EXAMINING CHRONICALLY ABSENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ABSENCES TO DETERMINE THE BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE

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Abstract

Several studies have been conducted to explore the correlation between academic success and school attendance. The more a child misses instructional days, the more the child will fall behind. This study compared the number of chronically absent students in two rural high schools within the same school district and identified the reasons coded for the absences of those students. The theoretical foundations of this study were Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Bowen's family system theories. Maslow's theory stated that before a student can reach his or her full potential, other individual needs had to be met. Bowen's theory, comprised of eight concepts, defined roles of the family unit and how the amount of trust and role of the school, contributed to a child's success. After the data were gathered for the chronically absent students at the two schools, their principals were interviewed to gain their perception of the data. This study found that although two schools examined had different variables that accounted for student absenteeism; both had a high number of unexcused absences.

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Gregory L. Sturgill

Date: March 12, 2020

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my dad. Without him, this would not have been possible. Dad, thank you for your support, your example, and love. You taught me to work hard and to always do my best while always helping others along the way. I will always strive to make you proud.

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I have tremendous gratitude and respect for all the professors I have worked with at Carson-Newman University. They have guided me through the work, and I have learned so much from them. A special thank you to Dr. Price, Dr. Dean, Dr. Taylor, and Dr. Barnes. Thanks for sharing your wisdom, kind words, and support throughout this process.

I would also like to thank the school system and principals of school A and school B. I hope the data collected will be useful and meaningful as you continue to fight chronic absenteeism.

My dog, Duke, stayed by my side during this entire process. Thank you, Duke, for keeping me company, reminding me to take breaks, and enduring countless hours of Pearl Jam during "this all-encompassing trip" (Vedder, 1996, track 10).

My in-laws have been very supportive throughout this program as well. Their encouragement and kindness will never be forgotten. Mr. Miller, I miss you and your words of wisdom. Your love, kindness, and stories will be shared with many generations to come! Mrs. Miller, I still have my "lucky dollar" in my jacket pocket. The two of you have made me "a millionaire" as well.

Last, but certainly not least, a huge thank you to my loving wife for love and support. I could not have completed this process without you. Thank you for your encouragement, listening to me go on and on about data, and for always believing in me.

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Chapter One: **Introduction and Background of the Study**

For many years, schools and districts have monitored attendance. States have passed laws focused on fighting truancy. Several states, including Tennessee, have also used attendance percentages in their funding equations for a least of a portion of the funding allocations. However, chronically absent students have been overlooked. These are the students who miss more than 10% of the school year for any reason. Due to most of the absences accrued by this group of students being excused absences, they did not meet the criteria to be considered truant. Students in this group were also overlooked when schools or districts scrutinized average daily attendance (ADA) percentages since that percentage analyzed the school or district as a whole without focusing on individual students.

In 2006, Hedy Chang was asked by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to examine the correlation between the lower number of economically disadvantaged 3rd-grade students reading proficiently and their individual attendance rates. She found that students who are chronically absent perform at a lower level academically than students with regular attendance. After studying attendance rates for four years, Chang saw the need for a national focus on chronic absenteeism, and with funding from the foundation, the non-profit organization Attendance Works was formed. Its mission is to advance student success and help close equity gaps by reducing chronic absence (Attendance Works, n.d.).

Building on the foundation of Attendance Works, schools across the United States have begun a more in-depth focus on chronic absenteeism. In 2015, President Barrack Obama signed the *Every Child Succeeds Act* (*ESSA*) into law (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). As a result of the increased accountability measures required by *ESSA*, Tennessee began to include the percentage of chronically absent students as one of its accountability measures. Prior to 2015,

school systems primarily monitored average daily attendance and unexcused absences that led to truancy.

The research of Chang and Romero (2008) found several negative consequences to chronic absenteeism. Students in the early grades did not build a strong foundation for further learning, and a high level of absenteeism in middle grades was found to be a strong predictor that students would not graduate on time. They also determined that chronically absent high school students were at a much greater risk of not obtaining their high school degree.

Statement of the Problem

During the 2015-2016 school year, over seven million students across the United States missed more than 10% of the school year and were considered chronically absent. That number includes about 16% of America's school-age children, which is roughly one out of every six students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). A research brief published by Attendance Works (2014b) noted the following among chronically absent students.

- Per a study conducted in California, students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade only had a 17% chance of reading on grade level when they reached 3rd grade.
- The effects were even more profound for students in poverty. That subgroup was less likely to have resources outside of school to help fill in reading gaps.
- Students in poverty were found to be four times more likely to become chronically absent. Many faced issues with transportation, health care, or housing.
- With improved attendance, students were shown to have increased their academic performance.

- Families were often unaware of how quickly those absences added up and the lasting effects of chronic absenteeism.
- Attendance rates were higher in schools where both students and guardians felt welcomed in the school, engaged with school, and safe within the school.

The effects of chronic absenteeism can be both immediate and long term. Ginsburg, Jordan, and Chang (2014) analyzed national research. They found that chronically absent kindergarten students showed lower academic progress in 1st grade, and students in poverty that were chronically absent in kindergarten had lower achievement scores in 5th grade. A Chicago study was referenced that found students who missed more than 20% of the school year as a better predictor of potential dropouts than the results of 8th grade achievement tests.

In an Oregon study, Hart Buehler, Topanga, and Chang (2012) ascertained that students who are chronically absent in kindergarten, especially those with the worst attendance among their peers, most likely will continue to be chronically absent in later grades. They determined that students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade had the lowest reading achievement levels in 5th grade. Those students that were chronically absent in 1st grade showed the next lowest scores, followed by the students who were chronically absent in kindergarten. Other research by Hart Buehler, Topanga, and Chang (2012) found that if a child is chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade, that student only has a 17% chance of reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade. The study also concluded the attendance of 6th grade students could be used as a predictor of dropout rates.

Ginsburg, Jordan, and Chang (2014) noted that students who are chronically absent were also missing some social skills. Those skills included being able to stay focused or pay attention, completing assignments independently, adjusting to change, and lacking engagement while at

school. The more a child missed, the more differences were found between that particular child and children with good attendance.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

According to the Tennessee State Report Card (Tennessee Department of Education, n.d.) during a previous school year, one particular school district in Tennessee had nearly 16% of its students listed as being chronically absent. That percentage was almost 2% higher than the state average and an increase from the previous year by nearly 2%. The chronic absenteeism rate for economically disadvantaged was over 22%. Both of the large high schools within the district had rates that exceeded the district average. The system was comprised of two large high schools with populations near 1,200 students at each school. One school, referred to in this study as High School A, had over 29.5% of its students reported as being chronically absent, a 2.4% increase from the previous year. Almost 9% of the students had received at least one out-of-school suspension, which contributed to the number of absences of the students. Although the exact rate for economically disadvantaged students was not listed, the report card listed that subgroup "demonstrated low performance." The other high school within the district, referred to in this study as High School B, had nearly 20% of its population listed as being chronically absent. That percentage was almost a 4.5% increase from the previous year. Almost 8% of its population received at least one out-of-school suspension. The subgroup of economically disadvantaged also "demonstrated low performance."

This study focused on the students who were chronically absent in the 2018-2019 school, and it examined the reasons behind the absences. The results identified what causes or influences student absenteeism and determined what barriers or influencers need to be addressed by the school district.

Theoretical Foundation

Psychologist Abraham Maslow developed a theory referred to as the Hierarchy of Needs. That theory suggested that people are motivated by having their needs met. His hierarchy formed a pyramid, with physiological needs such as food and water at the bottom. The items on the bottom of the pyramid were considered the most essential, and those needs had to be met before additional needs were considered. The second level consisted of safety and security needs. Once those were met, Maslow theorized that people would then seek to meet each of the following levels, which consisted of the needs love and belonging, self-worth and self-esteem, to know and understand, and aesthetic needs. Self-actualization was at the top of the pyramid, which is the need to reach one's full potential (McLeod, 2018).

Jones (2019) applied Maslow's Hierarchy to the school setting. She suggested that if more students' needs were met in the school environment, the students would feel safer at school, more engaged in the school, and more likely to want to attend school. The needs of students have long been a concern for schools. Physiological needs are met by maintaining facilities, providing clean water and access to food, and providing restrooms. Safety needs are addressed by providing a safe and secure learning environment. In efforts to help meet the needs of students for the upper levels of Maslow's Hierarchy, schools have focused on school attendance. Instead of only focusing on school-wide attendance rates, the majority of schools began examining individual student attendance. Schools increased parental support and engagement opportunities, increased the rigor of classroom instruction, and strived to create a more positive school climate to better meet the needs of students (Koopmans, 2018). In efforts to build self-esteem and a feeling of self-worth and connectedness to the school community,

schools have sought to find a place for each student to participate and get involved outside the classroom (Jones, 2019).

Bowen's Family Systems Theory explained how one's family unit impacted feelings or perceptions about others and situations outside of the home, including school. This family projection concept explained how parents and guardians could project their emotional problems or anxieties onto their children. For example, if a parent or guardian had bad experiences and feelings about school, that feeling could be transferred onto the child, making it difficult for that child to attend school. If those feelings and fears were strong enough, the child might even experience an emotional cut off from the school (Kerr, 2000).

A child's emotional safety and wellbeing were considered so important that the role of the school counselor completely shifted from primarily scheduling and career guidance to a stronger emphasis on emotional and social skills (ASCA, 2019). The effort was in hopes of meeting all of the needs on Maslow's Hierarchy, and guiding a student toward self-actualization (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). To ensure that attendance monitored not only school data but also individual attendance, another shift was made to monitor chronic absenteeism. According to Sahin, Arseven, and Kilic (2016), "Absenteeism is one of the most basic indicators of to what extent the educational needs of students are met by schools." (p. 195)

Research Questions

The study will address the following research questions:

Question 1: How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) in school A?

Question 2: How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) in school B?

Question 3: What are the school administrators' perceptions of any similarities and differences between the models of school A and school B?

Hypotheses

Ha1: There is a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school A.

Ha2: There is a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school B.

Null Hypotheses

H01: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school A.

H02: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school B.

Rationale for the Study

Over 7 million students missed more than 10% of instructional days during the 2018-2019 school year (U. S. Department of Education, 2019). The number of students throughout the United States who are chronically absent is not declining rapidly enough, and, in some school

systems, is actually growing. The percentage of chronically absent students in one rural high school in Tennessee grew from slightly over 20% to nearly 30% (Tennessee Department of Education, 2019). Until the root causes and barriers to school attendance are addressed, chronically absent students will continue to miss a large number of school days.

Students must be at school and engaged with classroom instruction before they can learn. Students not only acquire academic knowledge from attending school, but they also acquire social skills (Chang &. Romero, 2008). In order to address chronic absenteeism with individuals, the barriers and reasons for nonattendance must be discovered, and interventions put into place. The students and their families should know the school's attendance expectations and have the proper supports to meet the attendance goals (Sprick & Berg, 2019).

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

The study examined the attendance data entered into the district database by school personnel. The degree of accuracy of student attendance input by teachers cannot be measured. The accuracy of the type of attendance codes entered by school office personnel cannot be measured.

The willingness to medically excuse a child from school varies by each medical professional. The validity of excuses written by medical professionals and guardians of the students cannot be verified. It is possible that some medical excuses and parent notes were forged.

The sampling for this study limits the generalization to schools with similar demographics from similar regions. Urban areas may have different barriers and supports to address attendance concerns. The barriers may also vary by geographic location.

Definition of Terms

- **Average Daily Attendance (ADA):** The number of school days a child is present at school divided by the total number of days the child is enrolled in a particular school. School districts in Tennessee receive a portion of their funding based on district-wide ADA (My Tennessee Public Schools, 2019).
- **Chronically absent:** A term a student who misses more than 10% of the school year. Those absences can be for any reason, excused or unexcused (Chang & Romero, 2008).
- **Exclusionary discipline:** "The removal of a student from his or her regular academic program for disciplinary reasons (Tennessee Department of Education, n.d.)." Common types of exclusionary discipline are out-of-school suspension and expulsions.
- **Extremely chronically absent:** Missing over 20% of the school year for any reason, including excused, unexcused, and exclusionary discipline absences. (Koester, 2011).
- **Regular attendance:** In comparison to chronic absenteeism, regular attendance is missing less than 5% of the school year for any reason, including excused, unexcused, and exclusionary discipline absences (Sprick & Berg, 2019, p. 23).
- **Truancy:** Being absent from school without a valid reason or excuse (U.S. Legal, Inc., n.d.). Tennessee previously defined a student as *truant* once he or she obtained five unexcused absences. Due to a change in Tennessee Code Annotated § 49-6-3007 in 2018, at the time of this report, Tennessee does not have a legal definition of *truant.*

Organization of the Study

This study contains five chapters. In the first chapter, the topic definitions of regular attendance, at-risk attendance, and chronically absenteeism are introduced. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bowen's Family Systems are explained, and the roles that the school and attendance play in each is examined. The study sought to determine the root cause of absences of chronically absent students.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature. It begins with the history of education and then addresses the need for attendance policies and laws. The theories of Maslow and Bowen are more thoroughly explained. The second chapter ends with the research on chronic absenteeism and the need to address the issue.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the research for this study. It includes the research questions, hypotheses, the research design, and the methods and time periods for the data collection.

Chapter 4 includes the data collected during the research and explains the results that were found. All data collected were ex post facto data. Chapter 5 provides conclusions of the study and recommendations for further studies for the subject of chronic absenteeism.

Summary

According to the Tennessee State Board of Education School Attendance Policy 4.1, schools in Tennessee must excuse a variety of absences accrued by students. Schools are required to make provisions to excuse absences for non-school-sponsored extracurricular activities, court appearances, religious observances, military departure or return of a guardian, and religious instruction during the school day. Schools also have procedures in place to excuse

school days for illness, bereavement, college visits, weather conditions, and family emergencies. Students are also suspended or expelled from school for disciplinary reasons. Regardless of the reason for the absence, with the passing of ESSA in 2015, the majority of the schools in the United States are held accountable for the number of school days missed by individual students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Missing an excessive number of school days has a significant impact on student achievement. Students who are chronically absent one year during their school career are at a higher risk of becoming chronically absent in subsequent years. To reduce the number of days missed by chronically absent students, the school system must have a better understanding of why students miss instructional days of school. Unless the schools address the root cause of the reason for the absences, most chronically absent students will continue to miss an excessive amount of instructional school days. The school must find ways to better connect students and their guardians with the school. The stronger commitments both groups have to the school, the fewer school days the students will miss (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2015). The level of student engagement with the school contributes to students' perception of the school, their academic achievement, and better relationships with teachers and other students (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Organization of the Literature Review

The review of literature initially detailed the beginnings of taking school attendance. However, it was discovered that merely tracking attendance by one means was not sufficient. The review discussed the shift from using only one tracking method to using several tracking methods. The methodology and framework were then described. Educational trends, such as the current role for school counselors, attendance monitoring, and educational technology. were introduced.

The review continued with the effects of chronic absenteeism, attendance trends and barriers, and methods of reducing chronic absenteeism. The gaps in the literature explaining the needs of this study were included next. The literature review concluded with a summary.

History of Tracking School Attendance

In 1853, Massachusetts was the first state in the United States to pass a law requiring students to attend school. One of the founders of public education, Horace Mann, championed for a free school system open to all children rather than just those that came from privilege. The U. S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary (2008) quoted Mann as saying, "All are to have an equal chance for earning, and equal security in the enjoyment of what they earn (p.7)." Other states soon followed the lead of Massachusetts by passing compulsory attendance laws. However, a high school diploma and a college degree were still seen as achievements that only the wealthy obtained.

The perception that education was only for the upper class began to change following the Civil War. Those freed by the Emancipation Proclamation began to seek out the education they were once forbidden to obtain. Booker T. Washington (1901) wrote, “In every part of the South,

during the Reconstruction period, schools, both day and night, were filled to overflowing with people of all ages and conditions, some being as far along in age as sixty and seventy years. The ambition to secure an education was most praiseworthy and encouraging." By the 1890s, approximately 6% of children between ages 14-17 attended high school. That number would steadily rise. In 1930, over half of the children in that same age group now attended a high school (U. S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2008).

At the end of the 1800s, numerous child labor disputes were filed, and states quickly began to construct compulsory attendance laws. By 1918, every state had adopted a compulsory attendance law. In some states, the requirements were stringent. *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) stipulated that an Oregon attendance law that forced students to only attend public schools was unconstitutional (HSLDA, n.d.).

Early in public education, it was believed that every student should be taught the same material in the same way. Differentiated instruction was not a practiced concept. The National Education Association (NEA), a union that was established to represent teachers and administrators in education, released a publication entitled *Cardinal Principals of Secondary Education (1918).* The release contained the seven major principles they viewed should be valued in public schools. Their principles did not include information regarding academic achievement. but instead emphasized the need for vocational and life skills instruction.

Contrary to the philosophy of Horace Mann, many in education believed in the theory that stated that 60% of students would not gain a college education or be able to obtain skilled employment. The effects of this theory were seen nationwide. In 1944, the NEA and the American Association of School Administrators Educational Policies Commission claimed that

high school academic standards had slowly become less rigorous (U. S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2008).

In a Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954*) overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)*, which stated "separate but equal" education facilities were constitutional. The Court found that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibited segregating schools based on a student's race. Although the schools began to be desegregated, academic standards did not begin to become more rigorous until the Soviet Union successfully launched the first artificial satellite, Sputnik 1, into space in 1957. In 1958, President Dwight Eisenhower signed into law the *National Defense Education Act*. The act emphasized strong curriculums in science, math, and foreign languages, and it increased supports for student loans and graduate school fellowships (U. S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, 2008).

Although standards had been made more rigorous and national expectations had been increased, schools did not have an accountability measure to ensure the new standards were being taught. School testing was more focused on aptitude than on actual achievement. Schools also began to ability group students and promoted students socially whether they had mastered the grade-level standards or not. Achievement gaps between non-economically disadvantaged without a disability and students in poverty and students receiving special education services were growing. To counteract the growing achievement gap, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) in 1965. ESEA provided funding for elementary and high schools and promoted high standards and increased accountability for every grade. The majority of the funds from ESEA funded Title I. Title I helped to support schools and systems with a high number of students in poverty. Title II funded preschool programs and

helped both public and private schools secure textbooks and library books. Title III provided funding to extend the school year for students with disabilities and provided additional funding for rural and isolated schools. Title IV was created to help fund educational research. Title V supplemented state department grants obtained under Public Law 874. The law and established limitations of that law were defined in Title VI. ESEA failed to close the gaps, although it was the most expensive education law to date (Paul, 2016).

A Nation at Risk was published in 1983. At the request of the then Secretary of Education, it was written by members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. It called for a significant reformation of America's public schools. The publication stated (as cited in Graham, 2015), "If an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." It included a list of improvements needed in education, including more rigorous standards, testing to measure achievement, higher standards for graduation requirements, additional funding, and updates curriculums that included art and computer science.

From its incarnation in 1965 until the present day, ESEA has been modified numerous times. One of the biggest reauthorizations occurred in 2001 under President George W. Bush. His reauthorization became known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB increased accountability for schools, teachers, and students. Annual tests were given to determine the progress made toward the new achievement measures. Schools had to publish reports each year of their student achievement levels and demographics. NCLB not only measured achievement goals, but it also began to scrutinize student growth measures labeled Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). While NCLB helped close the achievement gaps, it also incentivized schools to lower their standards so that more students could meet them. NCLB also focused more on punishments

than rewards for achievement and emphasized achievement levels to a much greater extent than student growth (Paul, 2016).

In 2015, President Barrack Obama signed the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. The law was an effort to provide all public-school students with equal opportunities. Some of the provisions included protections for economically disadvantaged students; higher academic standards aimed at better preparing student for college; more transparency of state testing results to teachers, families, students, and communities; increased supports for local innovations; increased availability of pre-schools; and addition of increased accountability measures (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). As a result of the increased accountability measures, Tennessee elected to include monitoring of students who are chronically out of school or chronically absent.

The Disadvantages of Only Tracking Truancy and ADA

Regular attendance was defined as missing less than 5% of the school year. Based on a school year with 180 days, a student with regular attendance would miss less than nine days. Sprick and Berg (2019) stated that regular attendance is the goal that should be set for every student, and each student should strive to average only missing a day or less per month. Students who missed more than 5% of the school but less than 10% were considered students with at-risk attendance. Students in the at-risk attendance category missed between nine and eighteen instructional days during a 180-day school year. Students who were absent more than 10% of the school year were considered chronically absent. Chronically absent students would miss more than eighteen days based on a 180-day school year. Those days did not have to be consecutive days; a student who missed two or three instructional days a month would have been considered chronically absent. Severe or extremely chronically absent students missed more than 20% of the school. Based on a 180-day school year, those students would have missed

more than 36 instructional days. For each category, the absences could have been excused, unexcused, or due to exclusionary discipline, including suspensions and expulsions. Although laws are in place to prevent truancy, which is absences without parental permission or a valid excuse, no legislative procedures are in place for students that are chronically absent. Typically, the majority of absences for chronically absent students were excused absences; students in that category were not in violation of any laws.

The Tennessee Department of Education (n.d.) acknowledged that solely tracking ADA tended to disguise some substantial attendance concerns. Although truancy was also being monitored, excused absences were often being ignored. The practice of monitoring chronic absenteeism allowed the TDOE to determine the number of students that were missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason. Those reasons included excused absences, unexcused absences, and absences caused by exclusionary disciplines such as suspensions and expulsions. Thirty-five other states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico also included chronic absenteeism as one of their measures of student quality or student success (SQSS). The majority of the time, the students with the highest attendance challenges were found to have needed the highest number of supports (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Tennessee's ESSA Plan (n.d.) stated that chronically out of school is an "absolute performance pathway measures the percent of students who are chronically out of school." The plan also noted that an Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) would be established that examined cohort groups and set targets to reduce the percent of chronically absent students. Growth expectations were also set based on state-level percentages to reduce the number of students who were chronically out of school in previous years.

According to the Tennessee Department of Education's *2019 Accountability Protocol* (2019), as a part of Tennessee's accountability, several indicators were used to develop a school's and a district's score. For schools with grades K-8, overall achievement scores accounted for 45% of the overall score, student growth was used for 35% of the overall score, student growth scores from the English Language Proficiency Assessment factored in 10% of the score, and the percentage of students chronically out of school made up the remaining 10%. For high schools, achievement accounted for 30%, growth accounted for 35%, graduation rate accounted for 5%, the percentage of students who meet the TDOE's Ready Graduate standards accounted for 20%, and the percentage of students who were chronically out of school and English Language Proficiency Assessment scores accounted for 10% each. Achievement percentages were derived from students' absolute performances or by a school meeting its AMO target. Growth was calculated from the progress of students' mastery, and the score from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) was used as the measure. The percentage of students chronically out of school was calculated from the number of students who were enrolled in a school for at least 50% of the school's instructional days. TDOE took the number of students who missed more than 10% of the school year and divided it by the total number of students. The last measure, the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) scores, was only used in the overall score if the school had at least ten students had composite ELPA scores for both the previous and current school years.

The Tennessee Department of Education's *2019 Accountability Protocol* (TDOE, n.d.) established grades for each area using a grading scale of A through F. Points were given for each grade. Zero points were awarded for an F, one point awarded for a D, two points awarded for a C, three points awarded for a B, and four points awarded for an A. For the chronically out

of school indicator, an elementary or middle school would have to have less than 6% of its students chronically absent, and a high school would have to have less than 10% of its students chronically absent to receive an A. If elementary and middle schools had 6.1-9.0% of their students chronically absent or if high schools had 10.1-14.0% of their student chronically absent, they received a B. Elementary and middle schools who received a C had between 9.1-13.0% of their students chronically absent, and high schools who received a C had between 14.1-20.0% of their students chronically absent. Elementary and middle schools with between 13.1-20.0% of their students chronically absent and high schools with between 20.1-30.0% of their students chronically absent received a D. Any elementary or middle school with greater than 20% or high school 30% of their students chronically absent received an F.

Methodology for the Literature Review

Research articles were found during an online search of various databases, including the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, and the Carson-Newman University online database. The following key terms were utilized when conducting the online searches: attendance history, truancy, chronic absenteeism, effects of poor school attendance, chronic absenteeism in the early grades, chronic absenteeism in middle school, chronic absenteeism in high school, use of technology to monitor attendance, common causes to absenteeism, and barriers to school attendance. The articles chosen met the following guidelines:

1) articles were peer-reviewed, and the full text was available;
2) articles used focused on chronic absenteeism and used common definitions, and

3) articles had to have been published within the last twelve years, which included the years 2007-2019.

Books and research articles that were used to complete the study were required to contain research and writings that were relevant to the study and theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs stipulated that people are motivated by their desire to have particular needs met. His theoretical hierarchy formed a pyramid with physiological needs at the bottom. Those needs consist of items such as food, shelter, and water. Safety and security needs were on the next level, followed by love and belonging needs, self-worth and self-esteem needs, need to know and understand, and aesthetic needs. The need for self-actualization, which is the need to reach one's full potential, is at the top of this pyramid (Jones, 2019). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be applied to the school setting. The physiological needs of food, clean restroom, and water were at the bottom of the pyramid. Safety and security needs consisted of a safe and secure learning environment. Self-worth and self-esteem needs included the feelings of being valued and respected. The need to know and understand directly aligned with a relevant and rigorous curriculum. Aesthetic needs included a pleasing and stimulating school environment. Self-actualization manifested as the need for students to reach their maximum potential. The following questions were posed: "What if we focused on improving the climate and the culture of the school, on creating an environment where all children could have their needs met? What if we measure schools on how well they met the needs of students as a whole, instead of focusing on individual teachers?" (Jones, 2019).

Bowen's family systems theory. Family Systems Theory (Kerr, 2000) was developed by Dr. Murray Bowen, and it examined human behavior in the context of the family unit. Bowen saw the family as an emotional unit and described the interactions within the family structured into different systems. A strong connection was found between members of a household, even when the members of that unit did not feel connected. The theory suggested the household members strive to gain attention and acceptance while aiming to meet the needs of the others within the household. Each of the eight concepts within Bowen's theory was defined. The first concept was referred to as triangles. Triangles are the smallest stable geometrical structure, and the concept referred to a three-person family system. The three-person system was seen as the foundation for the family system. Although more stable than a two-person system, the triangle can lead to one member feeling left out or isolated. The feeling of being left out often rotated around to each of the three members. At the foundation of the United States educational system, they adhered to the British law of *in loco parentis*. The law stated that the educational system assumed the role of the parent while the child is in their care, and their legal guardian is not present (Kytzidis, 2017). While the law was passed in regard to legal issues, teachers and school staff also assumed the role of the parent in Bowen's Family System Theory while the student is attending school. However, the school may also be seen as a third part of the triangle in conflict with the other two components.

The next concept was that of differentiation of self. Bowen theorized that within a system, some members are so affected by the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the household that they may have a lessened sense of self. Once the sense of self was developed, Bowen stated that it was difficult to change without a strong, concentrated effort. However, Bowen also noted that one with a well-defined sense of self apart from the system could act in such a way that

thoughts were grounded in the best interests of the system without being pressured by relationships formed within the group. Bowen observed the person with a strong sense of self-thought confidently but could understand others' points of view. The nuclear family emotional process was the next concept. Bowen divided it into four relationship patterns: marital conflict where partners focused on the faults in the other partner; dysfunction in one spouse, in which one partner pressured his or her views onto the other partner that conceded to those views; impairment of one or more children where the partners channel their worries and fears onto one or more of their children; and emotional distance, in which members of the system distance themselves from the group at the risk of feeling ostracized from the others (Gilbertson & Graves, 2018).

The next concept, the family projection process, explained that parents could transfer their emotional problems and anxieties to their child or children. Kerr (2000) referenced Bowen's three steps of the process. The first step involved a parent or parents focusing on a child perceiving that something is not right with that child. The next step was the parent reaffirming his or her fear by observing the child's behavior. The final step was the parent treating the child as if the perceived problem actually exists. Bowmen's concept stated the parents or parent would then try to solve the perceived behavior in such a way that the child actually develops the misdiagnosed problem. Frequently, the complexities of the family system were multigenerational. The fifth concept, multigenerational transmission process, described how slight differences in how children are treated by their parents over several generations might eventually lead to vast differences in the nuclear family system. Communicated through their relationships, the differences may have been shown by purposeful teaching of new ideas or feelings, or the differences may have transmitted unknowingly through reactions and behaviors.

The next concept, emotional cutoff, described members of a household partially or completely cutting off emotional ties with the other member due to the inability to resolve emotional conflicts. Bowen stated emotional cutoff could be achieved by several means including physical distance by moving away and not visiting often or by only partaking in conversations emotional content. Bowen found that people who avoid their parents after adulthood may have a tendency to place higher importance on their spouse, children, or other relationships to meet their emotional needs. Bowen also stated that the person who is emotionally cut off from his or her family might eagerly anticipate that a return home may have a different interaction than before only to be disappointed each time (Thompson, Wojciak, & Cooley, 2019).

Kerr (2000) reported that Bowen's sibling position concept was closely aligned with the research of Walter Toman. The concept accredited the different roles assumed by siblings to their sibling position (oldest, middle, or youngest child). Chronological age did not always determine the role; in some systems, the youngest sibling had to take on the role of the oldest. The one in the oldest sibling role tended to be more of a leader, whereas the one in the youngest sibling role tended to be more of a follower. The middle sibling showed characteristics of both the older sibling and the younger sibling. Although each of Bowen's concepts can be applied to school and work "families," his final concept, societal emotional process, focused primarily on how the emotional system governs behavior on a societal level, promoting both progressive and regressive periods in a society. Bowen noticed a shift in the juvenile courts during the 1960s. He found that many of the courts view the children who committed crimes as the "victim of bad parents." Bowen also noted the views of the schools were also making a similar shift. He

suggested that instead of trying to improve "the future generation," society members need to focus on their personal role in the regression of society.

Educational Trends

School counselor. The term *guidance counselor* is no longer accurate to describe the role of counselors in education. In the early 1900s, their role was to provide vocational guidance with a primary emphasis on preparing students to enter the workforce. Throughout the beginning of the position, counselors were given the duties of academic testing and assessment and of "vocational planning" or schedule (ASCA, 2019).

John Dewey was known for beginning the cognitive development movement in the 1920s. Dewey stated the schools had a major role in growing a student's cognitive, personal, social, and moral knowledge. His movement led to expanding the counselor's curriculum to include those areas. In the 1940s, theorists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers stated that the role of the counselor should be to help students reach the goal of self-actualization and that students should be taught coping techniques for current and future problems. After Rogers began his work, the term *guidance counselor* began to be replaced by the term *counselor*. In 1990, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) was a strong proponent of changing the job title to a *school counselor* (Lambie & Williamson, 2004).

The American School Counselor Association (2019) clarified the role of elementary school counselors is to provide programs and counseling to students to assist them in acquiring academic success, gaining awareness of career choices, and learning social and emotional skills to respond to situations encountered in their daily lives. ASCA stated that middle and high school counselors are to continue social and emotional education while working with the school staff and community to build a safe and respectful school environment. They are to continue to

educate students about career opportunities and how students can achieve their educational and personal goals.

Shifts in attendance monitoring. For schools to help better meet students' various needs, one area of focus has been school attendance. Koopmans (2018) stated that attendance is a "behavioral expression of the interplay of a causal network" consisting of multiple variables including parental support, socio-economic status, quality instruction, school resources, and individual teacher support of individual students (p. 19). Before the 2017-2018 school year, schools in Tennessee were primarily concerned with truancy and average daily attendance (ADA) when addressing attendance issues. Truancy issues were addressed due to statutes in Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA). According to TCA § 49-6-3001, all children from age six until age eighteen are required to attend either a public school or a non-public school. Non-public schools include church-related schools, home schools, and private schools (LexisNexis, n.d.). ADA was a focus because it is a factor in determining the division of a portion of funding when a county contains one or more city school systems and a county school system.

London, Sanchez, and Castrechini (2016) stated that chronic absenteeism differs from truancy in many ways. Truancy specifically scrutinized unexcused absences while chronic absenteeism monitored all absences, including excused, unexcused, and those caused by suspensions and expulsions. Most schools and legal systems possessed policies or laws that addressed truancy. However, at the time of the report, only a few schools had any policy that mentioned chronic absenteeism. Whereas truancy had legal consequences, the only consequences for chronic absenteeism were the social, emotional, and academic consequences that naturally occurred.

Sahin, Arseven, and Kilic (2016) argued that "Absenteeism is one of the most basic

indicators of to what extent the educational needs of students are met by schools (p. 195)." Instead of attempting to determine what is wrong with the students, schools should examine what is wrong with the school.

Technology in education. Many have seen the benefits of technology use both for personal and professional purposes. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center (2019) found that as of 2018, 96% of American adults own a mobile phone, and 81% of those phones are smartphones. That number is up from 83% owning a mobile phone and only 35% owning a smartphone in 2011. Almost 75% of American adults own either a laptop or desktop computer, and 50% own a tablet.

A qualitative survey to gain insight into teachers' perception of technology was conducted by an associate professor of education at Saint Lev University. The results indicated that nearly 60% of the educators that responded believed technology use in the classroom increased student engagement. Twenty-five percent stated that technology use increased both student engagement and student learning. The remaining 35% replied that technology was beneficial for differentiation of instruction, student research, and providing current content to students (Carver, 2016). Although the number of electronic devices in the schools has dramatically increased over the last several years, many teachers report barriers to technology use in the classroom. Eighty percent of his research sample viewed the quantity of technology and the availability of technology as the primary barriers to its use. Others reported the location of the technology, the amount of time, and the availability of support as additional barriers. Just over fifty percent of the respondents claimed their decision to use technology for instruction was based upon the availability of the devices. Twenty-five percent listed differentiation opportunities, student interest, and the standards being taught as their motivation to incorporate

technology. The remaining 25% of those surveyed stated they based their decision on whether or not to integrate technology on the available class time, ease of use, and district policies. Although some students surveyed reported the bandwidth at the school as a concern, no teachers listed it as a potential problem. Carver concluded, “Expanding educators’ technology knowledge base might expand technology usage in evaluating curricular content, increasing student engagement, and differentiating instruction. As these issues are addressed, teachers might develop more extensive ways to use technology for research and evaluation (p. 115).”

The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services conducted a research study to determine if the technology was being integrated as an effective tool for middle school writing instruction. The researchers found that technology was not being used effectively. Teachers' personal feelings about technology were given as one possible reason. However, even the forty-seven teachers who labeled themselves as "technology users" spent little time using it for instruction. They indicated that setting up the computers or lessons involving technology took too much time. They also said that their technology access was limited, and they had to compete with other teachers to secure a time to use the technology that was available (Regan et al., 2019).

Young’s (2016) study reported similar results. At the time of his research, Young was an education technologist for a private consulting firm. He surveyed elementary schools in Ireland regarding teacher attitudes regarding iPads and how much they were used in the classroom. The teachers noted the amount of time it took to plan and secure the devices and the lack of professional development as the main barriers to iPad use in the classroom.

A study conducted in Ohio reported the teachers they surveyed had two initial concerns: the effects of technology on student learning and its usefulness for the subject area being taught. Although teachers viewed technology and digital devices as a great visual with current

information, they were also aware that many students might become distracted. During a follow-up interview, teachers mentioned concerns with the availability of devices, self-efficacy and current computer skills, little training with unfamiliar technology, minimal tech support, and limited wireless connections. The researchers found that even among those participants that felt as though their college training had prepared them to use technology in the classroom, continued training and support where desired. Even those that grew up using technology, or digital natives, surveyed were not comfortable staying knowledgeable with ever-changing technology. They also did not hold the same optimistic views the value of ITC (Information and Communication Technology) in increasing student engagement and performance (Li, Worch, Zhou, & Aguiton, 2015, p. 7).

Hechter and Vermette (2013) performed a research study with similar results. They determined that the main barrier to technology use in the classroom was teacher beliefs. Teachers with a negative view of technology are less likely to use technology and foster a love of technology in their students. While some school systems are investing much funding into technology, the dissatisfaction occurs when teachers are not sure how to utilize it or integrate it into their classroom effectively.

Francom's (2016) research indicated that teacher beliefs were not a barrier to technology in the classroom. He conducted his research in rural K-12 school districts in a northern Midwestern state. He labeled barriers in one of two categories: first-order barriers and second-order barriers. First-order barriers consisted of factors that were outside of the teachers' control, or external barriers, such as available resources, training, and support. Second-order barriers were thoughts or perceptions of one's internal barriers. Second-order barriers included confidence with technology, beliefs about learning, and personal level of importance the teacher

places on technology in the classroom. Over 63% of those surveyed reported a lack of access to technology as their number one barrier. Over 40% also stated that lack of planning and preparation time was also a limiting factor. Suburban schools were more likely to have adequate planning and preparation time than rural school districts. Although a percentage was not given, teachers listed lack of training, and minimum amounts of support were also barriers.

Given the strong correlation of teachers' attitudes regarding technology and its use in the classroom, school administrators should strive to implement practices that improve the teachers' perception of technology use. Increasing access to technology would decrease feelings of competitiveness. Training on available hardware and software would allow the teachers to feel more comfortable with its use and foster ideas on how it can be implemented into the classroom instruction. Regan et al. (2019) noted that with additional technological devices and software, school districts should provide training before and after implementation. Time for reflection was needed for leaders to address any negative attitudes towards technology integration that could be addressed and shifted to a more positive direction to allow for a smoother integration of the technology into the classroom. Support provided for devices and applications led to a more positive outlook on technology (Young, 2016).

As technology increases for teachers, technology also increases for parents. Parents' perceptions of the value of technology in the classroom vary significantly based on the family's socioeconomic status. The more the family saw technology used in the workplace, the more importance they placed on their child being exposed to technology. Children from high-income families were also more likely to be exposed to learning through technology at home (Ekici, 2016).

A research study conducted by Blackwell, Gardiner, and Schoenebeck (2016) reported that in their sample of teenagers surveyed, twenty-four percent stated they were online "almost constantly." Ninety-four percent of teenagers with a smartphone or tablet were online daily. Most of them were on some form of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or others). The same study found that parents and guardians of teenagers often are not as comfortable with technology as their children.

Many student management systems such as Skyward offer online grade books for teachers and online family portals parents can use to view their child's academic progress, discipline, and attendance. However, just like the teachers, parents need training on the software. Parents also need to be trained on devices the children are using at home and school. Before implementing tablets or Chromebooks into a classroom, a parent workshop could be utilized so that the guardians know precisely how to help their child with the technology at home. The educational benefits and purposes of technology devices should be made clear to strengthen positive parent perceptions and curve possible negative thoughts of potential concerns. Rules and policies regarding the use of school devices should also be made clear to ensure a smooth transition between home and school use (Zhu, Hao Yang, McLeod, Shi, & Wu, 2018).

Patrikakou (2016) stated that schools should also offer parents information and workshops on “parenting principles as they relate to technology and media use (p. 20)." Likewise, students should be taught how to communicate online properly and general expectations of school use of technology and safe practices to use at home when online. Internet sites such as “Edutopia” (www.edutopia.org) and “Common Sense Media” (www.commonsensemedia.org) offer information, online reviews, and toolkits that can be used

by both teachers and parents to help enable them to share safe and proper use of online resources with their students. Patrikakou gave this advice:

> For example, establishing, explaining, applying, monitoring, and enforcing clear rules regarding computer use and web access with students should not only be part of the school's planning and routine, but specifics of this sequence should also be shared with parents as a framing reference for what they could be doing at home to reinforce and extend healthy technology and media-use habits. In this way, schools can serve as facilitators of productive parent-child interactions and support parents in navigating the complex and often overwhelming parameters of the digital era. (p. 20)

Teaching parents to utilize technology has many benefits. Not only can they help their children with technology learning at home, using programs such as Skyward Family Access and email increases the amount of communication and timeliness of a response. One school included a tab labeled "Parental Involvement" on their website to list volunteer opportunities for parents and to share links the teachers researched and found appropriate for the students to visit to complete class assignments and to explore with their parents. The teachers at this school maintained their own class website to list homework assignments, standards being taught, and other information relevant to the class. Other communication techniques included an "All Call" system, electronic newsletters sent via email, and e-blasts to send short but essential messages (Smith, Wohlsetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011).

Applications such as Skyward Family Access take online access for parents a step further. With a login to a website or by downloading a mobile app to their smartphones, parents can view attendance, monitor grades, view assignments, communicate with the teachers and administration, make a course request for high school students, and check food service account

balances. Parents can also set email alerts for customized grade thresholds, attendance, progress reports, and low food service account balances. Teachers, coaches, and club sponsors can use it to directly message parents and students of upcoming events or schedule changes. The application was set up with a similar look and navigation as many popular social media sites so that it would be easy for most users to learn very quickly (Skyward, n.d.).

Skyward also directly links with the automated calling software School Messenger. Parents are able to log into Skyward and update phone numbers used to call and text as well as email addresses. When parents update the information in Skyward, it is almost instantly updated in School Messenger also. This practice ensures that when automated calls and emails are sent from each school, the software has the most up-to-date contact information.

Grady (2011) quoted a principal as stating, “To be a principal in the 21st-century school demands leadership of technology. To be a leader of technology requires a willingness to learn, flexibility, and the capacity to accept change as a constant factor. Adaptability and acceptance of ambiguity are essential” (p. 1). Grady concluded that the principal had to find ways to make devices and appropriate software for the staff and students. Training must be relevant and frequent, and professional development activities should stress practices that incorporate technology into daily classroom instruction. Opportunities should be scheduled for parents and guardians to learn about what their children are using at school and how they can utilize technology at home. That principal went on to say, "Because technology changes continuously, there is no menu of technology must-dos and must-haves. Instead, leaders of technology must be lifelong learners and explorers of the new, the exciting, and the useful in technology” (p. 1).

Effects of Chronic Absenteeism

Chang and Romero (2008) stated, "Students have to be present and engaged in order to

learn" (p. 1). Thousands of students are academically at-risk due to excessive absences during the early grades. Regular attendance is crucial to establishing a firm foundation for further learning. Not only do students acquire academic knowledge, but they also develop social skills. If these skills are not developed by 3rd grade, students require additional educational interventions and are at a higher risk of being a drop-out. The absences of students with chronic absenteeism also affect other students. The teacher must focus attention on chronically absent students, diverting the attention of students with regular attendance.

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) found that chronic absenteeism in 1st grade is correlated with lower academic performance for all genders, ethnicities, and social classes. There is an even stronger correlation between attendance and academic performance for Latino children who were also chronically absent in kindergarten. Regular school attendance is particularly important for impoverished families that may not have access to resources to help children fill in the gaps obtained when they miss school. For students in poverty, chronic absenteeism in kindergarten is a predictor of the lowest percentile in student achievement after 5th grade. Chronic absenteeism rates can vary in schools across a district. The example used in this article was in a school district with a chronic absenteeism rate of 13.8% had schools with rates falling in the range of 1-54.5% (Chang and Romero, 2008).

Christian, Revetti, Young, and Larwin (2015) cited research from the Chronic Absenteeism Issue Brief Series (CAIBS). According to CAIBS, poor attendance affects learning, social connections to peers, teachers, and the school community, physical and mental health, graduation rates, and the ability to obtain employment.

Chang and Romero (2008) found contributing factors to absenteeism both from within and outside the schools. Schools that did not communicate the importance of school attendance

regularly and appropriately in the family's home language had students with a higher number of absences. Schools that did not monitor absences correctly or consistently also had higher absenteeism rates. Other leading reasons listed for increased absenteeism were the failure to contact families when their child misses frequently, barriers to attendance were not addressed, parents were not engaged in their child's education, and schools did not have the resources to address ways to decrease teacher absenteeism and turnover due to being underfunded. Factors for the families included the following: not informed about the dangers and effects of chronic absenteeism, inadequate routines, lack of resources for families in poverty, frequently relocate, insufficient health care, prior negative educational experiences, and pressing issues such as mental illness, homelessness, abuse, incarceration of a parent, or other problems that have disrupted the family. The researchers also listed contributing factors from the community: Not enough support in the form of preschool or Head Start programs, lack of resources to promote positive child development opportunities, and safety concerns such as frequent occurrences of violence that prevent students from arriving at school safely.

Sprick and Sprick (2019) observed that students in kindergarten that are chronically absent have the lowest academic performance in 1st grade. Third-grade test scores are viewed as a significant milestone and predictor of long-term success for students. The researchers cited a California study that analyzed the test scores of 3rd grade students in correlation to their attendance when the students were in kindergarten and 1st grade. The study found that 64% of students with regular attendance, missing less than 5% of the school during both kindergarten and 1st grade, received a score of proficient or advanced. Only 17% of students who were chronically absent during both their 1st grade and kindergarten years received a score of proficient or above. Students who are not reading on grade level by the end of their 3rd grade

year are four times more likely to become a high school dropout than their peers. The U. S. Department of Education (2019) stated, "Children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade. Students who cannot read at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school." Teuscher and Makarova (2018) ascertained that students who do not complete their post-secondary degrees are at-risk for "social exclusion" based on the percentage of higher-paying careers and healthier lifestyles of those with advanced degrees.

Poor attendance has not only shown to have adverse effects on the individual missing school but also others in the classroom. Teachers lost planning and instructional time trying to catch up students with attendance issues. Group activities were harder to plan for teachers with several chronically absent students. Other students in the classroom were shown to have lower amounts of academic growth when classmates were chronically absent. Low academic growth has led to anxiety and frustration in both the students and the teacher. Other students had questioned their need to be in the class when they failed to see consequences for chronically absent students. Siblings of chronically absent students have shown to have a higher risk of becoming chronically absent. Teacher expectations have also shown to reflect teachers' experiences with older siblings (Sprick & Sprick, 2019). Chronically absent students had a harder time developing trust from their peers, at least in part due to their lack of dependability. Others in the classroom have been less likely to partner or want to be in a group with a student who misses school frequently (Sprick & Berg, 2019). Regarding Maslow's hierarchy, students with regular attendance in the classroom did not have their safety needs to be met because they did not feel secure their partner or a member of their group would attend school. The chronically

absent students struggled with their sense of belonging to the class, which also affected their self-worth (Jones, 2019).

Research has also shown that students who are chronically absent have higher rates of involvement in delinquent behavior, including the use of alcohol and drugs. Chronically absent students are also more likely to have negative adult experiences, including experience with the criminal justice system, mental health issues, and unemployment or employment in lower-paying jobs. Chronically absent students were found to be less likely to develop attendance habits, such as being on time or attending daily when they gain employment (Sprick & Berg, 2019).

A study of students in the San Francisco Bay area focused on the percentage of students chronically absent for a single year and a percentage of students chronically absent over multiple years, the demographics of students with and without poor attendance, and the relationship between attendance and academic achievement on the California Standards Test (CST). The researchers looked at the three school years beginning with the 2008-2009 academic year, and they divided K-12 students into cohort groups based on grade level. Kindergarten students were shown to have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism; high school students had the second-highest rate. Students that were chronically absent in one year were more likely than their peers with regular attendance to be chronically absent in the following years. The researchers also discovered chronically absent students that were chronically absent for multiple school years had an initial gap at the beginning of the year of the study in scores on the CST in math and English Language Arts. School districts should develop a policy to address chronic absenteeism, track student attendance, and look at both school statistics and individual student attendance (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016).

Belfanz and Brynes (2012) gathered data from Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, and Rhode Island for their research. They discovered students in poverty are at an even higher rate of becoming chronically absent. The six states reported between 6-23% of their students were chronically absent. Higher rates were more prevalent in urban areas with high poverty rates; up to 33% of students in that area were chronically absent. The rates were even higher in rural areas with a high population of students in poverty; nearly 25% of their students missed more than 10% of the school year.

Belfanz and Brynes (2012) also noted a correlation between school attendance and academic achievement, especially in math courses. Attendance was also shown to impact norm-referenced and criterion-based test scores as well as graduation rates.

Attendance Trends and Barriers

Whitney and Liu (2017) focused on the effects of missing partial days of school. The study examined daily attendance for over 50,000 urban middle and high school students starting with the 2007-2008 school year and ending with the 2012-2013 school year. The researchers were concerned with the amount of part-day absenteeism comparative to full-day absenteeism, the type of subjects (core or elective classes) missed, and the different rates of absenteeism for various subgroups, including economically disadvantaged and race and ethnicity groups. Students missed more partial days than full days. The number of partial days missed (12.2%) was nearly three times greater than the number of full days missed (4.2%). When the researchers included a code of "tardy" as an absence, the partial-day absence rate increased to 21.1%. More than half, 55%, of the full-day absences were considered excused absences by the school districts. The rate of unexcused absences for partial-day absences was 92%. The rate of partial-day absences was higher in high school than in middle schools, and the most significant

percentage was prevalent among juniors and seniors. A chronic absenteeism rate of 23.6% was found when scrutinizing class period attendance due to partial-day absences compared to the full-day chronic absenteeism percentage of 9.2%. Nearly 5% of students were absent from their first-period class, the most missed class period, and 4.7% of students were absent from their last period class. Students were least likely to miss their middle period in their schedule. While little difference was found between core and elective classes, students were slightly less likely to have unexcused absences during core classes, and the class that was missed the most frequently was physical education. Students were likely to miss their social studies class the least. Black and Hispanic students had higher rates of chronic absenteeism than other racial or ethnic groups. Black and Hispanic students also showed the most significant increases in chronic absenteeism when students moved from middle school to high school. Black 12th grade students had a chronic absenteeism rate of 69.9%, while Asian students had a chronic absenteeism rate of 23.4% (Whitney & Liu, 2017).

Additional studies have shown similar statistics. The U. S. Department of Education (2019) reported that American Indian and Pacific Islanders are 50% more likely to become chronically absent than their white peers. Black students were 40% more likely, and the Hispanic students were 17% more likely to be chronically absent than their white peers. Students with disabilities were reported to be one and a half times more likely to be chronically absent than students with a disability. However, English Language Learners (ELL) were 15% less like to be chronically absent than non-English learners.

Research has shown that students in high school are more likely to become chronically absent than middle or elementary school students. According to the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) report, during the 2015-2016 school year, close to eight million students across the

United States, about one in six students, were considered chronically absent. Their rate of chronic absenteeism was over 21% while the rate for elementary students was close to 13.5%, and the middle school rate was just over 14%. The report referenced a Utah study that found that any student in grades 8-12 that was chronically absent for even one of those school years had a dropout rate seven times higher than students with regular attendance during the same academic years. While American Indians had the highest rate of any race during their school years at close to 31%, the percentage increased for every race and ethnicity at each grade level during the same time period (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Balfanz and Brynes (2012) found that kindergarten and 1st grade students have about a 10% rate of chronic absenteeism, but by 2nd grade, it begins to improve and drops to about 5% by 5th grade. However, the numbers started to increase again by middle school, and they continued to increase throughout high school.

While no significant difference was apparent between genders, students with disabilities had a higher rate of absenteeism according to the CRDC report for the 2014-2015 school year. Students with disabilities had a chronic absenteeism rate of 19%. Students without disabilities had a chronic absenteeism rate of just under 13%. Another group observed to have a higher rate of absenteeism was students who were mobile throughout the school year, including students in foster care, students with migrant parents, and students in transition (Sprick and Sprick, 2019).

Chang and Romero (2008) found several factors that led to chronic absenteeism. Some families had unreliable transportation. Others worked jobs with low pay and long hours that were inflexible. Some students came from families that could not find affordable homes and had inadequate housing. Access to proper health care was another barrier that was noted.

London, Sanchez, and Castrechini (2016) stated that individual-level factors including self-esteem, self-concept of academic levels, peer relationships, frequent unsupervised time after school, low grades, lack of educational desire, and drug use affected attendance rates. Family-level factors, including family conflicts and ineffective home discipline, also reduced attendance rates. School-level factors such as poor student relationships with staff and teachers and improper academic placement for students are other reasons for attendance problems. It is probable that all these factors were inter-connected. Sahin, Arseven, and Kilic (2016) also found a correlation between student relationships and student attendance. Students that did not have positive relationships with their peers, teachers, and administrators were more likely to be absent and had a higher likelihood of dropping out of school. Of those relationships, their relationship with their peers was the most important (p. 205).

Demir and Karabeyoglu (2015) examined contributing factors to absenteeism and the effects of that absenteeism on the students. Five-hundred eighty-one students in grades 9-11were surveyed. Of those that completed the survey, 44% were male, and 56% were female. The results showed that 83% of the respondents saw the school environment as the primary factor in their commitment to the school. Students' commitment to school, the overall school environment, and family control were the primary reasons for absenteeism. As commitments to the school increased, absenteeism rates decreased. "Commitment to school" was divided into three different categories: commitment to teachers, commitment to friends, and commitment to the school. The commitment that had the strongest predictor of attendance was the commitment to the teacher. Teachers who did not show respect to their students did not address their individual needs, and those teachers had poor classroom management had higher levels of absenteeism. Ignoring students' educational needs made students feel incapable and

overwhelmed. It also could lead to students feeling bored with the material and instructional methods. Addressing one variable alone would be enough to reduce the absenteeism rate. However, when the students felt they were a valued member of the school, felt respected, and felt like they belonged in the school, the absenteeism rate can be reduced. The commitment to friends and family attitudes were also factors that should be addressed.

An Ohio study was conducted to find common indicators of students who were not on track to be on-time graduates. The study was conducted using data from three school districts that included over 50,000 students. The graduation rate varied among the districts, with a range of 56% to 91%. Student data for students in grades eight and nine were gathered regarding attendance, achievement, classwork, and discipline. Of all the data collected, only year-end attendance data for both grades eight and nine was the only consistent predictor of on-time graduation in all three districts. In the first district, 8th grade attendance rates below 93% (students that missed nine days out of 182 possible school days) and 9th grade attendance rates below 90% (students missed eighteen out of 182 possible school days) was a strong predictor on a student not graduating on time. For the other two school districts, attendance rates below 95% (nine days out of a possible 182) was a predictor of the student not graduating on time (Stuit et al., 2016).

Sprick and Sprick (2019) noted that one of the most significant barriers to attendance is poverty. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reported two-thirds of Nebraska chronically absent students were also economically disadvantaged. They referenced the Utah Education Policy Center findings that stated students who received free or reduced lunch at school were 90% more likely to become chronically absent than their peers who did not qualify for free or reduced meals at school. Being regular school attendees was the most effective way for students to escape

poverty. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) stated, “Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students, and it is low-income students who benefit the most from being in school every day (p. 6).”

Sahin, Arseven, and Kilic (2016) researched the causes of absenteeism and school dropouts. They found that the primary causes of absenteeism stemming from the student’s family were the child-family relationship, the ignoring of absenteeism, family problems, the family’s perception and value of education, and financial troubles. The relationship between school administrators and students, the relationship between the teachers and students, the behaviors of the teacher during class, and school attitudes towards attendance were the primary causes of absenteeism stemming from school personnel. The school’s attitude regarding attendance was measured by the amount of contact it had with parents about attendance, the amount of time and energy spent tracking and monitoring attendance, and the school consequences for students missing school. The school structure and school atmosphere were also seen as factors influencing attendance.

Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, meeting a student’s safety needs was the first level in the pyramid (Jones, 2019). A study that analyzed the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey found no significant effects of visible security on students' academic performance, attendance, or the desire for students to attend college post-high school graduation (Tanner-Smith & Fisher, 2015).

A study was conducted of an urban school district with about 200 schools and approximately 30,000 students in grades 1-12 during the 2014-2015 school year. The district had a graduation rate of nearly 60%. The researcher found the mode for the number of school

days missed, and the study focused on students who missed more than two days higher the mode. Students who participated in a previous pilot study the year before, students with a disability, and students in transition were excluded from the study. Up to five mailings were sent to the guardians of the remaining students. The control group received no mailings. The *Encourage* group received mailings that spoke to the importance of school attendance and the parents' role in reducing the number of absences. The third group, the *Encourage + Self* group, received the same mailings as the *Encourage* group, but they also were sent the number of days their student had missed. In the last group, the *Encourage + Self + Norms* group received the same information as the previous group, but they were also sent the attendance comparisons to the majority of students in the same grade level. All but the control group received five mailings over the school year. A phone survey was conducted at the end of the school year. The results indicated a better understanding of attendance from the four tested groups. The number of absences decreased for these students as well as other students in the same household. However, although attendance did improve, there was little evidence to support the guardians' beliefs about the importance of school attendance had changed (Rogers & Fellers, 2016).

The decision made by a student to drop out of school was found not to be an immediate choice. The decision resulted from a long-term disconnection for the school community. The degree of engagement in school for students contributed to one's perception of school, academic achievement, and relationships established both with one's peers and the adults at the school. The study concluded that the most significant relationship to affect truancy and school engagement was the teacher and student relationship (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018, p. 124).

Demir and Karabeyoglu (2015) recommended that high schools find ways to increase students' involvement and commitment to the school in efforts to lower the absenteeism rate. The

schools should make every effort to make each student feel as though he or she is an essential member of the school community. The feeling of belonging and importance to the school would decrease absenteeism and unwanted behaviors while increasing academic performance and success. School administrators' and teachers' positive attitudes and empathetic relationships with the students will also help the students feel connected to the school. The positive relationships built between the students and teachers will make both groups want to be at school more often. The school should provide a variety of programs and activities that are of interest to the students. The responsibilities and the positive relationships built with other members in the same program or activity will also encourage student attendance.

Parent involvement and engagement were also found to increase student attendance. Parents and guardians of students should be informed about the importance of attendance towards academic success and life skills for future success outside of school. Attendance rates were higher in schools that provided an engaging learning environment, retained quality teachers, and provided opportunities for parents and gradians to be an active part of their children's education. Attendance rates are higher at schools that provide a rich, engaging learning experience; have stable, experienced, and skilled teachers; and actively engage parents in their children's education. Communicating the importance of school attendance, often on a regular basis, can reduce the number of chronically absent students. Early interventions provided to students who are beginning to have excessive absence is also effective. Another method suggested was providing experiences in early grades that prepare children and families for continued educational experiences (Perry et al., 2019).

Chang and Romero (2008) ascertained that the first step in reducing chronic absenteeism was for the school system to determine if chronic absenteeism is a problem in its district, and if

so, to what extent. If it is a problem, partner with community agencies and families to understand the root causes and develop a plan to address those issues, it is also essential to monitor early absenteeism and to address issues leading to the absence as early as possible. Schools and communities have seen benefits from including information chronic absenteeism into existing initiatives focused on school readiness, afterschool programs, health services, and graduation readiness. Using data to early absences and setting data points as "triggers" to begin early interventions were listed as methods for schools to partner with families in efforts to provide each child with educational opportunities so that the child would have the means to maximize his or her potential.

Elias (2019) found that once the schools identify the chronically absent students and get them to attend school regularly, the work needs to continue. Students must feel welcome at school. When they are absent, they need to know they are genuinely missed and are a valuable member of the school community. "Empty seats may have economic ramifications for a school," Elias stated, "but continually filling the hearts and minds and raising the spirits of our students can have major social, emotional, and educational benefits (p.3)."

According to the National School Climate Center, a positive school climate is a foundation for academic growth, social-emotional, and character development. It is also a leading factor in preventing harassment, bullying, and school discipline (Elias, 2019). The research showed a strong correlation between school climate and attendance in general, although the research did not specifically address chronic absenteeism. However, the more students felt engaged at school, the more often they wanted to be there. The school should have a culture and climate that welcomes all students and their families.

The Social-Emotional Learning Alliance for New Jersey listed several critical elements of a welcoming and positive school climate. The school should be inspiring; students should be asked to set goals for the school year and each class. The teachers and administrative staff should model goal setting. The school should also be supportive; students should feel supported as they aim to reach their goals. Students should be working together to reach those goals so that improvement becomes a group effort. Mistakes should not be seen as failures but rather opportunities to learn. The school should be both safe and healthy; this included physical and social-emotional health. The overall culture of the school and each classroom should be respectful; schoolwide, everyone should show respect for everyone else. It should be made the expectation. Classroom instruction should be active and focus on problem-solving. The learning should be meaningful and relevant to the students. Teachers and staff should model what "learning together" looks like and its benefits (Dunlap, 2016).

Per a report by Perry, Gottfried, Young, Colchico, Lee, and Chang (2019) in 2018, the Policy Analysis of California Education (PACE) chronic absenteeism began being used as a performance indicator for California public schools. Over 12% of the schools were considered “in the red” due to a combination of the percentage of chronically absent students and significant decreases in attendance rates the previous year. African American students, students in transition, and students in foster care had the highest rates of absenteeism. Like California, 36 other states now use chronic absenteeism as an accountability measure. The decision to use chronic absenteeism as a factor was based on the following assumptions: chronic absenteeism can be accurately tracked, the measurements used to track it are fair, and that systems and schools can implement changes that affect the chronic absenteeism rate.

Numerous myths regarding chronic absenteeism were addressed. The first myth was that chronic absenteeism is a new concern. However, new methods of tracking attendance are new. The second myth was that tracking absences are the same in every school district. Different districts used different codes for different types of absences. The biggest cause of truancy is students skipping school was the third myth. Early elementary students missing many school days were a bigger problem. The myth that schools can quickly reduce absences was also detailed. Schools have a limited budget and resources, which made it difficult to implement new programs. The last myth was that parents know absences are not good. Parents often underestimated the effects of chronic absenteeism.

A crucial step to reducing chronic absenteeism was to understand the factors that caused the students to be absent. Barriers external to schools such as illness and lack of adequate health care, limited transportation, and involvement in the juvenile justice center were factors for absenteeism. Poor school experiences that may have involved bullying, behavior issues, or academic challenges also played a part. Other factors included the lack of school engagement due to poor classroom instruction, uninviting schools, low teacher attendance rates, and being misinformed or uninformed about the importance of school attendance. It is not only important to monitor the data to see which groups of students are having attendance issues, but the staff must also find the root cause of absences. At-risk students need early interventions, and students on-track to being chronically absent need individualized supports put into place (Perry, Gottfried, Young, Colchico, Lee, & Chang, 2019).

Teuscher and Makarova (2018) concluded that the best way to reduce the truancy and chronic absenteeism rates was by promoting school engagement by "building and maintaining positive relationships in the classroom. Moreover, by establishing caring and supportive

relationships with students and by increasing their school engagement, teachers can prevent students' truant behavior, and possibly even their dropping out of school" (p.133). Sahin, Arseven, and Kilic (2016) stated that rather than punishing a child for truancy, preventative measures such as counseling should be the priority. School counselors should be the ones that monitor attendance, and attendance should be monitored daily, weekly, and monthly. If necessary, school professional development opportunities should be held for teachers to create a positive school atmosphere in efforts to increase students' dedication to the school. Koopmans (2018) studied the effects of moving students from a large high school to a much smaller high school, and determined students were more engaged in the smaller high school, felt more a part of the school community, and were more likely to attend school based on the relationships formed.

Sprick and Berg (2019) suggested that chronic absenteeism is not an issue a teacher or school can properly address alone. Family supports for students was found to be highly important in some instances for students to receive the proper motivation to achieve regular attendance. Schools that were successful in decreasing the number of students who were in the chronically absent category communicated their attendance data and goals with the parents and guardians of the students and the community. Information disseminated was supportive, without judgment statements, and written in each student's home language. Ideal supports included communicating with newsletters, back-to-school events, social media, and classroom newsletters. Attendance should be discussed with parents and guardians throughout the school year during parent-teacher conferences, and teachers should provide support and strategies for parents and guardians to directly target the most common attendance issues within their classroom. Other recommendations included putting limits on social media and technology use,

parent education addressing when a child is too sick to attend school, healthy sleep habits including bedtime and morning routines, and anxiety management techniques.

Gaps in the Literature

The literature addressed numerous barriers to attendance and reasons that justified tracking chronic absenteeism. The literature, however, did not include any studies specific to rural areas, particularly rural Tennessee. Although rural Tennessee students may face similar attendance barriers and concerns as students in urban areas, this study specifically scrutinized the individual needs of students from that region. This study also addressed the reason for the discrepancies in the attendance data between two high schools in the same district. The schools had the same resources and funding, but one had a 10% higher chronic absenteeism rate.

Summary

Monitoring student attendance and trying to find ways to motivate students to attend school is not a new problem America is facing. However, not until President Obama's passing of *ESSA* have most schools monitored chronic absenteeism. The focus in earlier years was on ADA and on truancy. ADA was monitored due to its effect on funding for some schools, and truancy was monitored due to compulsory attendance laws. ADA monitoring helped schools stay accountable as a whole, but it did not examine students' individual attendance. Compulsory attendance laws were successful at reducing the number of unexcused absences and preventing dropouts, but the majority of students' absences have been excused.

Accurate and timely attendance should be kept and referenced frequently. The use of seating charts, routines for the beginning of class, and reminders should be utilized by teachers to ensure proper data are collected. When analyzing the data, the percentage of absenteeism should be used, rather than the number of days. The terms *regular attendance, at-risk attendance,*

chronically absent, and *extremely chronically absent* all focus on the percentage of days missed so that students' attendance rates can be addressed throughout the school year (Sprick & Berg, 2019).

Many programs and incentives have been initiated to help reduce the number of chronically absent students. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the causes of chronic absenteeism and which methods work best to increase attendance rates. The attitude of the teachers and the culture of the school were reoccurring themes in the studies of the causes. Although health-related issues, including inadequate health care, lack of reliable transportation, feeling disconnected from the school, and a negative school climate were listed as the most identified reasons why students miss school. The majority of the research showed that building strong relationships, a sense of community, and a feeling of belonging and commitment to the school achieved the best results in approving attendance. In order to establish strong relationships with the students, families, and communities, a school must understand its roles within the family system for each student. Once the school's role is firmly established, it is able to meet the basic needs as outlined by Maslow and subsequently meet other needs in Maslow's hierarchy. The more an individual's needs are being met at school, the more likely this individual is to attend school regularly.

To accomplish the goal of reducing the number of students who are chronically absent, schools must work with all the stakeholders in the community. Schools should work at building positive relationships with students and guardians in efforts to determine the primary causes of non-attendance. Parents and guardians should be made aware of attendance data, attendance goals, and available supports and strategies they can use to help motivate students to attend school more often. Attendance meetings with the parents, guardians, and students should be

supportive and encouraging. Punitive measures should be considered a last resort. Common and individual barriers to student attendance should be addressed.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The term *chronically absent* was coined by Hedy Chang in 2006. She discovered that chronically absent students, students that missed more than 10% of the school year, tended to have lower academic performance than students with regular school attendance (Attendance Works, n.d.). She also found the student attendance was a strong predictor for whether a student would graduate on time or not. Her research showed that the more school years a student was chronically absent in high school, the less likely the student was to graduate.

Chronic absenteeism rates vary from one school district to another, but they also vary from one school to another within a school district. Scrutinizing one rural school district in East Tennessee, this study found that two high schools within the same system had significantly different rates of chronic absenteeism. This study examined the types of absences of the chronically absent high school students to understand more fully the reason behind the varying rates and to identify barriers to attendance at each school.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

Question 1: How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) in school A?

Question 2: How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) in school B?

Question 3: What are the school administrators' perceptions of any similarities and differences between the models of school A and school B?

Hypotheses

Ha1: There is a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school A.

Ha2: There is a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school B.

Null Hypotheses

H01: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school A.

H02: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school B.

Research Procedures and Time Period of the Study

The study used ex post facto data from the 2018-2019 school year. Permission was granted from the school district to examine attendance data from that school year. The researcher examined the absences of chronically absent high school students during the 2018-2019 school year. All data were retrieved from Skyward, the district's Student Management System (SMS), or the Tennessee Department of Education's Education Information System (EIS).

The students were from two high schools within the same Tennessee school district. The attendance records of chronically absent students, students with less than ninety percent average daily attendance, that were enrolled at least one-half of the school year were examined. Each

absence from chronically absent students was placed in one of five categories: unexcused absences, parental excuses, medical excuses, legal excuses, principals' discretionary excuses, and exclusionary discipline absences. The exclusionary disciplinary absences were further categorized into out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.

After the absences were categorized, the data from each school were compared and analyzed. Discrepancies from the two high schools were noted, and the principal from each high school was interviewed to note their perceptions of the similarities and differences between the two schools.

Description of the Study Participants and Setting

This study examined the number of chronically absent high school students and the reasons for their absences for a rural school district in East Tennessee. The school system contains two high schools, each with a student population of about 1,200 students. High School A had a chronic absenteeism rate of 29.45% for the 2018-2019 school year. During that same time period, High School B had a chronic absenteeism rate of under 18%.

Both high schools had very similar subgroups. According to the Tennessee Department of Education's website (n.d.), both schools had a White population over 93%, and close to 30% of the students from both high schools were considered economically disadvantaged. High School A and High School B both had an almost equal number of males and females.

The study examined the attendance record of each student who was chronically absent and determined the number of excused absences, unexcused absences, and the absences resulting from exclusionary discipline. For each excused absence, the type of absence (medical excuse, parental excuse, legal excuse, or principal's excuse) was also recorded. For inclusion in the study, the student had to have been enrolled in the same school for at least half of the 2018-2019

school year.

Upon completion of the multi-regression models, the principal of each high school was interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to determine these principals' perception of the data.

Description of the Specific Research Approach

Research design. A multiple regression model, a correlational model that examined the relationship between multiple variables, was constructed for both School A and School B. The independent variables were the different types of absences accumulated by the chronically absent students. The study was a retroactive ex post facto research study. Experimental research could not be ethically conducted, so data from the 2018-2019 school were analyzed to determine the relationship between the types of absences of the students. The models were compared to determine the variation in student attendance due to various types of absences. (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014, p. 386)

Data collection. The researcher scrutinized the causes, or independent variables, for the dependent variable of chronic absenteeism. The researcher compared homogeneous groups of students from two different high schools who had missed more than 10% of the 2017-2018 school year. The list of names was generated using the Tennessee Department of Education's Education Information System (EIS). The students' attendance records were cross-referenced by the local school district's Student Management System (SMS) to determine if each absence was excused, unexcused, or due to exclusionary discipline. If the absence was excused, the researcher determined the source of the excuse.

The perspectives of the principals of each school were obtained through an in-person interview. Both principals were asked for their impressions of the data from their school. They

were also shown the data from the other school and asked for their thoughts regarding the similarities and differences between the two schools.

Ethical considerations. Although overall attendance data is posted on the Tennessee Department of Education's website, individual student attendance is not. During the study, the students' names were removed; they were only identified by their state identification number.

The report identified the schools as School A and School B to further protect the identity of individual students. When data were shared with the schools, it was shared without any student identifiers or individual student data.

Data analysis process. The students were listed by state identification number, and all names were excluded while the research was conducted. A multiple regression analysis was completed for both schools to compare the number of each occurring independent variable to ascertain, which ones had the most significant contribution to the total number of absences at each school. Microsoft Excel was used to record the data and to determine the amount each type of absence contributed to chronic absenteeism.

The multiple regression models produced *R*, a coefficient of multiple correlations that denoted the relationship between the types of absences in combination and chronic absenteeism. Squaring *R* resulted in the coefficient of determination, the amount of variability of total absences that were obtained by each absence type. (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014, p. 387)

The analysis was used to determine the greatest needs of the majority of chronically absent students. To meet the needs at the top of Maslow's pyramid and for individuals to reach their maximum potential, the needs found on the lower levels must first be addressed (Jones,

2019). According to Bowen's family system theory, each student has a differentiation of self, and individual student needs should be met (Gilbertson & Graves, 2018).

Once each model was completed, the principal from school A and the principal from school B were interviewed to gain their perception of the data. Since the qualitative portion of the study was an interview to gain the perception of the principals, no triangulation of the findings was needed. Their responses had parallels from both Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Bowen's family systems theory.

Summary

Schools in Tennessee are required by state law and policy established by the Tennessee Department of Education to develop procedures to address student attendance. Procedures must be implemented to excuse non-school-sponsored extracurricular activities, court appearances, religious observances, military departure or return of a guardian, religious instruction during the school day, illness, bereavement, college visits, weather conditions, and family emergencies. Students are also suspended or expelled from school for disciplinary reasons. The accountability measures established by ESSA require Tennessee schools to monitor the number of school days missed by individual students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Regardless of accountability measures, being chronically absent has a significant impact on student achievement. Statistically, students who are chronically absent during any school year are more likely to become chronically absent in the following years. To better support students and their families, school systems must have a clear understanding of why their students miss. Research indicates that the more connected students and families are with their schools, the more likely the student is to have regular school attendance (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2015). The level of student engagement with the school yields a more positive perception of the school

increases their academic achievement and establishes a better relationship with staff and peers (Teuscher and Makarova, 2018).

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

The study was designed to examine the types of absence accrued by students who were chronically absent for the 2018-2019 school year to determine why they missed so many days of school. Data from two rural high schools in Tennessee within the same district were utilized in this study. Both schools had similar enrollment, but one school had over a 10% higher rate of chronically absent students.

The district policy clearly defines the types of absences, and the persons at each school responsible for maintaining the attendance data were required to attend yearly informational reviews. Data entry personnel at both schools were trained by the same district support on how to enter attendance codes into their student information system. Both schools used the same codes for the different types of absences. Information at the school level was uploaded nightly into the state database. The district office monitored the data to ensure accuracy in both databases.

Data maintained by the Tennessee Department of Education in its Electronic Information System (EIS) were used to determine which students at either school were chronically absent. A report titled “Absent Student” was utilized to download the attendance of all students in both School A and School B into two separate spreadsheets. Each student's total absences were divided by the number of days the student was enrolled to determine the student’s absenteeism rate. If the student's absenteeism rate was higher than .10 or 10%, the student was considered chronically absent. Also, any student that was enrolled for less than half the number of total school days was excluded from the final report. School A had a total of 313 chronically absent students out of an enrollment of 1,060 (29.52%). Eighty-seven of those students (8.21% of the school population) were extremely chronically absent, missing more than 20% of the school

year. School B had 186 chronically absent students out of an enrollment of 1,049 (17.73%). Fifty-two of those students (5.01% of the school population) were extremely chronically absent.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed in School A?

   Null Hypothesis 1, H0: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at School A.

2. How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) in School B?

   Null Hypothesis 2, H0: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at School B.

3. What are the school administrators' perceptions of any similarities and differences between the models of School A and School B?

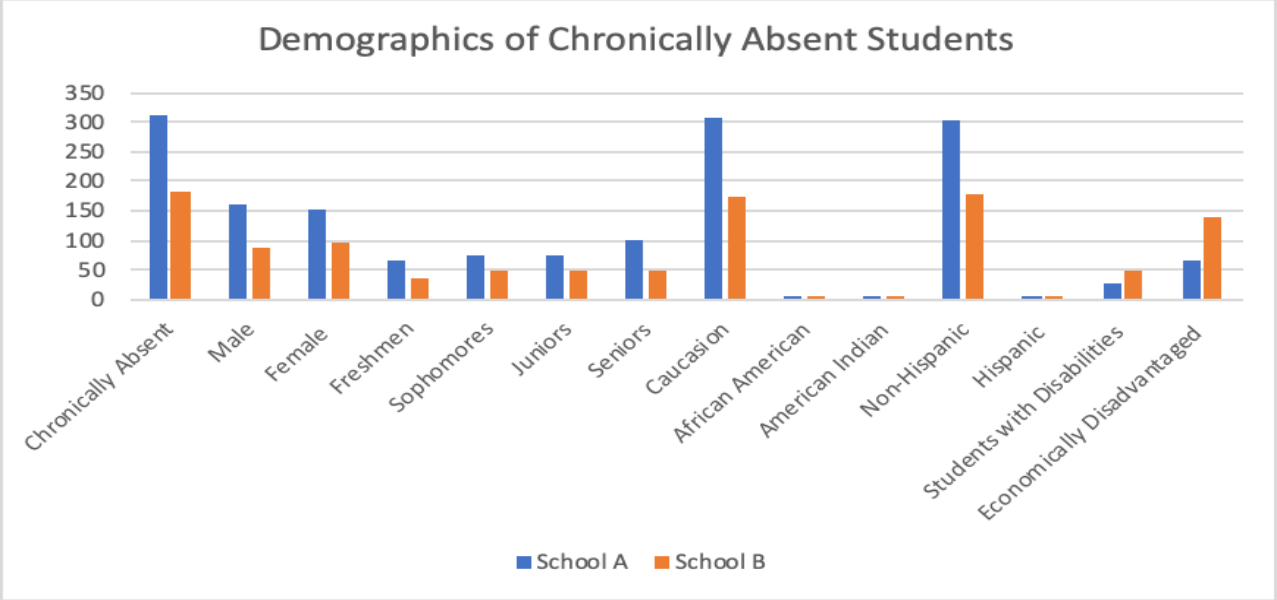
Demographics

At School A, 161 (53.11%) of the chronically absent students were male, and 152 (47.21%) were female. Four of the students were African American (1.31%), three students were American Indian (0.98%), and 306 of the students were Caucasian (97.70%). Eight students at School A were identified as Hispanic (2.62%). Scrutinized by grade level, 72 chronically absent students were freshmen, 72 were sophomores, 71 were juniors, and 97 were

seniors. There were 141 chronically absent students classified as economically disadvantaged, and 47 classified as a student with a disability.

At School B, 88 (47.82%) of the chronically absent students were male, and 96 (52.17%) were female. Eight of the students were African American (4.35%), two were American Indian (1.09%), and 174 were Caucasian (94.57%). Six students at School B were identified as Hispanic (3.26%). Scrutinized by grade level, 35 chronically absent students were freshmen, 50 were sophomores, 49 were juniors, and 50 were seniors. Sixty-five of the students were considered economically disadvantaged. Twenty-six of the students had a disability. The demographic comparisons of the schools are provided in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1. Demographics of Chronically Absent Students by School



Data Collection

Multiple regression tests were conducted for both schools. At School A, 304 of the 313 chronically absent students' attendance records were included in the multiple regression test. The total number of individual student absences was used as the dependent variable. The various

reasons for the absences were used as the independent variables. The reasons used were medical excuses, parental notes, legal excuses, principal's excuses, unexcused absences, out of school suspensions, and expulsion.

For both schools, each of the predictor values (P-values) showed a high statistical significance (less than .01). The multiple correlation coefficient for School A was 0.9896, and the multiple correlation coefficient for School B was 0.9978. At School A, legal excuses (1.38) and principal's excuses (1.15) were the most significant coefficients, and the smallest factors were parental notes (0.83) and suspended (0.91). At School B, parental notes (1.03) and out of school suspensions (1.07) were the largest, and legal excuses (0.79) and principal's excuses (0.93) were the lowest. The results for School A are shown in Table 4.1, and the results for School B are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1

School A Multiple Regression Test

	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*P-value*
Intercept	2.7594	0.2991	(<.01)
Medical	0.9977	0.0168	(<.01)
Parental Notes	0.8332	0.0388	(<.01)
Legal Excuses	1.3830	0.3450	(<.01)
Principal's Excuse	1.1527	0.1615	(<.01)
Unexcused	1.0057	0.0119	(<.01)
Suspended	0.9119	0.0528	(<.01)
Expelled	1.0165	0.0178	(<.01)

Notes: $R^2 = .979$ (ps < .05)

Table 4.2

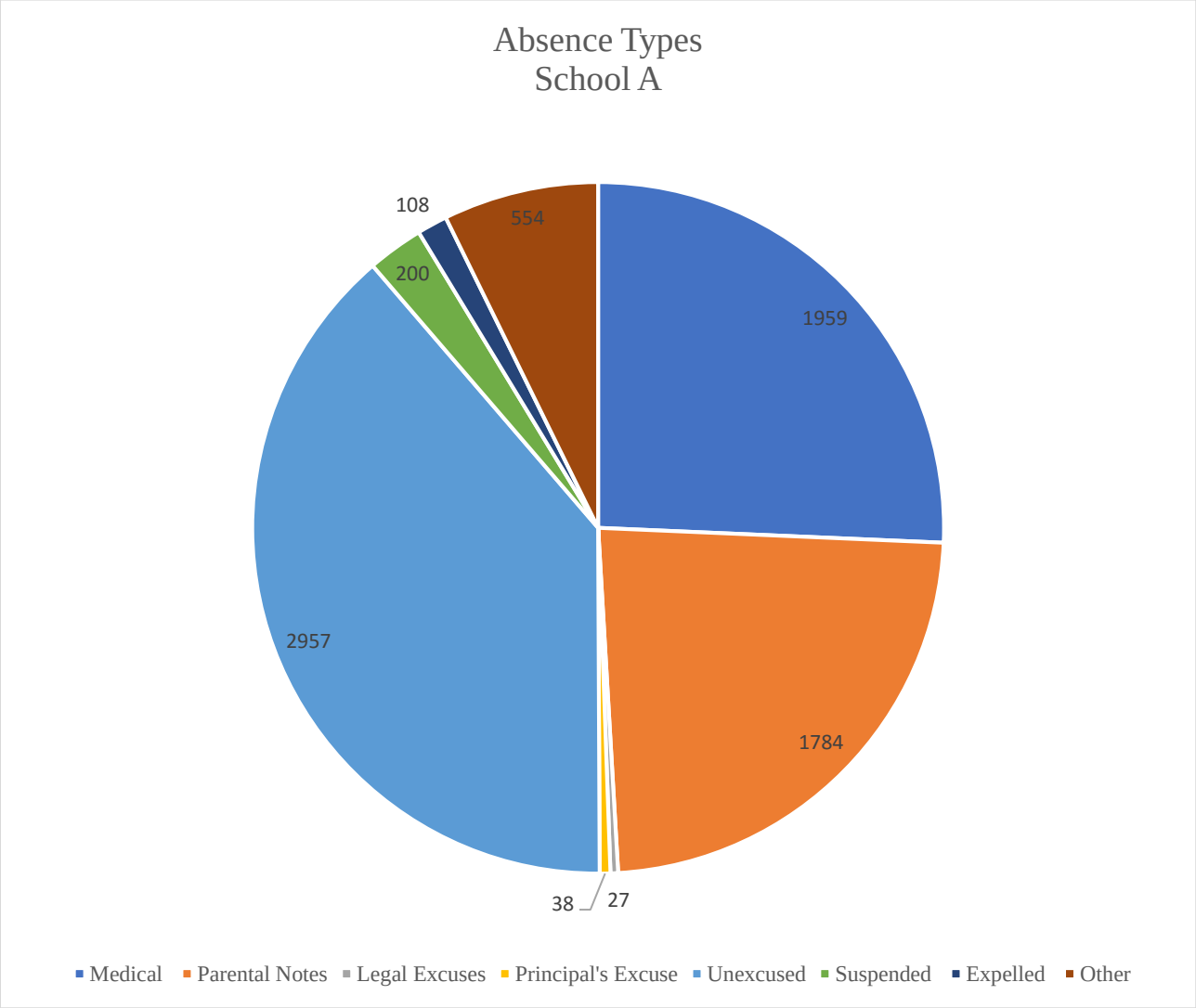
School B Multiple Regression Test

	Coefficients	*Standard Error*	*P-value*
Intercept	0.0949	0.1771	0.5929
Medical	0.9969	0.0082	(<.01)
Parental Notes	1.0332	0.0226	(<.01)
Legal Excuses	0.7924	0.1902	(<.01)
Principal's Excuse	0.9321	0.0980	(<.01)
Unexcused	1.0080	0.0065	(<.01)
Suspended	1.0653	0.0307	(<.01)
Expelled	0	0	N/A

Notes: $R^2 = .998$ (ps < .05)

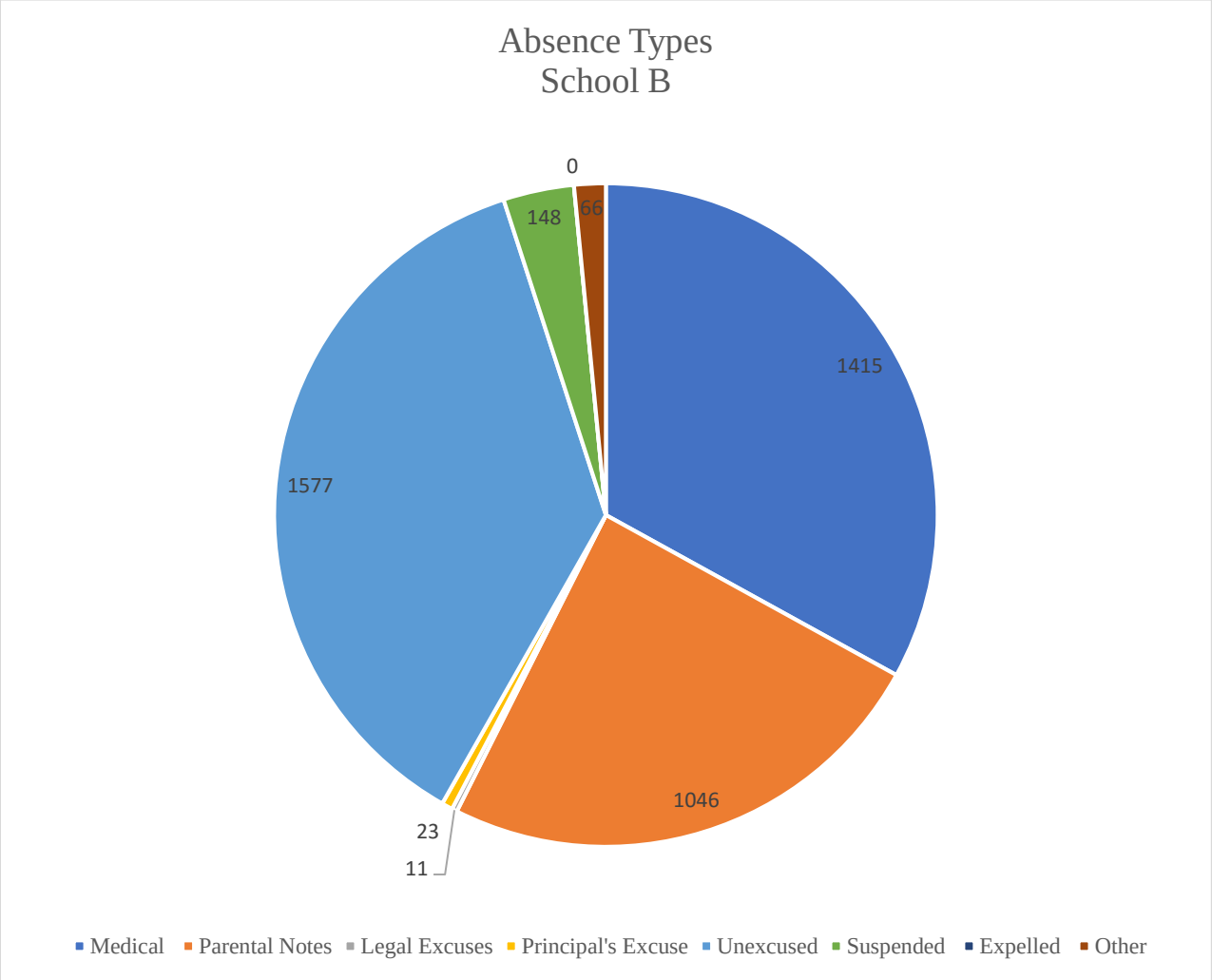
At School A, 304 of the chronically absent students' data were available to analyze. Combined, those 304 students missed a total of 7,627 days of school during the 2018-2019 school year. Of those absences, unexcused absences (2,952 days) accounted for the most significant percentage of the absences at 38.77%. Chronically absent students missed 1,959 days with medical excuses (25.69% of the days missed), and 1,784 days were missed with parental excuses (23.39% of the days missed). The breakdown of percentages is displayed in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. The pie chart displays the types of absences accumulated by students at School A.



School B had a total of 184 chronically absent students, and 181 of their attendance records were analyzed. Those students missed a total of 4,286 days of school during the 2018-2019 school year. Of those absences, unexcused absences (1,577 days) accounted for the most significant percentages of the absences at 36.79%. Chronically absent students missed 1,415 days with medical excuses (33.01% of the days missed), and 1,046 days were missed with parental excuses (24.41% of the days missed). The breakdown of percentages is displayed in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. The pie chart displays the types of absences accumulated by students at School B.



Qualitative Insights

In addition to the quantitative data, some non-numerical data were also captured in this study. The response to the third research question required a qualitative portion of this study to investigate how the principals of the schools in this study interpreted the data. The principals of School A and School B were interviewed to obtain their thoughts and perspectives. Both were given the "Fact Sheet" included in the appendix and asked the same four questions.

1. What is your first impression of the data?
2. What similarities and differences do you see?

3. In your opinion, what factors contribute to the differences and similarities?
4. What measures are you taking to reduce chronic absenteeism this school year?

Principal A. The first impression of the data from the principal of School A, was that both schools have a high percentage of chronically absent students. His school had almost double the number of chronically absent students as School B, and he seemed surprised initially. He stated that having almost a third of the students in School A being chronically absent is a "big number." In his opinion, the percentages were similar in unexcused absences, medical excuses, and parental notes. A difference he noted was the number of students who had three or more unexcused absences. He was startled at the number of chronically absent students that needed a tier 1 meeting, and he appeared disappointed that so many were left undone. He also stated that more parental notes were used at School A, although the percentages were similar. He believed that the system offered too many parent notes, and chronically absent students took advantage of those.

He stated that the student mindset of "it is ok to miss school" contributed to the similarities. He noted the differences were partially due to the socioeconomic status of the students. He stated that some students were from families that did not have transportation, and, if the student missed the school bus, the student would have no means to go to the school.

The principal of School A transitioned to a new role as a district high school supervisor in the same school system at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year. He was asked what supports or measures he has implemented in his new position to help with chronic absenteeism. He stated, as a former principal, a higher priority should be placed on completing the tier process for truant students. He stated that the process begins with informing the staff on what chronic absenteeism is and its impacts. He said that on the Tennessee school report card, School A

focused on graduation rate. He believed a shift needed to occur to focus on chronic absenteeism, and the tier process needs to be followed with greater fidelity. He stated the school could offer supports and assistance to students during the tier process. He also included punitive measures to deter absenteeism, such as denying students driving privileges, the opportunity to attend school activities such as prom, and the chance to participate in graduation ceremonies.

Principal B. When analyzing the pie charts shown in Tables 4.4 and 4.5, the principal of School B stated that his first impression was that his school did a better job of addressing chronic absenteeism. His mindset changed once he realized, even though lower than School A, his students still had a very high number of absences. He pointed out that the demographics showed the number of chronically absent students in both schools increased from one grade level to the next, but he was surprised to see so many underclassmen were represented. Before seeing the data, he attributed most of the absences among the seniors that were over 18 years of age and no longer under the compulsory attendance laws in Tennessee.

When asked the similarities and differences between the two schools, he noted again that School B had fewer chronically absent students even though their enrollments were similar. He stated that even though School B had a more significant percentage of medical excuses, the percentages of unexcused and parental notes were similar. He referenced the number of students with three or more unexcused absences at School A was double the amount at School B, and School B conducted fewer tiered invention meetings. The number of excuses in the "other" categories was also noteworthy. He was pleased to see he had issued a lower number of principal's excuses than Principal A.

When he was asked about the contributing factors to the differences and similarities of chronically absent percentages between the two schools, he stated School A was more rural than

School B. He believed transportation would be critical due to the geographical zoned area for School A. Being more rural also meant the students were further away from businesses and industry.

During the 2019-2020 school year, School B had shifted from having the administrators conduct all the tiered truancy intervention meetings to requiring the teachers to conduct the first meetings of the tier process. This has allowed the meetings to be completed quicker, and the principal of School B stated the meetings were held by staff members that had a closer relationship with the students. He also mentioned the positive steps and incentives being utilized at School B, which included drawings for cash prizes based on attendance and positive messaging in the cafeteria and common areas of the school. He was content with the changes that had occurred during the 2019-2020 school year, and he was positive that the number of chronically absent students would decrease during the 2019-2020 school year. He was thankful for the support given by the district office.

Other Findings

The district implemented a new tiered attendance policy in the 2018-2019 school year due to the requirements of Tennessee Code Annotated § 49-6-3007. Per the policy, once a student accumulates three unexcused absences, a truancy intervention conference must occur between the student, gradians, and the school. The purpose of the meeting is to implement steps that deter further unexcused absences. Before being referred to juvenile court for truancy, a student must have three theirs of truancy intervention or show an unwillingness to cooperate with the tier process. Of the 263 students at School A who qualified to have a Tier 1 conference, 149

students completed one of these conferences. At School B, of the 139 students who qualified to have a Tier 1, 55 students completed one of these conferences.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the types of absences that were obtained by chronically absent students at two rural high schools in the same Tennessee district and to obtain the perspective of the school's principals' analysis of the attendance data. The total number of absences accrued by each student was the independent variable. The types of absences included in this study were medical excuses, parental notes, legal excuses, principal's excuses, unexcused absences, out of school suspensions, and expulsions.

The first research question was answered by the results from the multiple regression test preformed on School A's chronically absent students' attendance data. The results of the test determined that the null hypothesis should be rejected; a strong correlation between the independent variable and dependent variables was found. At School A, legal excuses (1.38) and principal's excuses (1.15) showed the strongest correlation.

The next research question was answered by the results from the multiple regression test preformed on School B's chronically absent students' attendance data. The results of the test determined that the null hypothesis should be rejected; a strong correlation between the independent variable and dependent variables was found. At School B, parental notes (1.03) and out of school suspensions (1.07) showed the strongest correlation.

For question three, both principals discerned differences and similarities in the data. They both stated the number of chronically absent students at School A was much higher. Principal A primarily attributed a higher number of absences to the lack of truancy intervention plans that were developed for the students. Principal B cited the broader geographical region

zoned to attend School A and the higher number of economically disadvantaged students at School A for the explanation of the differences. The principal of School A stated punitive measures could be added to decrease absenteeism, and Principal B spoke more to positive incentives that could be utilized.

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Implications, Recommendations

Chronic absenteeism has shown to have numerous adverse effects on students throughout their school careers. A study conducted in California found students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade had only a 17% chance of reading on grade level by the end of 3rd grade (Hart Buehler, Topangam, & Chang, 2012). Research has indicated that middle school attendance has been proven to be a predictor of whether a student will graduate on time (Chang & Romero, 2008). A Utah study that found that any student in grades 8-12 that was chronically absent for even one of those school years had a dropout rate seven times higher than students with regular attendance (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). An effort to decrease chronic absenteeism must begin with an understanding of why students are missing school so often.

The effects of chronic absenteeism reach beyond academics. Chronically absent students have a harder time than those with regular attendance, building trust and relationships with their peers (Sprick & Berg, 2019). After high school, the student who was chronically absent is at a much higher risk than those that had regular attendance for social exclusion from their peers (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Chronically absent students are more likely to have adverse adult experiences, including legal issues, mental health concerns, and unemployment or employment in lower-paying jobs (Sprick & Berg, 2019).

This study focused on the types of absences of high school students in two rural high schools in the same school district. Both schools had the same policy and procedures for excusing absences. In a multiple regression study, the following were used as dependent variables: medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, out of school suspensions, and expelled days.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are as follows.

1. How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) in school A?

   Null Hypothesis 1, H0: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school A.

4. How much variance in student absenteeism is accounted for by a linear combination of the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) in school B?

   Null Hypothesis 2, H0: There is not a relationship between the variance in school absenteeism and the different types of days missed (medical excuse, parental excused, unexcused, exclusionary discipline) at school B.

5. What are the school administrators' perceptions of any similarities and differences between the models of school A and school B?

Theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs stated that people are motivated by their desire to have certain needs met. His theoretical hierarchy formed a pyramid with physiological needs at the bottom. Before the needs at the next level become motivators, the needs at the current level must be met. The next level contained safety and security needs. The third level from the bottom contained a sense of belonging and being loved. The needs on these three levels must be met before one can continue up the pyramid and, eventually, reach one's full potential (McLeod, 2018).

Family Systems Theory (Kerr, 2000) examined human behavior in the context of the family unit. The theory suggested the household members strive to gain attention and acceptance while aiming to meet the needs of the others within the household. Schools have often played a strong role in family structures.

Conclusions

This study sought to identify the reasons behind the absences of chronically absent students. The theoretical framework of both Maslow and Bowen revealed that a sense of belonging was crucial in meeting the needs of individuals. The study found the more importance the principal put on school attendance and value of school attendance exhibited by the community, the less likely a student was to become chronically absent.

Study findings to the literature review. For Question 1, the absences of chronically absent students at School A were analyzed. The dependent variable with the strongest correlation was legal excuses, followed by principal excuses. Although a few of these types of excuses were issued, that type of excuse was a predictor of chronic absenteeism. The principal of School A stated he did not place enough emphasis on attendance during the 2018-2019 school year, and the addition of additional excuses for chronically absent students reflected that. Due to the types of absences being linked to students becoming chronically absent at School A, the null hypothesis was rejected.

For Question 2, the absences of chronically absent students at School B were analyzed. School B had fewer legal excuses than School A, and the two variables with the strongest correlation were suspensions and parental excuses. Suspensions overall comprised only a small percentage of the absences; however, if a student was suspended, the likelihood of becoming

chronically absent increased. Due to the types of absences being linked to students becoming chronically absent at School B, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The principals of School A and School B were interviewed to address Question 3. Both principals indicated that the community surrounding School A placed a lower importance on education. The school could change the priority it placed on attendance and communicate that to the community. Local business and industry partnerships should be an area of focus. Most likely, these stakeholders would like to see school attendance increase due to research showing students who attend school are more likely to become employees that have that same habit of good attendance.

The data from School A and School B suggested the sense of belonging was missing at both schools. The highest number of absences were unexcused absences, and both schools had a low number of tier-one truancy intervention meetings completed. In those meetings, relationships had the opportunity to be formed, and students' needs could have been addressed.

According to Bowen's Family Systems Theory, the simplest shape that allowed for support in a triangle. If one section of the triangle were removed, it is no longer supportive (Kerr, 2000). When the triangle is formed by a student, the student's parents, and school staff, the conflict between any of the two, individuals or groups begin to feel isolated, and the support system is weakened. When students or parents feel a disconnect for the school, attendance lessens.

While one principal suggested punishment for absences and the other proposed incentives for attendance, a combination of both needs to be applied consistently. The culture and climate of a school plays a significant factor in its students' attendance (Dunlap, 2016). If a child feels welcomed and feels connected to the school, that child is more likely to attend regularly.

Approximately half (50.75%) of the chronically absent students that were also truant received any truancy intervention. Only those that received the truancy intervention were on a path that could lead to juvenile court. London, Sanchez, and Castrechini (2016) and Sahin, Arseven, and Kilic (2016) both found that poor relationships with peers and staff in the school environment lead to increased absenteeism and drop-out rates. The tiered invention meetings were an opportunity to strengthen those relationships or begin the process of court involvement. However, with the chronically absent students, several of those meetings were left undone.

Teuscher and Makarova (2018) concluded that the best way to reduce chronic absenteeism rates was by establishing and nurturing positive relationships at the classroom level. While technology tools such as Skyward Family Access increase the awareness of attendance issues for several parents, the lack of availability to technology may be a barrier for some (Francom, 2016). Communication between the child's home and school should be clear and in a way that is effective for the student's family.

Findings relevant to the district's policy and state laws. Both schools had a high percent of absences of chronically absent students due to parental notes (23.39% at School A and 24.41% at School B). Each student could have missed up to ten days during the school year by using parental excuses. Limiting the number of parental notes per student could result in fewer school days missed.

Both schools need to work harder to be in compliance with board policy and state law regarding the tier truancy intervention plan. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-3009 states that school districts implement a tiered truancy invention plan that begins when a student accumulates five unexcused or less as determined by that district's board policy. The purpose of the law was to keep students out of juvenile court for truancy. The bill accomplished its goal, but also created

mandated meetings that allow the school to strengthen relations with the students and their families when implemented with fidelity. The truancy invention meetings provide the schools with a chance to start the conversation as to reasons the student is missing and what support schools can offer.

Implications

The study revealed that the importance of attendance needed to be communicated more at both schools. The percentage of unexcused absences highlighted the lack of communication between the school and the students' homes. The teachers should be informed that positive relationships with their students and their families can lead to increased attendance. The goal of the tiered truancy interventions should not be to get the child before the juvenile judge, but rather to provide information and help to the family.

Training. Due to the low number of tiered truancy meetings that occurred during the 2018-2019 school year, the process may need to be reviewed with the administration. As School B turns the process over to their teachers, the teachers should be trained on how to conduct the meetings, how to record the information, and, most importantly, why the meetings are important in establishing relationships with the students.

Comprehensible input. Both School A and School B need to establish a stronger focus on attendance. Parent nights or other activities could be scheduled to share the positive outcomes of good attendance and the negative consequences of chronic absenteeism. The activities could also include parent training in applications like Skyward that allow the parents to track attendance and grades.

Teachers also need to stress the importance of attendance in the classroom. The best way to teach is to model the expected behavior. When teachers miss regularly, students are more

likely to attend less. Teachers can also work on the importance of attendance in their daily lessons (Smith, Wohlsetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011).

Recommendations

School B shifting the Tier 1 meetings from being completed by the administration to the classroom teacher is a positive step in increasing communication. Consistent and clear communication should exist between the school and the guardians so that all are aware of the attendance data, the school's specific attendance goals, effects of non-attendance, and the available support the school and community can offer students. Having the teachers reach out to the guardians and their students will establish or build upon an existing relationship, and it will allow for the teacher to better understand the reasons behind all students' absences.

The school district currently offers academic incentives for attendance, but only the students who are academically motivated are encouraged to attend school by this reward. Further study should be conducted on how many of the chronically absent students' plans included higher education compared to those who did not plan education beyond high school, and if their attendance hindered them from obtaining entrance to a post-secondary institution or completion of a higher degree.

Further study should also be conducted in the middle and elementary schools that feed into the two high schools. A longitudinal study over several school years could determine if the attendance habits of students learned in the early and middle grades continue into high school. Both the high schools in this study had at least one middle school with a low rate of chronic absenteeism. It would be interesting to note those students' attendance practices in high school.

Summary

The two rural high schools had very similar demographics, but one had a much higher rate of chronic absenteeism. The schools had similar enrollments (1,060 at school A and 1,049 at school B). School A had a chronic absenteeism rate of 29.5%; School B rate, while also high, was 17.7%. At School A, 31% of the students were identified as being economically-disadvantaged. Almost 43% of those students were chronically absent (141 students). School B had 23% of its students identified as economically disadvantaged, and nearly 27% of them (65 students) were chronically absent.

The principal of School A noted the lack of emphasis placed on attendance by both the school and the students' gradians as the primary reason for the gap between the rates at the schools. Principal B attributed this to the lower economic status and broader geographical region. Both principals were of the effects of chronic absenteeism and the need to further address at their school.

The goal of this study was to understand the reasons behind the absences of chronically absent students. For the schools to properly address the attendance issues, the reasons for the absences must be discovered. The multiple regression test performed with the data from School A showed a correlation between principal's and legal excuses and chronic absenteeism. The analysis revealed the strongest coloration at School B between suspension and medical excuses and chronic absenteeism.

Both principals mentioned parent perceptions regarding the importance of education played a factor in school attendance. Bowen's Family System Theory discussed how the child often duplicates the thoughts and feelings of the family. The child's sense of self is lessened, and, once it is developed, it is not easy to change without a lot of hard work (Kytzidis, 2017).

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Withdrawal.&config=025054JABlOTJjNmIyNi0wYjI0LTRjZGEtYWE5ZC0zNGFhOWNhMjFlNDgKAFBvZENhdGFsb2cDFQ14bX2GfyBTaI9WcPX5&pddocfullpath=/shared/document/statutes-legislation/urn:contentItem:4X0R-BCJ0-R03K-53BM-00008-00&ecomp=k3v8kkk&prid=97dcbdb7-cf62-41c0-b869-50ce2642d922

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Appendices

Appendix A

Fact Sheet Shared During Principals Interviews

Appendix A

Fact Sheet Shared During Principals Interviews

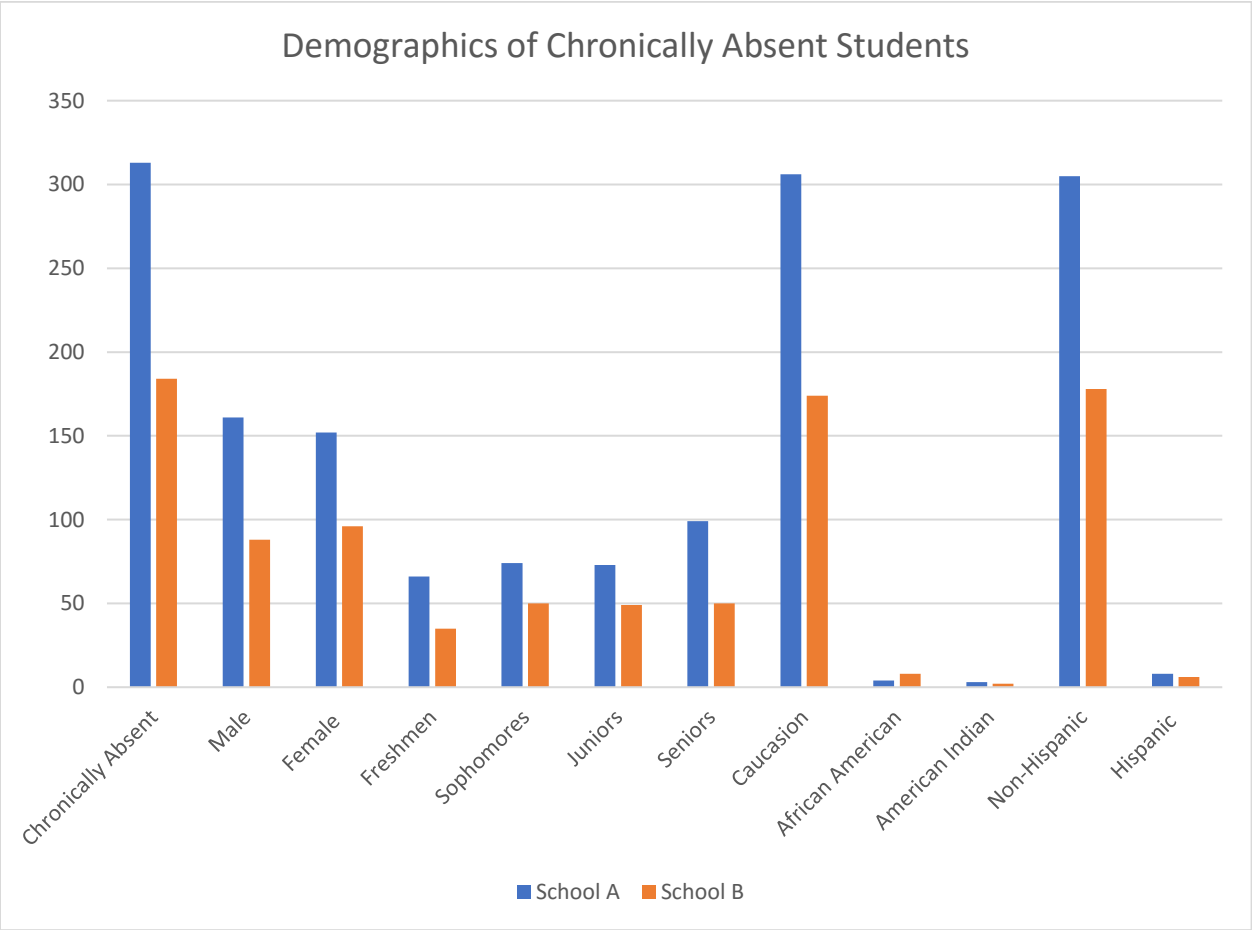
	School A	School B
Number of Students:	1,060	1,049
Number of Chronically Absent (CA) Students:	313	186
Percent Chronically Absent:	29.52%	17.73%
Percent of Absences by Type:		
Unexcused:	38.77%	36.79%
Medical:	26.69%	33.01%
Parental Excuses:	23.39%	24.41%
Number of CA with Three or More Unexcused:	263	139
Number of Tier 1 Meetings Completed:	149 (56.65%)	55 (39.57%)

Appendix B

Demographic of Chronically Absent Students

Appendix B

Demographic of Chronically Absent Students

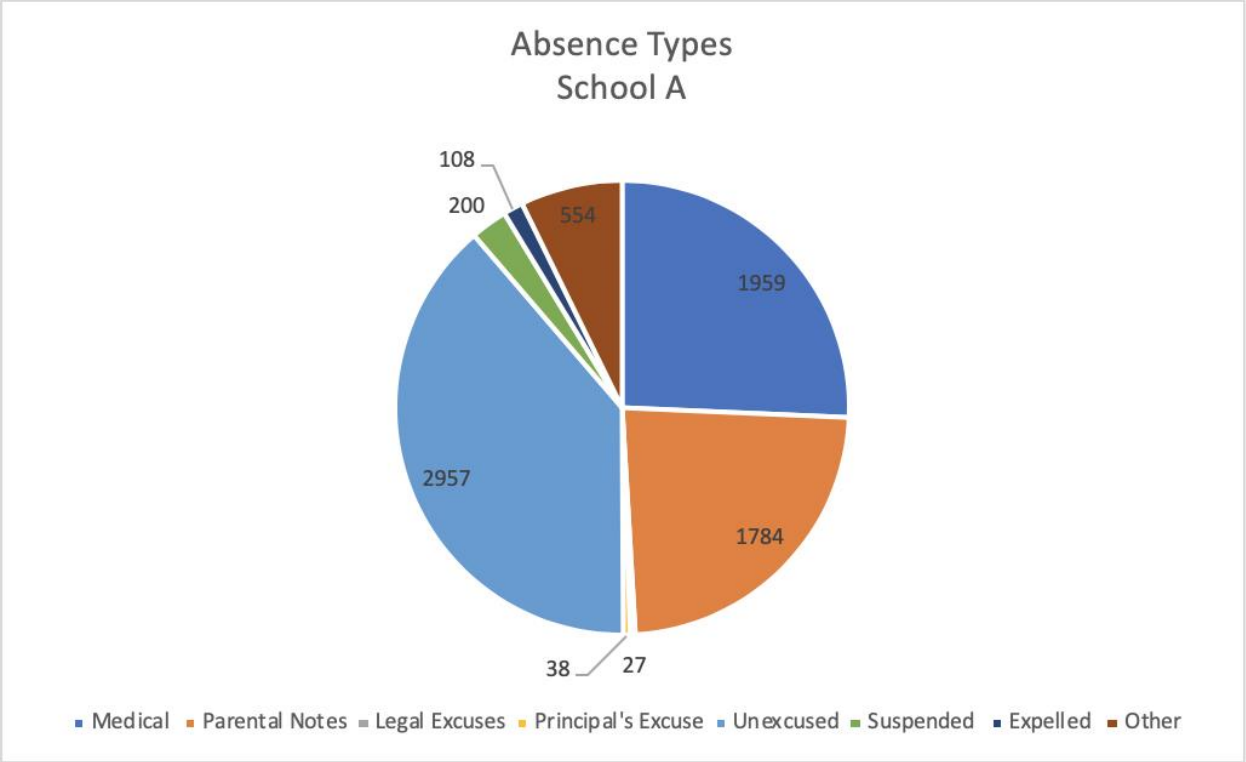


Appendix C

Absence Types – School A

Appendix C

Absence Types – School A

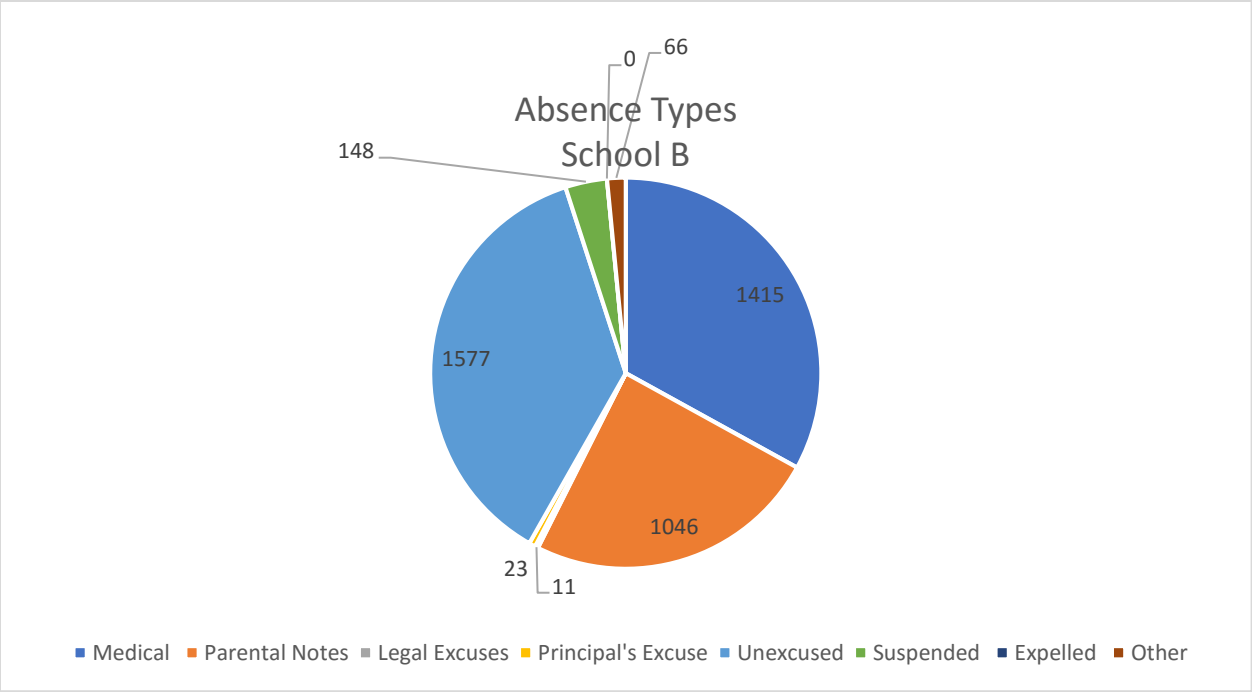


Appendix D

Absence Types – School B

Appendix D

Absence Types – School B



Appendix E

Interview Questions for Principal Interviews

Appendix E

Interview Questions for Principal Interviews

1. What is your first impression of the data?
2. What similarities and differences do you see?
3. In your opinion, what factors contribute to the differences and similarities?
4. What measures are you taking to reduce chronic absenteeism this school year?

Appendix F

Letter Requesting the Use of District Data

Appendix F

Letter Requesting the Use of District Data

November 5, 2019

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO USE DATA FOR RESEARCH

Dear

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Carson-Newman University. The research I wish to conduct for my dissertation involves analyzing the absences of chronically absent students in grades 9-12 during the 2018-2019 school year. I also would like to share the complied data with the principals of the high schools to gain their perception of the data.

I am hereby seeking your consent to analyze the absences of students chronically out of school to determine barriers to their attendance and to interview the principals of and

If you require any further information, please let me know. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gregory L. Sturgill
Attendance Supervisor

Appendix G

District Approval Letter

Appendix G

District Approval Letter

November 5, 2019

To Carson-Newman Univeristy,

As a representative of I confirm that the school district grants permission to Gregory L. Sturgill for the proposed research (Analyzing the Absences of Students Chronically Out of School to Determine Barriers to Attendance) to be conducted once IRB approval has been obtained. The research will take place at both in , Tennessee, and in , Tennessee.

Name:

Title: Director of Schools,]

Signature: 11/8/19

Appendix H

Informed Consent Form

Appendix H

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: *Analyzing the Absences of Students Chronically Out of School to Determine Barriers to Attendance*

Principal Investigator:
Gregory L. Sturgill
Carson-Newman University
Email: GLSturgill@cn.edu

Consent to take part in research:

- I_____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves a one-on-one interview with the researcher.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in a dissertation or presentation related to the dissertation.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in on a flash drive until stored securely at the home of the researcher until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation.

- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

_____ _____

Signature of participant **Date**

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

_____ _____

Signature of researcher **Date**