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# TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS, PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS,
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# ABSTRACT

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS,

PROGRAMS AND INTERVENTIONS: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

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The purpose of this mixed method study was to examine the relationships between teachers' academic department, years of experience, tenure status, and their knowledge of chronically absent students and the existing programs and interventions to support absent students in their schools. The study utilized a district of five junior-senior high schools in a suburb of New York, which is ethnically and economically diverse. Participants of this study took a survey composed of questions from two different surveys from the organization Attendance Works (an organization dedicated to the improvement of school attendance nationwide). Interviews followed to better interpret and triangulate the survey data. While studies around student absenteeism have examined academic effects of chronic absenteeism (Balkis et al., 2016; M. Gottfried et al., 2019; Kirksey, 2019) and others have studied programs and interventions that attended to this issue (Eklund et al., 2020; Finning et al., 2018; M. Gottfried et al., 2019) there were very few studies that examined the role of the teacher or the teachers' input and perceptions on the issue at hand or the programs used to alleviate it. This study fills a gap in the literature as teachers' perceptions had not generally been considered in prior research. The results can

be used to inform teachers and administrators as to how they can best support chronically

absent students and the teachers who work with them

**DEDICATION**

To think that I started this journey back in 1990, shortly after finishing my master's degree is mind-boggling. I had earned 15 credits towards the administration degree at St. John's before my son was born in 1997 and it took me another 20 years to finish the certificates in building level and district level administration. That being said, I wouldn't change a thing about any of that. It was time well spent reading picture books, doing school projects, going to soccer, volleyball, football, basketball, lacrosse, baseball and softball games, as well as swim meets, and scout meetings while still squeezing in time for a full-time teaching job, laundry, cooking and the occasional night's sleep. My family is my motivation: my children, Andrew and Stephanie who always understood that mom worked and had other things going on, too. Also, to my husband, Dan, who always made sure to make dinner on the night's I went to school or was at the dining room table typing and complaining. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my mother, Adelaide, and my late father, Louis, who always supported and valued education for their daughters which was not always the norm in the 1980s. I love you all more than you will ever know.

My heartfelt gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Catherine DiMartino, for her guidance and patience. I now understand about the punctuation in APA, maybe. Also, much gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Joan Birringer-Haig and Dr. Stephen Kotok, for being my stats gurus, and for understanding that someone with a bachelor's degree in Spanish does not always get what is 'significant' in this life and what is not.

Finally, my love and appreciation to the unofficial cohort for their support:

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Without you all, I definitely would have quit after Stats 1.

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**CHAPTER 1**

According to the United States Department of Education, over seven million students missed 15 or more days of school in 2015-16. That is equivalent to 16% of the student population of this country. In other words, approximately seven million students are chronically absent each year *(*United States Department of Education, 2019) In its simplest explanation, chronic absenteeism is defined as missing more than 10% of the school year *(*United States Department of Education, 2019). However, the term absenteeism measures absenteeism for excused, unexcused, and disciplinary absences to supply a more complete picture of how much school, specifically instructional time, students are actually missing (Jordan & Miller, 2017). The causes of absenteeism can be categorized into three groups: barriers, aversion, and disengagement. Aversion is when students do not feel welcomed or are afraid to attend school. Finally, disengagement is when students do not have the motivation to attend school, nor do they see the value in attendance (Patnode & Patnode, 2018). Illness, housing instability, transportation or lack thereof, and suspension all prevent students from attending school and are considered barriers.

Average daily attendance is a measure of the percentage of students in attendance each school day. Chronic Absenteeism is the measure of how much school a student misses for any reason, including excused, unexcused, and discipline-related absences (Rafa, 2017). While most students will miss several days of school per year due to illness or other familial obligations, chronic absenteeism is when a student misses 10% or more of the school year (which is the equivalent of 18 days, depending on in which state you reside). Keeping in mind that this is less than two days absent per month, many parents

have chronically absent children and are unaware of how often their child misses school or that they should be attending school more often.

The current study examines teachers' perceptions of these students and the support that schools give to teachers in order to serve these students. The problem of chronic absenteeism is not clearly understood. There is a difference between truancy and chronic absenteeism. Truancy is the missing of school without parental permission(Chen et al., 2016).In contrast, absenteeism is any missed day of school due to illness, required court appearances, religious observances, transportation, or suspensions. The figures presented by the Department of Education regarding this issue are startling: 1 in every 6 students are chronically absent. With classes generally having 25 to 30 students that means there are at least 4 or 5 potentially chronically absent students in each class (United States Department of Education, 2019).

The Civil Rights data from 2015-2016 revealed that nearly seven million students are chronically absent every day (United States Department of Education, 2019). The overall rate of chronic absenteeism in the United States is 18%. The breakdown ethnically is as follows: White 14%, Black 22%, Hispanic 19%, Asian 8%, American Indian 27%, Pacific Islander 23%. There is an even number of males and females that are chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism peaks in high school for every race and ethnicity. According to the 2015-2016 Civil Rights Data, one in five high school students is chronically absent. In Middle School, 14% of students are chronically absent yet the rate rises to 20% in High School (United States Department of Education, , 2019).

Issues with chronic absenteeism can be correlated not only with ethnicity and race but also students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), English Language Learners

(ELL), and those with free and reduced-price lunch. Of students with IEPs, 26% missed three school days or more as compared to 18% of non-IEP students. 3.9% of Hispanic ELL students and 3.2% of Asian ELL students were absent more than 10 days, which is higher than the 1.7% of their non-ELL counterparts. 23.2% of students who are eligible for free lunch and 17.9% of students who are eligible for reduced price lunch missed three or more school days while only 15.4% of non-eligible students did (Garcia & Weiss, 2018). The aforementioned statistics are important to understand chronic absenteeism and to find the root or roots of the problem.

**Consequences of Absenteeism**

The negative effects of missing school have often been cited in the research literature (Bruner et al., 2011; Chang & Romero, 2008; Garcia & Weiss, 2018; Gottfried, 2019; Hancock et al., 2017; Kirksey, 2019; Schmulian & Coetzee, 2011). Absenteeism effects begin in the early school years. For example, 10% of all preschoolers and kindergartners miss school, which is generally predictive of later absences (*Healthychildren.Org*, 2022). If chronic absenteeism is addressed with students and families at a young age, it is more likely to be mitigated (Chang & Romero, 2008). Regarding reading ability, attendance is paramount in the early grades. Students who have chronic attendance problems in the early grades are less likely to read on grade level by third grade. 17% of students who were chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade did not read proficiently by third grade. Comparatively, 64% of students with good attendance read proficiently (Attendance Works, 2018). Those who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

Being a high school dropout is associated with poverty, diminished health, and problems within the criminal justice system *(*United States Department of Education, 2019).

While absenteeism is prevalent in the younger grades, it improves in the middle grades, begins increasing again in middle school and peaks in high school (Data.Gov, 2019). Targeting middle schoolers that are frequently absent has been proven to help in the transition to high school. Students in 9th grade often have problems with the transition to high school because of factors such as the size of the school, the new surroundings, the new people, and the departmentalization (Attendance Works, 2018; De Wit et al., 2010). It is crucial to have early warning systems and procedures in place to lessen the problem. By tagging and intervening with students at the earlier ages, the schools can be more successful with decreasing the levels of students at risk of dropping out. However, merely identifying chronically absent students is not sufficient. Research shows that there needs to be established programs that are continually reevaluated and tweaked to ensure they are evolving to meet the unique needs of students (Davis et al., 2018). Students need to be in school and schools need to find ways not only to get them there but to make them want to be there.

**Federal Policy**

Federal Education Law includes chronic absence tracking (Attendance Works, 2018). States are required to report chronic absenteeism rates for schools. School districts are allowed to spend federal funds to reduce absenteeism. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) was bipartisan legislation which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965). NCLB differed from prior legislation in that it included accountability through mandatory yearly testing, which required schools to

report on yearly academic progress. The hope was to close the achievement gap for disadvantaged students. By employing a standards-based curriculum, the purpose was to level the playing field for all students. The new level of accountability held states responsible for providing additional services for students who did not reach the minimum benchmarks. NCLB also gave states greater flexibility in using funds for their students' particular needs. A new facet of NCLB that had not existed before is that it gave parents the choice to move their students to other public schools or charter schools in their areas if the school their child attended was underperforming (United States Department of Education, 2019).

NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. While both laws were written and implemented to protect the education of the nation's children, ESSA, still required accountability, and allowed for even more flexibility and rights for the states. Furthermore, it reduced the required number of assessments students must take. Another important change with ESSA was that accountability no longer relied solely on student assessments but on many facets which appeared on the school report card. Besides reading and math scores, ESSA required Kindergarten readiness, school climate and safety reports, access to and completion of advanced coursework and attendance reporting (The Difference between the Every Student Succeeds Act and No Child Left Behind, 2021).

Additionally, ESSA classified schools into five tiers of chronic absenteeism. The five tiers are extreme absence (missing 30%+ of the school year), high chronic absence (20-29% of the school year), significant chronic absence (10-19% of the school year), modest chronic absence (5-9% of the school year, and low chronic absence (0-5% of the

school year) (*Every Student Succeeds Act*, 2019). Of the nation's 92,933 schools, 11% have extreme chronic absence, an additional 11% have high chronic absence, 31% have significant chronic absence, 23% have modest chronic absence, and 24% have low chronic absence (Jordan & Miller, 2017). At the time of their groundbreaking report on student absence, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) discovered that only six states tracked chronic absenteeism. At that time, California and New York did not collect the necessary data to track those students who were chronically absent. The states that did track chronic absenteeism showed the highest concentration in urban, low-socioeconomic areas (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Prior to ESSA, states had focused on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) instead of focusing on the constant absences of individual students even if such data had been collected. A school with a high ADA may still have chronically absent students. For example, schools with a 90% ADA could still have a chronic absenteeism rate of 40% as the ADA did not consider which students comprised the 10%. Different students could be absent on different days. However, within that 10% there could be many students who had missed school quite frequently (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018). States are now required to report chronic absenteeism (and not just ADA) as part of their accountability. Student rates of attendance are now tied to funding, and chronic absenteeism in schools has become a growing prevalent educational issue (Childs & Lofton, 2021). Because of the presence of ESSA, 37 states and Washington D.C. now use chronic absenteeism as part of their school report card or school accountability systems (Kostyo et al., 2018).

In 2015, President Barack Obama initiated *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism.* The program was a joint

program of the White House, departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development and Justice. The main goal of the program was to reduce chronic absenteeism each year by 10% (*Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, 2016). The initiative was an outgrowth of President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* program whose purpose was to eliminate opportunity gaps for young men of color and to ensure that all young people in American can reach their full potential (My Brother's Keeper, 2016).

My Brother's Keeper required school districts to report chronic absenteeism, as well as have interventions in place for the students affected by this issue. It also mandated that school boards develop and write policy that addressed chronic absenteeism and that districts adhere to the written policy. Within the policy, there had to be a delineation between excused and unexcused absences. Excused absences are defined as those for personal illness, illness or death in the family, approved college visitations, religious observances, or required court appearances. Excused absences must be verified by a parental letter. Unexcused absences, tardiness, and early dismissals are referred to as Absent, Tardy, Early Dismissals (ATEDs) (*Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, 2016). The school board's role in the process is to ensure that the policy is carried out by the superintendent and the superintendent is provided with the tools, personnel, and resources to carry out the policy and subsequent interventions (*Attendance Works*, 2018).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to better understand teachers' perceptions about chronically absenteeism, which includes the programs and

interventions for the chronically absent students and how teachers are supported in their efforts with the same. An explanatory sequential design was utilized. In the first phase of the study, survey response data was collected from teachers and teaching assistants at a district comprised of five junior-senior high schools (grades 7-12). This phase assessed if the independent variables of years of experience, tenure status, academic department, and gender related to the participant's perceptions of the chronically absent students and the associated intervention programs. The second phase was qualitative data collection, where 14 participants were interviewed as a follow-up to their responses on the survey.

Teachers' perceptions were measured by a survey composed of questions that are a combination of two different surveys from the group AttendanceWorks.org (Attendance Works, 2018). The combined survey is called "Teachers' Perceptions of Chronically Absent Students, Programs, and Interventions" and it utilizes a five-point Likert scale. The survey sought to understand if teachers' years of experience, academic department, gender, and tenure status affected their perceptions and knowledge of the students and the programs. It also sought to understand if teachers feel supported by administrators and pupil personnel service staff when working with chronically absent students. Teachers will demonstrate their knowledge of, input into, and perceptions of their schools' programs and interventions. They will also report who, if anyone, has helped them with their chronically absent student(s) and if they feel supported in their effort. The researcher conducted interviews with teachers using a semi-structured interview protocol. Teachers' participation was solicited during the survey process.

**Statement of the Problem**

Since the implementation of ESSA tied chronic absenteeism to funding, chronic absenteeism has become one of the most researched educational policy issues. The groundbreaking study in 2012 by Balfanz and Byrnes, "The Importance of Being There" was one of the first studies that evaluated chronic absenteeism data. The data from six states were used to assess trends and predict the severity of the problem in the United States. The report concluded that in high poverty urban areas one third of students were chronically absent and one quarter of rural area students were as well (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Studies on chronic absenteeism are mostly quantitative or qualitative and have different foci. A majority of studies focus on reasons behind absenteeism and the issue's effects on achievement (Arthurs et al., 2014; Bruner et al., 2011, 2011; Gase, 2016; Schmulian & Coetzee, 2011). Other studies focus on interventions tried by schools and school districts (Balenzano et al., 2019; Balu & Ehrlich, 2018; Mauer, 2016; Perry et al., 2019). However, studies have not been conducted that explore the lived experiences of teachers and their chronically absent students. Additionally, studies do not address the value teachers assign to the interventions in place at their respective schools/districts.

Thus, this mixed methods study gives a more complete picture of what is happening at the secondary school district sample chosen in regard to the students and the interventions and the support, if any, that the teachers are given.

**Theoretical Framework**

The concept of a wicked problem was proposed by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber in their article "The Dilemmas in General Planning" (1973). Both authors were

professors at the University of California, Berkeley. Rittel, a professor of the science of design and Webber a professor of city planning, used the concept to explain ill-defined problem sets that are difficult to resolve. The concept of the wicked problem arose in contrast to the scientific problem, which has a linear design and a set solution (Rittel & Webber, 1973). A wicked problem is defined as a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve. Wicked problems can be economic, environmental, organizational, and health-related and can play out globally, communally, or individually.

A major tenet of a wicked problem is its interconnected nature with other problems. The general concern of Rittel and Webber was that the social professions (such as education) were being misled by the hope that traditional scientific approaches could resolve social issues which they cannot (Jordan et al., 2014).

The Wicked problems framework is appropriate for use in this research as chronic absenteeism is a wicked problem: it is interconnected with other problems such as poverty, transportation issues, special needs, food insecurity, and lack of school engagement (Bruner et al., 2011; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Gase, 2016; Önder, 2017; Schmulian & Coetzee, 2011; Yawson, 2013). By examining the problem of chronic absenteeism by using the wicked problem framework, the research will explore the complex solutions used to mitigate the problem.

**Significance of the Study**

The study discovered teachers' perceptions and knowledge about chronically absent students and what factors affected those perceptions. The factors include years of experience, gender, tenure status, academic department, and particular school. Teachers are charged with keeping accurate attendance records for each class as well as ensuring

that those students who miss classes are provided with the learning and materials to ensure they reach the same benchmarks as their peers. This study also explored teachers' perceptions of the programs that will support in this effort. Teachers have many tasks that must be attended to each day and the additional task of the chronically absent student only adds more to the workload. Excessive workload leads to teacher dissatisfaction and burnout. Burnout has been described by many as having feelings of failure, exhaustion, and cynicism toward work (Rumschlag, 2017). By understanding educators' perceptions about the programs and support they experience at their schools, this study enriches the research literature with areas not yet widely explored.

For this study, it is also important to understand the structure of attendance reporting and record keeping. ESSA requires that each district or Local Education Agency (LEA) has a district attendance policy. New York State requires that each LEA has an attendance policy. The attendance policy must include its goals and the strategies to accomplish them. It must also include the determination of absences as excused and unexcused, as well as notate who is charged with attendance records and decisions regarding incentives for students who attend and disciplinary sanctions for those who do not. The objectives of the policies are to confirm that all students are meeting compulsory attendance requirements as well as knowing the whereabouts of students for safety reasons. Furthermore, the records should be used to look for patterns of absence and to create targeted interventions for them (NYSED, 2020).

New York State's Education Policy leaves much of the determination to the LEA with a few provisos: all teachers and students must be made aware of the policy and be aware of their rights and responsibilities. Suggestions are given for which absences

should be considered excused and unexcused, but religious observances are always to be considered excused (NYSED, 2020). Superintendents are required to report chronic absenteeism through the State Information Repository System (SIRS).

However, the state permits the LEAs to determine if there are minimum attendance requirements for course credit at the secondary level. It also allows the policies to offer make-up work for missed classes to receive credit. That is at the discretion of the individual district's attendance policy. Attendance can only be attached to course credit at the high school level. Identical to the national statistic, 18% of New York State's students are chronically absent (*New York State Office of the Comptroller*, 2021). While New York City schools have more chronic absenteeism than schools in other parts of New York State, there are many suburban districts that have high chronic absenteeism rates (Untied States Department of Education, 2019). Comparatively, those number are not as high as New York City schools, but they are still quite high. Because there are chronically absent students in all schools, teachers need to be supported and part of the solutions and programs for these students. Teachers are charged with educating students, yet many times they are not represented on committees or councils which devise those plans. The teachers are told what to do (whether it is feasible or not) and then need to not only find the time, but also a solution to educating a child that does not consistently attend school.

Chronic absenteeism is a major threat to school completion. Two of the National Education Goals are school completion and student achievement and citizenship (Law.cornell.edu). By the time a student is in high school, attendance rate is a better dropout indicator than test scores. Chronic absenteeism during the school years is shown

to lead to absenteeism in the post school years during employment (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

**Connection with the Vincentian Mission in Education**

The Vincentian Mission in education strives to provide an excellent educational experience for all: specifically, for those who are economically, physically, or socially disadvantaged (St. John's University, 2021). People of color are chronically absent more often than white students and special education students are absent more often than their general education counterparts (United States Department of Education, 2019). Furthermore, chronic absenteeism is often rooted in poverty. Those who live in poverty have more health, transportation, and housing issues. All which lead to absenteeism (D'Agostino et al., 2019). The result of this research has the potential of creating interventions for these underserved populations. Because the Vincentian mission is to devote intellectual and physical resources to seek the sources of social injustices, this study is directly related because, by gathering data from teachers, the researcher aimed to determine how teachers are supported in their efforts to educate these students. By seeking teacher input, the programs to help these students may be improve, which in turn may increase student attendance. Those who are more engaged in schools are less likely to be involved in risky behaviors later in life (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Students who attend school are more likely to be college and career ready. Reduction in chronic absenteeism will create opportunities for higher education for these underserved groups. They are more likely to attend post-secondary institutions which create better economic outcomes later in life (Ansari et al., 2020; Attendance Works, 2018).

**Research Design**

This study utilizes a mixed method design. Specifically, it employs a concurrent transformative design. In a concurrent transformative design, there is concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data; each having equal weight. This type of design also employs a framework (Kroll & Neri, 2009). Mixed methods research combines both quantitative and qualitative data. However, it is important to note that it is not just the combination of both methods. By using both forms of data together, it will give more strength to the research. The combination of the methods provides an expanded understanding of research problems (Creswell, 2009).

Mixed method designs are appropriate for understanding differences in quantitative data. They also give voice to the quantitative data and explain the 'why' behind the findings in the quantitative portion of the study (Creswell, 2017). The main purposes of combining quantitative and qualitative data are for triangulation of data, complementarity of viewpoints and more enhanced understandings than using one method of research (Ansari et al., 2020).

By using a concurrent transformative design, the researcher collected the data in two distinct phases. The quantitative data was collected via survey form at a single district that consists of five junior-senior high schools. Analyzing the results, the researcher was able to gather initial descriptive data as well as gauge teacher perceptions.

Subsequently, the researcher gathered perspectives of several teachers using an interview format, and follow-up participants were identified as part of the survey. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher interviewed 14 teachers. The

interviews helped to explain the choices the participants made while participating in the survey (Creswell, 2017).

**Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows:

*Descriptive Research Question 1*

How do teachers' years of experience, tenure status, and academic department influence their knowledge of chronically absent students?

$H_0$: There will be no significant difference in teachers' perception scores of chronically absent students when comparing teachers' years of experience, tenure status, and academic departments.

$H_1$: There will be a significant difference in teachers' perception scores of chronically absent students when comparing teachers' years of experience, tenure status, and academic departments.

*Quantitative Research Question 1*

How do teachers' years of experience, gender, tenure status and academic department influence their perceptions of their schools' programs and interventions for the reduction of chronic absenteeism?

$H_0$: There will be no significant difference in teachers' perception scores of their schools' programs and interventions for chronic absenteeism reduction when comparing teachers' years of experience, tenure status, and academic departments.

$H_1$: There will be a significant difference in teachers' perception scores of their schools' programs and interventions for chronic absenteeism reduction when comparing teachers' years of experience, tenure status, and academic departments.

### *Qualitative Central Research Question*

What are teacher perceptions of chronically absent students, and the school supports available to these students?

### *Mixed Method Research Question*

In what ways do the interviews of the teachers about chronically absent students explain the results of the quantitative survey results?

### Definition of Terms

*Average Daily Attendance (ADA)*

The average daily attendance is an attendance statistic which is computed by taking the total number of days of student attendance and dividing it by the total number of days in the regular school year (Attendance Works, 2018).

*ATED*

ATED is an acronym used to describe unexcused student absences, tardiness, and early dismissals (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

*Burnout*

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress at one's workplace. It is characterized by feeling overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and exhausted (Burn-out an "Occupational Phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases, 2019)

*Chronic Absenteeism*

Chronic Absenteeism is when a student misses 10% or more of the school; generally, the equivalent of 18 days or more (United States Department of Education, 2019).

*Every Student Succeeds Act*

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the education law that replaced No Child Left Behind (NCLB) on December 15, 2010. President Barack Obama signed the education law into effect to replace NCLB. ESSA changed accountability with a lesser emphasis on testing and adding other accountability measures (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2019).

*Interventions for Chronic Absenteeism Reduction*

Interventions for Chronic Absenteeism Reduction are plans created by schools and school districts to reduce the number of students who are chronically absent as well as to reduce the number of absences themselves. (Attendance Works, 2018)

*Local Education Agency*

Local Education Agency (LEA) is a public board of education, or another public authority legally constituted within a state to control or direct public elementary or secondary schools in a town or political subdivision of a state (United States Department of Education, 2019).

*Truancy*

Truancy is the missing of school without parental permission. Truancy is non-compliance with mandatory attendance regulations (Attendance Works, 2018).

**CHAPTER 2**

This chapter serves to introduce both the theoretical framework for this study as well as the findings from research on the topic of chronic absenteeism as it relates to teachers' knowledge of and perceptions of chronically absent students and their school's associated intervention programs. The research in this section is from peer reviewed journals found through the St. John's University databases, which include EBESCO and Pro-Quest. Additional research was found using Google Scholar and databases, which include the United States Education Department as well as AttendanceWorks.org.

The research is categorized into four themes: Data about Chronic Absenteeism, Causes of Chronic Absenteeism, Chronic Absenteeism and Achievement, and Programs and Interventions to Mitigate Chronic Absenteeism. Programs and Interventions will be further delineated by type. The chapter will conclude with the gaps in the literature which this study will address.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study uses the Wicked Problem Framework of Rittel and Webber. Rittel and Webber describe a wicked problem as one that does not have a linear solution, like a scientific problem. In social sciences, a wicked problem framework is appropriate as there is no set solution that will solve all problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

For example, in education, one such wicked problem is professional development. While all agree that teachers need professional development, there is not a singular professional development program that will meet the needs of all teachers at all schools. Because different schools and individual teachers have different, unique needs for professional development, the problem gets further complicated. Teachers are often put

off by having to endure sessions to teach skills or concepts for which they are already familiar or have mastered. Furthermore, there is the cost factor of professional development that further exacerbates the problem ("Professional Development: A Wicked Problem in Education," 2021). What one school needs, they might not be able to afford.

The current study focuses on student absenteeism, which is another example of a wicked problem. Supporting students' well-being (especially during Covid-19) has become increasingly more prominent (Wilson et al., 2020). Mental health issues, which include social anxiety, prevent students from attending school. These issues may arise from bullying which may happen both online and in person which may lead to the mental illness and social anxiety. (Schmulian & Coetzee, 2011)Students who are more engaged in school are more likely to have better attendance. By increasing student engagement, academic outcomes improve. Better academic outcomes also increase student self-esteem which improves mental health which leads to better participation in school in general (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

Thus, chronic absenteeism is classified as a wicked problem. It is overly complex and not easily solvable. While mitigations and interventions are put in place to help, it will probably never be completely solved. Chronic absenteeism is also a wicked problem because each case is unique. The causes of chronic absenteeism can vary from community to community, school to school, and student to student. Furthermore, there are studies that show that there are solutions that reduce chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Eklund et al., 2020; Finning et al., 2018; Keppens & Spruyt, 2020).

However, they are not easily replicated at different schools containing different demographics.

Wicked problems are unique and complex and are indicative of larger problems. Chronic absenteeism can be associated with poverty, which is a larger problem (Dahl, 2016). It can also be associated with bullying, cyber-bullying, and crime (Balkıs et al., 2016), which are also part of larger societal problems. It can also be associated with health concerns, which are often associated with poverty. An example would be the effects of physical fitness on student absenteeism. Students from lower socioeconomic settings are more likely to have less opportunity for physical activity because of the time and cost for their parents. Lower physical activity and subsidized food programs both lead to poorer health conditions which lead to higher absenteeism (D'Agostino et al., 2019). This is an example of the birth of a wicked problem. How would one solve this problem? Is there one solution that would fit all? Is the solution economic? Is it a result of a social class system? Is it a product of systemic racism? Would throwing funds at the problem resolve it completely?

The wicked problem's framework is appropriate for the study of chronic absenteeism because it requires the researcher to examine the problem with a complex lens. It also serves as an excellent lens for examining the proposed interventions and solutions. The solutions to wicked problems require the promotion of and sustainment of curiosity. Therefore, the solution may not be one that has been successful somewhere else. A solution that works for one student may not work for another, and one that works now may not work in the future. In this study, the researcher, specifically in the

qualitative phase of the study, sought to discover the individual interventions/solutions to those students associated with the issue at hand.

Also, there must be a culture of constant curiosity and the flexibility to change the solution as need be. There must also be a willingness to involve and continually speak with diverse stakeholders. All stakeholders' beliefs must be taken into consideration and not just controlled by a panel of 'experts' from the schools. Additionally, there is a need to share in collective sense-making to continually revisit and revise possible solutions (Farley et al., 2019).

**Review of the Literature**

*Data Behind Chronic Absenteeism*

The perspectives of educational researchers who mention attendance as a factor in students' success have been frequently cited in the literature (Arthurs et al., 2014; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Hancock et al., 2017; Kirksey, 2019; London, 2016). Before mentioning attendance as a factor for student success, it is important to first discuss the data concerning chronic absenteeism in American schools.

Researchers agree that chronic absenteeism affects many students (Arthurs et al., 2014; *Attendance Works*, 2018; Gottfried, 2019; Lynch, 2014; Perry et al., 2019). In a longitudinal study, London (2016) tracked attendance for three years in two districts for a total of 21 schools from Kindergarten through High School. By using a multiple regression by cohort (grade levels), it was revealed that, like other studies, Kindergarten students and 12th graders exhibited the highest absence rates at 12% and 11% respectively. The best attendance rates were in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at 6% absenteeism.

The study also revealed that the greatest predictor of chronic absenteeism is chronic absenteeism in prior years of school (London, 2016).

Bruner et. al (2011), discussed the importance of tracking attendance data as well as the shift from tracking average daily attendance for a school to tracking attendance for individual students. Bruner et, al. (2011) conducted a study of elementary schools in three urban districts. The researchers correlated Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rates with the percentage of students who met the definition of chronic absenteeism; a school that has a 95% ADA may still have many students who are chronically absent. The 5% that are absent comprise a large, rotating number of students who are frequently absent. While only recording a 5% absence rate, the schools still present a problem of chronic absenteeism. Students could miss one to three days a month, not consecutively, and wind up being chronically absent over the span of a school year (Bruner et al., 2011).

Since most states allocate funding based on the Average Daily Attendance (ADA), chronic absenteeism has been ignored in school policy changes. Childs & Lofton (2021) conducted a literature review of chronic absenteeism from 2000 to 2020. By using the Wicked Problems Framework, the researchers were able to frame chronic absenteeism as a public policy issue. Prior to ESSA, attendance reporting had not been required. Therefore, many states did not track chronic absenteeism. The problem got ignored due to the lack of necessity to address it, thus, a public policy issue. The policy fostered the prevalence of the problem (Kostyo et al., 2018).

The researchers describe what they refer to as the "Black Box of Chronic Absenteeism." In the 'black box' are student well-being, school environment, family dynamics, neighborhood conditions, and poverty. The researchers also purport that by

trying to mitigate chronic absenteeism, one must engage with other, larger wicked

problems such as poverty. Poverty can usually be linked to neighborhood conditions,

familial problems as well as school environment. Schools in poorer neighborhoods are

often in worse condition than those in higher income areas. Furthermore, student well-

being has strong ties to poverty (Berman et al., 2018). The importance of not only

tracking ADA but also tracking chronic absenteeism data will be paramount in addressing

the problem.

### *Students that are Chronically Absent*

The amount of chronically absent students varies by ethnicity, poverty level, age,

as well as special education versus general education. Chronic absenteeism takes place all

over the country in all different types of schools and in different areas (Balfanz & Byrnes,

2012; Chen et al., 2016; Dahl, 2016; Gase, 2016; Gee, 2018; Lara, et al., 2019; Whitney

& Liu, 2017).

Civil Rights Data (Data.Gov, 2021) reveals that there are disparities within the

ethnicities of students regarding attendance. Native Americans have the most chronic

absenteeism, followed by Pacific Islanders, Blacks, Multi-ethnic, White, and then Asian

students who have the least amount of chronic absenteeism. There are equal numbers of

males and females who are chronically absent. Students with disabilities are more likely

to be absent than those who do not have disabilities. English language learners are also

absent more than native English-speaking peers (Lara, et al., 2019).

Dahl (2016) conducted a qualitative study of 34 former truant students, who at the

time of the study were adults. By conducting semi-structured interviews with the former

students, it was revealed that students of lower socio-economic background were more

likely to be chronically absent. This was because these students are more likely to have transportation issues and may also be called upon at home to either work or care for younger siblings rather than attend schools (Dahl, 2016). In a brief, Gee (2018) summarized attendance data from various sources and suggests that the use of high-quality data can help minimize the disparities among racial and socio-economic groups when it comes to attendance. The data can help explain the disparities. Based on those disparities, interventions can then be designed to address the specific problems with the sub-groups (Gee, 2018).

Chen (2016) studied trajectory patterns of truancy through latent class growth analysis of 58,000 middle school students in a large urban school district. This model allowed for students' truancy to be tracked at multiple points in time. The analysis revealed that the patterns were not linear, which means that individuals must be followed consistently not only for isolated instances of unexcused absences, but also for patterns. If this is executed, those who show signs of early truancy can be constantly supported. In addition to concurring with other researchers regarding ethnicity and disability, it was also revealed that there are trends by month with absenteeism being constant from September to November, peaking slightly in December, lowering in January, and remaining constant and then peaking from 10% to 20% in the month of June (Chen et al., 2016).

Whitney and Liu (2017) studied partial day absences in secondary schools in a large, urban school district in California and found that the amount of partial day absences was actually higher than full-day absences. The researchers used six years of attendance data. The researchers compared full-day absences to partial-day absences. The

data included period-by-period attendance as well as if the absences were considered excused or unexcused. Absences were considered excused if the attendance office received a parent phone call excusing the student from class. The data also included the period of the day, teacher, subject, and if the class was core or elective. The researchers found that the absences began in middle school, increased with the transition to high school, and continually increased throughout high school. A multiple regression revealed that data were displayed in what the researchers refer to as a U shape, with beginning and ending classes of the day having the highest number of absences and with third period having the least number of absences (Whitney & Liu, 2017).

In a study of a small urban school district in California, Kirksey (2019) used attendance data, GPA data, and graduation rates to concur with prior research that indeed attendance affects achievement. Absenteeism was confirmed as having a nonzero, negative association with course grades, overall GPA, and the likelihood of dropping out of high school. His study differed in that it too, included period-by-period absence. His study yielded evidence that absences have a linear relationship to academic outcomes (Kirksey, 2019).

In a report entitled "The Importance of Being There: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools", Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reported that all student absence can be categorized into three main groups; students who cannot go to school because they are ill, do not attend because of unsafe conditions, bullying or harassment, and a third broader group. The third group is those who do not attend school because they or their parents do not see the value in education, they have something else they would rather do, or there is no one who prevents them from skipping school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

The third group presents the most ambiguous of circumstances and what fuels those circumstances that need to be further investigated.

There is extensive research that includes demographic information on the chronically absent. The studies present the students in different categories by age, race, gender, special education services, English Language Learners, etc. For example, many student demographics will be considered. These include but are not limited to free and reduced priced lunch, gender, ethnicity, race, English language learners, familial status and if students are categorized as special needs with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). There are longitudinal studies that prove that chronic absenteeism is a problem that needs to be addressed and mitigated. However, it is important to discover the reasons behind the student absences.

### Reasons for Student Absenteeism

At all levels, students miss school for a variety of reasons. These reasons have been cited in many research articles (Balkıs et al., 2016; Birioukov, 2016; Buchanan et al., 2016; Cuffe et al., 2014; De Wit et al., 2010; Gase, 2016; Gottfried et al., 2019; Grinshteyn & Tony Yang, 2017; Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Heyne et al., 2017; Lynch, 2014; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Of course, illness is a major reason for student absence but there are also many other reasons students miss school. These include transportation, bullying, parents who do not see value in education, truancy, employment, as well as familial responsibility. Student absenteeism may be attributed to the school itself. If the school is not organizationally sound or does not have teachers that connect with the students, there is a higher likelihood of chronic absenteeism (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Furthermore, if students do not connect with classmates, there is a

higher likelihood for students to miss school. The lack of a sense of belonging or a purpose to being there, fuels the absences(Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

Grinshteyn and Yang (2017) conducted a study of 13,554 high school students in the United States from both private and public schools. By using the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), the researchers measured behaviors associated with injury, violence, sexual behavior, alcohol, and drug use as well as electronic bullying. The dependent variable for this study was days absent from school. By conducting a multinomial regression, the researchers determined that in addition to other predictors, electronic bullying was also a predictor of student absence. Students felt fearful at school or in transit to school which caused their reluctance to attend. Because it does not happen within the school buildings, it is difficult for schools to address, but because it affects what occurs in the schools, it must be addressed within the school setting (Grinshteyn & Yang, 2017).

DeWitt, et al (2010) studied the effect of diminished teacher and classmate support for 9th graders transitioning to high school. The researchers administered three questionnaires at different intervals to 2,973 9th grade students in Ontario. The cohort was considered to be diverse as it included students from different areas, both Anglophiles and Francophiles as well as Catholic and public high school students from 23 different schools. The questionnaires were administered during the fall of 9th grade, the spring of 9th grade and the fall of 10th grade. Using an ANOVA, growth curve models indicated absenteeism increases with diminished classmate and teacher support. Because the transition to a new school environment brings departmentalization, multi-aged cohorts, bigger class sizes, and bigger school buildings, students feel a diminished lack of

connection with other students and classmates. The lack of connection leads to a lack of engagement and increased absenteeism (De Wit et al., 2010).

Gase (2016) conducted a qualitative study of 39 youths with a history of truancy from South and East Los Angeles to discover the multiple factors that influence school truancy. By using a 16-question open-ended interview guide, participants could recount their histories of truancy starting with the first time they skipped school to the current day. Interviews were coded and responses were then classified into the following categories: major influences on decisions to skip school, school characteristics, and the school's response to the truancy. It also collected information on the youths' recommendations to reduce truancy.

In five of seven school factors that influenced students' likeliness to skip school, low engagement was cited. Students felt the curricula were boring, they were not engaged in the instructional style, and had infrequent meetings with school counselors. They also cited large schools and class size as well as chaotic and unsafe environments as triggers for absenteeism. Conversely, positive relationships or friendships with a teacher helped to decrease absenteeism (Gase, 2016).

Similarly, Hendron, and Kearny (2016) found that both negative school climate and poor relationships with others and with teachers adversely affected attendance. The researchers studied 398 middle and high school students who were diverse in nature in ethnicity but all from the same school district. Participants were recruited from a family court and service center and a truancy diversion program within the district. Although socioeconomic data was not provided, 53% of students' mothers and 60% of students' fathers had not graduated from high school. The researchers used the School Climate

Survey Revised Edition (SCS) to collect data regarding students' perceptions about their schools. They also used the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale (RCADS) to collect data regarding mental disorders including social phobias, separation anxiety, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, as well as major depressive disorder. Parents were given the Conners' Parent Rating Scale-Revised (CPSRL) to measure students at home behavior. Lower school climate scores were related inversely to anxiety and other mental disorders as well as behavioral issues; all of which led to more student absenteeism (Hendron & Kearney, 2016).

Lenhoff and Pogodinski (2019) studied school organizational effectiveness and chronic absenteeism. Using data from Michigan's Center for Education Performance Information, the research focused on characteristics of the schools' organization as related to chronic absenteeism. The research did not include other factors. The participants were 165 Detroit public and charter schools. The factors were based on essentials of school organizational effectiveness set forth by Bryk (2010). Bryk described the 5 "essentials" of school organizational effectiveness. Lenhoff and Pogodinski used the 5 Essentials survey for their study as the teachers rated the schools as well-organized, organized, moderately organized, partially organized or not yet. The correlational and predictive relationships between school-level characteristics and chronic absenteeism were studied. There were six regression models to identify school characteristics with chronic absenteeism.

Results were different for public schools and charter schools. From the 5 Essentials score indicators, 16 of 35 indicators were negatively associated with chronic absenteeism in public schools. Most importantly, "well organized" and "partially

organized" schools were negatively associated with chronic absenteeism in public schools.

However, in charter schools, only four of the measure scores were significant; they included disruptions, safety, school safety and teacher safety. Of those four, all were also significant with the full sample. The way students perceive their schools and the people in them has an effect on their attendance rates (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018).

Dahl (2016) interviewed 34 adults who had been truant during their high school years. All participants had attended traditional high schools in Colorado. About 60% of participants either graduated from high school or received a GED diploma. Like Gase (2016), Dahl interviewed the actual truant students. Dahl's study differed in that it engaged former students who recounted their reasons for missing school. It also revealed where they were and what they did when they should have been in school. Dahl found that for these students, the most common activity that students did when skipping classes was eating. They ate with friends and socialized. Most students skipped classes during lunch periods as to spend time with other friends who were scheduled for lunch when they were not. Most did not spend time alone but rather with friends or boyfriends and girlfriends. The most common illegal activity was smoking marijuana, again, which was done with friends. Students also participated in the selective skipping of classes according to their engagement in the class. Students also admitted to showing up for the compulsory number of classes to participate in sports, band, or other activities. It is important to note that one-quarter of the students worked in lieu of attending their classes while more than half of the respondents had familial responsibilities like childcare for

siblings and errands. More than half of the respondents were from single-parent households (Dahl, 2016).

There is a myriad of reasons that students miss and choose to miss school. The reasons for choosing to miss school do vary from pleasurable activities like eating and socializing with friends, to earning money and taking on familial responsibility. Being academically engaged in a particular class (articles mention arts and automotive classes as examples) help to reduce chronic absenteeism. Participation in extra-curricular activities helped as well. Some students mention attending just enough classes to be able to participate in band or sports, etcetera. Relationships with other students and teachers and staff foster a sense of familiarity that will bring students into schools.

### *Academic Effects of Chronic Absenteeism*

The academic effects of being chronically absent are represented in many studies and articles in various journals (Arthurs et al., 2014; Balkıs et al., 2016; Hancock et al., 2017; Kirksey, 2019; London, 2016). Students who are chronically absent in lower grades are less likely to read on level by 3rd grade. By 6th grade, those who are chronically absent are more likely to drop out of high school. Chronic absenteeism is a better predictor of dropping out than low test scores (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Kirksey (2019), in his aforementioned study, sought to discover if attendance rates had an effect on academic achievement. In this large-scale study, Kirksey specifically wanted to discover if class attendance was associated with grades in a specific class. Additionally, he wanted to discover if after reaching the 10% absence threshold if students earned disproportionately lower grades in classes as well as in year-end GPAs. Finally, he sought to discover if overall attendance was associated with

graduation. All hypotheses showed that chronic absenteeism was negatively associated with class grades, GPAs, and graduation rates. The study however did not include any qualitative data which may have given the "why" behind the absences. (Kirksey, 2019). Additionally, the study revealed that poor attendance in early school years is a predictor of poor attendance in subsequent school years.

In a study that took place in Turkey, Balkis, et. al, surveyed 423 students from grades 9-12 from two public schools in urban areas. Students were asked to supply demographic information as well as fill out the School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised (SASS-R) to assess the five factors associated with underachievement. These included academic self-perception, attitudes towards teachers and school, goal valuation and motivation and self-regulation. Using this information, the researchers used an ANOVA to determine the variance between chronically absent students and regular attendance students with the other factors. Chronically absent students were found to have lower achievement in all grades. Their lower achievement in the lower grades affects their achievement in upper grades as well as academic self-perception. Each influenced the other (Balkıs et al., 2016).

Hancock et. al, (2017) studied absence and achievement records of 89,365 students in grades 5, 7, and 9 in Western Australia in order to discover the association between student absence and lower achievement and how it varied by student and school-level socioeconomic characteristics. The researchers used the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The NAPLAN scales were used to make comparisons between students and cohorts of students within an assessment and over a period of time. These tests are administered in Australia yearly to all students in grades 3,

5, 7, and 9. The researchers also used demographic data which included gender, language spoken at home, educational level, and occupation of parents. It is suggested that parents who do not speak English at home are less likely to be able to help their children with schoolwork of any kind, especially work that needs to be made up from having been absent.

The research revealed that associations of higher absences and lower achievement were greater for students who did not speak English at home. Higher levels of absence and lower achievement were more strongly associated for previously higher achieving students. The findings suggest that absences affect all students regardless of the socioeconomic level of the school (Hancock et al., 2017).

Garcia & Weiss (2018), in a report reviewed data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), analyzed student absenteeism's effect on progress. While acknowledging prior research (Data.Gov, 2016; Gottfried, 2019) that showed that absenteeism affects achievement, their research analyzed absence at five levels of absenteeism in lieu of comparing the achievement of chronically absent students with those who had regular attendance. The researchers used the following categories: no days absent, one to two days absent, three to four days absent, five to ten days absent, and more than ten days absent. By not controlling for any other influence except absence, the researchers compared mathematics achievement scores by days absent. The researchers found that those who missed three to four days scored .29 standard deviations below those who missed none. Furthermore, those who missed five to ten days, scored .39 standard deviations below. Those who missed more than ten days had a standard

deviation .64 lower than those who did not miss any school at all. The more days missed, the lower the achievement (Garcia & Weiss, 2018).

In contrast with other articles, Gottfried (2019) mentions, but does not focus on the effects of chronic absenteeism on the chronically absent student, but rather on the classroom as a whole. Students who have chronically absent classmates often suffer from a similar achievement gap. Students who have been chronically absent require remediation from their teachers. Gottfried used data from a large urban school district in Pennsylvania which contained records of absence for every student as well as student demographic, academic, and teacher information. The participants in this study were 23,386 third and fourth grade students from 175 schools. By using third and fourth grade students only, the researcher was able to use state-wide test data for tests that are given in the second and fourth grades. This data was used to determine the effects of chronic absenteeism on the child as well as on the classmates of that child. Using a correlation study, Gottfried showed that the chronically absent students' presence in the classes caused a negative spillover on their classmates with regular attendance. The independent variables were chronically absent students and regular attendance students. The dependent variables were scores on Reading and Mathematics assessments. Reading $r$ (23,385)=-6.63, $p<.001$ Mathematics $r$ (23,385)= -10.05, $p<.001$. Reading Teachers often spend instructional time on the chronically absent student to play 'catch up' which took away from time spent with the students who had been present. Teachers curtailed lessons to repeat what chronically absent students had missed instead of moving forward with the curriculum. This quantitative study was rich because of the number of participants

involved. This was an exceptionally large sample size that yielded significant results that prove Gottfried's findings (Gottfried, 2019).

One study which addressed teacher preparation programs in the state university system in California addressed the teachers' role in dealing with chronically absent students. Kindergartners and first graders have missed more days of school than other elementary school children (*Data.Gov*, 2016). Gottfried, et. al, (2020) sought to discover what aspects of Teacher Preparation Programs (TPPs) helped kindergarten and first grade teachers deal with the chronically absent students and if they same held true for teachers of 2nd through 5th grade. Researchers studied teacher programs during the 2017-18 school year. It is the only one of its kind. Of 273 teachers surveyed, 69 were going to teach kindergarten and first grade.

In this study, teachers' perceptions of their TPPs were used as the independent variables. The data from this was derived from surveys using a five-point Likert scale; strongly disagree to strongly agree. The dependent variables were knowledge of chronic absenteeism and preparedness to deal with chronic absenteeism. Questions about knowledge included the definition of, laws about, effects of, and the use of data to address chronic absenteeism. They also included knowledge of home factors and school factors that promote absenteeism.

Questions regarding preparedness to deal with chronically absent students included feeling prepared to assist families in getting their students to school, comfort with collaborating on school attendance review teams with other school personnel, as well as feeling prepared to engage chronically absent students and having the skills to help them value learning.

Outcomes showed the singular most important factor that kindergarten and first grade teachers cited was feeling supported by their university supervisors. While this did not hold true of teachers in 2$^{nd}$ through 5$^{th}$ grade, it is most important to note that it is in the early years of elementary school when attendance patterns and school routines are established. Early patterns of attendance are predictors of future attendance patterns (London, 2016). It is within the TPPs and placements that teachers are developing their toolbox for use in their future careers and support was the single most important factor (Gottfried et al., 2020).

This study was unique in that it addressed the issue of chronic absenteeism from a teacher perspective. New teachers are often overwhelmed with how much they must learn and deal with and are often disillusioned and leave the career (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2017).

The previous studies suggest that missing school has detrimental effects on the achievement of the students who miss school. By concentrating solely on absence and not on other factors, Garcia and Weiss (2018) show that absence affects achievement for all students regardless of other status. Gottfried (2019) shows the effects that chronic absenteeism has on classes and schools for all who attend regardless of attendance status. The data shows that the best place for students to be is in attendance at schools whenever possible.

### *Interventions and Programs to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism*

**Mentorship.** Many interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism have been chronicled in the literature (Anderson et al., 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Childs & Grooms, 2018; Conry & Richards, 2018; Eklund et al., 2020; Finning et al., 2018;

Gottfried & Kirksey, 2017; Mazzerole et al., 2017; Nauer, 2016; Perry et al., 2019; Stripling, 2018, 2018). The interventions vary in scope and intensity. Many studies have shown effective measures and others have proved measures to be completely ineffective. Interventions are both small and wide scale. They include mentorship programs, bans on truancy, both postcard and phone call notifications to parents apprising them of their children's absences, statewide bans on suspensions for truancy and community and familial involvement. (Balu & Ehrlich, 2018; Chang & Romero, 2008; Hickman & Anderson, 2019; Nauer, 2016; Perry et al., 2019)

Mentorship programs have been deemed to be an effective way to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Hickman & Anderson, 2019; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). However, this will depend on the type of mentorship and how attuned the mentor is with the assigned student. Weiler et. al (2019) studied the effects of attunement between mentor and mentee. The research was based on prior research that proved mentorship was effective in reducing absenteeism and improving academic achievement (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). In the mentorship programs, the attunement between the mentor and the mentee is paramount to success. The researchers studied 286 at-risk youth who were matched with 204 mentors, who were college students. Students and mentors were asked to take a baseline survey one month prior to the program start and another one during the final week of the program. The survey was called the School Value Scale; it assessed the perceptions of the youth. The survey used for the mentors was used to measure self-efficacy, which came from the student Motivation and Engagement Scale. After using the intervention called Campus Connections (CC) chi-square and ANOVA tests were used to

determine whether the groups differed by attunement variables, demographics, level of risk, academic prescription, and baseline scores. Bivariate correlations were used to determine relationships among study variables. T-tests were used to show growth over time. The study found that the mentor-mentee relationships could be categorized into three groups: attuned mentors, over focused mentors and under focused mentors. The attuned mentors connected more on a social level with the students and less on an academic level. A series of linear regressions were used to test post-intervention differences between groups. The attuned group reported a significant increase in school usefulness, $t$ (55) = - 3.19, $p$ <.01, academic self-efficacy $t$ (55) =-2.37, $p$<.05. The youth in this group also had a significant decrease in truancy, $t$ (45) =3.23, $p$<01. This had a positive effect on the at-risk youth's attendance and achievement which was shown by growth from pre to post-test scores. The study yielded statistically significant results with the large sample size. The study has important value because although mentorship programs are deemed to be an effective way to mitigate absenteeism, clearly the mentor-mentee relationship must also be considered when embarking on such programs.

In a small study, Hinojosa and Maxwell (2019), studied the effects of an athletics coach on school absenteeism. This qualitative study consisted of structured interviews with three coaches; two who were presently employed and one who was currently retired but had coached and taught for over 40 years. There were two males and one female, they were football, track and field and basketball coaches. It is important to note that all were also teachers at the schools where they coached. The coaches were interviewed, and the researchers coded for common themes.

All of the coaches credited their own families as the reason for their personal success. All came from families who supported them in their education. Additionally, they each had an adult in their life from an educational setting that had an impact on them. They felt that their relatability was the key to turning them into mentors to the students that they coached. Athletes understand other athletes. However, all the coaches also grew up in similar neighborhoods to the neighborhoods where they taught and coached making them even more relatable to their students. Hinojosa and Maxwell did not measure attunement between mentor and mentee in a quantitative sense, surely the coaches were attuned with the athletes and students with whom they coached and taught daily. The coaches all told anecdotes of students who at one time or another contacted the coaches to tell them what an impact they had had on their life and in helping them to be successful in school. There were numerous anecdotes by all the coaches citing their continued contact and relationships with the students. Furthermore, a lack of student engagement is cited as a reason for chronic absenteeism (Fredricks, 2019; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018) and by their participation on athletic teams and by having positive relationships with adults (Gase, 2016; Whitney & Liu, 2017), student attendance improved.

Hickman and Anderson (2019) studied the mentor-mentee relationship between paid mentors from an Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) and high-school dropouts to see to what degree the relationships were successful in recruiting students back to school and having them graduate. Using the EMO Grad Solutions located in Mesa, Arizona, the researchers sought to understand the effect the mentor-mentee relationship had on the student's success in graduating high school. The survey was sent

to 460 participants from the classes of 2017 and 2018. This qualitative single case study was of the 34 participants that responded completely to the survey. The open-ended interview questions were asked of all participants. The interviews were coded and there were five emerging themes: communication, encouragement, motivation, caring and understanding. While there were five themes, the repeated message was in the relationship that the mentor and mentee had. From the mentee's point of view, the mentor was a constant in their lives. The mentors would consistently check in and check up on their mentees. Some would send encouraging videos or messages; others would make sure that work was being done consistently. Many of the mentees stressed how "down to earth" their mentors were, and they really felt understood. Like Hinojosa and Maxwell (2019) and Weiler, et al (2019) the relationship between mentor and mentee is paramount which is shown in this study. It is important to note that the mentors in the EMO were trained and educated in working with at-risk students and were not college students or teachers/coaches (Hickman & Anderson, 2019).

Nauer (2016) reported on a case study of a New York City public school that participated in Mayor Bloomberg's three-year pilot program to reduce chronic absenteeism. Of the schools in the program, 58% posted reductions in absenteeism. A new principal took over a New York City elementary school and created a program to reduce chronic absenteeism. In that year, 2011-2012 the principal switched from tracking only Average Daily Attendance to tracking the attendance of every student at the school individually. Additionally, each grade level was assigned a mentor to address chronically absent students. Mentors met with students two to three times weekly. They also reached

out to parents who had outside issues that prohibited them from getting their children to school. Mentors coordinated with families who could help one another with this issue.

Mentors also held monthly attendance events with prizes for those students whose attendance had improved. By the end of the first year, chronic absenteeism had dropped from 33% to 17% which was a significant improvement and also proved that the program had worked. Scores on state assessments also rose significantly.

The chronic absenteeism began to rise again when the school lost its' mentors when the mayor's program ended, and funding was no longer available. The school also doubled in size. Additionally, staff which had participated in the attendance program at that time, were then required to learn the new common core curriculum and could no longer focus on attendance (Nauer, 2016).

Clearly, students' relationships with the adults at their schools has positive effects on the students' participation in school. The more positive relationships that students have, the more likely they will be engaged and want to be in school.

### *School Engagement and Climate*

Researchers have studied the relationship between school climate and school engagement with chronic absenteeism (Balkıs et al., 2016; Berman et al., 2018; Eklund et al., 2020; Gase, 2016; Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Liu & Loeb, 2017; McCarter et al., 2020; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Students who feel engaged in their classes are more likely to attend school on a consistent basis. Positive school climates are linked to an increase in academic success and student outcomes; therefore, schools should strive for positive relationships that foster positive climate which reduce absenteeism (Rogers & Feller, 2016). While interviewing students with chronic absenteeism issues for her

qualitative study, Gase (2016) discovered that feeling disengaged in classes was a major factor in student truancy. Of the 39 interviewed students, 23 said that they felt they could not relate to the teachers' style of teaching and that the curricula were boring, and they could not relate to it. The students also noted that they did not have many positive relationships with teachers and counselors. When the students had a positive relationship with a teacher, they felt an obligation to attend those classes. The students also spoke of the school being too big and chaotic and cited those reasons for not attending school (Gase, 2016).

Liu and Loeb (2017) conducted a large-scale study of $7^{th}$ through $11^{th}$ graders in a medium sized California district. The researchers studied the effect of having different teachers on both attendance and California state examination scores. Students in $12^{th}$ grade were excluded in this study because they did not take state examinations and they were less likely to have good attendance because they were not as motivated as they were quickly going to graduate. Liu and Loeb (2016) studied attendance records for a ten-year period from the 2003-2004 school year through 2013 and the 2014 school year. The researchers tracked absenteeism by period for unexcused absences only. They sought to discover if differences in teachers made a difference by subject. The subjects included mathematics, social studies, science, ELA, and foreign language. English teachers had the widest variance of attendance while foreign language teachers had the least.

The researchers discovered that depending on the subject area, the teacher a student had could influence their attendance in that class. In an ELA class, a student was 58% less likely to be absent if they had a teacher with a value one standard deviation higher than another. The same was true of mathematics classes at a rate of 45%.

Additionally, the researchers found a weak correlation between the teacher's attendance affect and a teacher's effect on test scores (Liu & Loeb, 2017).

Teuscher and Marakova (2018) studied 290 7th and 9th graders in Switzerland from seven public schools. The data came from the Swiss cross-sectional study Latent school absenteeism. Like Liu and Loeb (2017), the researchers wanted to discover the relationship between school engagement and truancy. Specifically, they sought to discover which students were at risk for low engagement and high truancy, how relationships with peers and other students impact truancy and finally if low school engagement led to more frequent truancy.

Students were given interview questions all of which used Likert scales from 1 to 4. School engagement was operationalized from not being engaged to very engaged. Truancy was operationalized as a number of times missed school. Student-teacher relationships and student-student relationships were operationalized as fully disagree to fully agree when asked a series of questions about those relationships. Other studies have shown that there is a positive association between school engagement and grades (Dahl, 2016; Gase, 2016; Liu & Loeb, 2017). Furthermore, strong relationships with peers and strong relationships with teachers were also predictors of student engagement. Decreases in truancy were seen when there were both positive relationships with teachers and peers and school engagement (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

In a large-scale study during the years 2011 to 2014, Kirksey and Gottfried (2018) used 8,209 elementary students from 13 California public elementary schools to study if the presence of familiar faces had an effect on attendance. The researchers used first through fifth grade records so as to use a student's current and previous attendance and

classmates. The researchers used school district data; absences had been coded as excused and unexcused. Data showed that students who had more familiar faces in their classroom from the prior year had -1.08 fewer unexcused absences than those who had not. Kirksey and Gottfried (2018) studied the model on several levels; the first model was only the percentage of familiar faces, the second added in demographic data, the third classroom data and the fourth added in school characteristic data. For all four models, having familiar faces was statistically significant. The researchers also found that those schools with teachers that identified as Hispanic (the predominant demographic of students) and those with more experience also had fewer unexcused absences. Both of these findings align with positive school climate and engagement (Dahl, 2016; Gase, 2016; Liu & Loeb, 2017) and mentor attunement (Hinojosa & Maxwell, 2018; Weiler et al., 2019) both which have been shown to be successful in reducing chronic absenteeism (Kirksey & Gottfried, 2018).

School engagement is paramount to reducing chronic absenteeism. Students need to want to be at school to find the energy to get there. When students are disengaged and bored, there is no motivating factor to make efforts to be in school. Coupled with a lack of familial support, disengaged students will continue to miss school.

### *School Wide Interventions and Programs*

Some schools participate in district wide or school wide programs to reduce chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Balu & Ehrlich, 2018; Heppen et al., 2020; Nauer, 2016). If administrators can get the entire school (teachers, staff, and support staff) to buy into a program or intervention, it can have great success. As chronic absenteeism is the greatest predictor of future absenteeism, it is of the utmost importance

especially since it has now become part of most states' accountability system or school report card (London, 2016).

Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) studied the effects of a district wide campaign to reduce chronic absenteeism in New York City's elementary schools. The program was spearheaded by the mayor's office in conjunction with the Department of Education (DOE). Other interagency partners included the Administration for Children's Service, the Department of Homeless Services, the Department of Health, the Department for the Aging, NYC Service, the Department of Youth and Community Development, the NYC Police Department and other private sector and community partners and representatives from the schools.

Because the problem of chronic absenteeism is so complex, the efforts of the various partners helped from their area of expertise; for example, many students who are chronically absent suffer from asthma, the health department was the expert for that. Another example is that homeless students tend to miss school more often, the Department of the Homeless was the expert in that area.

The city-wide program had many facets. Students' absences and successes were all individually recognized. The city created the NYC Mentors program to provide outside mentors that did not work at the schools. Students would receive prerecorded phone calls from celebrities reminding them to get up and go to school. There were also advertising agencies that promoted attendance.

Using 146 schools involved in the task force program, and comparing schools of similar demographics, the researchers ran regression models to compare outcomes over periods of time. They also analyzed year end data for students in the schools in the task

force program over a period of time. All schools showed at least a 1.5% reduction in chronic absenteeism rates for the three years of the program. Year-end individual student results showed that students that attended schools in the programs were 7% less likely to be chronically absent and 8% more likely to be good attenders (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018).

A similar study was conducted by Rogers and Feller (2016), using 30,000 1st and 2nd grade students. The students were chosen if they were two standard deviations of absences above the average student. The purpose of the study was to encourage parents to get their children to school, inform parents about their children's absences and to show parents the norms regarding attendance.

In order to achieve this, the researchers called homes to "nudge" attendance. Many parents are actually unaware of the number of absences their child accrues in a given year (Rogers et al., 2017). The study yielded positive results as the students whose parents received phone calls and mailings had reduced absenteeism by .9 days (5.3% reduction) and .6 days (3.5% reduction. However, statistically significant results were not found when informing parents of the norms of attendance (Rogers & Feller, 2016).

Grooms and Childs (2018) conducted a qualitative study of the Success Mentors program that had been implemented at a large school district in Central Texas where 13% of the students had been chronically absent. The Success Mentors Program was implemented and consisted of mentors from within the schools as well as volunteer mentors from external partners. The study consisted of using semi-structured interviews with 25 mentors. The researchers used 13 of the 25 interviews. The research also included informal interviews and document analysis.

The results of the interviews showed that by convening local partners who worked in collaboration with school personnel, there was a sense that chronic absenteeism was a community problem and required a community effort to combat it. The outcomes of the interviews showed that this community was in support of implementing a nationally recognized mentor program, using data to chronicle attendance and having a community centered approach. Similar to, and mentioned in, this program mimicked the aforementioned Mayor's Task Force in New York City (Childs & Grooms, 2018).

Conroy and Richards (2018) analyzed truancy policies by state. All but seven states have truancy policies. The states without truancy policies tend to have populations of more than 50% white students. Furthermore, these states spend more money on education and serve non-economically disadvantaged students. The states with the most severe state truancy policies have disproportionate minority populations, specifically Hispanics. The study also regressed the severity of state policies with the amount of chronic absenteeism. The study revealed no statistical significance. States with stronger, more severe truancy policies did not have a reduction in the number of students with chronic absenteeism (Childs & Grooms, 2018).

While interventions vary in type and effectiveness, there is no doubt that their presence in schools is necessary. There are some schools where interventions simply do not exist. While federal guidelines require some sort of intervention (*Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, 2016), it may simply be a 'tag' on an electronic attendance system and no real intervention follows. Also, interventions at smaller schools are easier to implement and control while large urban districts and schools may have a harder time. In larger districts where

interventions might be conducted in multiple schools, it is more difficult to implement, monitor, and maintain consistency. Different schools within the same district may have different demographics that could cause interventions to work at some schools and fail at others. A one size fits all approach may not work.

Additionally, since the implementation of ESSA, schools have just recently begun to implement interventions. Hopefully, when more data is available, schools will be able to better choose interventions for their type and size of school as well as the specific demographic of the absent student(s).

**Conclusion**

Many studies about chronic absenteeism focus on achievement of chronically absent students and their classmates (Balkıs et al., 2016; Gottfried, 2019; Kirksey & Gottfried, 2018; London, 2016; *National Center for Education Statistics*, 2019). Interventions focus on the reduction of absences (Childs & Grooms, 2018; Hickman & Anderson, 2019; Perry et al., 2019; Stripling, 2018). While teachers are charged with the education of the students, there is little mention of how teachers are supported in dealing with chronically absent students. Furthermore, there is little mention of the interaction between those involved with the programs and interventions and the classroom teachers themselves. Gottfried's study (Gottfried, 2019) was the single study that was found that actually discussed the teachers' actions in the reduction of chronic absenteeism. How prepared are teachers to tackle this 'wicked' problem? Can training in such an area as chronically absent students change the pattern? Also, how are experienced teachers supported about the same issue?

This study sought to discover teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and how they are supported in dealing with these students. It sheds light if those who are supported feel that they are more successful. Also, it seeks to ask teachers their needs in yet another task that is assigned to them in their already busy days.

**CHAPTER 3**

This chapter provides the methodology and data collection for this study

regarding teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and

the programs and interventions in place at their schools to mitigate the problem. This

mixed-method study used a survey for the quantitative portion of the study and semi-

structured interviews for the qualitative portion. This allowed the researcher to collect

descriptive and inferential data about the participants as well as have a more in-depth

understanding through the qualitative interviews. There was triangulation of data using

quantitative data from the survey in the forms of both multiple regressions and

descriptive statistics of frequencies as well as percentages. The coded themes and sub-

themes provided the qualitative data.

The methods and procedures followed the concurrent transformative design

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a concurrent transformative design, the data is collected in

two phases at the same time and utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods. The

quantitative method, the survey, was conducted in phase one, followed by the

qualitative method, the interview in phase two. While the qualitative data was collected

in the second phase, it was not informed by the quantitative data. The questionnaire

survey data was complemented by the themes that emerged from the coding of the

qualitative data gathered during the interview process.

**Methods and Procedures**

*Research Design and Data Analysis*

This study used a mixed-method design, the concurrent transformative design.

With a concurrent transformative design a researcher typically connects the two phases of

quantitative and qualitative analyses. In this particular study, the researcher surveyed teachers from a school district. The penultimate question of the survey asked for participation in the interview process. The quantitative data was analyzed first and when the researcher interviewed the volunteers, she had already had a sense of their answers to the survey. This provided a rich complement to the quantitative data. The data gathered from the qualitative semi-structured interviews helped explain why the sample responded in the way they did in the quantitative phase of the study. (Creswell, 2009, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ivankova, et al., 2006).

Two multiple regressions were used to analyze the data in the first (quantitative) phase of the study. Multiple regression analysis allowed the researcher to assess the strength of the relationship between the dependent variable and several predictor variables as well as the importance of each of the predictors to the relationship, often with the effect of other predictors (Salkind, 2010)

The following table represents the independent variables that were used in the multiple regressions for research questions 1 and 2.

**Table 1**

*Independent Variables and Groups*

| Independent Variables | Groups |
| --- | --- |
| Tenure Status | Non-tenured |
| | Tenured |
| Academic Department | Art/Music |
| | Humanities (English, Social Studies, World Languages) |
| | Physical Education/Health |

| | Steam (Mathematics, Science, Business and Technology) |
| --- | --- |
| | Support Services (Special Education, Guidance) |
| Years of Teaching Experience | 0-4 years |
| | 5-9 years |
| | 10-20 years |
| | 21 or more years |

The research questions are as follows:

Phase One:

**Quantitative Research Question 1.** How do teachers' years of experience, tenure status and academic department influence their knowledge of chronically absent students?

**Quantitative Research Question 2.** How do teachers' years of experience, tenure status and academic department influence their perceptions of their schools' programs and interventions for the reduction of chronic absenteeism?

Phase Two:

**Qualitative Research Question.** What are teacher perceptions of chronically absent students, and the school supports available to these students?

**Mixed Method Research Question.** In what ways do the interviews of the teachers about chronically absent students explain the results of the quantitative survey results?

Hypotheses:

$H_0 1$: There will be no significant association between teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students by tenure status, years of teaching experience and academic department.

$H_1 1$: There will be a significant association between teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about students by tenure status, years of teaching experience and academic department.

$H_0 2$: There will be no significant association between teachers' perceptions of their schools' programs to mitigate excessive student absenteeism by tenure status, years of teaching experience and academic department.

$H_1 2$: There will be a significant association between teachers' perceptions of their schools' programs to mitigate excessive student absenteeism by tenure status, years of teaching experience and academic department.

### *Field Setting*

The setting for this study was a suburban district outside a large metropolitan city in the northeastern part of the United States, which consists solely of five junior-senior high schools. The district serves approximately 8,000 students. The four-year graduation rate is close to 95%. The district is culturally diverse:  20% Black, 20% Latino, 25% Asian, 30% White and 5% multi-racial. Approximately 40% of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged. English Language Learners make up 5% of the students and approximately 15% have disabilities. There are approximately 600 teachers in total and five building principals and two assistant principals at each of the five schools. The chronic absenteeism rate for the district is 7.9%. (*NYSED*, 2020).

The following table represents student demographic information from the Tall Trees

School District (fictional name).

**Table 2**

*Student Demographics of Tall Trees District (N=8,140)*

| District Demographics | % |
|---|---|
| Total Student Enrollment | |
| Male | 52 |
| Female | 48 |
| American Indian or Native American | 0 |
| Black or African American | 23 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 21 |
| Asian or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 24 |
| White | 32 |
| English Language Learners | 4 |
| Students with Disabilities | 12 |
| Economically Disadvantaged | 38 |
| Homeless | 1 |
| Graduation Rate | 95 |

It is important to note that in this particular district, the highest percentage of

chronically absent students are not Black but White and Hispanic which is not in

congruence with national averages (*Data.Gov*, 2014) or studies that analyze student

absence data by race and English Language Learners (*Every Student, Every Day: A*

*National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, 2016; Hancock et al.,

2017; Lara, et al., 2019).

*Sample*

The sample for this study included 130 teachers. The researcher requested from the district's Assistant Superintendent for Personnel permission to use the district's teachers in the study. Subsequently, the Assistant Superintendent spoke to the Superintendent on the researcher's behalf. The Superintendent granted permission for the district's teachers to be used as a sample in the study. After receiving approval from the St. John's University Internal Review Board (IRB), the researcher sent the IRB approval along with the proposal and a copy of the survey to the Superintendent of Schools, as well as the building principals.

Additionally, emails were sent to the different building principals to inform them of the purpose of the study and asked for their school's participation in the study, five in all. Upon receiving approval, emails were sent to all the teachers at all five schools. Teachers received an email with a link to the survey. Prior to the email distribution, a copy of the proposal and a letter of consent was sent to the superintendent of schools as well as to each of the five principals. In the email to the teachers, it was explained that participation in the study was completely voluntary, and that a participant had the right to leave the study at any time. The penultimate question of the survey solicited participation in the qualitative/interview portion of the study

Participants came from the entire school district. Non-random sampling was used. It was a convenience sample because all participants will come from this particular school district (Creswell, 2009). The school district was chosen because the researcher was particularly interested in chronic absenteeism in a suburban school setting at the

secondary setting. Furthermore, the district has five junior-senior high schools and is diverse both ethnically and socio-economically.

### *Instrument*

Participants in this study were administered a survey that was derived from two different surveys from an organization called Attendance Works. Attendance Works is an organization that offers schools and educators tools to improve attendance. The survey questions originated from the surveys entitled "Attendance Survey: Teachers and Staff" (*Attendance Works*, 2018) and "School Team Self-Assessment" (*Attendance Works*, 2021). The surveys have been used in several studies by the organization in their research about chronic absenteeism (*Attendance Works*, 2018). Using existing survey items or sets of items is not only more efficient, but it has the additional benefit of producing results that can be compared with results from other studies that use the same items (Walston et al., 2017).

Reliability and validity are concepts used to evaluate the quality of research. Together they indicate how well a method, or a test, or in this case, a survey, measures something. Reliability is about the consistency of a measure, and validity is about the accuracy of that measure. Validity is concerned with the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Reliability is concerned with the ability of an instrument to measure consistently. In order to increase overall reliability, the survey was given to 10 educators who were not teachers at the district used in the research. A Cronbach's Alpha analysis was conducted to establish internal consistency of the survey (Bonett & Wright, 2015). A reliability analysis was carried out on the perceived value scales of 12 items.  The Chronbach's alpha analysis showed the survey to reach

acceptable reliability *a*=.838. Most items appeared to be worth of retention, resulting in a decrease in the alpha if deleted. A Chronbach's Alpha value between 0.70 to 0.95 is acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Face validity is described as when respondents to the survey find the questions to be relevant. Five items should be considered when employing face validity: relevance, ease of response, item ambiguity, distressing or sensitive items and judgmental items. If all test respondents rate the survey questions in a similar way, it is said to have face validity (Connell et al., 2018; Fowler, 2009; Nevo, 1985). If a measure looks like a reasonable measure, it is said to have face validity (Rooney & Evans, 2019). By using face validity, the questions were proved to be valid in their construct. Permission was granted from AttendanceWorks.org and can be found in Appendix A.

The survey was comprised of 35 questions and took less than fifteen minutes to complete. The survey was distributed to all participants by building-level administrators via email, and the email contained a link to the survey in a Google form. Once participants had completed the survey, data was collected, aggregated, and analyzed the data that had been collected in a Google drive that was password protected. Only the principal researcher had access to the drive.

The first seven questions collected demographic information about the participant which included, years of teaching, academic department, school, grade level, tenure status, and role at the school (teacher, teacher's assistant, guidance counselor, or administrator). The subsequent questions sought to gather the perceptions of the teachers regarding their school's approach to chronic absenteeism, as well as their individual approaches to dealing with chronically absent students. Most questions used a five-point

Likert scale 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). There were five questions that asked participants to check off from one to seven choices that answered the posed question. There were two questions that had follow-up questions that asked the participants to explain if they chose "other" as a choice to a previous question. The penultimate question solicited participation in the qualitative portion of the research. The final question asked participants if they would like to add anything that they would like the researcher to know. The survey can be found in Appendix B.

**Procedures for Collecting Data**

*Phase One: Quantitative*

With the permission of the superintendent of school and the building principals and with the help of the assistant principals, the researcher sent the survey via email to all teachers at the five schools. The use of Google form was employed, and all responses were confidential and stored in a separate hard drive to which only the researcher had access. Once the forms were filled out and collected, the data was downloaded from the Google Sheets and uploaded to Excel and eventually into SPSS 28. The data was cleaned and was used for descriptive statistics as well as for multiple regression analysis based on teachers' academic departments, years of teaching experience and tenure status. All data was then stored on an external hard drive to which only the researcher had access.

*Phase Two: Qualitative*

**Research Question.** What are teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students, and the school supports available to these students?

**Setting**. The setting was the Tall Trees School District (fictitious name), the same school district used in the quantitative phase of the study.

The use of semi-structured interviews is prevalent in qualitative research. The semi-structured interview guide provides a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. While the researcher will have a prepared set of questions, some were open-ended. This allowed the participant to answer freely while the researcher sometimes readjusted their questions to allow for response variability. Semi-structured interviews are used when the researcher wants to delve into the perceptions of the participants. This methodology is congruent with the study because semi-structured interviews are recommended for use in clinical studies (J. Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2006)

**Participants.** The participants were 14 teachers from the schools in the district. One participant was from Sycamore School. Five participants were from Elm School, five were from Fern School, one was from Hawthorne School and two were from Cassia School.

$H_0$ 3: There will be no significant association between teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students by tenure status, years of teaching experience and academic department.

$H_1$ 3: There will be a significant association between teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students by tenure status, years of teaching experience and academic department.

The final question of the quantitative survey solicited participation for an interview in the second phase of this study. The researcher contacted the interested participants via email and used a semi-structured interview protocol, see Appendix C. Interviews were scheduled for a mutually convenient time. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. The researcher interviewed 14 teachers with varied demographic data.

Participants were asked to provide demographic information similar to the first seven questions of the survey. The questions can be found in Appendix …. However, participants were also asked if they had worked in other schools to draw comparisons between their experiences in this district versus other schools. The participants were then asked if they were familiar with the term "chronic absenteeism." Subsequently, participants were asked if they had ever had a student that was chronically absent and, if so, they were asked to describe the situation. The researcher captured the lived experiences of the teachers that provided data about their knowledge of and perceptions about the chronically absent students as well as the programs to mitigate the absence (Creswell, 2009). If the participant had worked at another school/district (three participants), the researcher asked the participants to compare their experiences regarding chronic absenteeism. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted via Zoom due to social distancing requirements implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each interview was video recorded using the zoom recording feature. The zoom program was password protected. The interviews were transcribed using maestra.com software. The researcher then reviewed the transcription along with the audio files and made the proper corrections. The interviews were then coded for commonalities and themes. Protocol questions can be found in Appendix C. All interview recordings were kept confidential and stored on an external hard drive. Only the researcher had access to the recordings.

**Methods of Quantitative Data Collection**

The first step in this study was to conduct a survey and collect quantitative data. Each of the principals was asked to send an email inviting teachers to respond to the

survey that was prepared by the researcher. The data was collected via a Google form, distributed via email with the help of the individual schools' principals. The data was collected, downloaded into Google Sheets, and then uploaded to SPSS 28 for analysis.

Questions in the survey solicited data regarding demographics, familiarity with chronic absenteeism, knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students or perceptions about the schools' programs for chronically absent students. Table 3 shows the survey questions by category.

**Table 3**

*Teachers' Perceptions by Question Item*

| Category | Question Items | Research Question |
|---|---|---|
| Demographic Information | 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 | 1 & 2 |
| Familiarity with Chronic Absenteeism | 9, 10 | 1 & 2 |
| Knowledge of Chronically Absent Students | 11, 12, 23, 29 | 1 |
| Perceptions of Programs for Chronically Absent Students | 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32 | 2 |
| Teachers' Use of Attendance Data | 19, 22 | 2 |

**Data Analysis**

***Methods of Quantitative Data Analysis***

All participants were administered the survey which was derived from a combination of two surveys from Attendance Works.org. Permission was received to use

the survey for this study. That permission can be found in Appendix A. The survey can be found in Appendix B. The survey was modified into a digital format and distributed through email using a Google Form. This allowed teachers to respond electronically within their own time frames. The researcher gathered descriptive data using SPSS. The researcher also ran crosstabs by school. The crosstabs helped to summarize the relationships between the different questions by individuals' responses by school. A multiple regression analysis was run to determine how teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students were affected by their tenure status, academic department, and years of experience. The multiple regression was considered an appropriate analysis to predict what affect several independent variables would have on one dependent variable.

### *Methods of Qualitative Data Analysis*

To initiate the analysis of the qualitative data, the researcher used transcription software to transcribe each interview. The researcher then reviewed the transcriptions and corrected any computer-generated errors as in comparison to the recordings. The researcher then read all the data to gather a general sense of the data as well as the tone of the participants. After organizing and preparing the data for analysis, the researcher arranged the data into specific categories and later reflected on the overall meaning of the data. The researcher initially coded the data and then did line by line coding. The researcher then organized the data into categories in order to code. Coding was done by hand drawing upon the commonalities of the responses of the participants. The researcher used inductive coding and allowed the codes to emerge from the qualitative data. The three main codes were School Climate and Engagement, School Organization and

Accountability and Consequences. The researcher then looked for the presence of subcategories. The sub-categories that emerged under School Climate and Engagement were holidays and vacations (for students), student work responsibilities and student engagement. The sub-themes under School Organization were hierarchy of reporting, teaming and communication. The sub-themes under Accountability and Consequence were student accountability, teacher accountability and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teachers.

When the researcher had completed coding all the interviews and had discovered the common themes, she also looked for differences in perceptions of the participants and compare them using the demographic data to discover if there are differences according to a participant's years of experience, school, tenure status and academic department. The researcher then used this data and organized the interview responses into the codes for three main themes and sub-themes. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021).

**Trustworthiness**

Mixed method design is likely to provide rich insights into the research that cannot be fully understood by using only a qualitative or quantitative method. A mixed method research design integrates several data sources to study complex problems. Both methods have value and are complementary and there is value in combining them (Dawadi et al., 2021) A mixed method study generally employs triangulation design. The triangulation design is the use of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic. By using a mixed method study with triangulation design, the concept is to examine a situation or phenomenon from different perspectives and by using different lenses. In this particular study, the convergence model was used. The convergence model is described

as when the researcher collects the quantitative and qualitative data separately. The

results of the data are converged during the interpretation of such data (Creswell, 2017).

In this study, the quantitative data was collected via the survey, which employed

questions from two different surveys (*Attendance Works*, 2018 *Attendance Works*, 2021).

The qualitative data collected from the interviews was used to support the findings of the

quantitative data from the surveys. By triangulating and converging the data, the validity

of the study was strengthened as the data in the study was not from a single source but

from two sources each representing multiple participants (Creswell, 2009).

The four components of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. Credibility will be established through triangulation of

the qualitative data and the quantitative data. Transferability is how the researcher will

assure that the findings can be used in other contexts, in this case, in different junior-

senior high schools. By reporting detailed accounts of the interviews with the

participants, patterns were established.

The researcher based her findings solely on the participants' responses. The

researcher did not skew the data based on personal bias. By using an audit trail which

included notes of interviews as well as coded transcriptions, assured that there was

confirmability within the qualitative data.

**Research Ethics**

Voluntary informed consent is essential to conducting ethical research with

human participants. According to Palmer (2015) valid consent rests on three pillars: the

absence of coercion or undue influence, providing participants with information relevant

to the decision at hand, and ensuring that participants have the capacity to use that

information to make an authentic decision on whether to participate (Palmer, 2015). Through informed consent, potential study participants will be made aware that participation is voluntary, any aspects of the research that will affect their well-being and that they are free to withdraw participation at any time without penalty (Glesne, 2006).

Participants in both the quantitative and qualitative sections of the research were assured confidentiality, and this was communicated on the survey and again during the interviews that all data collected was used for research purposes only. The purpose of the study was explained in both the survey and during the interview process. Those participants who agreed to be interviewed via the survey were then contacted by the researcher via email. An additional letter of informed consent was read to all the participants in the qualitative portion of the study. Participants agreed to be recorded and a copy of the letter can be found in Appendix D. A mutually convenient time was decided upon for the interviews. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded using the recording feature on the Zoom app. All data was stored on an external hard drive. Only the researcher had access to the hard drive. All interview data was destroyed at the end of the research process.

There were no psychological, physical, legal, social, or economic harm associated with the study. The probability of harm was not greater than those encountered in daily life. The following steps were employed to ensure participant confidentiality. The research design of the study allowed the participants to complete the survey alone, on their own time, using a device of their own choosing. While the Google form collected email addresses from the participants, none were shared with anyone but the researcher. Participants were not required to use their school email addresses, although many did.

The survey did collect other demographic information such as the school at which the participant was employed, their academic department, years of teaching experience, and tenure status. Admittedly, this information may be used to identify participants. However, to ensure confidentiality, all email addresses were eventually deleted from the data file. While the other information could be used to identify participants, the results were reported in a way that it is unlikely that anyone could identify an individual based on the information given.

Voluntary participation in phase 2 (qualitative) required participants to provide a way for the researcher to contact them. As previously stated, many supplied their work emails, some used other emails, and some provided phone numbers. All interviews were conducted during a mutually agreed upon time; all taking place when both the researcher and the participant were alone and not at their place of employment. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded using the Zoom recording feature. All were stored on a password protected external hard drive at the researcher's home. Informed consent was given verbally before each video recording.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of a researcher in a quantitative study is to collect and analyze data. The researcher's role should be non-existent (Creswell, 2009). The role of the qualitative researcher differs in that the researcher is quite involved in the collection of data as the interviewer. The data in qualitative studies is compiled by a human being and not by surveys, inventories, or computers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Therefore, it was important that the researcher identified her role. The researcher was a veteran secondary Spanish teacher, having completed her 34th year in the classroom. The researcher has

predominantly taught high school level Spanish ranging from special education Spanish 1 through Advanced Placement Spanish and college level classes for thirty-four years. The researcher's beginning years were spent teaching at a Catholic all boys high school in New York City. The researcher later worked at a school in suburban New York where she spent eight years. This school was a junior-senior high school, and the researcher taught some junior high school classes. That suburban high school was remarkably diverse and continues to be. It is important to note that this particular school was one of the schools being used in this study. However, the researcher had not worked there for twenty years. .. The researcher spent the last 20 years at a different suburban high school not geographically far from the schools in this study. However, it is not in the same district. The researcher had always sought to understand why students do not attend school with regularity. Of course, absence due to illness was not perplexing. However, it had always intrigued her that students did not attend school and in suburban settings, passed their classes and graduated regardless. It was also befuddling that teachers were not often mentioned in the literature regarding chronic absenteeism. Through the literature review, the researcher has found that there is very little input from the teachers themselves regarding the problem. The research focuses mainly on the programs designed by administrators and/or outside personnel. As teachers are the personnel who have direct contact with the students, not the administrators, guidance counselors, the social workers, nor school psychologists, one would think that teachers and students would be at the core of the research. They are not.

It is also hard to comprehend that there is such variation in how schools address the issue or that some simply do not. Having had such a long teaching career, the

researcher had an intricate understanding (as well as firsthand experience) of the unique stressors placed upon teachers. Dealing with chronically absent students was just one of them. Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) has added additional pressure to New York State teachers. Teachers are rated annually on their performance and student standardized test scores are one component of that score (*Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) Guidance*, 2019). Students who are chronically absent do not achieve as well as their peers. The scores of these students directly affect a teacher's APPR score. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has added even further to teacher job dissatisfaction (Pressley, 2021). Moreover, during the return to school in fall 2020, whether remote, hybrid or in person, new attendance issues had arisen. An increase in in-person absenteeism as well as remote absenteeism has led to students missing more and more instructional time. Those who had chosen to stay remote did not have the level of engagement as those who were in the classroom. Students suffered from attention fatigue and had more distractions at home. Economically disadvantaged students also had less access to technology and high-speed internet (Gallagher & Cottingham, 2020). As mentioned previously, increased absenteeism has a host of effects on academic, social, and emotional success for students. Teachers had additional stressors trying to 'recruit' and 'find' absent students during these unprecedented times (Santibañez & Guarino, 2021).

# CHAPTER 4

The purpose of this study was to determine the association between teachers'
knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and the programs
implemented at the teachers' schools to mitigate the problem. The study analyzed the
variance by academic department, tenure status, and years of teaching experience on total
scores of teachers' survey responses regarding chronically absent students. The study also
analyzed variance by academic department, tenure status, and years of teaching
experience on total scores of teachers' survey responses regarding their school's
programs to mitigate student absence.

A mixed methods the concurrent transformative study was conducted using a
survey which the researcher comprised of questions from two different surveys from the
organization called AttendanceWorks.org (see Appendix A). The researcher followed up
the survey by conducting individual interviews with fourteen teachers from the five
schools in the district that were used in the study to determine educators' perspectives on
the programs, which is discussed in further detail in the previous chapter.

## Quantitative Research Questions

1. How do teachers' years of experience, tenure status and academic department
   influence their knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students in
   their classes?

2. How do teachers' years of experience, tenure status, and academic department
   influence their perceptions of their schools' programs to help chronically absent
   students?

This chapter will describe the analyses conducted to determine the associations between teachers' academic department, years of teaching experience and tenure status and their knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and the programs at their schools for those students. To determine these associations, descriptive and regression analyses were conducted in SPSS. In this chapter the analyses are presented to answer the research questions of this study. Two multiple regression analyses will be conducted in SPSS followed by the qualitative research analyses in which interviews will be coded for themes and sub-themes. Conclusions will be drawn from both the qualitative and quantitative data samples.

**Sample and Population**

The researcher surveyed 130 public school teachers in a suburban county of a major city in the Northeast. Additionally, 14 teachers were interviewed as a part of this mixed methods study. This population is considered a convenience sample. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method where units are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are easy for the researcher to access (Creswell, 2002)... This was due to the fact the researcher solicited the superintendent for the district's participation and the superintendent agreed. The sample came from five junior-senior high schools with diverse enrollment and diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The sample was selected for its' size and accessibility. The population of the researched district had higher population of minority groups than the county in which it is located. The following table explains the difference between the demographics of student population by district and by county.

**Table 4**

*Demographic Population Comparison by District and County*

| White | District | County |
|---|---|---|
| Hispanic or Latino | 31 | 44 |
| Asian, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 21 | 27 |
| Native American or Alaskan | 16 | 25 |
| Black | 11 | 22 |
| Multiracial | 1 | 2 |

**Data Analyses**

Two multiple regressions were conducted to answer the quantitative research questions. Each multiple regression included all three independent variables (years of service, tenure status, and academic department). The first multiple regression used the perception of chronically absent students as the dependent variable and the second used teachers' perceptions of the programs at their schools to mitigate the problem. Also included are descriptive statistics demonstrating responses by school as well as tenure status, academic department and years of service.

**Results/Findings**

Table 5 represents the breakdown of the population surveyed, by schools, of the 130 respondents.

**Table 5**

*Participants by School (N=130)*

| School | N | % |
|--------|-----|------|
| Cassia | 19 | 14.6 |
| Elm | 52 | 40.0 |
| Fir | 22 | 16.9 |
| Hawthorne | 24 | 18.5 |
| Sycamore | 13 | 10 |
| Total | 130 | 100 |

The researcher sought to discover if tenure status affected teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and the programs at their schools for those students. Table 6 represents the breakdown of the tenure status of the population of the 128 teachers by school. The data was cleaned. Two cases were deleted as the respondents were full-time administrators.

**Table 6**

*Tenure Status of Respondents by School (N = 128)*

| School | Non-tenured | Tenured |
|---|---|---|
| Cassia | 1 | 18 |
| Elm | 18 | 32 |
| Fir | 7 | 15 |
| Hawthorne | 3 | 21 |
| Sycamore | 4 | 9 |
| Total | 33 | 95 |

Table 7 represents the breakdown of the population of the 128 respondents by academic department. The highest percentages of respondents were from the Humanities departments (English, Social Studies, and World Languages) 30.5 % and Mathematics and Science 36.7 %.

**Table 7**

*Respondents by Academic Department  (N = 128)*

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Art and Music | 7 | 5.5 |
| Humanities | 39 | 30.5 |
| Physical Education and Health | 6 | 4.7 |
| Special Education, Guidance and Student Services | 29 | 22.7 |
| Mathematics and Science | 47 | 36.7 |

The researcher sought to discover if years of teaching experience affected the teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students at their school and the programs for those students. The table shows that 75% of the participants had at least 10 years of experience. Table 8 represents the years of teaching experience and percentage of the population.

**Table 8**

*Respondents by Years of Teaching Experience (N = 128)*

| Years of Experience | N | % |
|---------------------|-----|------|
| 0-1 | 8 | 6.2 |
| 2- 4 | 15 | 11.5 |
| 10 – 20 | 55 | 42.3 |
| 21 or more | 43 | 33.1 |

The similarity of teachers with one or less years of experience is reflected in the data sample for this study. The inexperienced teachers in this survey were 6.2%. The district has 7% inexperienced teachers (*NYSED*, 2021). The largest respondent group from this research had at least 10 years' experience: 10 to 20 years 42.3% and 21 or more 33.1% for a total 98% of respondents.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question aimed to explore the teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students. A summary score was calculated based on the respondents' answers to specific questions in the survey. The survey called "Teachers' Perceptions of Chronically Absent Students" used a Likert Scale in which 1

represented strongly disagree, 2 represented disagree, 3 represented neutral, 4 represented agree and 5 represented strongly agree. The lowest means were regarding the question regarding all staff being "on deck" when approaching attendance (M=2.68) and the question regarding understanding the factors that contribute to absences (M=2.81). The highest mean was regarding the question about connecting chronically absent students to a liaison (M=3.74). The table shows teachers' opinions about their schools' response to chronically absent students.

Four of the survey questions were used to create the sum scores for teachers' knowledge of chronically absent students. Table 9 represents mean scores and standard deviations for each of the survey questions that were used to create the sum scores.

**Table 9**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Scores of the Teachers' Knowledge of Chronically Absent Students (N =128)*

|  | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| To what extent do you agree that poor student attendance has been a problem in your school in the past 1-2 years? | 3.64 | 1.092 |
| At my school, we understand the factors that contribute to absences for individuals and groups of students. | 2.81 | .977 |
| At my school we connect students who are missing too much learning time to one adult in the school (a liaison, mentor, etc.) | 3.74 | .863 |
| At my school, our entire school staff has bought into an "all hands-on deck" approach to attendance. | 2.68 | 1.009 |

Prior to running the multiple regression analysis, the six assumption tests were conducted. The first assumption test, the relationship between the independent variables

and dependent variable is linear, was not conducted since all of the independent variables were categorical. There was no multicollinearity in the data as the highest correlation was between years one to four teaching experience and non-tenured, $r=.384$ $p<.001$. When viewing the collinearity statistics in the SPSS output, the VIF scores were below 10 (0 to 4 years of teaching experience = 1.420, 5 to 9 years' experience = 1.986, 10 to 20 years' experience = 5.5344 and 21 or more years of teaching experience = 5.513, non-tenured = 2.837, Art and Music = 1.211, Physical Education and Health = 1.142, Special Education and Guidance = 1.506 and Mathematics and Science = 1.691). Tolerance scores were above 0.2 (0 to 4 years' experience = .704, 5 to 9 years' experience = .503, non-tenured = .352, Art and Music = .826, Physical Education and Health = .875, Special Education and Guidance = .664 and Mathematics and Science = .591). The variables of 10 to 20 years' experience and more than 21 years' experience had tolerance values of .181 and .187, respectively. Therefore, the multicollinearity assumption was met. The values of the residuals were assessed by using the Durbin-Watson analysis. The results of the Durbin-Watson were ($p = .333$), which was not close to 2, as it should be in order to meet this assumption. However, Chan (2014) states that the Durbin-Watson requires that data have a natural ordering, such as in a time-series analysis. Questionnaires and surveys do not have a natural order to the data. Therefore, the Durbin-Watson analysis result does not accurately determine that the values of the residuals are independent variables (Chan, 2014) . The table below represents the model summary and coefficients for research question 1.

**Table 10**

*Model Summary and Coefficients for Multiple Regression Between Academic*

*Department, Tenure Status and Years of Experience (N=128)*

| | | | | | Change Statistics | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .446[a] | .137 | .167 | 2.45 | .199 | 3.22 | 9 | 117 | 0.02 |

a. Predictors (Mathematics and Science, Non-tenure, Physical Education and Health, Art and Music, Humanities, 0 to 1 year experience, 2 to 4 years' experience, 5 to 10 years' experience, 10 to 20 years' experience, 21 or more years' experience, non-tenured

Using the sum scores for teachers' knowledge of chronically absent students,

multiple regression analysis was performed for research question 1. The table below

represents regression analysis for research question 1.

**Table 11**

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Teachers' Familiarity*

*with Chronically Absent Students (N=128)*

| Variable | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ | $sr^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 to 4 Years' Experience | 1.302 | 1.223 | .116 | |
| 5 to 9 Years' Experience | 1.186 | 1.196 | -.054 | |
| 10 to 19 Years' Experience | -.286 | 1.018 | -.838 | |
| Non-tenured | .278 | .845 | .120 | |
| Art and Music | 1.379 | 1.050 | -.261 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mathematics and Science | -1.423 | .587 | -1.121** | .040 |
| Physical Education and Health | -1.230 | 1.097 | .503 | |
| Special Education and Student Services | .324 | .645 | .092 | |
| $R^2$ | | .199 | | |
| $F$ | | 3.22** | | |

*Note:**p<.05*

The variance of the residuals was constant which was identified by the plot showing no signs of funneling, which suggests the assumption of homoscedasticity has been met. The values of the residuals were normally distributed which was evidenced by the P-P plot, as the dots were closely placed near the line. Finally, there were no influential cases of biasing or outliers in the data which was verified by calculating Cook's Distance values which were all under 1.00.

The multiple regression analysis was run using SPSS and the correlations of the independent variables (years of teaching experience, tenure status and academic department) were all significantly correlated with the dependent variable perception of chronically absent students and with each other. A significant regression equation was found $F$ (9,117) = 3.22 $p$ = .002. $R^2$ = .199 which indicates that 19% of the variation is explained by the model. The knowledge of the teachers of Mathematics and Science received the strongest positive weight in the model and contributed significantly to the model ($B$= -1.423, $p$ = .017). The tenure status and years of experience of the teachers did not affect the model nor did their academic department.

SPSS excluded the variables of tenured and academic department of Humanities in the regression. The excluded variables did not supply any additional significant information to the model. In this case, the variables, while important, were explained by other variables in the model. A predictor variable is excluded when it is perfectly predictable from other predictor variables (Warner, 2020).The null hypothesis was rejected. The academic department of Mathematics and Science contributed the strongest weight to the model. The other academic departments, tenure status, and years of teaching experience did not. This means that teachers' survey responses regarding their chronically absent students were not affected by their tenure status or years of service. The only variable that affected teachers' survey responses regarding chronically absent students were those teachers who taught Mathematics or Science classes. Teachers from those departments had sum scores indicating that they did not feel included in the process of helping mitigate the absences nor did they feel that they understood the reasons behind those absences. Furthermore, they had sum scores that indicated that they believed that absence in their schools was a problem.

**Research Question 2**

Research question 2 explored the teachers' survey responses regarding the programs for chronically absent students at their schools. A summary score was calculated based on the respondents' answers to specific questions in the survey. Table 7 shows mean scores for the survey questions that addressed research question 2. The survey used a Likert Scale in which 1 represented strongly disagree, 2 represented disagree, 3 represented neutral, 4 represented agree and 5 represented strongly agree. The highest mean scores were for the questions regarding knowing who to contact for help as

well as for promoting an engaging school climate (M=4.30). Teachers appeared to be

neutral regarding early personal outreach for families of the chronically absent (M=3.14)

and the use of data to determine those in need of that early intervention for absence

(M=3.11). Evidence shows that the teachers did not believe that the district used data to

monitor trends (M=2.87), nor did they believe that the district provided professional

development on the issue (M=2.40).

Six of the survey questions were used to create the sum scores for teachers'

perceptions of the programs for chronically absent students. Table 12 represents mean

scores and standard deviations for each of the survey questions that were used to create

the sum scores.

**Table 12**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Scores on the Teachers' Perceptions of Programs for*

*Chronically Absent Students (N = 128)*

|  | M | SD |
|---|---|---|
| At my school, I know with whom to speak and where to go if I need assistance with a student who may have an attendance problem. | 4.30 | 8.77 |
| At my school, we proactively promote an engaging school climate. | 4.30 | .593 |
| At my school, we have a protocol for early personalized outreach to families whose students are chronically absent. | 3.14 | 1.47 |
| At my school, chronic absence data are used to identify students who are in need of early or intensive supports. | 3.11 | 1.087 |
| At my school, attendance and chronic absence data, trends and patterns are monitored every week. | 2.87 | 1.216 |

Prior to running the multiple regression analysis for the second research question, six assumption tests were conducted. The first assumption test, the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable is linear, was not conducted since all of the independent variables were categorical. There was no multicollinearity in the data as the highest correlation was 0 to 4 years' teaching experience and humanities, $r=.416$ $p<.001$. When viewing the collinearity statistics in the SPSS output, the VIF scores were below 10 (0 to 4 years of teaching experience = 3.395, 5 to 9 years' experience = 1.240, 10 to 20 years' experience = 1.437, non-tenured = 3.065, Art and Music = 1.175, Physical Education and Health = 1.192, Special Education and Guidance = 1.445 and Mathematics and Science 1.701). Tolerance scores were above 0.2 (0 to 4 years' experience = .295 5 to 9 years' experience = .806, non-tenured = .326, Art and Music = .851, Humanities = .558. Physical Education and Health = .839, Special education and Guidance = .692 and Mathematics and Science = .588). Therefore, the multicollinearity assumption was met. The value of the Durbin Watson statistic was ($p = .354$), which was not close to 2, as it should be in order to meet this assumption. However, as previously stated, the data came from a survey and not a time series analysis and had no natural ordering. Therefore, the Durbin-Watson analysis result does not accurately determine that the values of the residuals are independent (Chan, 2014).

**Table 13**

*Model Summary and Coefficients for Multiple Regression Between Academic Department, Tenure Status and Years of Teaching Experience, Research Question 2*

| | | | | | | Change Statistics | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .384[a] | .147 | .081 | 5.36 | .147 | 2.42 | 9 | 117 | 0.024 |

a. Predictors (Mathematics and Science, Non-tenure, Physical Education and Health, Art and Music, Humanities, 0 to 1 year experience, 2 to 4 years' experience, 5 to 10 years' experience, non-tenured

Using sum scores for teachers' perceptions of the programs for chronically absent students at their schools, multiple regression analysis was performed for research question 2. The table below represents the multiple regression analysis for research question 2.

**Table 14**

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Teachers' Perceptions of Programs for Chronically Absent Students (N=128)*

| Variable | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ | $sr^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 to 4 Years' Experience | -1.157 | 2.319 | .347 | |
| 5 to 9 Years' Experience | 1.661 | 2.067 | -.078 | |
| 10 to 19 Years' Experience | -1.157 | 1.158 | .076 | |
| Non-tenured | 2.135 | .845 | .046 | |
| Art and Music | 3.207 | 2.263 | .166 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mathematics and Science | -1.330 | 1.299 | .146 | |
| Physical Education and Health | 5.674 | 2.452 | -.114** | .039 |
| Special Education and Student Services | 2.683 | 1.364 | .216** | .028 |
| Humanities | 1.774 | 1.392 | .131 | |
| $R^2$ | | .147 | .202 | |
| $F$ | | 2.42** | | . |

Note:**p<.01

The variance of the residuals was constant, which was identified by the plot showing no signs of funneling, which suggests the assumption of homoscedasticity has been met. The values of the residuals are normally distributed which was evidenced by the P-P plot, as the dots were closely placed near the line. Finally, there were no influential cases of biasing or outliers in the data which was verified by calculating Cook's Distance values which were all under 1.00.

The multiple regression analysis was run using SPSS and the correlations of the independent variables (years of teaching experience, tenure status, and academic department) were all significantly correlated with the dependent variable perception of chronically absent students and with each other. A significant regression equation was found $F(9,117) = 2.24\ p = .024$. $R^2 = .147$ which indicates that 15% of the variation is explained by the model. The teachers from the Physical Education department received the strongest positive weight in the model and contributed significantly to the model ($B= 5.674, p = .022$) while teachers from the Special Education and Guidance departments also contributed significantly to the model ($B=2.683, p =.052$). The tenure status and

years of experience of the teachers did not affect their perceptions of the programs. Being a teacher of Art and Music, Humanities or Mathematics and Science also did not affect their perceptions of the programs.

SPSS excluded the variables of tenured and years of teaching experience of 20 or more years in the regression. A predictor variable is excluded when it is perfectly predictable from other predictor variables (Warner, 2020). The null hypothesis was rejected.

Only participation in the academic departments of Special Education, Guidance and Physical Education, and Health affected teacher perceptions of the programs at their schools. other academic departments, as well as teachers' years of experience or tenure status, were not found to have a significant relationship with the dependent variable, sum scores for perceptions of programs.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative data further delves into teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students as well as their schools' responses and interventions for these students. All teachers were able to connect to their experiences with chronically absent students; both in their current school and in previous ones. Teachers shared their experiences with the researcher. Teachers communicated their thoughts and opinions which were highlighted by their frustrations with the students and their schools' responses. Through the interview process, the researcher interviewed 14 teachers. The table below represents the respondents by school, experience, academic subject, and tenure status. All names are pseudonyms.

**Table 15**

*Participants by School, Years of Experience, Academic Subject and Tenure Status (N=14)*

| Teacher | School | Years of Experience | Academic Subject | Tenure Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bradley | Elm | 15 | Mathematics | Tenured |
| Ellen | Cassia Fern (split) | 4 | English/English as New Language | Non-tenured |
| Gary | Hawthorne | 18 | English | Non-tenured |
| Joseph | Fern | 10 | Science | Tenured |
| Julia | Fern | 4 | World Languages | Non-tenured |
| Katina | Elm | 1 | Mathematics/Special Education | Non-tenured |
| Kenneth | Fern | 22 | English | Tenured |
| Marjorie | Elm | 30 | Science | Tenured |
| Maureen | Elm | 13 | Special Education/Social Studies | Tenured |
| Melinda | Fern | 20 | English | Tenured |
| Sarah | Elm | 18 | Mathematics | Tenured |
| Ned | Sycamore | 28 | Social Studies | Tenured |
| Rhonda | Cassia | 32 | Mathematics | Tenured |
| Winnie | Elm | 23 | English | Tenured |

Using SPSS, the researcher ran descriptive statistics to determine frequencies and percentages for participants for each of the schools in the district. The highest number of participants came from Elm and the lowest from Hawthorne and Sycamore. Table 16 shows the number of interview participants and percentages by school.

**Table 16**

*Number and Percentages of Interview Participants by School (N=14)*

|            | N | % |
|------------|---|-----|
| Cassia     | 2 | 14.2 |
| Elm        | 6 | 42.5 |
| Fern       | 4 | 3.5% |
| Hawthorne  | 1 | 0.7 |
| Sycamore   | 1 | 0.7 |

Of the interviewed participants, there was one Social Studies teacher, five English teachers, three Mathematics teachers, two Science teachers, one World Language and two Special Education teachers: one with a concentration in Mathematics and the other in Social Studies. Two of the interviewed participants also serve as deans in their schools and three teachers serve as department chairs. Overall, the participants had varying degrees of experience starting from a first-year teacher through more than 30 years. Though varied in their years of experience, their lived experience within their roles was quite similar. Many common themes emerged during the interview process. The three emerging themes were school climate and engagement, communication and accountability, and consequences both for the students and the teachers.

**Theme 1: School Climate and Engagement**

One of the major themes that was discussed by all participants was the need for students to feel engaged and welcomed, not only in the school but also in the particular classes that each attended. All participants at all the schools believed that their respective schools offered an engaging climate. However, teachers also felt that not all students are engaged in school and the reasons for that varied greatly. Arguably, to be engaged students must be present. Teachers agreed that students missed school for a myriad of reasons; some that were within their control and others that were not. Some teachers reported that students missed school mainly due to family vacations, family responsibilities, work commitments, and from a general lack of engagement on the student's part.

*Sub-Theme 1:  Holidays and Vacations*

Holidays and vacations are a main cause of student absence that is out of the students' control. Marjorie, a veteran science teacher from Elm High School has more than thirty years of teaching experience. Marjorie discussed first-generation American students that leave school at holiday times for extended periods at a time. These students are taken out of school by the parents to visit relatives in their native countries. Marjorie shared,

> Yeah, I don't have any issues with the AP Bio children being out, except
> for like trips for, you know, around the holidays for a month….they try to
> make it (the work) up. Some do and some don't. They are in Africa for a
> month, and they will say I didn't have Wi-Fi. And I don't know if they
> did, or they didn't.

In the same vein, Katina, a first year Mathematics and Special Education teacher from Elm added:

> I have one student who was out for a full month, because she went to Bolivia to visit her family. So, they took (an) extended absence, and her sister is in 10th grade and taught her all the material and she came to one extra help session, and she was right back in it. Really, really good family there. So that was pretty cool.

Julia, a fourth year World Languages teacher from Fern cited problems with absence for family planned vacations:

> They're going to Aruba in the middle of March for no reason, but it becomes hard on us (the teachers). Where does my attention lie? Sometimes it's like "Miss, I'm going to be absent, can I have all the work?" And then there was people (students) who will go away and say "Well, I wasn't here."

Whether the student was absent for a pleasure vacation or to visit family because they are first generational American student, the result is the same: students are not in school. This is not of their own choice. Their families have decided that it is permissible for them to miss school. However, this does affect the teachers' perceptions of the students. There is a sense of frustration on the part of the teachers who have added responsibility to supply the work via a Google Classroom or shared PowerPoints or to be forced to catch the students up upon their return. Either way, the teacher has more to do because of the absence of the students.

*Sub-Theme 2: Work Responsibilities*

According to the teachers who were interviewed students also miss school because they have financial responsibilities to their families which force them to work after school. Some teachers expressed that these jobs would cause them to be tired and subsequently miss school. Some of the interviewed teachers mentioned that students also have responsibilities to care for younger siblings because their parents need to work and need childcare. According to the teachers interviewed, this will also cause students to be frequently absent and/or late for school. Ellen, a fourth year ELL and English teacher from Fern High School discussed students missing school for work responsibilities. Ellen said:

> I have one, she's a commanding ELL student, very few modifications, when she is absent, it is usually work related, she worked very late in a restaurant, and she wakes up and she's exhausted. It's just not happening. I couldn't even get up.

Winnie, a 22-year veteran English teacher from Elm added:

> Working is one of our biggest issues. Especially with the ELL population. And that is one of the biggest issues, we have the racetrack kids, we are right near the track, and they were missing school whenever there was something going on at the track.

Parents were sometimes responsible for a students' absence. Katina added:

> On Mondays and Thursdays, his little sister doesn't go to preschool, and the mom has to go to work. So, he's staying home two days every week to babysit his sister. I just found this out today. And I'm new and I don't

know what to do about this. Do I call and suggest they get someone else to
watch the kid?

These were not questions of engagement but students simply not being present for
situations that were out of the student's control. However, all resulted in a student not
being present for school and the myriad of academic and social-emotional consequences
that ensued. Teachers expressed empathy for the students. However, there was a general
sense of hopelessness that the teacher could actually do anything about the situation.
Similar to the absence due to vacation or holiday, the teachers are left with additional
responsibilities and a sense of frustration.

### *Sub-Theme 3: Student engagement*

The qualitative data revealed that even though schools are trying to engage
students, teachers felt that not all the students felt and responded to the engagement.
Teachers did report striving for that engagement in their personal relationships with
students. Of the survey participant teachers, 93.8% believed that they and their schools
promoted a positive school engagement. The teachers all reported trying to forge
relationships with students. One example of this effort was mentioned by Winnie, a
veteran English teacher from Elm:

> They don't want to come. And if we can link them in which I think it is
> something we do, we make them feel so at home, so comfortable and so
> happy that they come, yeah, they know that, you know, teachers are going
> to be happy to see them for the most (part). So, the cultivating, you know
> it's cheesy as it sounds of student-teacher relationships.

These relationships can be just in the classroom but also can stretch to relationships with students in extra-curricular activities and sports. Ellen also discussed engagement:

I feel like a lot of teachers forget that the relationship is two ways, you know, a lot of people, not a lot of people, but there are some people who think that teaching is linear, and that the relationship is linear and that there, there is no reciprocal that we can't, you know, that they can't do anything for us, so I feel like the sooner you realize that these students want to think of you as a real human and want to relate to them, the sooner you can foster that environment, say 'Hey, listen, if it's not your day, you're not having a good day, that's fine, still come to class, I will let you put your head down, but I would like you to be here. As long as you're giving your best, that's fine by me.

Participants came from different academic departments but expressed similar sentiments. For example, Joseph, a 10-year Science teacher from Fern also discussed engagement:

I try to design my classes in a way where the students are just set up for success and anything that I can do to help them to achieve. But if they do not come to labs, there is nothing I can do. I can try to get them to make up the labs but if they don't show, they don't show.

Kenneth, a veteran English teacher that also serves as a chairperson at Fern, discussed engagement not only in the classroom but as a coach, which he had been for many years prior to assuming the chairperson's role:

...it was huge because of their involvement in the school stuff, especially

football and basketball were the world to them, they really enjoyed that

time. They valued it tremendously. So as a coach, I did progress reports.

And I was always in touch with the parents and the teachers about

anything whether it was missing homework, late for class, missing class.

To that they miss class, or they were late or not doing the right thing, they

weren't going to play first quarter or first half or maybe the entire game

based on the situation. …the fall and winter sports once they were done,

the kids that weren't involved in spring sports the truancy and absences

spiked. We would try to keep our mentorship ongoing, it was a family

approach, like we will all be back together in the fall.

Kenneth explained that while the sports were being played it was much easier for

the coaches/teachers to remain engaged with the players and to encourage good

attendance.

Ned, a 28-year veteran Social Studies teacher from Sycamore, who now serves as

a chairperson but also spent much of his career coaching sports, discussed engagement.

…we cannot drive to their houses to get them, so the only thing the

teacher can do when the student is there, talk to him or her, encourage,

inspire motivate. We should be trying to make the class as relatable to the

kids as possible.

Most teachers expressed some level of frustration with absent students even if the reason

for the absence was out of their control. Each teacher cited the creation of some sort of

additional work that needed to be done on their part: supplying work before the student

left for a vacation, supplying work upon their return, or having to reteach or teach students something that they had already taught.

When students are engaged in school and school activities, whether they are sports or extra-curricular, they are generally happier with the school experience. Interviewed teachers all agreed that school engagement was important, and they all strove for engagement in their particular classrooms. However, the overarching sentiment was you cannot engage students who are not present. In order to engage them, they have to be in school. Engagement can only go as far as that. The aforementioned reasons that students are not in school are a barrier to engagement.

**Theme 2:  School Organization**

All interviewees reported issues with school organization. Considering the interviewees hailed from five different schools, there seemed to be similarity in the participants' responses to inquiries regarding school organization. The participants claimed that the schools' response to chronically absent students was varied. All The schools showed a lack of organization in their approach not only to dealing with the students but their overall plan to mitigate absence. Which policy? The policy was either not enforced or not enforced consistently.

*Sub-Theme 1:  Hierarchy of reporting*

All participants, including the teachers that served as deans as well as chairs, expressed confusion about to whom they should report the fact that students were chronically absent.

One of the participants who is also a chairperson in his school reported that their union had relieved them of the duty of handling chronic absenteeism, so he no longer

deals with it. Another reported that teachers in his department reported chronic absenteeism to him first. He said that he liked to relieve some of their pressure by helping to deal with the problem so that the teacher did not have to go further. This particular chairperson tried to meet these students and talk with them about their absences and encouraged them to come to class/school before the student would be referred to the attendance office, dean and/or assistant principal.

All participants reported that the reporting does begin with the teacher. It is not the deans, attendance officers, guidance counselors (or other pupil personnel services) that came to the teacher about the student, it was always the responsibility of the teacher to start the process.

Winnie, a veteran English teacher discussed teachers' responsibility in regard to excessive absence:

The buck starts and almost stops with the teachers. I feel like it is on us (teachers). And like the AP (Assistant Principals) will say to us at meetings, they pull up on their computer a kid's file and see that they (the student) have missed English class 30 times and you (the teacher) didn't mention that. Uh-oh. So, a lot of the responsibility, and rightfully so, being the first line of defense lies in the hands of the teachers.

Sara, a veteran Mathematics teacher from the same school added:

But you know, I, I really don't know what the protocol is? How? Who? Who gets notified after the fifth absence, the tenth absence, the fifteenth? Is there any sort of I don't know, icon on Infinite Campus or Power School or whatever it is we have now? I don't know.

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Katina, a first-year teacher of Mathematics and Special Education also at that building:

> As a young teacher, it is hard to find the balance. I don't want to be
> annoying. Obviously as a first-year teacher, I don't want to be like 'Oh
> My God,' this girl never stops sending me emails (to the assistant
> principals). But at the same time, I don't know. I'm, do I just give up? I
> hate to give up on a student. Do I walk away? I have only once ever
> received an email from an assistant principal regarding a student's
> attendance, it's always the other way around.

Ellen, an English teacher with ten years' experience at a different building discussed the
same issue:

> And if the teacher doesn't say anything, nobody ever notices? No, I never,
> well rarely, seen a case where an administrator or a guidance counselor
> will say, 'oh, it looks like the student is having a poor attendance issue.
> It's always us, and we have a lot to do already.

When the researcher questioned Bradley, who was a dean as well as a Mathematics
teacher, about the process, the participant responded:

> It's like an escalating level of supervision, you know? And then we (the
> deans) call different people, you know, and we'll see, are they in a club?
> Do they play a sport? Can we use that as like a privileged situation? And
> yeah, we have definitely held kids out of practices and games because of
> an attendance issue.
>
> (reporting) It's really teacher directly to dean, because, with all the
> computer systems now, you know, I can come in the morning and I can

pull up the 11th graders and see which ones have missed classes the day

before and which one didn't, sometimes guidance counselor will do that in

terms of getting on the (computer). They don't want too many people

being the bad guy, so the guidance counselor is the good cop, and I am the

bad one.

All participants mentioned the school district's change to a new data management

system this year. The new data management system has created additional organizational

problems. The two deans that were interviewed mentioned that they were not yet aware

of all of the capabilities of the new program. It also, at least for the present time, had

limitations that the former program did not have. The teachers used to be able to check a

student's attendance in other classes, the new program only permitted them to see the

student's attendance in their class. A teacher was unable to see if a student missed only

their class or had been absent for the entire day. Furthermore, teachers who taught

morning sections, were unaware if a student was absent or just came in late. The former

program also generated phone calls to parents/guardians that a student had missed a

class(es). The current program may or may not have the capability, the deans and the

teachers were unaware if it did. Melinda, an English teacher at Fern cited, "In our old

program, there were icons that showed students were attendance problems, if that is a

feature, I don't know if anyone knows how to use it because it's not being used. I don't

know about it and I'm a dean, so I guess others don't either" Rhonda, a veteran

mathematics teacher from Cassia added:

If you sign in late and miss period one, and then you leave early and don't

go to (period) nine, you don't get on that list (daily absence list). Yeah, of

course, they (the students) can figure that out. And they have used that.

Most people (teachers) don't have access to see what I can see.

The district as a whole moved to a new data management system the year prior to the study. All of the schools in the district (and the study) now use the system. All, some, any outliers? Teachers were accustomed to the former system and knew how to use it to manage student attendance issues. The new data management system has added to the complexity of the problem. This was especially true for teachers of period one classes. They were no longer able to find out without contacting the attendance office or an administrator to discover if a student missed the entire day of school or just their class. The new system led to more frustration on the part of the teachers and a sense of helplessness; while they tried to be informed about their student's attendance it now took more effort and became increasingly harder to do so.

### Sub-Theme 2: Teaming

Being junior-senior high schools, the schools serve two distinct groups: 7th and 8th grade students who are considered to be junior high school students and 9th through 12th grade students who are considered to be high school students. This is true in all of the five schools in the district (and the study). The students in the junior high grades are placed on academic teams. All schools have teaming at the junior high level. Teams consist of an English, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science teacher are assigned a guidance counselor and have an assistant principal who oversees the team. Teams meet weekly to discuss their students. The counselor and assistant principal loop with their team from 7th to 8th grade so they become very familiar with the students on their team.

Interview participants who served on those teams reported that by being a member of an academic team, teachers felt more supported in dealing with absent students. A student would be discussed at a team meeting and the guidance counselor would follow up with home contact reiterating what was discussed at the team meeting. Winnie, a veteran English teacher from Elm said, "There was a child in one of my classes in 8th grade and she was out a lot and we all started talking about her at a team meeting and we started the ball rolling." If a parent meeting needs to be facilitated, it is planned, if possible, during the team meeting allowing all of a student's teachers to be present. Winnie added that despite of the team's effort, the student wound up failing but subsequently passed in summer school. But she had added that the guidance and the assistant principal were making the contacts instead of the individual teachers. Teaming is not available for students and teachers in 9th through 12th grade classes. Teachers that are not on teams are called into meetings during their prep periods. Furthermore, it is difficult for the school to schedule all of a particular students' teachers to meet with a parent at one time because their classes would need to be covered by substitutes. Because of the difficulty in planning, these meetings are less likely to happen.

Katina first-year, non-tenured teacher of Mathematics and Special Education believed the team helped with the problem of absenteeism. She said, "I'm very fortunate to be a part of a team for my 7th grade classes, it takes some of the pressure off." Marjorie, a veteran science teacher added "I will tell guidance, and guidance will reinforce what I've said. So, there is you know, backup, right?" Winnie, a veteran English teacher at the same building concurred "(On the team) the guidance counselors follow the students from 7th to 8th grade and so that allows them to focus on the issues

that arise and become familiar with the kid." Sara, a veteran Mathematics teacher at the same building added "I taught middle school (level) for a little period about three years back I didn't feel that in middle school absenteeism was an issue." In accordance with other participants, Winnie a veteran English teacher added:

So, we were an 8th grade team of teachers with a guidance counselor attached to us and we all, you know started talking about it (a student who had been absent an average of 15-20 times a month). And if we didn't meet about it as a team, I really wondered if some of the other teachers would have noticed if she was there or not. So, the guidance counselor got on it, but even that wasn't enough.

Teaming was definitely revered as a positive reporting thoroughfare for dealing with student absence. On these teams, teachers not only had the support of an administrator but the student's guidance counselor as well. Only 24.2% of teachers felt went asked that their school had an "all hands-on deck" approach to student absenteeism when surveyed during the quantitative data collection. Those teachers who are not part of the 7th and 8th grade teams do not enjoy the benefits of the teaming approach where indeed, there is an all hands-on-deck approach which includes all of a child's teachers and the child's guidance counselor and an assistant principal.

### Sub-Theme 3: Communication

All participants expressed frustration with the lack of communication among the different roles at the schools. As previously mentioned, the teacher most likely facilitated some contact regarding a student who is frequently absent. Teachers were also unaware

of the protocol for reporting an issue, and there seems to be no set protocol or hierarchy

for reporting such issues. Those teachers who serve on teams, seem to have a protocol for

the team which is not given to non-team teachers. While all of the interviewed teachers

all mention reporting student absence to a chairperson, attendance officer, dean, or

assistant principal, there was no mention of an established protocol. Some teachers were

also resistant to report an issue to assistant principals as they were weary of outing their

colleagues that had not made such a report. The schools all seemed to lack a clear and

direct flow chart of the reporting of excessively absent students that teachers should

follow. Considering that all respondents said that they were responsible to bring it to the

attention of administration, guidance, and the attendance officers, this was perceived to

be extremely problematic.

Rhonda, a veteran Mathematics teacher who has worked in three different

buildings within the district stated:

> I'll reach out and say 'I have an attendance issue with Susie. And then the
>
> AP will wind up saying how come only (this teacher) .is the only person I
>
> have heard from? It ends up being public humiliation for every other
>
> (teacher of that student) in an email. So, you know you cover yourself as
>
> much, but in covering yourself, you throw your colleagues under the bus.

Participants also stated that they are usually left in the dark about students' absenteeism

and the reasons behind their absences. While assistant principals and guidance counselors must

protect student privacy regarding certain issues, teachers expressed frustration that they were not

even privy to a general reason why a student had missed so much school. While they did not

believe they needed to know intricate details about the student's absence, a general sense of a

particular issue would allow teachers to feel more empathy and subsequently less frustration.

Furthermore, teachers felt like they would be better equipped to manage situations appropriately

if they were given some background information. One interviewee said she had asked a student

where he had been because he had missed several days of school, and he shut down. When she

reached out to guidance, the counselor had known that the student's good friend had been killed

in a car accident in a neighboring town. This teacher felt regret about her comment and also felt

that she had marred her relationship with that student.

When asked why she did not receive the information from guidance, Ellen a fourth year

ELL and English teacher responded:

I don't know. I get the comment that they (guidance counselors) have so

much going on, there's just so much that needs to be done and the meetings

with kids and stuff and parent meetings and it's scheduling and colleges and

things like that, take precedence over this, but a quick email? You have

known this for a week? Just a heads up would be nice.

Winnie, a veteran English teacher from Elm added:

I know our guidance department does CST (Child Study Team) meetings

where the address student absenteeism. We have an attendance officer who

sits in on those meetings as well and he'll do like home checks, or he'll say

he's handling it.  But I think a frustrating part of that is that they tell us

they're doing all this but then we never hear back. There's never any follow

up. Never any. This is what we found out; this is what we are working on.

There's never any, it's always left up in the air. And we are told it's being

handled and if I don't actively ask what the outcome was, or whatever,

however it was resolved, never go back, I don't know. It takes a lot of time

to do that (follow up).

Even though teachers were from different schools within the district, many

expressed similar feelings. Their collective frustration could be felt in their responses. For

example, Melinda, a veteran English teacher from Fern, who also serves as a dean added:

One of the teachers said, like, you know, there's a big difference between, you

know, mom's really sick at home and needs help and you came back from and

have a tan because you were on vacation somewhere. There's a fine line about

what you can say and what you should say, it's tough because you know, most

teachers would be a lot more sympathetic.

Winnie also felt that there should be more proactivity on the part of the administrators and the

guidance counselors. Because the students attend the schools for six years, the teacher felt there

should be some sort of follow-up to students who have had attendance problems in the past. Winnie

stated:

…now don't they (administration, guidance) know? And it's normal, it's normally

the same kids who are absent, right? And being that they are in our building for

six years, you could say, yes, who's going to be absent a lot? Right? I do feel like,

yeah, they should be doing more.

Gary, a teacher who also chairs the English department at Hawthorne, discussed the

effect that the process has on teacher morale. This teacher felt like the lack of

communication translated into a lack of respect.

I've really tried to act as to try to pull some of that burden off of my teachers and

pursue those questions for them through guidance and attendance on their behalf

because otherwise they just get frustrated. And what winds up happening is that they map this sense of diminishing teacher, respect, and autonomy….And I think sometimes (they) have a hard time, like really understanding the particulars of the student's case, because they're just not told.

Teachers' perceptions of the absent students and their schools' handling of those students was influenced by the communication or lack thereof. They expressed a sense of frustration in being kept in the dark by administrators and guidance counselors. The teachers, while wanting to stay on top of student attendance through the data management system were further frustrated by the ability to do so.

**Theme 3: Accountability and Consequences**

Consequences and accountability were two important tenets of the study: for students as well as for teachers. The accountability factor influenced teachers' perceptions of their schools' response to the chronically absent students and how they felt as a result of those responses.

***Sub-Theme 1: Student Accountability and Consequences***

The district has an attendance policy, which is available for viewing on the district website. It is contained in Appendix _____. The document was adopted in 2002 and the last time it was amended was in 2005. While some of the interviewees discussed the attendance policy, others were unaware of its' existence. Two of the participants who also served as deans discussed the policy. One responded that they have never seen the policy enacted. Bradley, a dean, and Mathematics teacher stated "It is used more of a scare tactic. I have seen it used but definitely less than 5% of the time."

The policy states the following:

A student who has more than twelve (12) absences in a semester course, and twenty-four (24) absences in a full year course, may receive no credit for that course. Being late to class three times is the equivalent of 1 absence. Student absences attributable to approved school related functions will not count toward the 12/24 absence total. To ensure that parents and students are aware of the implications of the minimum attendance requirement the teacher will advise the student and a designated staff member will contact the parent(s) by telephone (when possible) and by mail when the student reaches 9 absences in a semester course and 18 in a full year course. Report card and progress report comments will also be used to communicate to the parent or guardian poor attendance and the possible loss of credit( *Tall Trees School District Attendance Policy*, 2005).

Maureen, a Special Education and Social Studies teacher, who has worked in the district for more than thirteen years said, "There is a system in place to remove a student from (receiving) credit, to stop a student from getting credit if they don't have the seat time for a course. But that is extremely rare. It's used very, very rarely." When the same was asked of Rhonda, a mathematics teacher with more than 25 years in the district, who has worked in three different buildings, she added: "I have seen it used in case of seniors who were really just not present at all, and they're not going to fit their graduation requirements."

Sara, another veteran Mathematics teacher asked the researcher if the district still had an attendance policy. The teacher said:

I don't even know if it's in place right now, like apparently, if it's like twelve absences for the semester, you automatically have 12/24 for the year (twelve for a

semester course, twenty-four for a full year course). And there's so many every year, I always have that handful of kids where I'm looking at them, I'm looking at like, you know, my Eschool (data management system) and they're like up to forty or fifty. And so, we always have that conversation where we're like, oh, well, technically, according to the district policy, they failed the class, buy they don't, seems that never gets followed throughout. There's always a loophole or some way shape or form, that as long as the kid hands in some kind of work and do the final project or take the (state) examination and get some passing grades, they passed. So, part of me is like 'What's the point of having this attendance policy?' Right? But if we stuck to the twenty-four, we would have hundreds of kids that would fail every year.

Ned, a Social Studies teacher and chairperson from Sycamore, discussed that sometimes a loss of membership in a club, activity, or sport is a form of accountability for absence but can also be used as a motivator for the student to improve attendance. This teacher recalled a student where sports were the consequence and motivation for attendance:

With one particular student, it was a school phobia thing, he was truly diagnosed, school anxiety, this was around 8th grade, and he did improve over the years, and he did enough to graduate. One of the catches had to be soccer, he was a pretty good soccer player and that got him going. He had to come to school to play.

Ned also said that when at his previous school they kept students out of practices and games but at their current school (also within the district) the lack of communication between the administration and attendance with athletics causes this not to happen and

the student does not suffer the consequences of missing a sporting event for having been absent for school.

One example where students are held accountable for their attendance is when it comes to participation in laboratory hours as a requirement for science classes. Being that it is state law, students cannot miss these classes without formal make-up of the time. Marjorie, a veteran Science teacher spoke of laboratory requirements:

> Science teachers have a unique situation in that there is a lab requirement to sit for the state-mandated examination. Guidance counselors and teachers have to advise parents if students are not meeting the required number of laboratory hours to sit for the examination.

Joseph, a science teacher with ten years' experience concurred, has barred students from taking the state examination because of the required laboratory hours but only after exhausting attempts to have students make up the hours He said "I've barred students from taking the (state) test and then they get a 0 and essentially, they fail for the year, it's the four quarters and the test divided by five, so they fail". While there were no physical education teachers who participated in the interview process, physical education classes must also be made up in order to receive credit in this particular state. The other academic courses do not have state mandated attendance, each district has their own attendance policy.

***Sub-Theme 2: Teacher Accountability and Consequences***

All interviewees cited frustration with the breadth of responsibility placed upon them when students were absent. Teachers were expected to not only supply the student with the work they missed, but they are also expected to offer tutoring during their

preparation periods as well as before and after school without any financial remuneration. If a student had been chronically absent and the student was in danger of failing the course for the year, teachers were frequently asked to supply the students with makeup work and then were expected to grade the work and give the students credit for it.

However, at one of the five schools, teachers are paid to make up labs and for extra help sessions offered on Saturday mornings. According to the teachers interviewed, many students who are absent during the week also did not come to the Saturday classes. Other interviewees were surprised that this was not the case at all of the schools, just the one.

Teachers of senior students who were in danger of not graduating were particularly pressured to supply the work and give students credit for it as to not impede the student from graduating. Kenneth, a veteran English teacher and chairperson said, "I can definitely speak to pressure being put on teachers to help kids pass and sometimes it's unfair and it's stressful for them." Bradley, a veteran Mathematics teacher from Elm added "When I was untenured, I certainly heard, keep your failures under this percent or whatnot.." In addition to their work with students, the onus was placed on the teachers to contact parents, administrators, deans, and guidance about student absence. As previously stated, the hierarchy or flow chart of reporting was murky, and teachers often exhausted their time making the appropriate contacts.

The policy itself states:

To ensure that parents and students are aware of the implications of the minimum attendance requirement the teacher will advise the student and a designated staff member will contact the parent(s) by telephone (when possible) and by mail when

the student reaches 9 absences in a semester course and 18 in a full year course. Report card and progress report comments will also be used to communicate to the parent or guardian poor attendance and the possible loss of credit (*Tall Trees School District Attendance Policy*, 2005).

Kenneth, a veteran English teacher who is also a department chair, said:

In some instances, you know, it's the Breakfast Club phenomenon where we bring the kids in on a Saturday or during testing week, when there's free time and you know pile them up with some work and they get their projects done and things that they didn't normally get done during the regular school year that would help them pass.

Rhonda, a veteran Mathematics teacher, discussed the following:

Pressure is put on the teacher, so what can be done, for example, my student I'm dealing with right now, I'll talk to her mom, I'll tell her she missed class, she'll send her to me for extra help. So, I'm meeting with her, either before school, or after school, trying to catch her up on lessons that she's missing. And that's not extra help in terms of additional academic support for students struggling. I'm trying to reteach everything. There's an underlying pressure to pass them because everything falls to the teacher first that I feel that pressure. And it means more time, more time, and more time.

In summary, Bradley, a veteran Mathematics teacher and dean, when questioned about being pressured to pass absent students, responded, "No one ever got spoken to for giving out too many A (grades), you know."

*Sub-Theme 3: Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Teachers*

The combined effects of the lack of communication, confusion, pressure, and increased workload left some teachers feeling under-appreciated, frustrated, and feeling that their work as educators was inconsequential. There was an over-arching sentiment of frustration and hopelessness amongst the interviewees. Many stated that the Covid-19 pandemic added not only to the absenteeism problem but also to students and teachers having more social-emotional issues.

During the lockdown, beginning in March 2020, teachers worldwide were forced to learn and implement new technologies and discover ways to reach and instruct their students. In this particular district, during the 2020-21 school year, students were given the option to be hybrid or fully remote. Depending on the school within the district, different amounts of students were fully remote, in one school, most students were fully remote, and in another most were hybrid. Regardless of the school, all teachers were engaged in technologies that most had little to no experience with prior. Returning to full in school instruction for the 2021-2022 school year presented even more challenges for teachers as there were significant learning gaps from the prior year and a half as well as new attendance issues arising from students who were not accustomed to attending school daily as well as those who had become anxious to return.

When the school year ended in 2020, there as an 'unwritten' mandate that all students pass for the year. Julia, a non-tenured World Language teacher said:

> You know, I mean, last year off the record, on the record I really don't care. Everyone was passing no matter what. We had specific instructions that regardless of if they had never signed on to the Google Classroom, if they had

never handed in a single thing of work, no one was to fail. I'm here. So, I'm here giving out 65s like I was Oprah. As a classroom teacher, right now, I feel like I'm pulled in so many different directions. Sure, you know, coming off the pandemic was a challenge you know, kids learning in a hybrid model, and kids not attending at all during that whole experience that, you know, was tremendous. And now that we are back to some sort of a normal learning environment, it's tough to add a number of more responsibilities to stack on top of teachers, you know, providing support for kids who are getting to class, you know, on time or not coming at all. It's a big challenge and very time-consuming. It's overwhelming.

The year following the lockdown (2020-2021), when the state canceled mandated state testing due to the effects of the lingering pandemic, students without any formal testing at the school year's end, mostly passed their courses. The following school year (2021-2022) was a soft return to normalcy with no remote option offered even for students who had Covid-19 or were quarantined. Some students missed 10 days without instruction because they had been quarantined and there was no remote option offered. This continued until the end of December 2021, when the Center for Disease Control dropped the contact quarantine and lowered the quarantine time for people who had contracted the virus to 5 days. Of the teachers interviewed, many felt that the pandemic added so many additional stressors to classroom teaching, more student absenteeism being part of it. Some teachers cited that because of the pandemic (and prior to it, as well) there was a lack of respect for teachers, school, and education. This led to more feelings of frustration for teachers. Marjorie, a veteran Science teacher added "I think to some extent, it is a lack of value (in education)". Some feel that there is no value to education

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or there are other things that take precedence. When discussing student absence, Bradley, teacher, and dean said, "There are definitely parents who enable it (absence) way, way too much." Katina, the first year Mathematics and Special Education teacher added:

When dealing with chronically absent students, the interviewed teachers all cited the amount of time they spend on these students with sometimes extraordinarily little return of effort by the students is exhaustive. Rhonda, a veteran mathematics teacher, said:

> You know, the only goal is to teach the curriculum to the student and the student isn't available, you know isn't showing up. And then having to meet with them at other times, it's completely frustrating. And it's demeaning. I feel like I'm being taken advantage of, I was there fourth period to teach this, (the student was not). Now, I am trying to teach our five lessons (from the week) in thirty or forty minutes in an extra help session. It's difficult.

Ellen, an ELL and English teacher that is split between two buildings added "I give up lunch periods, prep periods, periods prior to school and after school, I try my best in all aspects, so I catch students up but it's kind of hard." Referring to the 2020-2021 school year, Maureen a Special Education and Social Studies teacher, said:

> It's actually the most pressure I've had, like I've been doing this for 13 years and I think at the end of last year, I was almost having like mental breakdown because of the pressure to get in contact with these kids (absent students) and get them to do work. They (administration and guidance counselor) were constantly asking me if I heard from any of them. So, yes, it's a lot of stress.

Ellen, an English, and ELL teacher added:

So, I think the frustration comes largely from like putting a lot of effort into kids

and not getting any response, which can be very frustrating. If a teacher is

reaching out to you with a bunch of emails and you know, calling home and all

that stuff like how is this kid not getting back to me or getting work in?

The above statements and connections made by participants further evidence the

need for administrators to be aware of the breadth of the work that arises when teachers

are tasked with educating chronically absent students.

The protocols and procedures currently in place at the schools vary greatly from

one another and seemingly, from department to department. Much of the frustration cited

by the participants stem from two major tenets: lack of communication and tremendous

pressure to pass students regardless of the situation. The participants' perceptions of the

students and the programs was affected by their academic department and tenure status

but not their years of teaching experience which is evidenced by their responses during

the interview process. While all participants expressed frustration not so much with the

students but their buildings programs and protocols for these students, Mathematics and

Science teachers seemed to mention more the reteaching of concepts and laboratory

make-up sessions. The lack of communication overall was the overarching theme. Only

one of the interviewees was non-tenured, a first-year teacher, who mentioned that as a

new/non-tenured teacher she was particularly leery of creating waves or being

particularly bothersome.

The teachers from academic departments in which the material being taught is

based on prior knowledge as in Mathematics and Science were more likely to be

frustrated with the students. Those in the Humanities (English, Social Studies, and World

Languages), Physical Education and Health, Art and Music and Special Education and Student Services were less likely to find frustration with the students themselves although all seemed frustrated by the programs at their schools and the lack of consistency within their schools. All teachers regardless of academic department found fault and confusion in their schools' addressing of the students and subsequently felt frustration stemming from many different areas. Those included feelings of exploitation, overwork, blame, being uninformed and untrustworthy as they are often excluded from information regarding student absence.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students and the programs at their schools to help those students. The qualitative and quantitative data were complementary. The statements and connections made by participants in the semi-structured interviews further evidence the need for a reorganization at the school and district level concerning teacher responsibility for chronically absent students.

Mathematics and Science teachers and Physical Education teachers' responses had the greatest relationship with the dependent variable about teachers' familiarity knowledge of absent students. Six of the interviewees were teachers of Mathematics and Science (one was Special Education and taught only Mathematics classes). 43% of all interviewees were teachers of Mathematics and Science. Furthermore, Mathematics and Science teachers were 36.7% of all respondents on the questionnaire and 42.8% of the qualitative respondents. Because of the nature of their curriculum, knowledge relying on prior knowledge, Mathematics and Science teachers seemed to be more affected by

student absence. Mathematics and Science teachers also supplied qualitative data in which they expressed the same. Mathematics teachers spoke about having to teach concepts to absent students so that the students could continue learning. Science teachers spoke about the lab requirements for science classes that students either needed to make up or would not be able to sit for state testing and subsequently fail the class for the year.

Special Education and Guidance departments personnel had a stronger relationship with the dependent variable for programs for the chronically absent students. During the qualitative data collection in the second phase, Special Education teachers spoke of the tremendous pressure they felt to get students to pass. Since students with IEPs are more likely to be absent, Special Education teachers deal with the problem of chronic absenteeism more often.

Furthermore, of the teachers who responded to the survey, 53.1% were unaware of any incentives offered for good, perfect, or improved attendance. According to the district policy, there are perfect attendance awards.

From analyzing and coding the qualitative interviews, three major themes emerged: School Climate and Engagement, School Organization and Communication. Within the three themes there were sub-themes that emerged. Within School Climate and Engagement, the data revealed that holidays and vacations, work, and familial responsibilities, as well as student engagement in classes as well as school activities were all significant. Very few teachers cited any success with students actually doing the work they missed and getting caught up on their own.

The sub themes that emerged within School Organization were hierarchy of absenteeism reporting, academic teaming, and school communication. Teacher responses

revealed that academic teaming was viewed as a positive in regard to absenteeism while the hierarchy of reporting and communication regarding absent students was viewed negatively and caused frustration for the teachers who were interviewed.

The final theme in the qualitative data analyses was Accountability which was sub-divided into three sub themes: Student accountability and consequences, teacher accountability and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on teachers. The interviews revealed the teachers did not believe that student accountability and consequences were as stringent as teacher accountability and consequences for student absence. The after-effects for teachers were frustration, burnout, and resignation.

The implications will be discussed in Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 5

## Discussion

This research study examined teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and the programs at their schools to help mitigate student absence. This research explored how tenure status, academic department and years of experience affected teacher knowledge and perceptions. It also gave voice to the teachers and their shared experiences within their departments and their individual schools as well as examined the similarities and differences of the school response within and between schools in the studied district.

This study was a mixed methods study. Mixed methods research is defined as a research study in which the researcher combines both elements of quantitative research and qualitative research to have a broader understanding of a particular research problem. . In this particular study, for the quantitative data collection, the researcher surveyed 130 teachers at five junior-senior high schools in suburb in the northeast. The survey used was entitled "Teachers' Perceptions of Chronically Absent Students" which was a combination of two surveys from the organization AttendanceWorks.org, an organization dedicated to improving school attendance and providing schools with the tools to do so (*Attendance Works*, 2018). In order to increase reliability, the researcher conducted a face validity test with ten teachers outside of the study and ran a Chronbach's Alpha test to ensure reliability of the survey.

The qualitative data collection was gathered when the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 teachers that had volunteered to do so on the survey. The

semi-structured interview was designed by the researcher and can be found in Appendix C.

The theoretical framework of this study was the Wicked Problem by Rittel and Webber. As the researcher discovered, chronic absenteeism, in of itself is a wicked problem. There is no linear solution such as there would be in a scientific problem. The Wicked Problem is interconnected with other problems. In the case of absenteeism, as the researcher discovered, there is not one reason but a myriad of reasons that students do not attend school. There is not one solution to the problem as each case is unique and what works for one case will not work for another (Rittel & Webber, 1973). In the interview process, teachers shared personal experiences with chronically absent students and explained successful and unsuccessful methods of getting students through. Each response was unique and demonstrated that chronic absenteeism is a wicked problem as outlined by Rittel and Webber: there was no linear solution and each case needed to be handled in a different manner.  While conducting the research about teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and their schools' programs to mitigate the problem, the researcher discovered that tenure status, years of experience were all statistically significant in the predictor models for both multiple regressions. However, the academic departments of Mathematics and Science contributed most to teacher's knowledge of chronically absent students. Special Education and Guidance contributed most to teachers' perceptions of programs for chronic absenteeism. The qualitative data revealed that schools' communication regarding absent students was significant. All teachers interviewed expressed frustration with their schools' handling of these students. Teachers were often left in the dark about what the reasons behind the

absence were and then pressured to get the student through by supplying them with make-up work.

**Implications of Findings**

       This study examined the variance of teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students based on their years, department. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students and the programs at their schools for those students, prior to, during and post Covid-19 pandemic in a district in a suburb in the Northeast. The theoretical framework used in the study was based on the research of Rittel and Webber's "Wicked Problem." The findings of the quantitative data showed that teachers of Mathematics and Science and Physical Education had the strongest relationship with the dependent variable.

       The data showed that when looking at the survey questions that were used to determine teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about the students, that teachers did not perceive that there was an all "hands-on-deck" when approaching student attendance. Teachers also did not feel that they understood the factors that contributed to chronic absenteeism.

       The fact that teachers did not perceive there to be an "all hands-on deck" approach at their schools when it came to student absence, demonstrates that similar to the literature, the teachers were not included in the plans and programs for the absent students. Another example of this, is that teachers did not understand the factors that contribute to absence. This is because the teachers were often left in the dark about the reasons students were chronically absent. When teachers are involved in practices to

reduce student absence, there has been reduction in absences (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Liu & Loeb, 2017).

The same variables (tenure status, years of service and academic department) were used in a second regression model to determine if the regression was significant. The results showed a statistically significant regression model. The researcher found that the academic departments of Physical Education and Health and Special Education and Guidance had the greatest relationship with the dependent variable. This may be because Special Education students are more frequently absent than their general education counterparts (*Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, 2016). The other academic departments, years of service and tenure status did not contribute to the model.

When analyzing the quantitative data, the researcher found that scores for individual survey questions used for research question two, could be classified into three levels. The teachers did not feel that their schools used data, trends or patterns to monitor school absence, nor did they did not feel their school offered professional development to help them deal with chronically absent students. Professional development could help teachers learn to deal with the problem and alleviate some of their frustration (Gottfried et al., 2020). Teachers were neutral and were not really certain if there was early outreach for chronically absent students nor if data was used to identify students in need of early supports. This could be explained by the interview responses when most teachers responded that they are not communicated with about absent students nor are they privy to a plan for the students. They are unaware what their schools are doing for these

students. They are contacted when they have an absent student return and teachers are then told to catch them up and are forced to let them make up work.

Conversely, they did perceive their schools to offer an engaging environment. Engagement is considered to be a key in reducing student absenteeism (Fredricks, 2019). Teachers were certain with whom to speak to about a chronically absent student. However, who that person was differed depending on the department and the school. In the semi-structured interviews, all of the teachers said that they were responsible for reporting a chronically absent student to a supervisor. According to those interviewed, the process always began with the teacher.

The participants in the semi-structured interviews were forthcoming with their feelings about chronically absent students and the programs and interventions in place at their schools for those students. The over-arching theme of their shared experiences with these students was that of frustration. They felt feelings of frustration with students who were absent and did not respond to their repeated attempts to reach out to them. Also, they felt the same with those who also did not make up work. All teachers were expected to reteach the material before or after school or during lunch breaks without any financial remuneration. While the quantitative data collected for research question two showed that teachers knew who to talk to at their schools regarding student absence, the qualitative data revealed something curious. Participants all knew with whom to talk. However, depending on the school and sometimes, departments within the same school, the processing protocol was varied. Teachers reached out to different people in different roles. Some teachers reported it first to their department chairperson, others directly to the assistant principal in charge of the particular grade the student was in, some to

attendance officers and others that served on the 7th and $8^{th}$ grade teams to the guidance counselor. Three different teachers that also serve as chairpeople addressed the process differently. One took on the responsibility completely and met with the student. Another took the information from the teacher and reported it to someone else and a third said that his union no longer required him to address the problem or assist teachers with it, so he did not deal with it at all.

It is important to note that the multiple regression model for research question one showed that Mathematics and Science had the strongest influence on the model and almost 43% of the interviewed participants were Mathematics and Science teachers. Their willingness to participate could be attributed to their passion about the chronically absent students because it affected them greatly. While 31% of the respondents to the survey were from the Humanities departments (English, Social Studies and World Languages) which was close to the percentage of Mathematics and Science teachers, they did not contribute to the regression model. During the interview process, teachers of English and Social Studies commented that when a student who was absent returns to school, what they missed does not affect their ability to do their current schoolwork. For example, one English teacher said, "You can miss all of 'Of Mice and Men' and still read 'The Great Gatsby'". While Social Studies students may need to know prior knowledge for reference as well as for state examinations, they are able to return to school and pick up what is being taught. In Mathematics and Science classes, this is not so. The teachers that were interviewed from these departments, complained about having to reteach material and make-up laboratory assignments with students on their own time.

The researcher also discovered that the Covid-19 pandemic added to the problem of absenteeism. There was disruption during the shutdown and subsequent school year when the schools were hybrid with the option of full remote instruction (Pressley, 2021; Santibañez & Guarino, 2021). According to interviewed teachers, some students were completely unaccounted for during the shutdown and teachers were forced to pass them anyway. Upon the return to full school opening, in September 2021, students were reluctant to return and, according to the interviewed teachers, attendance issues spiked. The teachers, who also had suffered the consequences of teaching during the pandemic, were further stretched with having to make-up work with these students and were exacerbated when they were forced by administrators to pass students if they made up any modicum of work (Pressley, 2021).

**Relationship to Prior Research**

Student engagement is one of the leading indicators in the reduction of chronic absenteeism. Research shows that student engagement leads to better attendance. Studies show that at the secondary level, while there is higher levels of student absenteeism than in the elementary level, students will also have partial day absences. Some teachers are able to attract students to class and others are not (Liu & Loeb, 2017; Whitney & Liu, 2017). The teachers in this study believed that their schools offered engaging environments and individual interviews revealed the same response. The teachers believed that engagement was the key to better attendance outcomes which is supported by research (Fredricks, 2019; Gase, 2016; Marvul, 2012; Patnode, 2018; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

Most teachers represented by the survey and interview process expressed frustration with the lack of input and communication that they were given or were a part of when it came to the absent students in their classes. Diminished support by teachers at the secondary level has shown to lead to absenteeism. Students at the elementary levels have one main teacher for the majority of their day. Students miss that relationship when they get to the secondary level. Research has shown that when teachers are part of the solution for chronic absenteeism, there have been better outcomes (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Balkıs et al., 2016; Buchanan et al., 2016; De Wit et al., 2010; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). The teachers in this study are not being utilized as part of the solution for absent students and are mostly uninformed about the particular reasons behind their absences. This has led to great frustration on the part of teachers. It seems that these schools are not using their best resource: the teachers. Furthermore, educational institutions need to involve teachers and other stakeholders in problem-solving. Commitment to problem-solving at all levels of an institution is more likely to be a more successful approach which should produce better outcomes. The top-down mandate generally does not work and is met with resistance (Senge, 1996). At these schools, the teachers are handed mandates to reteach, catch students up and pass students which has led to increased frustration.

School organization has been cited as being a major tenet in reducing student absenteeism. The better organized a school is, the less likely there will be chronic absenteeism (Balkıs et al., 2016; Gase, 2016; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Marvul, 2012). The schools in this study, while offering engaging environments, lack hierarchical organization when it comes to the problem of absenteeism. Within and between schools,

there is confusion about where teachers can turn for help and what can and should be done. Schools, in this study, may benefit from providing an outline for reporting student absenteeism. This outline should streamline the process for the teacher and provide the teacher with appropriate feedback about the student.

The results of this research show that chronic absenteeism is a Wicked Problem. The qualitative data, where teachers responded with some of their success stories differed: what worked for some did not work for others. Schools must continually try to find unique solutions for absent students because what works for one, may not work for another (Childs & Lofton, 2021; Jordan et al., 2014; Skaburskis, 2008; Yawson, 2013).

**Limitations of the Study**

This study was intended to research and discover teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about chronically absent students and the programs at their schools for those students. It sought to discover if teachers' years of experience, academic department and tenure status had an effect on that knowledge and those perceptions.

The response rate of approximately 20% of the schools' teachers was low and may have limited the generalizations of the findings. The low response rate may have limited the degree to which the sample represents the population. The researcher only studied one school district within a suburb in the Northeast. The district is unique in the fact that it included five junior-senior high schools and no elementary schools. The elementary schools in this area are from different school districts within the same geographic locations. All teachers who participated in the study were secondary school teachers.

The response rate for the semi-structured interviews was approximately 11% of the respondents, which is also low. While the interviews were conducted via zoom at the convenience of the interviewee, the interviews took between 30 minutes and one hour. Teachers may not have participated as the study took place in the 2021-2022 school year, which was the first year with a return to complete in-school instruction and teachers may have been particularly busy and/or overwhelmed.

An additional limitation of the study was that while the researcher was able to see the overall budget of the district, she was unable to explore expenditures at individual schools. Teachers from one of the schools cited that there were programs offered on Saturdays for students to make up work, specifically laboratory hours for science classes. Teachers who worked at those programs were paid by the school district. A participant from another school said that they did not have that at their school.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of the study revealed not only the perceptions of the teachers about chronically absent students but also how their respective schools did or did not help them with those students. During the interview/qualitative data collection, all interviewees expressed some to extreme frustration and confusion of how their buildings handled the chronically absent students. Furthermore, the teachers felt a tremendous pressure to pass students regardless of their attendance issues. It has been reported that teachers everywhere have been particularly stressed during and following the Covid-19 pandemic (Singer, 2020). This study also brought to light that teachers in this district also had additional struggles during this time including anxiety and stress. Research should be conducted to discover if administrators are aware of the depths of the frustration the

teachers in their buildings are experiencing. Administrators should be aware and have the pulse of their staff. It seemed that in these schools that either administrators were unaware of the pressure placed on the teachers by the poor attendance of these students or by the pressure they placed on the teachers to pass them. Future research could discover if administrators at the building levels were pressured by central administrators to have higher passing rates for students. Furthermore, research could be conducted if passing rates were tied into building level administrators' evaluations.

Stemming from this particular study, research could be conducted to discover if the budgets for the five schools were equally distributed. One school in the study offered financial remuneration to teachers to make up work with students on Saturdays when others did not. Research could discover why that was done and if there was special funding for that particular school and the reasons that would have been. Research should also take place on a wider level: including more schools in suburban communities to make a better comparison. Studies can also be conducted within school districts that include elementary schools as to compare responses at the different levels of schooling.

Future research may also be done in schools with programs in which teachers have input and professional development regarding absenteeism and determine if the perceptions of those teachers differed from schools where teachers had no input and no professional development. Research would then discover if the professional development and inclusion in the development of programs changes the teachers' perceptions and makes them feel more empowered when dealing with chronically absent students.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

Research has proven the chronic absenteeism is a problem in all of the nation's schools regardless of location (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bauer et al., 2018; *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, 2016; *NYSED*, 2021). Because of the complexity of the wicked problem of chronic absenteeism, and the fact that there is not a cookie-cutter solution for the problem, schools have great difficulty trying to solve the problem (Childs & Lofton, 2021; Yawson, 2013). Yet, it is necessary for schools to mitigate student absence as absenteeism is directly correlated with decreased academic achievement (Arthurs et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2019; *Improving Student Achievement By Addressing Chronic Absenteeism*, 2021). Better attendance leads to better academic outcomes (Hinojosa & Maxwell, 2018; Marvul, 2012; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

At the district level, there is a clear need for the attendance policy to be revisited. While there are tenets of the attendance policy that are still viable, the fact that the policy was written in 2002 and has not been updated since 2005 is problematic. According to the data collected in this study, the policy is rarely enacted. Furthermore, if it is enacted it does not seem to be done in a consistent manner. While schools within a district need to adjust the implementation of procedures based on the nuances of their populations, there should be an overarching policy that is enacted consistently. Teachers should be aware of the policy and should be able to trust that it will be implemented. The district should offer professional development for teachers regarding chronic absenteeism. In this particular study, teachers' responses were particularly low when questioned about professional development regarding student absence.

By using the data collected from a study such as this one, administrators at the building level can acquire a sense of their staffs' perceptions not only of the students but of what the schools are doing to help not only the students, but also how they support the teachers charged with educating them. At the building level, focus groups should be conducted. As an outshoot of those groups, a shared decision-making committee should be formed. From the committee, in which all stakeholders have representation, a set plan can be formulated to deal with chronically absent students. There should be clear protocols as to what should be done, and it should be uniform within the different academic departments within the school as well as within the district. As the schools are all junior-senior high schools, this could be attained.

Schools should also make a more concerted effort to have open communication with teachers about absent students. Teachers expressed feelings not only of burden, but also of frustration and disrespect. Being 'left out of the loop' when plans are made for these students added to these feelings. Usually, those plans included some additional work on the part of teachers. The directive without representation or consideration was demoralizing. It was a top-down approach where teachers were told what to do and then pressured to get it done.

Additionally, while the task of education is the teacher's responsibility, the tasks of contacting parents and students could be overseen by pupil personnel service, attendance officers and administrators as to reduce the time teachers had to spend on these non-academic tasks while fostering appreciation and respect for teachers' preparation time. In the United States, there is a teacher shortage. Less people have chosen to become teachers while others have chosen to leave the profession. Those that

have left the profession cite a lack of respect, safety concerns, financial remuneration and general burnout as reasons for their departure (Bryner, 2021). The amount of responsibility placed on teachers has led to the burnout that cause teachers to walk away from the profession (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Pressley, 2021; Rumschlag, 2017).

In the classroom, teachers should be cognizant of student engagement and try to foster inviting atmospheres (Liu & Loeb, 2017). Furthermore, curriculum needs to be examined as to its validity and appropriateness and how it is relevant to current students. Making certain that curriculum is up-to-date leads to better engagement (Balkıs et al., 2016; Dahl, 2016). This would be the shared responsibility of the teachers and the building and district level administration.

**Conclusion**

The problem of chronic absenteeism in the nation's school is at crisis level (Bauer et al., 2018; *Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism*, 2016). The problem of absenteeism was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in which some students became unaccounted for during the shutdown of 2020. During hybrid or remote learning in the 2020-2021 school year, attendance again was problematic. Some students not only had contracted COVID-19 and missed school but others, often times had been exposed to the virus, and were forced to stay home in order to quarantine. During the full return to in-school learning during the 2021-2022 school year, the virus continued to cause absences. Additionally, students and parents became fearful of contracting the disease and students wound up staying home more often than prior to the pandemic (Santibañez & Guarino, 2021). During this time, teachers who had already been stretched thin trying to educate students during these

unprecedented times, dealt with higher rates of student absence (Bushweller, 2020; Pressley, 2021).

In this study, teachers' knowledge of and perceptions about the absent students and the programs for them was affected by their academic department. Teachers from certain departments, like Mathematics and Science, had a stronger relationship with their knowledge and perception of chronically absent students. Success in these classes rely more heavily on prior knowledge than English and Social Studies. While all secondary level classes rely on some prior knowledge, some courses tend to be more sequential than others.

The study also sought to discover teachers' perceptions about what their respective schools do for the students who are absent and how the teachers are supported. Again, academic department played a role in their perceptions. Teachers from the departments of Special Education and Guidance had a stronger relationship with their perceptions about programs for chronically absent students. This may be because students with special needs are more likely to be absent than general education students (Lara, et al., 2019). Therefore, Special Education teachers may be more in tune with what the schools do for these students because they deal with it more frequently.

Close attention needs to be paid to teachers, their perceptions, and their lived experiences with absent students, to best serve these students and their needs while not exhausting and overworking teachers. By supporting teachers in this area, schools can hope for more satisfied and empowered teachers, who in turn will have higher job satisfaction and be better prepared to deal with this, and other challenges of the job.

The discoveries made from this mixed methods study revealed the problems that exist in this school district regarding student absenteeism as it pertains to the teachers. As the recommendations for policy and practice suggested, these findings highlight the need for schools to lessen the burden placed on teachers when it comes to chronically absent students. By doing this, teachers, while still having to teach the students who were not present, could be compensated for it. That would also foster a more respectful way of treating teachers; by showing an appreciation for their time and by compensating them for the extra work they are currently being expected to perform. The practice of throwing schoolwork and assignments at students and having the teachers grade them at any time during the school year, and then pass the student, and give the student credit is clearly an unfair practice. We cannot continue to expect teachers to do more work without compensating them or giving them more preparation time to do so.

The research showed many examples of successful, as well as some unsuccessful programs, to mitigate student absence, but none mentioned the teachers' roles in those programs. The existing gaps between theory and practice need to be further addressed in order to avoid teacher frustration and burnout.

# APPENDIX A PERMISSION FROM ATTENDANCE WORKS

From: Cathy Wolfenden <cathy@attendanceworks.org>
Sent: Friday, June 4, 2021 4:14 PM
To: Laplante, Claudia
Subject: Re: New Submission from claudia.laplante@plainedgeschools.org

**EXTERNAL SENDER: This email originated from outside of the Plainedge Schools organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. If this email claims to be from a Plainedge employee, IT IS NOT. - Plainedge Technology Dept.

Hi Claudia:

Thanks for your email!  I'm including two sample surveys that you may find useful:

1. Sample template attached for teachers and staff (we've used this in various forms for different clients).

2. This is a survey that was developed by one of our partners at the University of South Florida exploring the reasons for chronic absence (targeted towards secondary students) --  https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Reasons-for-Chronic-Absenteeism-Survey-Blended-or-Virtual-Version.pdf

Feel free to adapt the questions as needed for your study, and I hope these help with what you're looking for!  Please let me know if you have any questions. Thanks!

Cathy Wolfenden
Administrative Coordinator
cathy@attendanceworks.org<mailto:cathy@attendanceworks.org>

**APPENDIX B SURVEY**

# Teachers' Perceptions of Chronically Absent Students

Thank you for taking a few minutes to answer the following questions about attendance practices in your school.  This survey will help further the information about teachers and their work with students who often miss school.  Participation is completely anonymous and voluntary.

The respondent's email (null) was recorded on submission of this form.

1.  Email *

    _____

2.  Please select your school

    Mark only one oval.

    

3.  Are you a teacher at this school? If no, skip to question 5.

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No

4. What grades do you teach? Check all that apply.

   *Check all that apply.*

   ☐ 7th
   ☐ 8th
   ☐ 9th
   ☐ 10th
   ☐ 11th
   ☐ 12th

5. What is your job title?

   *Mark only one oval.*

   ◯ Teacher
   ◯ Teacher's Assistant
   ◯ Guidance Counselor
   ◯ Administrator

6. How many years have you been employed in your current role? Include all years at this school and at other schools.

   *Mark only one oval.*

   ◯ 0-1 year
   ◯ 2-4 years
   ◯ 5-9 years
   ◯ 10- 20 years
   ◯ 21+ years

7. Please check your tenure status.

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ tenured

◯ non-tenured

8. Please check off our department. If you teach in more than one department, please check off the one with the majority of your schedule.

*Check all that apply.*

☐ Art/Music

☐ Business/Technology

☐ English

☐ Mathematics

☐ Science

☐ Special Education

☐ Social Studies

☐ Physical Education/Health

☐ World Languages

☐ Guidance Department

☐ Administration

9. At which point do you believe poor attendance begins to have an adverse effect on students' academic performance?

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Missing 5% of school (absent 9 out of 180 days)

◯ Missing 10% of school (absent 18 out of 180 days)

◯ Missing 20% of school (absent 36 out of 180 days)

◯ None of these has an effect on their perfomance

◯ I don't know

10. To which extent do you agree that poor student attendance has been a problem in your school in the past 1-2 years?

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Strongly disagree

◯ Disagree

◯ Neutral

◯ Agree

◯ Strongly agree

11. This question is for teachers only. When you have been aware of students with poor attendance, which of the following actions did you take? Check all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

☐ Told students they were missed when they were not in class.

☐ Asked students why the missed school.

☐ Reached out to parents to discuss the issue.

☐ Referred the student to the attendance office.

☐ Referred the student to the guidance office.

☐ Referred student to administration.

☐ Looked for ways to make class more engaging and interesting.

☐ I did not take any actions.

☐ Other

12. If you checked other for the previous question, can you please explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Chronic absenteeism has been a high priority among the administration at your school in the past two years (prior to and during the pandemic).

Mark only one oval.

○ Strongly agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly disagree

14. There is a team in place at my school with shared responsibility for attendance.

Mark only one oval.

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Neutral

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

15. The teachers at my school believe it is their responsibility to improve student attendance and reduce student absenteeism.

Mark only one oval.

○ Strongly disagree

○ Disagree

○ Neutral

○ Agree

○ Strongly agree

16. At my school, I know with whom to speak and where to go if I need assistance with a student who may have an attendance problem.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly disagree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly agree

17. Please list which people or resources you would turn to for assistance with an attendance problem:

_____

18. At my school we proactively promote an engaging school climate.

*Mark only one oval.*

- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly disagree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly agree

19. At my school we have a protocol for early personalized outreach to families whose students are chronically absent.

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly disagree
◯ Neutral
◯ Agree
◯ Strongly agree

20. At my school we connect students who are missing too much learning time to one adult in the school (a liaison, mentor, etc)

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly disagree
◯ Neutral
◯ Agree
◯ Strongly agree

21. At my school, chronic absence data are used to identify students in need of early or intensive supports.

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly disagree
◯ Neutral
◯ Agree
◯ Strongly agree

22. At my school, attendance and chronic absence data, trends and patterns are monitored every week.

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly disagree
◯ Neutral
◯ Agree
◯ Strongly agree

23. At my school, we understand the factors that contribute to absences for individuals and groups of students.

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly disagree
◯ Neutral
◯ Agree
◯ Strongly agree

24. At my school, we examine if school policies, procedures or practices contribute to poor attendance.

*Mark only one oval.*

◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly disagree
◯ Neutral
◯ Agree
◯ Strongly agree

27. Which school staff do you believe share the responsibility for improving school attendance? Check all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- [ ] Attendance clerks
- [ ] Attendance officers/deans
- [ ] Counselors/therapists
- [ ] Family liasions
- [ ] Nurses/health office staff
- [ ] Resource teachers (reading specialists, special education teachers
- [ ] Social workers
- [ ] Teachers
- [ ] Others

28. 26. If you checked off other, please explain who and why they should be responsible for improving student attendance.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

29. Which of the following reasons for poor attendance do you believe principals, teachers and other school staff can address? Check all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- [ ] Student has a chronic health issue.
- [ ] Student stays at home to take care of a relative.
- [ ] Unreliable transportation to school
- [ ] Parent or caregiver does not consider daily attendance a priority.
- [ ] Student skips school on his/her own,
- [ ] There is domestic instability in the student's life.
- [ ] Student is not engaged in school.
- [ ] Student feels bullied at school.

Other: [ ] _____

30. 29. If you answered other to the previous question, can you please explain here?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

31. Does your school have incentives to recognize or reward students for any of the following? Check all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- [ ] Perfect attendance
- [ ] Outstanding or good attendance
- [ ] Improved attendance
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] I do not know.

32. Which of the following strategies for effective messaging do you or your school already implement? Select all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- [ ] Communicate that missing class means missing out on learning experiences.
- [ ] Launch a year-long focus on reducing absence with Attendance Awareness month
- [ ] Encourage families and students to track their own absences.
- [ ] Educate families about how missing just two days a month can cause a student to fall behind, and how good attendance contributes to academic success.
- [ ] Talk with families about ways the school can support them in overcoming barriers to attendance.
- [ ] Ensure a safe space for students to identify their attendance barriers and a process to find solutions with supportive adults.
- [ ] Other

33. If you chose other to the previous question, can you please explain your answer?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

34. Is there anything you would like to add that was not asked of you? Please feel free to add anything you would like. Your perceptions of chronically absent students are integral to the research and would be greatly appreciated.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

35. The researcher is continuing this study by interviewing school staff regarding their perceptions, If you would be willing to be interviewed, please leave your email address below. All interviews will be conducted via zoom at the interviewees convenience. The interview should not take more than one hour. Please consider sharing your perceptions. Thank you! Provide your email below.

_____

# APPENDIX C INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

\* (Script)

- **Welcome participants**
  Thank you for participating in this interview regarding chronic student absence and the programs used to help reduce student absence. I will be the primary researcher in this study. Currently, I am a third-year doctoral student at St. John's University.

- **Purpose of the study**
  The purpose of the study is to understand teachers' experiences with student absenteeism and how it affects the classroom environment as well as the teacher's workload and the classroom environment. The study also seeks to understand if the programs and interventions in place at schools are deemed effective by the teachers at those schools.

- **Individual interview structure**
  As an interviewee, you will be asked to complete a survey questionnaire online (you have already completed this step) prior to the individual interview. The interview will consist of 8 open-ended questions that I will provide. The interview will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom and recorded using the Zoom recording feature.

- **Participant rights**
  You may withdraw from the interview at any time without explanation or penalty. Refusal to participate or to discontinue participation will not involve penalty. Your identity will remain confidential throughout this study. Your name and the name of your school and district will not be disclosed or included in any forms, transcription, data analysis or research findings. Your name will not be used but rather you will be given a pseudonym. The consent form you completed is the only document that will identify you as a participant, but your name will not be used in research findings.

- **Start the interview:**
  1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your own educational background? Maybe your experiences as a teacher?

2. Can you describe to me any experiences you have had with a chronically absent student? If you have more than one experience, please feel free to describe those experiences as well.
3. How did you feel about this (these) particular student(s)?
4. When thinking about these students, can you comment on their academic abilities?
5. Did the student eventually pass or fail the course you taught them?
6. What are some things that you tried to get these students caught up with the work that they had missed? How did you handle that?
7. What, if any, were some things that your school had in place that helped you with this (these) student(s)?
8. Do you think that any of those things were helpful to you as the teacher and to the student? Why?
9. Please describe anything that you think that you or your school could have done differently to make dealing with these students easier.
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about this topic?

- **Close the interview**

    Thank you again for sharing your perspectives during this interview. Your feedback is greatly appreciated and is important to this research. To test for validity, I will transcribe your responses and share them with you to confirm for accuracy. If you are interested in the research results, I will gladly share them with you.

# APPENDIX D DISTRICT CONSENT

Hello ███████████

I hope this finds you well.  I am currently doing a doctoral study about teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students.

I spoke to the assistant superintendent, ██████████ and he directed me to the principals under your direction.

I worked for ██████████████████████████ for eight years in the 90's and early 2000's.  I think the district would be a wonderful place to do the research as it is large and so diverse.
I just need you to respond so I can show your response to my mentor at St. John's University.
An email would be perfect.

I thank you in advance for taking the time to read this and to allow me to survey your teachers.  The survey will not be done on school time, will be anonymous and all responses will be safe-guarded and are for research purposes only.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
**Claudia LaPlante**
World Languages Department Coordinator
Plainedge High School
North Massapequa, New York 11758
(516) 992-7542

← ≪ →

Mark as unread

Mon 4/26/2021 3:15 PM
Deleted Items

**EXTERNAL SENDER: This email originated from outside of the Plainedge Schools organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe. If this email claims to be from a Plainedge employee, IT IS NOT. - Plainedge Technology Dept.

Dear Ms. LaPlante,

███████████  did speak with me regarding your research.  You have permission to survey the teachers.  Please be sure to send me an advance copy of the questionnaire that you will utilizing.

Respectfully,

**APPENDIX E LETTER OF CONSENT**



**ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY**
THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**Letter of Consent**

**Title of Research Topic**:  Teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students and programs and interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism

**Researcher:**  Claudia Lisi LaPlante

**Institution:**  St. John's University, Queens, New York

You are invited to participate in a study that explores teachers' perceptions of chronically absent students in their classrooms as well the programs and interventions in place at their schools. This study will be conducted by Claudia Lisi LaPlante, a current third year doctoral student at St. John's University. As part of this research, the researcher will be surveying and interviewing teachers from all the schools in the district across grade levels and academic departments. The purpose of this study is to understand your experiences with chronically absent students and the programs designed to mitigate chronic absenteeism.

If you agree to participate in the interview, you will be asked to answer 8 questions via Zoom and will be video and audio recorded via Zoom at a mutually convenient time.

There are no perceived risks involved in participating in this study. However, I will be asking for you to commit 30 to 45 minutes of your time. The benefits of participating in the study is that your perceptions and experiences will provide schools and school leaders a better understanding about teaching chronically absent students. Furthermore, your perceptions about the programs in place at your school will provide valuable information about if the programs are effective.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name and the name of your school building or district will not be disclosed or included in any forms, transcription data analysis, or research findings. Pseudonyms will be used. This consent form is the only document identifying you as a participant. It will be stored securely by the researcher and the data collected will be destroyed at the end of the study. If you are interested in securing a copy of the results, you may contact the researcher. Aggregated results may be published in academic venues to inform educational researchers and practitioners about teachers' perceptions of the chronically absent and programs to reduce chronic absenteeism.

If you have any questions about the purpose of this research study, you may contact the principal researcher, Claudia Lisi LaPlante at (516) 353-2079. If you have any questions concerning your right as a human participant, you may contact St. John's University Human Subjects Review Board at (718) 990.1955 or the researcher's committee mentor, Dr. Catherine DiMartino at (718) 990-2585. Your participation in this research is voluntary.

**Agreement to Participate**

Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of this consent form as well as your willingness

to participate.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____
_____

Signature of Participant                                                    Date

_____

Printed Name of Researcher

_____

_____

Signature of Researcher                                     Date

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Vita

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | *Claudia Lisi LaPlante* |
| Baccalaureate Degree | Bachelor of Arts, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York |
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