indicated the teacher has a role in improving student attendance. An overwhelming majority of teacher interview participants stated the teacher's role to improve school attendance was secondary to the role of the administrators. The administrators were in agreeance that the teacher's primary role did not include improving student attendance, but stated teachers do have a responsibility to aid in the efforts to improve student attendance. When evaluating teacher responsibilities to improve student attendance, research revealed maintaining teacher-student relationships, communicating with parents and

administrators, and consistent application of policies and procedures to be encompassed in the role of the teacher.

      This research can also be used to foster communication between administrators and teachers to discuss each of their perceptions on the teacher's role and responsibilities included in the teacher role. Administrators and teachers can use this study to begin conversations to work together to improve student attendance. From those conversations, school leaders can outline specific teacher responsibilities to help encourage student attendance. Since teachers perceive these practices to be encompassed within their role, teacher buy-in is more likely.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Roles in Improving Student Attendance

Tentative Teacher Questionnaire (on Google Forms)

Grade Level (select all that may apply):

9th grade   10th grade   11th grade   12th grade

Years of Experience:

0-5 years   6-15 years   16-25 years   more than 25 years' experience

For the following statements, teachers will be asked to select one of the following responses: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree Somewhat, (3) Agree Somewhat, (4) Strongly Agree.

1. The teacher has a role in monitoring student attendance.

2. The teacher has a role in improving student attendance.

3. The teacher has an influence on a student's desire to attend school.

4. The teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student has missed several days of school.

5. The teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student's absences are hindering the student's achievement.

6. The teacher has a responsibility to notify an administrator and/or school counselor when a student has missed several days of school.

If you are interested in this topic and have any opinions you would like to share, please leave your email address in the space provided for a confidential, individual interview:

_____

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Guide

Teachers' Perception of Their Role in Improving Student Attendance

Tentative Teacher Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Participant (pseudonym):

Briefly describe the project & interview procedures, ensure confidentiality, and remind the participant, he or she has the right to decline questions and/or the right to stop the interview at any time.

Interview Questions:

- How long have you been a teacher?

- How long have you been a teacher at your current school?

- How would you describe your school?

- How would you describe the overall attendance of the students in your school?

- Describe the current attendance practices in your building as they do or do not relate to any attendance policies that are in place.

- Who is responsible for addressing student attendance concerns in your school? What are his/her responsibilities?

- Why do you believe students are absent?

- Tell me about a time when the academic success of a student was influenced by their attendance.

- How do you see your role in responding to student attendance concerns?

- Tell me about a time when you had a student with an attendance problem and you took action. What were the results?

- Tell me about a time a student with an attendance problem improved his/her attendance. Why do you think their attendance changed?

- In what ways, if any, do you think you and your peers can better address student attendance concerns?

- Is there anything further you might like to add?

Appendix C

Administrator Interview Guide

Teachers' Perception of Their Role in Improving Student Attendance

Tentative Administrator Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Participant (pseudonym):

Briefly describe the project & interview procedures, ensure confidentiality, and remind the participant, he or she has the right to decline questions and/or the right to stop the interview at any time.

Interview Questions:

- How long have you been an administrator?

- How long have you been an administrator at your current school?

- How would you describe your school?

- How would you describe the overall attendance of the students in your school?

- Who is responsible for addressing student attendance concerns in your school? What are his/her responsibilities?

- Describe the current attendance practices in your building as they do or do not relate to any attendance policies that are in place.

- Why do you think students are absent?

- Tell me about a time a student with an attendance problem improved his/her attendance. Why do you think their attendance changed?

- How do you see the teacher's role in responding to student attendance concerns?

- Tell me about a time when a teacher's actions influenced a student's attendance?

- In what ways, if any, do you think teachers can better address student attendance concerns?

- Is there anything further you might like to add?

Appendix D

Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Title: Student Absenteeism: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role in Improving Student

Attendance

Dear Research Participants,

Please read the consent form carefully before deciding to participate in the study. The research

has been approved by Carson-Newman's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to address chronic absenteeism and

investigate the role of the teacher on improving student absenteeism.

What you will be asked to do: You will be asked to participate in an interview centered on the

teacher role and student attendance.

Time required: 1 hour

Risks and benefits: You will be exposed to minimal to no risks throughout the duration of the

research study.

Confidentiality: The interviews will be audio-recorded, and the transcriptions, field notes,

recorded interviews, and any other related materials will be secured on a password protected

computer and in a locked filing cabinet. The name of the participants and affiliated schools will

not be shared. The participants will be given a pseudonym to remain anonymous. Each

participant will have full access to the final report prior to publication.

Participation and Right to Withdraw: Participation in the study is voluntary. You have the

right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Questions about the study: If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the

researcher, Margaret Yoakum.

Agreement: I have read and agree to the research procedures described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study and have been given a copy of the informed consent form.

Participant (print name): _____ **Date:** _____

Participant's signature: _____