

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF
THE SUPERVISOR OF CHILD WELFARE AND ATTENDANCE
IN ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

By

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PREVIEW

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The Every Student Succeeds Act brought recognition to chronic absenteeism by requiring states to report on it annually. As many as 7.5 million students are believed to have been chronically absent prior to covid 19 and more than 10 million since returning to schools after covid 19. While every state addresses absenteeism in some manner, only the states of California and Louisiana address the matter with Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance.

The researcher proposed a conceptual framework that displayed the relationship between the Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance, the factors that impact student attendance, and the strategies employed to address those factors. This mixed methods study sought to compare and contrast the roles and responsibilities of the Supervisors of

Child Welfare and Attendance in these two states. To compare and contrast the roles of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance in the states of California and Louisiana, the researcher administered a survey in Phase I of data collection and utilized a focus group for Phase II of data collection. Through the analysis of data collected, the researcher determined that while similarities exist in the role of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance within each state and across the two states, there were significantly more differences in how California participants viewed their role and responsibilities in comparison to Louisiana participants.

Key words: Chronic absenteeism, Child Welfare and Attendance, Compulsory Attendance laws, NCLB, ESSA

DEDICATION

I thank God for placing this goal in my spirit and placing in my life the people that would hold me up throughout my pursuit.

I always sought the most isolated place on the cross-country trail to wait for my runners and offer encouragement. Each of you whether knowingly or unknowingly has found that spot on my trail. I love you all. Without you I would not have made it to this finish line.

This work is dedicated first to my parents James and Doris Barber. You have encouraged me, advised me and supported me throughout my entire life. You have both set the example for both furthering education and making a commitment to completion. I don't need to look far for examples of perseverance and determination. I am eternally grateful that you are here to see the fruit of your labor.

Next is to my wife Pama Barber. You have been the backbone of this household throughout this run. You have done all of the running around, picking up and dropping off while putting up with my complaining and frustration. You continued to pursue your career and kept us all sane through prayer, encouragement, tolerance, and compassion. I am truly blessed to have you and I thank God for you.

Lastly are William and Mataya. You prayed for me. You encouraged me. At times when I was discouraged you gave me a positive word, a hug, or smile. You gave me the energy to keep pushing to the finish line because "Barbers don't quit!" I love you both for the awesome human beings that you are!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	2
Context	3
Problem Statement	4
Significance of the Study	5
Research Question	6
Limitation and Delimitations	7
Overview of the Conceptual Framework	7
Definitions of Key Terms	8
Chapter Summary	9
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	11
History of Compulsory Attendance Laws	13
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)	15
Chronic Absenteeism	15
Truancy	18
Child Welfare	19
Coordination of Services	20
McKinney Vento Act	20
School Discipline	22
Conceptual Framework	25
Chapter Summary	27
III. METHODOLOGY	29
Research Questions	29
Type of Research	30
Research Design	33
Quantitative Design	35
Qualitative Design	35
Population and Sample	36

Instrumentation	37
Survey	38
Focus Group.....	40
Procedures.....	42
Data Analysis.....	43
Reporting of Results	44
Evaluation of Research Methods	44
Chapter Summary	45
IV. REPORTING OF RESULTS.....	46
Research Questions.....	47
Description of the Sample.....	47
Quantitative Analysis.....	49
Qualitative Analysis.....	50
Research Question #1	51
Survey	51
Focus Group.....	52
Research Question #2	54
Survey	54
Focus Group.....	55
Research Question #3	59
Survey	59
Focus Group.....	59
Research Question #4	61
Survey	61
Focus Group.....	62
Research Question #5	63
Survey	63
Focus Group.....	64
Chapter Summary	65
V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	67
General Findings.....	67
The Work Starts at the School	68
The Role of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance	69
Distinguishing Child Welfare Issues from Attendance Issues.....	70
Resource Partners.....	70
Implications.....	72
Recommendations for Future Practice.....	73
Ensuring District-wide Understanding of Chronic Absenteeism.....	73
Role of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance	74
Resource Partners.....	75

Recommendations for Future Research	76
Social Justice.....	77
Chapter Summary	78
REFERENCES	80
APPENDIX	
A. STUDIES TABLE	85
B. SUPERVISOR OF CHILD WELFARE AND ATTENDANCE JOB DESCRIPTIONS	98
C. SUPERVISOR OF CHILD WELFARE AND ATTENDANCE SURVEY	105
D. TRANSCRIPT OF FOCUS GROUP	116

PREVIEW

LIST OF TABLES

3.1	Alignment of Data Collection Technique, Research Questions, and Type of Research	38
3.2	Content Validity of Survey Questions	39
3.3	Content Validity of Focus Group Questions.....	41
3.4	Alignment of Survey Questions, Research Questions, Scale of Measurement, and Data Analysis	43
3.5	Evaluation of Research Methods	45
4.1a	Demographic Information for California Survey Participants	48
4.1b	Demographic Information for Louisiana Survey Participants.....	49
4.2	Alignment of Survey Questions, Research Questions, Scale of Measurement, and Data Analysis	50
4.3	Responses for Research Question #1	53
4.4	Responses for Research Question #2.....	57
4.5	Responses for Research Question #3.....	61
4.6	Responses for Research Question #4.....	63
4.7	Responses for Research Question #5.....	65

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	The Conceptual Framework.....	8
2.1	The Office of Child Welfare and Attendance.....	25
2.2	The Conceptual Framework.....	26
3.1	The Research Design.....	34
5.1	The Conceptual Framework.....	71

PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education is a state and local responsibility. This allows each state the freedom to organize its educational services to reflect the belief systems and social structures of its residents. Ninety-two percent of educational funding comes from state, local, private, and public sources. “That means the Federal contribution to elementary and secondary education is about 8 percent, which includes funds not only from the Department of Education (ED) but also from other Federal agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start program and the Department of Agriculture's School Lunch program.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2021) Two main areas of authority and responsibility to children exist. These areas are education services and child welfare services. In most states, these two services are provided through multiple administrative structures. For example, Texas employs Truancy Officers and Attendance Officers. (Indeed,2022) These titles may apply to school district employees or law enforcement officers. An interventionist is a position that may address only attendance issues. In some states these responsibilities are assigned to social workers. Curiously, Louisiana and California, each with unique populations, choose to organize and administer these services together under the administrative umbrella of Child Welfare and Attendance.

Regular daily attendance at school is key to student academic success. (National Center for Education, 2009) Consequently, chronic absenteeism is a barrier to individual success during a student’s school life. Moreover, students who experience chronic

absenteeism have challenges in life beyond their school years. This study seeks to describe the similarities and differences in how California and Louisiana address chronic absenteeism.

Context

Each school year students across the nation are absent multiple days for various reasons. “For example, factors like unsafe school conditions, bullying, housing instability, substance abuse and delinquency affect a student’s attendance.”(Aftunion, 2016) School systems are charged with the responsibility of educating all school age children under their state’s compulsory attendance law. Some, but not all, absences are excusable by state law or district policy. Nonetheless, whether excused or unexcused, absences from school negatively impact student achievement. Therefore, every school and school system must work diligently to reduce absenteeism in order to provide students with the greatest opportunity for success.

Truancy was an attendance measure under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Truancy is not a comprehensive measure of attendance as it captures only the number of unexcused absences that occur. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB in 2015. It requires every state to report chronic absenteeism data. It also allows states to select chronic absenteeism as one of the metrics by which the state is assessed. While Louisiana has not selected it as one of their measurables, California has selected chronic absenteeism as a measurable for elementary and middle school students. (Wilkins, 2021)

Chronic absenteeism is a term that encompasses all absences, whether excused or unexcused, and provides more detail about individual attendance patterns. Chronic

absenteeism exists in nearly every school district in the United States. Prior to Covid-19 between 5 and 7.5 million students were absent annually for nearly a month based on research by Balkans and Byrnes (2012). Post-Covid-19 at least 10.1 million students nationwide were chronically absent. (Attendance Works, 2022) Chang found that approximately 10-15% of all students nationally were chronically absent (2014). The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) estimates that nationally 15.6% of students were chronically absent in the 2015-2016 school year. In California, 12% of students were chronically absent in the 2015-16 school year and 15% were absent in Louisiana for the same year. (Sparks, S.D., 2018)

Problem Statement

Average daily attendance has existed as the widely accepted measurement of absenteeism; however, it provides only a snapshot. Average daily attendance measures how many students have checked in to school on any given day. While this has value, it does not provide information specific to an individual student or that student's attendance patterns. Truancy was a required measure for reporting under NCLB. Yet truancy only reports those absences that are not excused by law or school district policy. Chronic absenteeism is a measure that provides information about individual students with relatively high rates of absence. Research has shown that any absence may have a negative impact on student achievement (Ginsberg et. al, 2014).

If we can't get these kids in school every day starting right at kindergarten, the attendance gaps we're seeing become achievement gaps. Those students are at risk of dropping out, which increases their chance of ending up in prison or being unemployed. (Habig, as cited in Kohli, 2015)

Consequently, school districts are challenged with addressing the issue of absenteeism by providing support to families who face the challenges that lead to chronic

absenteeism. Individually, states develop their laws, resources, and responses to this challenge. There is no uniform model for addressing chronic absenteeism that is recognized nationwide. Moreover, the approach to addressing the problem may look different across various school districts within a single state. Nevertheless, each state, school district, and school must have organized plans to address chronic absenteeism. The states of California and Louisiana have included Departments of Child Welfare and Attendance staffed with Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance in their models. They are charged with identifying and addressing the factors that impact student attendance. Their comprehensive role in supporting students and their families will be explored.

Significance of the Study

Education often seeks to find programs, processes, or procedures that are successful and replicable. That success and replicability is often the result of studies that measure results and outcomes. Studies can be found and reviewed on many aspects of education such as curriculum, mental health services, parenting, and extended day supports. Successful programs, processes, and procedures can be identified through the publication of these studies and the interpretation of the results discovered.

In the United States, there is no single approach to addressing absenteeism. Moreover, as truancy had been the reported measure of attendance required by the No Child Left Behind Act, states were not required to address chronic absenteeism. ESSA replaced NCLB and allows states to select chronic absenteeism as one of their required measures. As a result of ESSA, many states have acknowledged chronic absenteeism as a significant factor for consideration when identifying areas of student need.

There is a great deal of data available about chronic absenteeism from across the United States. There is little research identifying specific models or Best Practices in addressing chronic absenteeism. Each state is left to develop their own approaches to addressing chronic absenteeism. The states of California and Louisiana address it similarly to each other yet differently from other states by employing a Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance as a key position in this effort. This study may reveal elements of a model that could be studied and reviewed by other states and school districts across the country.

Research Questions

1. How is the governance organized to address Child Welfare and Attendance in California and Louisiana?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the role of Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance between California and Louisiana?
 - a. What is the role of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance in California and Louisiana?
 - b. How are Child Welfare issues distinguished from Attendance issues in California and Louisiana?
3. How is the time divided to address both Child Welfare issues and Attendance issues in California and Louisiana?
4. What factors do Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance in California and Louisiana identify as contributing to Chronic Absenteeism?
5. What strategies are employed by Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance in California and Louisiana to address Chronic Absenteeism?

Limitations and Delimitations

While every state addresses chronic absenteeism in some manner, one delimitation of this research is that California and Louisiana are the only two states in the United States that employ a Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance to address chronic absenteeism. This study did not address student data as it relates to chronic absenteeism. It focused on the similarities and differences between the roles and functions of the Child Welfare and Attendance supervisors in California and Louisiana. Additionally, it sought to view factors contributing to chronic absenteeism through the lens of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance.

Overview of the Conceptual Framework

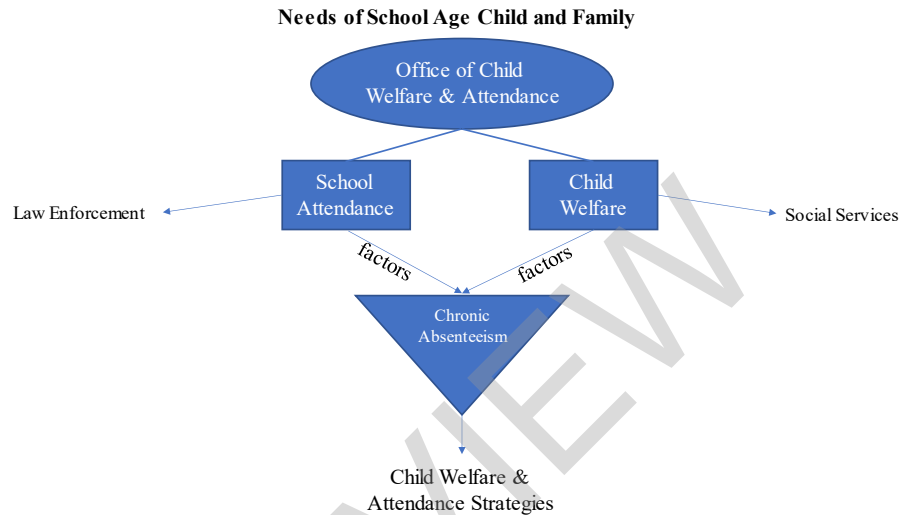
The needs of school age children and families in the United States fall into the categories of School Attendance and Child Welfare. Those needs are uniquely addressed through the office of Child Welfare and Attendance by only the states of California and Louisiana. The other 48 states address these issues by other structures. Factors surrounding the aspects of School Attendance and Child Welfare may lead to chronic absenteeism. Administratively, the Child Welfare and Attendance Department is designed to act as a liaison between law enforcement agencies and Social Services agencies. This unique structure allows for liaised strategies to address the problem of chronic absenteeism.

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the relationship between student attendance and child welfare and the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism and chronicles the strategies employed to reduce this phenomenon. It gave rise to the research questions developed to compare and contrast the systems found in

California and Louisiana. The conceptual framework will be further explained in Chapter II.

Figure 1.1

The Conceptual Framework



Note: The relationship between the office of Child Welfare and Attendance, School Attendance and Child Welfare, supporting agencies, the factors that contribute to Chronic Absenteeism, and the resulting strategies to address it.

Definitions of Key Terms

Child Welfare – a continuum of services designed to ensure that children are safe and that families have the necessary support to care for their children successfully.

(childwelfare.gov, 2018)

Excused Absence – an absence from school that is authorized by the local school administrator or local school corporation rule. (law insider, n.d.)

Truant (California) – Any pupil subject to compulsory full-time education or to compulsory continuation education who is absent from school without valid excuse three full days in one school year or tardy or absent for more than any 30-

minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof, is a truant and shall be reported to the attendance supervisor or to the superintendent of the school district (CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48260).

Truant (Louisiana) — Any student who is a juvenile and who is habitually absent from school or is habitually tardy shall be reported by visiting teachers and supervisors of child welfare and attendance to the family or juvenile court of the parish or city as a truant child. (LA Rev Stat § 17:233)

Homeless children and youths – individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (National Center for Homeless Education, nche.ed.gov)

Chronic absenteeism (CA DOE) – Students are considered chronically absent if they are absent at least 10 percent of the instructional days that they were enrolled to attend in a school. (CA DOE)

McKinney Vento Act – Subtitle VII-B of The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act authorizes the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program and is the primary piece of federal legislation related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. (National Center for Homeless Education)

Unexcused Absence – an absence from school that is authorized by the local school administrator or local school corporation rule. (law insider, n.d.)

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to compare and contrast the roles of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance in the states of California and Louisiana. The general

areas of School Attendance/Education Needs and Child Welfare/Health Needs were considered when investigating the responsibility of the Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance in addressing these issues. Underlying the comparison between the two states is the fact that chronic absenteeism has become a National focus under ESSA and that it may be the result of factors that exist in a school-age child's life. In Chapter II, the literature review, Conceptual Framework, and studies table will be presented.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is no national governance that controls the way in which the individual states address education. Because the right to educate lies within the power of each state, each one develops its own laws and guidelines and implement their own procedures and protocols to ensure the success of school-age children. Though the United States Department of Education provides guidance; states are not mandated to follow it. Various factors can become barriers to success for students. States choose how to address these barriers. In California and Louisiana, Departments of Child Welfare and Attendance have been developed to address the barriers that impede the success of school-age children. This study compared and contrasted how these two states, with vastly different populations, structure and administer services directed at addressing matters of School Attendance and Child Welfare.

Chronic absenteeism is one of the more significant factors impacting student success. “Chronically absent students are also at a greater risk for a number of negative long-term consequences, such as being more likely to experience poverty, diminished mental and physical health, and involvement in the criminal justice system as an adult.” (Wierman, 2021) Additionally, students experiencing chronic absenteeism are more likely to be retained or dropout (Balkans et al., 2012; Schoenenberger, 2012). They are also more likely to experience problems with social adjustment, psychological issues, and higher incidents of alcohol and drug abuse (Pellegrini, 2007; Zhang et al.,2010). School

systems across the United States face the challenge of addressing this issue at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

In most states, between 175-180 instructional days comprise a school year. In the United States high school students are absent an average of 20% (about 35-36 days) of those designated days, middle school students on average are absent 14% (about 25 days) of the designated days, and elementary school students on average miss just below 14% (just below 25 days) of the designated days. Absenteeism is comprised of both excused and unexcused absences. The latter is commonly referred to as truancy. The pooling of both types of absences amounts to a significant loss of instructional time for the individual student. From Pre-k to 1st grade, students who are chronically absent are more likely to fall behind grade level in reading. Students who are not reading on grade level by 3rd grade are more likely to drop out of high school. Students who drop out of high school are more likely to struggle with success in adulthood, face poverty, or become involved in the criminal justice system (United States Department of Education, 2018).

Although each state in the U.S. has some way in which they address this matter, only the school systems in the states of California and Louisiana address it similarly with Departments of Child Welfare and Attendance. The supervisors in this department have the responsibility of acting both as liaison between the family and support services as well as liaison between the family and the judicial system. Additionally, these supervisors, in collaboration with individual school personnel are responsible for identifying and addressing students with chronic absenteeism. They work with school personnel to support families by identifying the barriers that impede regular school attendance. This study sought to identify the contributing factors to chronic absenteeism

as viewed by the Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance and to identify the similarities and differences in the steps taken by the states of California and Louisiana to address these factors.

Key search terms: Absenteeism, Chronic absenteeism, Truancy, School Attendance, Compulsory Attendance laws, Child Welfare, Child Welfare and Attendance, Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance, Homeless, NCLB, and ESSA. The following sources were used to find research material: Eric, JSTOR, ProQuest, California Department of Education, Louisiana Department of Education.

This chapter presents information in three main categories: History of Compulsory Attendance Laws, Chronic absenteeism, Child Welfare. Furthermore, it will compare and contrast the systems of California and Louisiana.

History of Compulsory Attendance Laws

Educational practices in America can be traced back to the 1600s. Educational practices in America were heavily influenced by settlers from European and British colonies. In 1635, the Boston Latin School was established and designed for sons of certain social classes who were destined for leadership positions in church state or the courts. (Boston Latin School) In 1638, the Hartford public high school opened in Hartford Connecticut and is considered to be the second oldest secondary school in the United States. In 1727, the Ursuline Academy of New Orleans was founded. It was a Catholic school for girls sponsored by the sisters of the order of Saint Ursula. It is the oldest continuously operating school for girls and the oldest Catholic school in the United States (Clark, 1992). Reform was taking place in education with the establishment of