

UNPACKING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM:
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABSENTEEISM AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A doctoral thesis presented

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to unpack the complex issue of chronic absenteeism and examine how high school teachers perceive their role in addressing the phenomenon that is plaguing schools. The study was conducted among high school teachers that teach in low-income communities. For this study, the socioeconomic status of schools was defined by the percentage of students that receive free or reduced lunch in the United States. Data was gathered from a pre-interview demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Overall, the participants recognized that chronic absenteeism in high schools is problematic, and they have a role in addressing the phenomenon. However, the participants did not feel that it was their responsibility to address chronic absenteeism. The participants agreed that the responsibility belonged to school counselors, school social workers, and school administrators because as teachers they are not equipped with the skills and at times desire to address chronic absenteeism. The participants did not perceive their everyday role as a teacher as integral to unpacking the issue of chronic absenteeism.

Keywords: chronic absenteeism, high school, United States, low-income communities, free and reduced lunch

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the midst of teaching during a global pandemic, teachers nationwide are asking, “what about my students that just are not attending classes in person or virtually?” Many teachers are frustrated, overwhelmed, burnt out, and unclear of how they should address the attendance concern. There is no doubt that low or inconsistent attendance is playing a role in the current academic decline of students and the stress of some teachers. Unfortunately, absenteeism did not begin to exist solely during the pandemic. Absenteeism has plagued schools nationwide for years. Absenteeism is a factor that has contributed to students not being successful in school or reaching their full potential. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing more than 10% of the school year. Students that are considered to have regular attendance do not miss more than five days in an academic school year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Regular school attendance results in students having higher standardized test scores and grades (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). A decrease in absenteeism and an increase in regular attendance, is what many teachers wish they could see more of in their classrooms. Absenteeism is plaguing the classrooms of many schools on a daily basis and often leaves teachers and other school staff feeling defeated.

Statement of the Problem

According to Kearney and Graczyk (2014), regular school attendance is fundamental to children’s success in academic, language, social, and work-related domains. They also believe that regular school attendance provides youth with an environment that nurtures skills such as persistence, problem-solving, and the ability to work with others to accomplish a goal. While research establishes the negative impact that absenteeism has on students once students begin to fail or drop out of school, it rarely provides personal experiences from the teachers who work closely with students who are chronically absent or truant. According to Dahl (2016), “in the

process of addressing truancy as a national problem with a variety of coordinates, it seems that less attention has been given to understanding the individual characteristics and contexts of truancy as seen through the daily routines of truants” (p. 121). Often, schools rely on the information from research to explain why absenteeism or truancy is an issue. However, there can be power in prioritizing the teacher-student relationship and the role that teachers play in addressing absenteeism.

Significance of the Research Question

Chronic absenteeism predicts academic failure for many students. Educators, including high school classroom teachers, have an obligation to work with students and families to minimize the barriers to attendance and to maximize access to school. However, not all classroom teachers are equipped with adequate strategies or the comfort level needed for engaging with chronically absent students and their families. If we were to better understand the lived experiences of high school classroom teachers serving chronically absent students, then we might be better able to make sense of their sense of efficacy in meeting their needs. Therefore, using the theoretical lens of self-efficacy, the purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study is to understand the lived experiences of teachers who work in high schools among the United States that serve students that live in primarily low-income communities.

Research Problem and Research Question

This study will address the following research question (s):

1. What are the lived experiences of high school teachers in working with students who are chronically absent?

Definition of Key Terminology

Chronic Absenteeism: Chronic absenteeism is characterized as students missing too much school for any reason, excused or unexcused. Chronic absenteeism is why students miss at least 10% of the school year; 18 or more days.

High School: A school that educates students in grades 9-12.

Teacher: For this study, a teacher is any certified professional that directly teaches high school students, whether that is in a classroom or group setting; a core content or elective.

Self-Efficacy: Refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

Self-Efficacy Theory

This correlates with Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory of motivation. According to Bandura (1997), "perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Self-efficacy influences how individual's approach and engage in various situations, processes, tasks, and much more. Self-efficacy plays a role in whether an individual looks at various situations with a glass half empty or half full mindset. On a larger scale, self-efficacy explains human behavior. "People's belief in their efficacy have diverse effects. Such beliefs influence the course of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize" (Bandura, 1997, pg. 3). Ultimately in the professional realm, self-efficacy could determine if one looks at a tasks or component of his/her role as a chore or as an opportunity to grow and make unique connections with their interests, strengths, and weaknesses. "In short, perceived self-efficacy is concerned not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can

do with what you have under a variety of circumstances” (Bandura, 1997, pg. 37). Therefore, even though having a strong skill set often makes one feel more comfortable and approach daunting or unwanted situations with a more positive approach, his/her belief in him/herself and his/her ability to successfully address the task could play a more powerful role in the end result.

Critics of the Theory

While Bandura’s self-efficacy theory of motivation could positively help the field of education understand the role that teachers play in addressing absenteeism, there is some criticism that is associated with the overall theory. According to Lee (1989), many psychologists adopt the self-efficacy theory, because of the focus of human behavior. However, he also believes that the theory focuses on behaviors that are often unobservable and associated with variables that have unpredictable interactions. This then makes it difficult for researchers to make true sense results, which ultimately questions the validity of studies. Critics believe that the self-efficacy theory is not scientific. Therefore, since it is associated with individual behavior it could be understood differently depending on a person and his/her experiences. There is also no concrete model that explains the different behaviors of individuals, which forces researchers to rely heavily on interpretation, social context, and maybe even their experiences. Coincidentally, Williams (2010) shares Bandura’s rebuttal to critics that states, “self-efficacy ratings are valid indicators of self-efficacy even when influenced by outcome expectancies” (p. 420). Hence why it seems that it would be appropriate to utilize this theory when conducting a qualitative study that allows participants the autonomy to share their lived experiences.

Despite the criticism that is associated with Bandura’s self-efficacy theory of motivation, (Lee, 1989) believes that the theory is often utilized because it is popular, well-known, and practical. The critiques of the theory help to show why the theory should be utilized in studies that

focus on one social context and/or behavior. This will help to eliminate Tryon's (1981) concern for varying expectations, experimental conditions, and varying social influences. Analyzing and understanding the critiques could also provide researchers with a better understanding of the theory and encourage them to ensure that they are thoroughly explaining their study and procedures to the participants and audience.

Applying Theory to the Study

The self-efficacy theory has been utilized in the field of education to predict how students will succeed academically. Associating self-efficacy with education, has also allowed researchers to study the correlation between the level of confidence or optimism that is present for students during their academic career. According to Usher and Pajares (2008), "students who are confident in their academic capabilities monitor their work time more effectively, are most efficient problem solvers, and show more persistence than do equally able peers with low self-efficacy" (p. 751). While this study is focusing on teachers and not students, this perspective could be helpful in understanding how teachers view their role or capabilities that are also related to the field of education. For a moment, the teachers will be observed as the "students."

The reality is that teachers, like students are most effective when they have self-confidence and believe that they are equipped with the necessary tools and skills to confidently pursue tasks, goals, and overall the work that is ahead of them. For this reason, it will be helpful to study the self-efficacy of teachers as it relates to addressing or even understanding student absenteeism. It is known that the more stakeholders involved in addressing absenteeism could positively change the climate of education as it relates to the hidden educational crisis. However, one must understand if teachers even believe that they are equipped with the skills or knowledge necessary to combat the crisis that often plagues their classrooms on a daily basis.

Positionality

When I began my career as a school counselor, I was excited about the opportunities that I would have to work with students using a comprehensive school counseling program that focused on the academic, personal/social, and career development domains created by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). I was eager to work with students, especially middle schoolers in underserved schools, to help them develop skills that would eventually allow them to be successful adults. However, through my role of monitoring and addressing student attendance I began to realize that some students would not be able to take advantage of the comprehensive school counseling program or even the academic curriculum, due to their lack of school attendance. During my first year as a school counselor, I was shocked to see how many students missed more than 10 days of school. Once these students were recognized for their attendance trends, many of my colleagues constantly viewed them in a negative light. Even though I am privy to attendance data and teacher feelings related to attendance, I strive to be unbiased while seeking to help students improve their attendance. Being solely responsible for implementing student attendance interventions has been daunting and overwhelming to say the least. I often wish that I had more support from school staff, especially teachers.

Positionality and Absenteeism

In my experience, society often has a way of convincing educators that students reared in low-income communities are not taking charge of their educational career and destiny because their parents do not value education. During times of frustration with some of my students and their families, I became a believer of this environmental deficiency (Jupp & Slattery, 2010). In all honesty, I was naïve when it came to understanding the complexity of absenteeism and the community in which I worked. It was not until I began building genuine relationships with some

of my students and their families that I was able to learn that the way that society viewed many of the families at the school that I worked was based off of perception and/or research and not reality. However, if I would not have built relationships and had difficult conversations, I would have adopted this mindset I would have continued to contribute to the problem by always automatically blaming students and families for their deficits (Jupp & Slattery, 2010). As a doctoral student one of my professors encouraged me to remove my blinders and negative stereotypes so that I could focus less on blaming and punishing students and parents and more on building relationships and getting to the root of the problem.

Once I removed the blinders and started gaining more knowledge pertaining to the intricate details of systems and policies in the urban education system, particularly in Jacksonville, Florida I began to realize that many students in low-income communities were being failed. Absenteeism students were being failed because they were in educational environments that focused more on punitive actions, and less on positive engagement. There were many times where the administrators in my school would speak to me about the attendance of students with low attendance. However, it was very seldom that during these conversations they would ask about how the students were doing, what was preventing them to have high attendance, and what we could do to make these students and their families more engaged and welcomed. It has taken years for administrators to even offer to attend the attendance meetings with me, when meeting with families, to show support and concern. Even more so higher-level administrators, often appear to only be interested in the signature at the bottom of the parent attendance contract. I often felt like I was fighting the attendance battle alone with no suggestions on how to win. What was even more frustrating is that I would speak to school counselors in different cities and districts and they would be baffled by the lack of an effective

and comprehensive attendance program or policy. It was then that I began to realize that while I wanted families to be held accountable, I also wanted them to know that I was there to support them as we worked to improve attendance. I wanted them to also be educated on absenteeism and its effects.

Power, Privilege, and Bias in Relation to Positionality

Bias

My parents reared me to truly believe that education was essential to my success and my destiny. My mother often taught me that once I received my education that I could not be robbed of that. For this reason, education was something that I grew to treasure and I always strived to do my best. The view of education that was present in my home as a child also made me value school attendance. I can vividly remember the first time that my mom forced me to miss school, because I was sick. I was only in elementary school, but I knew that my attending school was important. I also knew that if I missed any school that I would miss some of my school and would not be able to receive a perfect attendance award at the end of the school year. I honestly, remembered being very upset; I am sure that my mother thought that I was being dramatic, especially since I did not miss school often and it only occurred when I was sick.

The feelings that I had about attendance as a child are still my truth. As an adult, I also believe that attending school daily is vital and that students should not miss school unless they are sick and possibly contagious. For this reason, it is often hard for me to grasp the idea of students pretending to be sick so that they can miss school. It is also hard for me to understand why some parents do not investigate the situations in which their students are presenting them with before they allow them to miss an entire day and sometimes more days of school. I honestly, could not imagine my parents just accepting that I was sick or believing that my sickness was worthy of an

absence, especially if a fever or other symptoms were not present. I also could not imagine my parents allowing me to miss school because I wanted a break from school, we were going on a cruise, or because it was raining outside. However, these are some of the attendance factors that are shared with me when speaking to students and occasionally parents. For this reason, I often have to remember to remove my thoughts or feelings to ensure that I am not being judgmental or biased towards students and their families.

Power

Being a scholar-practitioner has also allowed me to make a connection between the power of adults in school buildings and absenteeism that I had not made before beginning the doctoral program. Recently, while speaking to a parent about her student being absent recently, she informed me that she kept her son home because he was struggling to build relationships with some of his teachers and was not doing well academically. Then when speaking to another parent about her daughter being absent, she informed me that she was thinking about withdrawing her student, because she felt as though the adults in the school building were not respecting her choice to be identified as a male. While I was disappointed about the content of these conversations, research supports them and classifies the incidents as teacher-to-student bullying. Teacher-to-student bullying occurs when teachers utilize their power in the classroom to treat students negatively, label them, call them names, and make them feel inadequate. While research and incidences related to teachers bullying students and taking advantage of their social power are limited it should be considered because it has negatively impacted students and damaged the climate of classrooms, where students should feel safe and free to learn (Tamutiene, 2008). The climate that students encounter at school is important to their educational experience, because a positive school climate that includes constructive student-teacher relationships plays a role in

improving attendance and dropout rates (Brookmeyer et al., 2006). When students are not excited about school and do not feel included, wanted, or cared about their attendance often decreases.

While I was always invested in my education as a student, there was a time that I was not overly excited about going to school, because my grades began to decline. As an adult, I can reflect on an oppressive incident that I encountered and recognize that I was being bullied by my teacher, like a few of the students at the school that I am employed feel like they are being bullied. When I was in second grade my parents decided to have a teacher-parent conference with principal at my school when I kept bring home failing grades and after having conversations with a parent that helped in my classroom. My parents quickly learned that I was not failing because of my own efforts, but because my teacher was failing me. My second grade teacher did not care about the academic success or growth of me and some of my classmates, simply because of the color of our skin.

Ultimately, my teacher's actions had the ability to restrict my future (Corey, 2009). This incident hurt me, because I could not understand why someone would be so cruel towards me, especially when I wanted nothing more than to be successful and loved by my teacher. Without the advocacy and support that I received from my parents and my classmate's mother I would not have had the opportunity to experience the joy of learning. At seven, I did not know it but that unfortunate event planted a seed and contributed to the person that I am today. Oftentimes I try to bury the memories that are associated with my second grade experience, because it was a one time occurrence for me and overall school was a place filled with joy, positive memories, and hope for the future. As a child, it was my belief that all students were in school environments that fostered a feeling of excitement for learning and a future of limitless positive opportunities; this was my truth, however, life later revealed to me that this was not everyone's truth. According to Tackas

(2002), “few things are more difficult than to see outside the bound of our own perspective- to be able to identify assumptions that we take as universal truths, but that instead have been crafted by our own identity and experiences in the world” (p. 169).

Honestly, throughout the entire duration of research on absenteeism, I will have to be aware of my own perspective. During the process of learning about chronically absent students through the lens of teachers, I will have to strive to be open-minded. I will also have to be open-minded to the thoughts and experiences that teachers have centered around absenteeism. I will have to recognize that while addressing absenteeism is a major part of my role as a school counselor, it ultimately may not be the same for teachers. Attendance may not even be at the forefront of a teacher’s educational experience and/or classroom for that matter. I have to remember that everyone’s educational/professional experiences, home/class environment, and support system does not and will not mimic mine. For this reason, I will not be able to judge a teacher’s reason for not actively addressing absenteeism, engagement with chronically absent students, or investment in school attendance protocols. I cannot even judge the stories that teachers may share with me about chronically absent students. I cannot assume that teachers, students, and/or parents are not trying their best to improve chronic absenteeism. In order to be open-minded, I will have to constantly seek research that discusses urban schools, absenteeism, and truancy intervention programs so that my educational interest and desire to help address this issue that is plaguing many schools is not overshadowed by my thoughts on education and attendance, or even my hurt and negative experiences. During this research experience, I will have to strive to remove all of my personal feelings in order to gain the most insight.

Privilege

A new area of growth for me is ensuring that I am making a positive connection between the research that I am finding as a scholar-practitioner and my role as a school counselor. A great deal of my job as a school counselor is centered around monitoring attendance and the research that I am conducting allows me to view the process from various perspectives. However, I have realized that my school is not there yet. Just like I walked into the doctoral program feeling like the students that were chronically absent would continue to be absent if consequences were not given to them or their parents, I still see the school feeling that way. For instance, at the end of the school year there was a teacher that asked me, “what will be the student’s consequence for missing so many days, will he/she be retained?” The teacher asked this despite the fact that the student was passing all of his/her classes and the fact that we all just struggled through a school year that was centered around a pandemic. Because of my role as a school counselor and the research that I have done on absenteeism, I often times have to stop myself from quoting research to teachers and other school staff members, especially since I am still learning about absenteeism. However, this does motivate me to continue my research. The entire process is full of continuous reflection.

Conclusion

It is not uncommon for a teacher to ask a student, “where were you yesterday,” because the student was absent from school. Often times, the student openly shares information that is related to the events that caused the absence to occur. What happens next could lay the foundation for the teacher-student relationship and the trajectory of the student’s academic career as it relates to attendance. While the teacher’s verbal response and actions are important. It is also vital that how the teacher feels in the situation is assessed or understood. In order for teachers to effectively help to improve student attendance, they must feel motivated, prepared, and most of all capable. Having

more teacher buy-in and participation in addressing absenteeism could have a major impact on attendance trends and research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Today, there are many factors that contribute to students not being successful in school or reaching their full potential. One area of concern in many schools is attendance as it relates to absenteeism. Students that are considered to have regular attendance do not miss more than five days in an academic school year (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012). Regular school attendance results in students having higher standardized test scores and grades (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing more than 10% of the school year (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012).

Chronic or problematic absenteeism is also defined as missing at least 25% of total school time for at least two weeks, severe difficulty attending classes for at least two weeks with significant interference in the student's or family's daily routine, or being absent for 10 days of school during any 15-week period while school is in session (Kearney, 2008). Chronic absenteeism encompasses absences that are excused and unexcused (Jacobsen et al., 2016). Problem absenteeism also includes partial absences from school (Kearney, 2007). Unexcused absences can also be classified as truancy. However, this can be problematic for younger students, because often times they do not choose to miss school and usually are not absent without their parents knowing (Ginsburg et al., 2014). Research related to chronic absenteeism has shared information that suggests that every year, more than 5 million children miss school chronically (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Overall Jacobsen et al., 2016 believes that, "the problem of chronic student absenteeism has largely been overlooked and under documented but is detrimental to children as early as kindergarten" (p. 179). Therefore, the researcher reviewed several pieces of literature related to absenteeism.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on absenteeism. The chapter discusses (a) the history of attendance laws, (b) risk factors associated with absenteeism, (c) causes of absenteeism, (d) attendance policies, (e) attendance monitoring and data analysis, (f) attendance interventions, and (g) reflections of absenteeism students. To gain more insight into absenteeism, the researcher primarily reviewed peer-reviewed journal articles utilizing the following key terms when searching online databases: school absenteeism, adolescent absenteeism, truancy, absenteeism, and low-income schools. The researcher also reviewed some dissertations on the topic to learn more about newer research. The literature reviewed reflects the need to leverage teachers' voices and experiences in future research addressing absenteeism, which is a primary aim of this proposed research study.

Attendance Laws

Over the years, several laws have been created to enforce attendance in schools. However, there still seems to be a disconnect when it comes to upholding these laws and ensuring that they are enforced with fidelity. Also, despite the various laws attendance is still a crisis in education. The first attendance laws were passed in 1852 by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Katz, 1976). This was about 200 years after the first compulsory education law was passed. The attendance law passed in 1852 required parents in Massachusetts to send their children to a public school in their city or town for at least twelve weeks if the school was in session; six of the weeks had to be consecutive. This attendance law that was passed in Massachusetts was not very effective initially, because there was very little attempt to enforce it. The attendance law was actually ignored by many and it was not until 1918 that all the states of the union enforced the compulsory attendance laws. Even once the other states adopted the attendance laws, there was a lack of uniformity among

the states (Katz, 1976). This was a trend that would continue for years as officials would continue to truly define and understand attendance in education.

In 2015, former President Barack Obama established the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA is a reauthorization of the landmark Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The ESSA requires states to include an accountability measure for student performance that goes beyond test scores (Adams, 2016). Many states identified chronic absenteeism as their non-academic indicator under the ESSA (Adams, 2016; Attendance Works, 2017). Including chronic absenteeism helps to hold schools and school districts accountable. With chronic absenteeism as an ESSA indicator, officials have to include the issue in their needs assessments, school report cards, and among their school improvement plans (Attendance Works, 2017). Chronic absenteeism as an ESSA indicator also allows for schools to get a better understanding of other school issues among students. “Chronic absence data can provide guidance to schools about how to use hard-to-quantify characteristics, such as school climate and youth and parent engagement to direct their efforts” (Attendance Works, 2017). While chronic absenteeism being categorized under ESSA provides the field of education with more concrete data and guidelines, it also shows that attendance is being recognized more as an integral part of education. Teachers cannot teach students that are absent, which often reflects in test scores, student performance, and more.

Risk Factors Associated with Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is more prevalent among low-income students (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012). This is alarming because absenteeism is linked to school dropout, which is also prevalent among low-income students (Rumberger, 2011; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). The dropout rate in urban areas, where low-income students often attend school, can be as high as 50%-60% (Swanson, 2004). According to Balfanz and Chang (2013), a student being chronically absent

during the middle school years, is one of the best indicators that he/she will drop out of school later. Monitoring the increase in absenteeism in middle school is important, because A study conducted in Utah revealed that students who were chronically absent between eighth and 12th grade were 7.5 times more likely to drop out of high school (Utah Education, 2012). Also, in high school, 10th grade is a grade that can be used as an indicator for dropping out of high school as well; 40% of students that miss more than 10 days of school will not graduate (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In Florida, the dropout rate among minority students is a concern. The dropout rate of Black and Latino high school students is more than 50% (Swanson, 2004).

Some other risk factors that are linked to absenteeism are substance abuse, violence, suicide attempt, risky sexual behavior, pregnancy, delinquency-related behaviors, injury, and illness (Kearney, 2008). School absenteeism may also negatively affect student's social and emotional development, which can in return cause their educational development to be stagnate (Vanneste et al., 2016). School absenteeism and school drop-out are also often predictors of risk factors in adulthood (Kearney, 2008).

Causes of Absenteeism

School Climate

The issue of school absenteeism is very complex because there are many variables that schools have to take into consideration when working with a student that misses an increased number of days. Some students are frequently absent from school because of events that occur in the school building. A negative school and classroom climate can cause students to be uncomfortable and eventually absent from school (Tamutiene, 2008). School climate is multifaced and can be seen as the school's personality. School climate encompasses the school's environment, culture, and values (Wang & Degol, 2016). School climate influences student behavior, success,

and school connectivity (Maxwell et al., 2017). According to Ingul et al. (2012), “school connectedness and climate refer to the extent to which the pupils feel safe, accepted, respected, and valued at school” (p. 94). Often times, students miss school because they do not feel like they belong (Prince & Howard, 2002). Students at times feel isolated and begin to dislike school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015). Bullying is often one area of concern that leads to students not feeling accepted or connected to school, which increases absenteeism (Dake et al., 2003).

Bullying that occurs in schools can be either student-to-student or teacher-student. Bullying can be defined “as a pattern of conduct, rooted in a power differential, that threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear, or causes students substantial emotional distress” (McEvoy, 2005, p. 1). Teacher-to-student bullying, which is not discussed often, occurs when teachers utilize their power in the classroom to treat students negatively, label them, call them names, and make them feel inadequate. The teacher-student social power struggle at times led to either domination of a teacher or domination of a student, which had the potential to lead to classroom violence. Classroom violence could be seen through physical abuse, arguments, or chaos that would lead to teachers leaving the classroom (Tumutiene, 2008). While research and incidences related to teachers bullying students and taking advantage of their social power are limited it should be considered because it has negatively impacted students and damaged the climate of classrooms, where students should feel safe and free to learn (Tamutiene, 2008).

Health and Medical Absenteeism

A more individualized risk factor among students that are chronically absent is health. Students that miss school due to health concerns typically have some type of illness or chronic disease (Kearney, 2008). According to Grant and Brito (2010), some physical and mental health

conditions related to absenteeism are diabetes, seizure disorders, anxiety, and attention deficit disorder. Along with anxiety, students suffer with other psychiatric conditions such as depression and social phobia, which causes a decline in attendance (Kearney, 2008; Ingul et al., 2012). Dental problems also contribute to students missing school (Balfanz & Chang, 2013).

A major health condition that impacts student attendance is asthma (Grant & Brito, 2010; Balfanz & Chang, 2013). Over the years, the number of children with asthma has increased drastically. In 2010, there were 7 million children from birth to 17 years of age that were diagnosed with asthma (Akinbami et al., 2012). When children have asthma they miss school for various reasons, which include symptoms of the disease, doctor visits, sleep deprivation, and hospitalizations (Basch, 2011). Another major health condition among children is allergies. Over the years, more children have developed food allergies (Jackson et al., 2013). More children have also been classified as obese and overweight, which is concerning because children that are considered obese have a tendency to miss more school than children that are considered to be a healthy weight (Ogden et al., 2014; Kersh et al., 2011). Some other health concerns that lead to students missing school are cold, flu, nausea, vomiting, fever, headache, stomachache, muscle pain, and fatigue (Havik et al., 2015). A more recent health concern that often causes students to miss school is the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). COVID-19, is a highly contagious virus that caused schools to close in March 2020 (Walters et al., 2021).

When students have health conditions or impairments that cause their parents to report that they were absent for medical reasons, this is also known as medical absenteeism, which is school absenteeism that results in parents reporting that students are sick (Vanneste et al., 2016). Vanneste et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study in the Netherlands, where “half of school absenteeism is medical absenteeism” (p.2). The purpose of the study was to learn more about

how school staff felt about addressing medical absenteeism. The study also sought to learn about schools that utilized an intervention named Medical Advice for Sick-reported Students (MASS). MASS was “developed by the preventive youth health care department (YHC) of the Dutch Regional Public Health Service West Brabant, in collaboration with secondary schools and the municipal school attendance service for compulsory education in West Brabant” (Vanneste et al., 2016, p. 2). MASS was created to help limit medical absenteeism by making a collaborative effort that provides students with care related to their attendance concerns, educational adjustments, and support for them and their families.

Vanneste et al. (2016) worked closely with principals, and special education needs coordinators (SENCO's) who were recruited and later interviewed. As a result of the interviews, some trends and concerns were identified. Vanneste et al. (2016) found that medical absenteeism receives the most attention when it has a negative impact on students. Medical absenteeism is often associated with low academic achievement resulting from missing course material. This sort of school performance puts students at risk of eventually dropping out of school. During the study, participants shared that the students with a high number of medical absences often already struggle with being organized and motivated as it relates to school (Vanneste et al., 2016).

Participants from Vanneste et al.'s (2016) study also shared that they would like to collaborate with their students' parents when addressing absences, particularly those associated with medical absenteeism. School personnel/participants voiced a lack of parental involvement, forcing them to take on many caregiving responsibilities. Some school personnel also felt that working with parents would help to reveal some hidden reasons for students being absent. They voiced that they did not feel like students were always sick like they reported but were instead hiding other concerns. Some of the hidden reasons that the school personnel/participants thought

could be prevalent include: lack of stability at home, a disturbed relationship between parents and children, and a high level of academic pressure.

Family

Some familial risk factors that are associated with student absenteeism are family structure, family relations, and parental problems (Kearney & Silverman, 1995; Ingul et al., 2012). Other concerns that arise among families and cause an increase in student absenteeism are family conflicts, separation in families, maternal or paternal psychiatric illness, and parental alcoholism (McShane et al., 2001; Casas-Gil & Navarro-Guzman, 2002). As mentioned earlier, parental involvement is also a contributing factor to student absenteeism (Teasley, 2004; Vanneste et al., 2016). It is vital for parents to be present for their children at school and home. When there is a lack of adult supervision and children are forced to care for themselves they tend to miss more days of school (Reid, 2005).

Financial obligations and family role dissemination are also family factors that cause students to miss school more. At times parents force students to not attend school so that they can work to contribute to the home financially or care for their siblings while they work to provide for the family financially (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015; Garry, 1996). Other financial factors that impact families and student attendance are families being transient, unemployment, lack of transportation, and parents having to work numerous jobs (Peek, 2009). When focused on financial obligations and other factors that impact families, some parents place little emphasis on school attendance. This is also sometimes due to the fact that some parents do not truly value school and student attendance (Baker et al., 2001; Garry, 1996; Ingul et al, 2012; Peek, 2009). Since there are varying factors that impact families and how they view school

attendance in the midst of everyday life, it is vital that schools have systems in place for communicating with families and monitoring attendance overall.

Attendance Policies

In order for schools to be more effective with attendance systems, there must be clear policies and systems in place. Attendance policies must also be reasonable while setting high expectations for students (French et al., 1991). Overall, the goal is to have students invested in their attendance and for them to have self-discipline (French et al., 1991). The goal of attendance policies is also for them to “set limits on what is allowable behavior in the school and determine consequences for actions” (Railsback, 2004, p. 13). Research has shown that when attendance policies are punitive and harsh absences tend to increase (Railsback, 2004). Research has also shown that consequences such as suspensions and detentions lead to students missing more school, which is the opposite result intended (Epp & Epp, 2001). A better solution and/or addition to attendance policies could be to place students in in-school suspension, but instead of them receiving punitive consequences students would receive academic support and still be engaged in school (Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 2002).

Research and practitioners such as Railsback (2004) also provides schools and the field of education with suggestions on ways to make attendance policies effective. Here are some suggestions for effective attendance policies:

- Attendance policies should be publicized and understood by school staff and students.
- There should be a clear difference between excused and unexcused absences.
- Attendance policies should be aligned with the school district’s policies and goals.

- The purpose of attendance policies should be to change behaviors and decrease absences, instead of punishing students.
- Schools should have effective reporting, recording, and monitoring systems in place.
- School attendance policies must include full family involvement. This should include parent notification and reports/contracts that go home to families frequently.
- Schools should research and investigate the various computerized attendance tracking systems that are utilized nationwide.

Attendance Monitoring and Data Analysis

Many schools struggle to improve absenteeism because of the methods utilized to monitor student attendance. To effectively address chronic absenteeism, accurate and detailed data must be provided to the school officials that monitor attendance. According to Balfanz and Chang (2013), “most schools track only daily attendance and truancy, and both of those measures can mask chronic absence” (p. 22). With this process it is very easy for a student to miss a day here and there without being flagged as being chronically absent and therefore not receiving the resources that are needed to improve his/her attendance. This is problematic because “missing just 2 days a month means missing 18 days, or 10% of the school year” (Balfanz & Chang, 2013, p.22). For this reason, it is vital for schools to place emphasis on all students that accumulate a great deal of absences, this includes students that miss consecutive days of schools and students that miss days sporadically (Balfanz & Chang, 2013). This sort of in-depth attendance monitoring requires dedication. However, there are resources that are available to schools to make the process more manageable.

A national and state initiative that provides schools with tools that can be utilized to monitor attendance data is Attendance Works. The initiative has free self-calculating data tools that allows schools and districts to recognize patterns of chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Chang, 2013). Another tool that schools can be utilized to monitor and analyze attendance data is actually present in every school and given out four times a year; this tool is report cards. Students often receive report cards that summarize how many days of school they have missed. However, Balfanz and Chang (2013) found that many schools and districts do not compile this data into data reports. Consistently analyzing data allows school officials to recognize trends that may not typically surface when monitoring attendance.

It is vital that school attendance data is analyzed so that schools can clearly identify the causes of absenteeism and the school-specific issues related to students missing a high number of days from school (Reid, 2014). When attendance data is produced weekly, monthly, or yearly trends can be identified by classes and types of absences (Keppens et al., 2019). The data that is analyzed can be shared with stakeholders such as students, parents, and school staff (Chu et al., 2019). Data analyzation also gives school officials the information that is necessary to create goals and effective interventions that are centered around absenteeism (Keppens et al., 2019).

Attendance Interventions

Nurses in Schools

An attendance intervention that is often overlooked and simplified is the presence of nurses in schools. However, in 1902 Lina Rogers who was a pioneer in school nursing, revealed that there is a correlation between the reduction in absenteeism and healthy children (Jacobsen, et al., 2016). The presence of nurses in schools is important, because school nurses provide a number of vital services. These services include managing chronic conditions, tracking

infectious diseases, providing emergency care, and connecting students to health care providers (Institute of Medicine, 2011; NASN, 2012). When nurses are in schools, they help to save time by allowing school staff to focus on tasks that are more closely related to their roles (Baisch, et al., 2011). School nurses also help to decrease the number of students that leave school due to illness or injury, which helps to improve attendance (Pennington & Delaney, 2008).

Unfortunately, due to the nurse-to-student ratio and availability of nurses in school today, school nurses are unable to positively impact absenteeism and support students, which puts the health needs back into the hands of parents and other school officials. This often leads to an increase in absenteeism or missed class time.

Teacher-Student Relationship

Another common practice or attendance intervention that is often taken for granted is the teacher-student relationship. Teachers are individuals in a school setting that interact with students on a consistent basis, which often allows them to know students on a more personal level. Teachers are the first to know when students are missing from their classes and often are privy to personalized information that directly impacts students missing school. Teachers have the power to utilize their relationship to have a positive impact on students, their academic success, and consequently their attendance. The teacher-student relationship often leads to students having a stronger commitment to school (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2015). According to Marvul (2012), “if young people perceive that adults at school care about them both personally and as students, probabilities will increase that they will engage, connect, and bond to the school” (p. 146). There is value in the role that the teacher-student relationship plays in a student’s overall academic career.

In the past teachers have been seen as individuals that were only responsible for the providing students with access to academic curriculum. However, students often build relationships with teachers that is foundational to who they are as an individual. When students trust their teachers and feel supported by them teachers often become their counselor, friend, mentor, confidant, and more. The teacher-student relationship often plays a major role in students being positively motivated and feeling accepted, which encourages them to be more engaged in school and perform better academically (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). The teacher-student relationship is so important to some students that it changes their trajectory and gives them a reason to attend school (Gase et al., 2016). The teacher-student relationship has the power to make students that once disliked school, begin to enjoy school. This is because the teacher's perception and attitude towards the students is impactful and positively influences their sense of belonging (Muller, 2001; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). So even though it may not be clearly outlined in the teacher's job description, his/her role expands outside of academic content. The teacher role is now a combination of academic, social, emotional, and personal. When the social and emotional needs of students are met, even when indirectly by teachers, their attendance and academic performance improves (Phillippo & Stone, 2013).

Response to Intervention

Often in schools, the Response to Intervention (RTI) process is utilized to address the academic concerns of students. However, it is seldom used to address any other student concerns in schools. Kearney and Graczyk (2014) believe that schools should utilize the RTI model as the framework for restructuring the approach for addressing absenteeism. RTI refers to a systematic and hierarchical decision-making process to assign evidence-based strategies based on students' needs according to regular progress monitoring (Fox et al., 2010). The RTI framework consists

of a three-tiered service delivery approach with universal, targeted, and intensive interventions (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008). This is a collaborative effort that helps to address attendance concerns early on and before they have a chance to turn into more significant problems or surpass the legal limit (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014). The RTI model also strives to align assessments and interventions to student attendance patterns (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014).

According to Kearney and Graczyk (2014), literature related to RTI and absenteeism has crossed paths over the past 25 years. The literature for RTI and absenteeism is similar because they both focus on the following: 1) early identification and intervention with progress monitoring, 2) functional behavioral assessment, 3) procedures and protocols that are supported by research and strive to reduce obstacles related to academic achievement, 4) a multi-tier approach, and 5) implementing change through a team-based approach (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014, p. 4).

When utilizing the RTI approach to address absenteeism, the interventions in Tier 1 (universal) are focused on “all students and involve a core set of strategies and regular screening to promote attendance and identify students who are benefiting from these core strategies” (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014, p. 5). “Tier 1 strategies are aimed at encouraging better attendance for all students and preventing absenteeism before it affects achievement” (Attendance Works, n.d.). Tier 1 strategies would include attendance data collection and identifying students that are absent frequently (Kearney & Gracyk, 2014). Tier 1 could also consist of constant school-wide communication of attendance expectations and how absenteeism negatively impacts students. Tier 1 could also encompass school-based health programs, school-based mental health services, substance abuse prevention programs, and the promotion of parental involvement (Kearney & Gracyk, 2014). Some other examples of Tier 1 strategies consist of schools taking attendance accurately with care, recognizing good and improved attendance, and providing families with

personalized communication when students are absent (Attendance Works, n.d.). Within Tier 1, it is vital that attendance expectations are clear and consistent.

The interventions utilized in Tier 2 (targeted) are “directed toward at-risk students who require additional support beyond the core set of universal (Tier 1) intervention strategies” (Kearney & Gracyk, 2014, p. 9). Tier 2 interventions are “designed to address barriers to attendance for students at greater risk of chronic absenteeism; these are students that miss 10% of the school year” (Attendance Works, n.d.). Tier 2 interventions must include specific goals, parent collaboration, and support. An essential component of Tier 2 is ensuring that there is a clear strategy utilized to educate students. Once school personnel learn more about why students are absent, they may begin referring students and their families to a pediatrician, family therapist, child psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, tutor, or a specialist familiar with development or learning disorders (Reid, 2011). Some examples of Tier 2 interventions are: mentoring, home visits, and individual attendance plans with students and families (Attendance Works, n.d.).

Tier 3 (intensive) interventions are for “students with complex or severe problems who require a concentrated approach and frequent progress monitoring” (Kearney & Gracyk, 2014, p. 13). Students that receive interventions under Tier 3 are typically those who miss 20% or more of the school year (Attendance Works, n.d.). Once a student has reached Tier 3, the likelihood of them having regular attendance is not as high as it is for students that only reach Tier 2. It is also likely that students in Tier 3 will not be able to pass for the academic year because their chronic absenteeism has led to failing grades and a lack of credits (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). For this reason, “Tier 3 interventions must thus include innovative, creative, and intense procedures to propel academic achievement, enhance parental involvement, and address comorbid problems” (Kearney & Gracyk, 2014, p. 13). There is no room for school personnel or students and families

not to be consistent and urgent. Tier 3 is so intense that students often must participate in alternative programs that allow them to be supervised closely with intentionality (Kearney & Gracyk, 2014; Attendance Works, 2022).

Legal Strategies and Attendance

Kearney and Gracyk (2014) also mention legal strategies that can be utilized to address severe absenteeism. Legal strategies or interventions include truancy court, juvenile detention, and police intervention. Their research about several legal strategies or interventions led to different researchers' brief reviews of studies. For instance, Mogulescu and Segal's (2002) research found that in some states, parents are placed in jail, or students are required to complete community service. Some states even associate absenteeism with fines that must be paid. Many states have even begun to allow legal and/or punitive strategies to more directly impact students. This is done by linking student attendance to their ability to receive their driver's permit and driver's license. Revoking driving privileges and the fear of truancy court has led to a decrease in student absences (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gleich-Bope, 2014). While these are some negative aspects of legal interventions that are present in some communities, there are also some positive legal strategies.

Absenteeism being connected to legal resources allows schools to have a more multidisciplinary approach to addressing chronic absenteeism. Fantuzzo et al. (2005) discussed how some schools link their students and families with caseworkers from community agencies after participating in the court proceedings held within the school. The addition of caseworkers with this legal strategy helped improve attendance instead of viewing it from a negative perspective primarily associated with severe consequences. Richtman (2007) also took a multidisciplinary approach with legal resources and implemented strategies that involved

identifying absentee students and their parents to be referred to school-based meetings. Other individuals that were included in these meetings were: a county attorney, school social worker or counselor, and a probation officer. The purpose of the meetings was to create a school attendance plan (Richtman, 2007). As a result of the meetings, students and their families could also receive referrals for social service agencies, substance use and mental health evaluations, and student or family counseling. The collaborative approach discussed in the study resulted in truancy petitions being reduced 57.8% over a 10-year period for students under the age of 16.

Another collaborative approach that utilized legal resources was a truancy court diversion program. Shoenfelt and Huddleston (2006) discussed the program in their study. The program required that school personnel make home visits to gain insight into factors influencing chronically absent students. The program also included meetings with a judge, parenting classes, tutoring, anger management, mentoring, and support groups. The diversion group resulted in a reduction in unexcused absences and improved grades for students that were absent often.

Principals and Attendance Incentives

Balfanz and Chang (2013) shared a case study that focused on Roosevelt Middle School in Oakland, California. After analyzing some attendance data, Cliff Hong, the principal of Roosevelt Middle School, realized that absenteeism was truly a problem at the school. “Every day, 50 to 60 Roosevelt Middle School students were absent, and as many as 15% of students were missing nearly a month of school every year” (Balfanz & Chang, 2013, p. 23). The prevalence of absenteeism at Roosevelt Middle School was causing the school to lose funding because, in California, the state aid formula is based on average daily attendance. Students at Roosevelt Middle School were also struggling academically. The findings associated with the

attendance data caused principal Hong to take action. Some interventions that principal Hong utilized at Roosevelt Middle School to improve attendance are as follows:

- Certificates were given to students that had good or improved attendance. These students were recognized at assemblies. This is a great example of publicly praising students for attendance, which often helps to promote school culture while emphasizing the importance of attendance (Sheldon & Eptsein, 2004).
- An attendance team was organized and consisted of various staff members. These staff members included: the attendance clerk, school nurse, graduate student intern, and the principal.
- Principal Hong set goals to reach “an average of 95% attendance overall and no chronic absence.” Also, he wanted this data to be reflected among the three largest ethnic groups in the student population. These ethnic groups included Black, Asian Pacific Islander, and Latino (Balfanz & Chang, 2013).
- The attendance team met every two weeks to review the cases of students that had been chronically absent. The team met to identify the reasons that the students had been absent. Some of the issues (i.e., transportation, illnesses, etc.) that arose were new to the attendance team members.
- One member of the attendance team was strategically assigned to follow up with students that had been identified. Team members were responsible for speaking with students and their families.
- The attendance clerk and principal held conferences with families if the student’s attendance did not improve. The attendance expectations were explained during

these meetings, and families had to sign improvement plans. (Balfanz & Chang, 2013, p. 23)

Principal Hong's desire to change the trajectory of his students and the school community yielded positive results. The implementation of principal Hong's initiatives led to chronic absenteeism decreasing from 15% to 8% during the 2011-2012 school year. Reducing chronic absenteeism also led to an increase in academic achievement. The scores on the state's standardized tests increased 30 points from the previous school year (Balfanz & Chang, 2013).

Mentoring

Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) discussed an intervention that helped bridge the gap between schools and the community to improve attendance and decrease absenteeism. The intervention based in Atlanta, Georgia, was the Truancy Project, which matched volunteer lawyers with students identified as being truant. When students were identified early, they participated in mentoring. The result of the Truancy Project helped more than 50% of the students. The students were no longer failing or truant; instead, they became engaged in school again and successfully completed the school year (Gullatt & Lemoine, 1997).

Research has proven that "mentoring is one way to ensure that a child has a continuous, sustained, and caring relationship with a trusted adult – whether in or outside of school" (Railsback, 2004, p. 28). In order for mentoring programs and interventions to be effective they must have the following components: (a) ongoing training for mentors, (b) structured activities for both mentors and youth, and (c) expectation for frequency of contact, mechanisms for support and involvement of parents, and monitoring of overall program implementation (Dubois, 2002). Two mentoring programs that have successfully helped to address the issue of chronic absenteeism are Big Brothers and Sisters and Across Ages (Railsback, 2004). Mentoring

programs should not be isolated interventions for students with higher numbers of absences. Mentoring alone is not able to solve all problems that are associated with chronically absent students. Mentoring should be among other interventions in a comprehensive plan for increasing attendance.

Reflections of Absenteeism Students

Current Students

An aspect of absenteeism that is not present in a great deal of literature is a platform that allows students that have a history of absenteeism or even truancy, which is “school absenteeism that is driven by a student’s unwillingness to attend school,” to share their perspective (Dahl, 2016, p. 120). To learn about student’s reasons for not attending school individuals addressing chronic absenteeism, have interviewed and surveyed chronically absent students. An organization that spoke with chronically absent students was the Oregon Department of Education. The Oregon Department of Education “interviewed students enrolled in alternative high schools and asked what it was about their school that kept them in and what they would change about their previous high school to make it a better place” (Railsback, 2004, p. 7). Students shared that they desired to have teachers that were patient with them as individuals as they struggled through various academic adversities. Students also shared that they desired to have teachers that had high expectations for them academically. Students shared that when they felt supported, they worked to meet the goals and expectations of their teachers.

Former Students

Dahl (2016) decided to give adults that had a history of experiencing absenteeism a chance to reflect on their school experiences. The main question that the researcher asked the participants while conducting the qualitative study was, “how did you spend your time when you

were truant from school” (Dahl, 2016, p. 121). The study consisted of 34 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Most of the participants were classified as being chronically truant. To gain more insight and allow participants to share their narratives, the researcher asked semi-structured interview questions. The interviews lasted about an hour and were tape-recorded. The results were primarily centered on individual participants, families, and school factors.

When asked what kind of activities they were engaged in while being truant, many participants shared that they spent their time eating out or sharing a meal off-campus with their peers off campus (Dahl, 2016). A prohibited activity that some participants engaged in during truancy was smoking marijuana; this activity was often done among peers as well. Another activity that was associated with peers was lunch periods. Some participants shared that they skipped class to eat lunch with their friends, especially if they had different lunch periods. Other participants selectively chose when and which classes they would skip and then did so for various reasons. Some participants shared that they missed class to hang out with their boyfriend, have an extra hour of lunch, and have a chance to get more hours at work. A few participants shared that they missed school or some classes because they were balancing school and employment. Some chose to work, while others had to work to help contribute to their family financially. Other participants were also balancing home responsibilities associated with living in a single-parent household. Participants of this study and others shared that they could not balance working and attending school at the same time (Railsback, 2004).

Conclusion

According to Kearney and Graczyk (2014), regular school attendance is fundamental to children’s success in academic, language, social, and work-related domains. Regular school attendance provides youth with an environment that nurtures skills such as persistence, problem-

solving, and the ability to work with others to accomplish a goal. Therefore, members of the school community must work to address the different obstacles that contribute to students being absent while creating systems and interventions to monitor and improve absenteeism.

Interventions and programs that seek to address absenteeism must be comprehensive and consider the different aspects of a student's life. Interventions and programs meet students whether they are and cultivate them (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009).

Innovation is necessary when working with at-risk students and addressing truancy or absenteeism. At-risk students are defined as "adolescents who live in impoverished urban communities, many of whom are young people of color who lack structured guidance and support" (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009, p. 226). To aide with the success of at-risk students, it is important for them to receive support in and out school; they must be provided with individuals that support and encourage them while also advocating for them. For this reason, it is also important for the school leaders and policymakers to involve teachers when addressing absenteeism. When teachers, who work with students on a daily basis are not included in the conversation about absenteeism this eliminates key stakeholders who have the ability to positively play a role in addressing absenteeism. When a comprehensive system is not created to effectively address absenteeism, schools are failing students and are not providing them, their parents/guardian, or their teachers with the support needed to combat absenteeism.

Chapter III: Research Design

Research Overview

The problem of practice for this study is to investigate teacher's perception on the role that they play in addressing student absenteeism. To respond to this problem, the researcher investigated the experiences of high school teachers who work with students that are chronically absent at high schools that serves underserved students among the United States. The primary research question is: What are the lived experiences of high school teachers as they work with students who are chronically absent?

The overarching purpose of the research question is to gain a deeper understanding of the high school teacher's ability to address the needs of chronically absent students and understand if the high school teachers believe they were capable of effectively addressing the issues that are surrounded by students being chronically absent. There is substantial research that shows that regular school attendance is fundamental to the academic success of students (Graczyk, 2014). However, there is little research that provides information related to the experiences of those that work closely with students that are chronically absent. This study has the power to contribute to the existing literature related to student absenteeism by providing teacher's perspective on the persistent issue in education. This study may also help those in education understand the role that teachers feel they play in addressing student absenteeism and the depth of knowledge that they have about the issue that continues to plague schools daily.

Methodology

A qualitative design is utilized for this study, which aligns with the researcher's goal to get a better understanding of the high school teacher's experiences while addressing student absenteeism. Qualitative research is "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2009, p.4). Qualitative

research is a broad discipline that involves empirical procedures that are designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a particular setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research is also more focused on exploring the ‘what,’ ‘why,’ and ‘how’ questions of a particular topic. This is different from quantitative research, which focuses on ‘how much’ and ‘how many’ (Tuffour, 2017). The difference between qualitative and quantitative research, allows qualitative studies to give more exposure to topics that may not be as popular in the research world, while also diving deeper into more complex topics in the social world (Tuffour, 2017). The focus of qualitative research aligns perfectly with this study as it aims to bring the topic or phenomenon of student absenteeism to the forefront in schools, classrooms, and among teachers.

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the teacher’s experiences, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is proposed. IPA is a prevalent and dominant methodology in the qualitative research realm (Tuffour, 2017). IPA is considered to be a structured methodology that relies heavily on interpretation. IPA is “a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p.1). “IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience. And it aims to conduct this examination in a way in which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32).

Four key philosophers are associated with IPA. These phenomenological philosophers, who believe that phenomenology is a continuum are: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. A major component of IPA is hermeneutics, which is grounded in the art and science of interpretation. Hermeneutics is a fluid concept that is open to new insight, revision,

interpretation, and reinterpretation (Tuffour, 2017). When utilizing IPA, it is important to recognize that experience and meaning are closely associated, which means individuals give meaning to different situations and phenomena based on their experiences. These experiences are often expressed through language. With IPA the researcher will strive to make sense of the participant's experiences that are being shared. This often leads to 'double hermeneutics,' which is when the researcher often makes sense of his/her own experiences, while attempting to interpret the participant's experiences (Tuffour, 2017). While IPA can be viewed as complex, relational, and based solely on interpretation it is also idiographic, which means that there is a great deal of detailed analysis when utilized.

Site and participants

For the study, high school teachers were recruited from different cities in the United States. The teachers had to work at schools that served underrepresented students from low-income communities. The schools had to have a high percentage of students that qualified for free or reduced lunch. To participate teachers had to have at least one year of experience teaching at the high school level. Teachers that were new to teaching at the high school level were not able to participate. The use of purposeful sampling will be used because it allows the researcher to select a sample population based on prior information (Fraenkel et al., 2012). While purposeful sampling was utilized; teachers participated voluntarily.

Data collection

In order to understand the teacher's experiences with student absenteeism, interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to allow the researcher to gather data in a more meaningful manner (Seidman, 2006). To begin the interview process, each participant completed a demographic survey via Google Form. This survey focused on collecting

information about the participant's professional career, familiarity with the term chronic absenteeism, comfort level with addressing chronic absenteeism, and broad thoughts on responsibilities centered around addressing chronic absenteeism. The virtual interview focused primarily on the questions and experiences related to the participant's role and self-efficacy as it relates to addressing student absenteeism. During the interviews, the researcher also inquired about the participant's attendance taking protocols and teacher procedures overall. The interviews were centered around a set of predetermined open-ended questions (DiCicco & Crabtree, 2006). Utilizing the semi-structured format allowed for new questions to emerge during the interview process, which guided the flow of dialogue between the researcher and research participant (DiCicco & Crabtree, 2006).

The researcher ensured that the recordings were kept securely on a computer that was protected with a password. Also, participant real names were not utilized; they were given pseudonyms. This helped with security and anonymity. The researcher took notes as she reflected on the interview process. Included in the notes were the researcher's feelings, impressions, and additional questions or thoughts that were provoked by the interviews (Creswell, 2009).

Data analysis

The data from the interviews and materials were coded and read through thoroughly to recognize trends. According to Saldana (2016), "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data" (p. 4). To code the interviews, the researcher went through the transcription and reread every question and response. According to Saldana (2016):

Coding is a cyclical act. Rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted. The second cycle (and possibly the third and fourth, etc.) of recording further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory (p. 9).

While reviewing the transcriptions, the researcher reflected on the intentions behind each interview question. The response from each question was decoded so that the researcher could see what stood out in the participant's experiences. A few words from the response were notated to represent the participant's response; these words were either directly from the response or was a word that came to the researcher's mind while reading the response. These words or phrases were utilized as the codes.

Validity and Credibility

While utilizing teachers as research perspectives can add to the research centered around student absenteeism, the findings of this study may be based solely on each teacher's individual experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Therefore, there may be varying perspectives and findings for this study. However, as a school counselor that has worked for years to address and improve attendance by implementing various interventions with students and parents, it is evident that it is time to allow the voices of teachers to be heard. The teacher perspective is vital and using their perspectives to address absenteeism feels urgent. While the process may be difficult and varying, it could change the trajectory of absenteeism research and education.

Limitations

Utilizing IPA as a methodology can be seen as a limitation since it relies heavily on perception, interpretation, and experiences. Critics believe that "an authentic research inquiry seeking to understand the experiences of its participants will also seek to explore the conditions

that triggered the experiences which are located in past events, histories or social-cultural domain” (Tuffour, 2017, p. 4). Another aspect of the study that could be seen as limiting is the fact that the study is conducted at only one site and centered around a small number of teachers and students. Lastly, the participant’s true understanding and familiarity with student absenteeism and his/her positionality could be seen as a limitation.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher’s goal is to ensure that participants are not exposed to any significant risk. To help participants feel more secure, the researcher will build in time for participants to take breaks and/or time for reflection when feeling overwhelmed. The researcher will also remind the participants that the data and information will remain anonymous and will never be used against them personally or in their roles as teachers. Participants will be asked to complete an informed consent to ensure that they understand the research study and reduce the chances of unexpected harm. Participants will be advised of their access to the researcher outside of interviews (Seidman, 2006). Participants will be encouraged to be involved in the research process and to share their thoughts and concerns. Due to the sensitivity and vulnerability of the study, along with participants freely giving of their time and experiences, the researcher hopes to reward the participants with a small numerical reimbursement in the form of a gift card (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The student data utilized during the study, will also be kept secure and protected. The laws, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) that are prevalent in schools to protect student data will be a component of the study.

Conclusion

While analyzing and reflecting on the data that results from the study, the researcher will work to ensure the interpretation is biased and to be open to gaining new knowledge and insight on the participant's experiences. This is vital since researchers have such active roles in qualitative research. For this reason, it is very important to remember that interpretation, which is a major component of IPA, is based on perception and individual experiences. The researcher will use IPA to give teacher's a true voice as it relates to student absenteeism and their experiences. While there are disadvantages to the IPA methodology, there is power in the data that can be captured through the participant's experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The data that is captured could give new insight to the phenomenon of student absenteeism and shed light on how teachers view their roles in addressing the problem that is plaguing many of their schools.

Chapter IV: Data Collection

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how high school teachers perceive their role in addressing chronic absenteeism. This study analyzed two sources of data to gain a deeper understanding of the teacher perspective including a pre-interview and demographic questionnaire along with semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and was emailed to participants once they were provided with a detailed description of the study.

The questionnaire allowed the researcher to gain insight into the teacher's experiences including: the length of their teacher career, the population of students they teach, their familiarity with the term chronic absenteeism, and their overarching views of the role that teachers play in addressing chronic absenteeism. The questionnaire had yes or no, short answer, and Likert scale questions. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to dig deeper into the participant experiences by asking the teachers to expound on information shared in the questionnaire such as: the number of schools they have taught at, the variation of attendance protocols at different schools, and detailed encounters with chronically absent students. Each participant in the study provided in-depth dialogue regarding their experiences as working with students who have been chronically absent. Each participant also explained what he/she believed his/her role was in addressing chronic absenteeism.

Research Question

The primary research question was: What are the lived experiences of high school teachers as they work with students who are chronically absent? The overarching purpose of the research question was to gain a deeper understanding of the high school teacher's ability to address the needs of chronically absent students.

Presentation of Participants

The online survey/questionnaire, which was a Google Form was sent to any high school teacher that expressed interest in the study after receiving a detailed description. The researcher sought participants via social media, word of mouth, and personal relationships. The survey asked participants to provide their email address and availability for an interview if they were interested in participating once they answered the survey questions. About fifteen individuals volunteered to receive the survey and study information upon initial conversation. Eight individuals completed the survey and provided availability for the interview. However, only five individuals participated in the interview because all others declined participation. Of these five individuals, four were female and one was a male. With the five participants, each high school grade level was represented. Coincidentally, all participants had between six and fifteen years of teaching experience.

Participants

Table 1

Participant Name	City and State Currently Teaching	Years of Teaching Experience	Grade Currently Teaching	Familiar with the Term Chronic Absenteeism	Students with Free or Reduced Lunch
Katherine	Florissant, MO	6-15 years	12th	Yes	Yes
Monique	Putnam, CT	6-15 years	11th	Yes	Yes
Denise	Jacksonville, FL	6-15 years	9th	Yes	Yes
Emily	Powder Springs, GA	6-15 years	11th	Yes	Yes
Caleb	Jacksonville, FL	6-15 years	10th	Yes	Yes

*Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the confidentiality of the research participants.

A demographic summary of the five participants for the study are shared above in Table 1. Additional information about the participants about them is shared in this section.

Participant 1: Katherine

Katherine has experience teaching at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Most of her experience is at the high school level. During the time of the interview, Katherine had taught at her current school for six years. The overall demographics at the school were 80% African American. Katherine shared that about 60% of her senior students were chronically absent last school year. At times when comes to addressing chronic absenteeism and the reason for her students being absent, Katherine feels unheard.

Participant 2: Monique

Monique has seven years of teaching experience and all of them are at the high school level with 11th graders. Monique has taught at the same school for the duration of her teaching career, because of this she is often able to see students matriculate and come back. The demographics for the school that Monique teaches at is low-income with a majority of Caucasian students. Over 50% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch. Monique believes that 30% of her students were chronically absent last school year.

Participant 3: Denise

Denise has taught for a little more than eight years. During her teaching career, she taught at the middle school level for three and a half years. The remaining five years, she has taught at the high school level. In total, Denise has taught at three schools. Denise has taught in South Carolina and Florida. Many of the students at the high school that she currently teaches at qualify for free or reduced lunch. Denise likes teaching at the high school level, because she feels like it is the “last ditch chance to actually get students before they go into the career field.” Denise has noticed a decline in student attendance since she started her teaching career.

Participant 4: Emily

Emily has been a teacher for eleven years. She was a substitute teacher at the middle school level briefly before being hired as a full-time teacher. Emily has taught at the high school that she currently teaches for all of her teaching career outside of being a substitute teacher. The majority of the students at the school qualify for free or reduced lunch. When asked to describe the attendance trends at the school, Emily shared that students attend school regularly. Emily shared that about 10% of her students had attendance problems that were severe or persistent enough for her to take matters into her own hands or refer to other school officials last school year.

Participant 5: Caleb

Caleb has taught for nine years and has been at the high school level the entire time. He has taught at a total of two schools; both schools have similar demographics. Caleb has been at the school in which he currently teaches for one year. Most of the students at the school qualify for free or reduced lunch. In Caleb's opinion, about 15% of the students that he taught last school year had some type of attendance issues.

Presentation of Results: Analysis of Teacher Interview Data**Theme 1: Mixed perspectives on who is responsible for addressing absenteeism.**

During the study, it was revealed that all participants agreed that chronic absenteeism was a major concern in high school. However, not all of the participants felt that they were main stakeholder responsible for addressing and/or improving student attendance. The most common response for who participants felt should be addressing attendance concerns was guidance/school counselors and then school administrators. Participants mostly felt like addressing chronic absenteeism on a larger scale was out of their control. Some participants even shared that they did not feel as though they had to be 100% invested in student attendance. Some participants also

shared that they did not feel adequately equipped with the tools and skills needed to effectively address chronic absenteeism.

Katherine's survey results and discussion during the interview align with the fact that she believes that as a teacher she is not the owner of addressing attendance. Katherine does not feel like she is equipped with the skills and does not believe that she should be having the crucial conversation centered around addressing absenteeism. During her interview Katherine said, "I am going to be honest with you, I feel like absenteeism is an administrator thing. I need them to actually be the home/school connection." Katherine believes that as a teacher she should play her role in ensuring that the curriculum is relatable and that students are engaged. Katherine also believes that it is vital for her to ensure that she is developing personal relationships with students and letting them know that they are missed when they are not at school; the class is not complete without them. However, as mentioned before she does not feel it is her responsibility to address absenteeism; she does not feel that she should be contacting home for attendance. She also only somewhat agreed that she should be notifying the appropriate individuals when students miss school.

Emily has some similar feelings toward addressing chronically absent students. She responded that she somewhat disagreed with the fact that teachers have a role in addressing student attendance, the teacher has a role in improving student attendance, the teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student misses more than one day of school in a week, the teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student's absences are hindering the student's academic success, the teacher should be invested in student attendance, and feeling comfortable talking to students and families about attendance. Emily strongly disagreed with feeling equipped with the necessary skills needed to address student attendance. Emily feels that it is the

responsibility of school administrators to address chronic absenteeism. During the interview when Emily was asked what she felt the teacher role was in addressing chronic absenteeism she said, “honestly not much. I try to have conversations with people (students or parents), but by the time they get to 11th or 12th grade, it is an entrenched pattern. I work with the students to try to make sure they are doing enough to pass.” Emily truly sounds like she feels the bigger picture of addressing chronic absenteeism and students that are absent often is out of her hands.

Caleb’s feelings towards ownership of addressing attendance are different from Katherine and Emily’s. Caleb feels that he is equipped with the necessary tools to address absenteeism with students and their families, but he does not feel comfortable. Caleb feels like addressing absenteeism is more of a team effort; he believes that everyone plays a role in addressing attendance. During the interview he stated, “at some point everyone that is attached to the student from the teacher to the principal should be addressing the student’s attendance.”

Like Caleb, Denise believes that addressing absenteeism should be a joint effort. As a teacher, she feels that she could find ways to make catching up and learning easier when students return from being absent. Denise also felt like she could impact absenteeism in a positive way by providing students with a letter from her as the teacher once they returned to school. Denise believes that as a teacher relationship building is important when addressing absenteeism. She also feels like it is her role as a teacher to respond to attendance concerns, because her relationship with students is different from that of a school counselor or other individuals that may also be addressing chronic absenteeism. Monique also believes that building strong relationships with students is the teacher’s responsibility in regards to addressing chronically absent students. Monique said, “having strong relationships with students so that when they are chronically absent, you can have those conversations with them and they feel comfortable having

conversations with you about why they are absent and what it is that is keeping them from coming to school.” Monique believes that having strong relationships with students makes it easier for teachers and school teams to come up with solutions for addressing chronic absenteeism.

Theme 2: Communication is vital to addressing absenteeism.

During interviews the importance of communication was brought up. This could be communication between teachers and students, teachers and parents, teachers and school staff, and many more. In his interview, Caleb discussed the importance of communicating with families, especially once students have missed his class more than five times. Caleb also used communication as a tool to address attendance by sharing information with his school’s guidance/school counseling team and other individuals who he felt needed the information.

Katherine also utilized communication to address absenteeism. Katherine communicated often with the school counselor. Katherine and the school counselor would email back and forth to discuss students and what they may need when returning to school. Katherine also informally communicated with parents and students via email. When a student would miss too much school Katherine mentioned that there would be a more formal meeting with the student, parent, counselor and teacher. There were also times when Katherine would communicate her concerns to the principal and the principal would reach out to the student’s family.

At Emily’s school teachers are asked to communicate with families by sending home mailers addressing students that are chronically absent. Emily mentioned that even though it is a requirement, few teachers actually send home the mailers. Sometimes Emily also skips sending home the attendance information via mail and instead chooses to call home to speak with families about their student’s attendance. Emily also likes to have one-on-one conversations with

her students when they return to school. She likes to share with them what they missed while out, what is necessary to make up, and her availability for tutoring. Emily also shared that there is often student-to-student communication to help ensure that peers do not fall behind with their work. Students are able to text each other to see what they missed and are able to make up missed work on their own when they are absent.

Even though the participants were aware of the fact that communication was vital in improving attendance, they did not feel like the sole responsibility should be their responsibility. Most of the participants did not feel like they should be responsible for communicating absences and attendance policies to students and their families. Participants also were not always comfortable with having this level of communication with their students and families. Most of the participants also did not feel like they should be held responsible for creating and communicating a protocol in their classes to chronically absent students. This aligned with their feelings for communicating absent students to the appropriate school officials. The researcher gathered that most teachers wanted attendance data to be communicated to them versus them sharing the data. It could also be concluded that participants wanted someone other than themselves to be responsible for communicating attendance data and protocols to students and families.

Theme 3: There are various factors associated with students being chronically absent.

As a high school teacher, Katherine has many students that miss school due to working. Students may be too tired from working the night before or they may miss school to work. Katherine believes that students are being able to work more hours than are suitable for a high school student. The fact that the students were able to work and even have mobility at their jobs made them say things such as, “I do not need school and it is not going to help me in real life.”

Katherine feels like the students and the places that they work were becoming problematic.

Katherine also felt like with the amount of hours that students were able to work during the week and at their age, the companies must have been violating child labor laws. Katherine thinks this is a big concern and the community should address it.

Katherine also noticed that since COVID-19 has surfaced and students were able to be virtual at one point, they now feel like they do not need school, especially brick and mortar school. Students have shared with Katherine that they feel like school is “bogus.” Students felt like moving forward, they should be able to complete school online, especially since they had access to an online platform named Canvas when they were absent. Katherine mentioned that students would say, “the final is on Canvas, I should not have to come.”

Similar to Katherine, Emily also had students that missed school due to working. Emily shared that some of her students have financial difficulties that cause them to work long hours so that they are able to contribute to bills at home. Some of Emily’s students have also gotten comfortable with the concept of submitting work online. Emily also shared that 90% of her students missed school for orthodontist appointments, brief travel, or occasional mental health days. Emily also shared that once she had a group of low-achieving seniors that missed her first block often simply because they did not wake up on time.

In Caleb’s experience, students do not attend to school for several reasons. Some of the reasons that Caleb shared were: family related (good or bad), suspensions due to behavior, and in recent years COVID-19. Denise also feels that COVID-19 has played a role in why students miss school, whether this is because they are sick or because they preferred completing school online more. Denise mentioned social media and outside factors as reasons for students missing school

as well. Denise feels that outside factors often do not make school appear to be cool and/or popular.

Theme 4: Attendance protocols are often unclear, ever-changing, and inconsistent.

During the survey, all participants shared that they were fully aware of their school's attendance policy and procedures. However, during the interviews the researcher learned that even though some participants were very familiar with their school's attendance policies, there was still a gap in information.

Of the five participants, Katherine and Monique were able to share the most detailed information about their school's attendance policies and protocols. However, there was still some uncertainties of what steps were taken once chronically absent students traveled through the attendance process at their schools. Monique shared that at the school she teaches, parents are able to call students out/report their absences ten times and those will become excused absences. Any absences after these ten days are unexcused unless families are able to provide a medical note. Monique also shared the following:

“Other than that, there is not really a clear-cut policy in terms of making up work, seat time in the actual class, and those kinds of things. I mean we have had seniors graduate that maybe have attended less than ten days of school during a school year and somehow, they were able to get done what they needed to get done. So, it is interesting because we know that the teachers know the ten days and everything, but after that we are not really in the loop of what happens.”

Monique also shared that the fact that students are able to graduate without coming to school often has a negative effect on students that attend school with fidelity. Monique also shared that at times when attendance becomes chronic school administrator will say, “well there is nothing

we can do about it.” Monique feels like the school administrators at times change attendance data to reflect less chronically absent students or just gives up on the students.

Katherine shared that when students are tardy or absent the following consequences may be involved: in school suspension (ISS) referral, out of school suspension (OSS), and maybe a counseling referral. Also, sometimes administrators would conduct home visits. Katherine did not always feel like these consequences were consistent or providing solutions for addressing chronic absenteeism. More importantly, Katherine did not feel like the attendance policies were addressing many of her senior students that were missing school due to be tired from working so many hours. Once students were absent for 20 to 30 days in a row they were dropped from the school’s roster. Katherine felt that many students only attended school to play sports or attend prom, but the attendance mandates for these events and activities have not been consistent throughout the years.

During her interview, Denise shared that when students are absent someone from the school’s office staff contacts the family daily. This was stressful to her, because if a teacher’s first period attendance is not accurate or a student comes late, the parent may be contacted unnecessarily. Denise shared that some families get annoyed when they receive attendance phone calls often. Denise also felt that knowing someone from the school would call about attendance, often made teachers feel like they did not necessarily have to contact and have communication with the family. Denise shared that this could be detrimental to building relationships with students and their families. When Denise was asked to describe the school’s attendance policy she responded, “it is in my binder.” Denise admitted that she should be more familiar with the school’s attendance policy, but the only thing that she was able to concretely share was that families are contacted when their student is absent, and that guidance and school

administration works with chronically absent students. The attendance policies at Caleb's school aligns with that of Denise's. Parents are called at the end of first period, if students are absent too many times in a week the teacher makes contact with the family, then administration steps in. Caleb could not give any detailed information on the actual attendance policies.

During her interview, Emily shared that school administration meets weekly with the school social worker to talk about major attendance problems. However, she was not sure of how the social worker identified or followed up with chronically absent students. Emily also shared that students must bring in a note from parents on their third missed day, which rarely happened. Parents are also able to request long-term make-up work after students miss four consecutive days. Also, when students have health concerns, they must participate in a program called hospital homebound and a separate teacher goes to the student's home to work with the student.

Theme 5: Teacher-student relationships play a role in addressing chronic absenteeism.

During the interview, each participant was given the opportunity to share information about one high school student that he/she taught that was chronically absent. Each participant was asked to explain the actions that he/she took to address the student's attendance, the results, and if he/she wished he/she would have done anything differently when working with the student. The researcher felt like it was important for the participants to share specific details about a chronically absent student because the data from the survey showed that overall, the participants believed that the student-teacher relationship played a role in student attendance.

Participant 1: Katherine

During Katherine's interview, she discussed a student that missed school often because she had social anxiety. Katherine was able to provide this student with some grace and support because she was familiar with her situation. Katherine had this student in her class when she was

in middle school. One thing that was different for the student in high school was that she had officially been diagnosed with social anxiety and had a 504 plan to accompany the diagnosis. Even though the student still got anxious and often missed school, her attendance improved with the additional support. Katherine felt like the student attended school more in high school, because she could better understand why she felt uncomfortable attending school and she was able to realize that her issues were legit. Katherine shared that she learned from this student and her absenteeism. Katherine felt like her and the student were able to create a relationship, because she never embarrassed her, she had one-on-one conversations with her, would set her work aside, and did not penalize her for having late work.

Participant 2: Monique

Monique discussed one of her male students who missed school often. Monique thought that this particular student missed a lot of school, because he struggled academically. So, when the school team was able to work together to identify him as having a disability that qualified him for special education, Denise thought this would lead to great improvements for the student academically and in regards to attendance. This actually was the case for the first semester, where in was excelling and committed to school. However, during the second semester his grades and attendance began to decline.

Monique shared that this student's father is not in the picture, so at home he is considered the man of the house. When his attendance and grades began to decline again his mom had just lost her job. At this time, the student felt like he had to take a step back from school and take care of things at home. Monique was very concerned about this young man, so she reached out to the student, his mother, his friends, his special education manager, and the school counselor. Some family members stopped answering Monique's calls, friends said they had not heard from

him, and when the school counselor conducted a home visit the student answered the door and said he was busy and refused to come to school with the school counselor. The student said he could not attend school, because he had things that he needed to do. Based off of information from other students, it was suspected that the student had begun making money illegally to help his mom out with taking care of the house. Despite all of Monique's efforts, she wished that she was able to connect with the student a bit more so she could help him improve his attendance and establish a better relationship with him.

Participant 3: Denise

Denise chose to discuss one of her former male students that was chronically absent and missed more than 50% of the school year. Denise felt like the student missed so much school because he had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and struggled academically, along with the fact that he may have been involved in some illegal activities. When the student would randomly come to school, he would be so far behind that he struggled even more. He would often miss so much school and Biology labs that Denise would feel like, "I cannot give you this experience right now; I can give you the next one if you are here." She knew how defeated and lost he must have felt because he would be so far behind in class. Denise also felt like it was hard to catch the student at school and his guardian on the phone. Despite not being able to truly get through to the student or his aunt, Denise tried to wrap around and support the student from behind the scenes. So whenever he was present, she tried to ensure that they were doing something fun and engaging. Denise even tried to tailor some of the class assignments to things that would help the student fix his grade faster. In this situation, if Denise could have done anything differently she would have contacted the student's guardian more consistently to express the importance of him coming to school and to overall build a better relationship.

Participant 4: Emily

Here is some of what Emily shared when she was asked to discuss a high school student that was chronically absent.

“I had a student last semester, who I will call Kyle. He was chronically absent, or at least tardy, but usually absent. I checked his attendance in his other classes via email and saw that although his attendance was not perfect in those classes, it was a lot better than mine. I called home and got a disconnected line. I spoke to him in class and he said, ‘it is not my fault, I cannot get here on time.’ I pressed him (good naturedly) and he said he and his brother were both absent/tardy a lot. I asked why and he did not want to answer. I mentioned it to his administrator and he said they had always been like that and it was due to ‘problems’ at home. I dropped it after that.”

Even though Emily had one-on-one conversations with Kyle, conducted attendance checks, attempted home contact, and admin contact, his attendance only improved marginally right after interventions. Emily wishes that Kyle would have opened up more to her. However, she did not want to press him. When administration informed Emily that Kyle and his brother were chronically absent before, she felt like there was not much that she could do as one individual.

Participant 5: Caleb

Caleb discussed a student that he had, who missed more than 60% of the school year. Even though Caleb had a good relationship with the student, he never contacted the student’s family about the attendance concerns. However, Caleb discussed this student and his attendance with the school administration. He was informed that the student has always had attendance issues. The school administrators told him to have work ready for the student whenever he

returns. When reflecting on the attendance issue with this particular student Caleb said the following, “I wish I would have reached out to the family to inform them of the importance of the class and that their student needed to be present.”

Conclusion

Overall, the participants agreed that chronic absenteeism is a prevalent issue and concern among high school students. The participants also agreed that the student-teacher relationship played a role in student attendance. The participants also agreed that as teachers they should play some sort of role in addressing student attendance. However, the participants did not think that they were the main or most vital owner of addressing student attendance. Most participants also did not feel like they were equipped with the skills, knowledge, or comfortability to actually address student attendance in-depth. Participants felt like this role belonged to school administration or school counselors. Interestingly, the stories and experiences that the participants shared during the study showed that despite what they feel like their role is in addressing chronic absenteeism, their relationship with students played a role in better understanding or improving chronic absenteeism in their classrooms and schools. The participants were truly at the frontline of addressing and unpacking chronic absenteeism. No one else in their schools could share the experiences that they conveyed during the study.

Essentially, it appears that teachers do not feel comfortable with having such a demanding task as their full responsibility. The researcher believes that the participants do not feel they have the capacity to effectively address chronic absenteeism. This may be because of the various responsibilities that they have as teachers, their comfort level, or the tools that they have provided with at their various schools. While some participants were aware of the school’s attendance policy, this was only foundational. Not all of the participants could give in-depth

information on how student attendance was addressed once they reported the concern to the school administrator or counselor. At times it also seemed as though participants did not truly know who at their school handled chronic absenteeism; they just knew that the responsibility should not solely belong to them as teachers.

Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

The findings of this study sought to unpack the complex issue of chronic absenteeism among high school students and to learn more about the role that teachers play in addressing the concern. The goal was not to argue whether chronic absenteeism is prevalent in high schools, but instead to gain insight on how high school teachers perceive chronic absenteeism in schools in which they work. The overarching question that guided this study is: What are the lived experiences of high school teachers in work with students who are chronically absent?

An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized to assist in learning more about the experiences of high school teachers as it relates to chronic absenteeism. IPA strives to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). The IPA is a two-fold: participants are trying to make sense of their world and researchers are trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world. Emphasis is on taking the time to learn what it is like from the point of view of the participants. A downside of IPA is relying on the participants willingness and vulnerability in regards to disclosing information. “People struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling, there may be reasons why they do not wish to self-disclose and the researcher has to interpret people’s mental and emotional state from what they say” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54). Grounded in IPA, the findings of this study make meanings of how research participants perceive a phenomenon.

Research findings supported the literature and research that chronic absenteeism is a very prevalent issue in high schools nationwide. Research findings also supported that teachers are aware that chronic absenteeism is a problem, but they often do not know the exact protocols for

addressing the concern or do not feel like it is truly their responsibility. Research findings revealed that even when high school teachers do feel like they have some sort of responsibility in addressing chronic absenteeism, they may not feel prepared or comfortable. In this section, I present a discussion of the findings and offer implications for future practice and research. The hope is that the recommendations are utilized by high schools and the field of education to increase awareness of chronic absenteeism, attendance protocols, and attendance interventions. This would in return, improve attendance rates and decrease chronic absenteeism.

Overview of Findings

The following findings emerged through an analysis of participant experiences:

1. Every participant agreed and recognized that chronic absenteeism is present in their classrooms and is a major concern among high school students. During the interviews, each participant shared detailed information on attendance trends that he/she have observed as a teacher.
2. Each participant mentioned that the pandemic and presence of COVID-19 has added barriers as it relates to student attendance. Essentially, the pandemic added an additional layer to an already complex issue in high schools.
3. Every teacher that participated in the study felt that they could have more of an impact on his/her student's academic success if they attended school more.
4. Each participant believed that the teacher-student relationship played a role in addressing chronic absenteeism. However, they did not believe that it was 100% of the teacher's responsibility to address chronic absenteeism. They also did not feel like they were completely equipped with the toolkit or skill set to effectively address chronic

absenteeism; eventually they hit a dead end and felt like it was appropriate for someone else in their school to address the concern.

5. Even if a teacher was familiar with his/her school's attendance policies, no teacher could recite the attendance policies with 100% completion and accuracy. There was always a gap in information or uncertainty when sharing the details of his/her school's attendance policies.

Discussion of Research Findings in Relation to the Literature

During the study, the participants provided the researcher with some new insights regarding chronic absenteeism in high school. There was also some information shared during the study that aligned with literature centered around chronic absenteeism. This section will discuss some trends that were mentioned both in the literature and the study.

Factors Associated with Students Being Chronically Absent

Financial Obligation and Family Roles

Literature has revealed that family obligations and roles often play a role in students missing school. According to Demir and Karabeyoglu (2015), "conditions at home have a significant impact on children's attendance and their promptness" (p. 41). There are times when students miss school because they are forced to contribute to the home financially (Garry 1996). Students working to help support their families was also a reality during this research study. Katherine and Emily shared that they had students who missed school due to work obligations. Emily shared that students would prefer to work long hours at night and submit work online, instead of physically attending school.

Katherine shared that it was her experience that at times students were too tired from working to come to school. Katherine was also concerned with the amount of hours that students

were being allowed to work. Katherine shared that students were making more money than they were used to at their age so they felt like they did not need school to be successful or make money in the future. Katherine believed that this should have been a concern for employees and also the community as a whole, because she felt that during high school education should be a priority. Katherine's desire to have the community and school involved in addressing the importance of high students attending high school versus working is important. Even though Katherine's students were comfortable with the amount of money they were making as young people, society is ever-changing and more responsibilities come with age.

Health and Medical Absenteeism

Throughout the literature it was established that students often miss school for reasons related to health and medical appointments. This information was also shared during interviews for the study. Physical and mental health conditions play a role in students missing school. Some of these conditions are diabetes, seizure disorders, anxiety, and attention deficit disorder (Grant & Brito, 2010). A condition that was not shared often in the literature but was mentioned throughout the study was COVID-19. The pandemic that was associated with COVID-19 has played a major role in students being able to attend school. During the 2019-2020 school year, K-12 schools in the United States were forced to switch from face-to-face instruction to virtual learning (Lake & Dusseault, 2020). Student achievement and attendance was impacted by COVID-19, because the virtual learning was sudden and there were large gaps in technology and more. Once students were able to return to face-to-face instruction, they were still impacted by COVID-19 due to having to miss school if they had COVID-19 or having to quarantine when they were exposed to COVID-19. This also played a role in student achievement and attendance.

A condition that was mentioned during the literature review and the study was social anxiety, which is considered a mental health medical condition (Grant & Brito, 2010). Throughout the literature it was shared that social anxiety, social phobia, and other psychiatric conditions often lead to students having a decline in attendance (Kearney, 2008; Ingul et al., 2012). During the study, Katherine shared that she had a student who ended up being diagnosed with social anxiety and receiving a 504 plan once his/her parents expressed concern about his/her attendance. While the student's attendance did not become perfect once he/she was diagnosed, the attendance and the student's behavior did bring attention to a more alarming concern and the student was able to receive even more support. When students have disorders such as social anxiety, it is very important for them to feel comfortable and supported. This shows how medical absenteeism can align with school climate and positive teacher-student relationships.

Teacher-student Relationships Play a Role in Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

Katherine shared that she never punished her student that struggled with social anxiety. Katherine never called the student out for missing school, instead she worked with her in hopes of helping her be a successful student. When teachers such as Katherine, can monitor student attendance, unpack the concerns related to the student being absent, and show compassion they are able to impact student attendance (Allensworth & Evans, 2016; Gase et al., 2016). When teachers such as Katherine utilize this teacher move, which is probably innate to them, they are positively impacting students, their attendance, and overall academic success. Teacher relationships, which can be utilized as an attendance intervention shows students that attendance is important and that their presence in class matters. This aligns with the research that discusses how the teacher role is centered around more than academics and curriculum (Uslu & Gizir, 2017).

An effective teacher role now forces teachers to provide students with a learning environment that delivers instruction and facilitates positive relationships (Uslu & Gizir, 2017). If the social and emotional needs of students are not met, it is often difficult for them to meet their full academic potential. When students in low-income communities have access to teacher-student relationships and classroom environments that meet their social and emotional needs, they are provided with the chance to feel safe and protected. These sort of teacher-student relationships and safe havens give students a chance to focus on their academics and themselves as individuals instead of factors such as family, depression, life outside of school, and more (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Despite only one participant in this study strongly agreeing that he/she has a role in improving student attendance, research literature and the narrative shared during the study prove that the teacher-student relationship plays a role in addressing chronic absenteeism and is vital to improving attendance. The teacher-student relationship has positively impacted student attendance even though they do not feel like they are provided with the skills to be effective. Even with the lack of professional development centered around teachers addressing chronic absenteeism, many teachers like Katherine naturally have a skillset that has allowed them to improve attendance.

Attendance Protocols are Often Unclear

During the study no teacher was 100% clear on his/her school's attendance polices. Also, no teacher had 100% been equipped with the tools needed to address chronic absenteeism. This was very concerning, however it also aligned with previous research that was presented during the study. Railsback (2004) shared that attendance policies should be publicized and understood by school staff. While the research participants were somewhat familiar with his/her school's attendance policies, they would often pause during the interviews because they were unsure of a

next step, exact details, and/or where to find the attendance policies and procedures. The research participants would also stumble when asked what happens to the attendance information that they share with their administrators, school counselors, or school social workers. For this reason, schools should have a system in place that effectively outlines reporting, recording, and monitoring attendance. In schools, attendance policies should be publicized and understood by school staff and students. This would ensure that school staff, students, and families are receiving clear messaging and the importance of attendance is understood (Demir & Akman Karabeyogula, 2015).

The reality is that the attendance procedures that many schools have in place are inconsistent, which leads to a lack of change when addressing chronic absenteeism (Robinson, 2009). During the interviews, a few participants shared that they felt at times the attendance policies were changed or inconsistent. It was also shared that at times school attendance data was changed so that the school could be represented in a more positive light and/or to ensure that students graduated. This is very problematic. When attendance policies are not implemented with fidelity this sends the wrong messaging and devalues the importance of attendance (Clarke, 2008). The inconsistency of policies, lack of clarity, little sense of investment, and absence of proper training and education as it relates to chronic absenteeism is often what led research participants to share during interviews that they did not feel like they should be responsible for attendance. For various stakeholders to effectively address chronic absenteeism schools must have attendance policies and systems that are fair, consistent, and comprehensive. The attendance policies must be known and there must be system in place that allows attendance data to be analyzed and utilized to improve chronic absenteeism (Railsback, 2004).

Limitations

As with any study, there were limitations present during this study despite the steps that were taken. One limitation that the researcher felt was present was the ability for participants to be truly vulnerable. Often times during the interviews the researcher felt like participants were initially hesitant to share information. It felt as though the participants did not want to shed light on whether or not attendance policies and information was shared with teachers. The participants also seemed a little reluctant when the information they shared revealed that his/her school did not implement and/or enforce the attendance policies with fidelity. One reason that the researcher feels that it was difficult for the participants to be completely vulnerable initially is because two of the participants were teachers at the school in which she is a school counselor. The two participants from the same school as the researcher and the other participants were also more vulnerable with their feelings on their role in addressing chronic absenteeism during the initial questionnaire versus the interview. It appeared that the participants were hesitant to share their true knowledge of the attendance policies at the school in which they work or even their true feelings on the role that they feel they should play in addressing chronic absenteeism. Once dialogue began during the interview, the researcher could see the participants becoming more comfortable and recognizing the true complexity of chronic absenteeism in schools.

Similar to the vulnerability of the participants during the study, the researcher's positionality could also be seen as a limitation. As a school counselor and the person that was responsible for implementing attendance interventions at her school, the topic of chronic absenteeism was very familiar for her. The researcher's thoughts on who should address chronic absenteeism and/or how chronic absenteeism should be addressed also played a role in her positionality. However, the researcher addressed her positionality in Chapter 1. The researcher

also worked really hard to engage in dialogue with the participants without allowing countertransference to be present. The researcher's experience as a counselor, choosing to utilize an interpretive paradigm, and being able to self-reflect after interviews are what made her feel more comfortable in her ability to limit bias.

Additionally, the process for conducting interviews was a limitation. Similar to students, many adults and teachers have gotten comfortable with how we as a society interacted during the onset of the pandemic during the spring of 2020. During this time, we utilized more indirect contact methods. For instance, there were more opportunities to complete surveys and questionnaires in place of meeting with individuals. While the participants had the option of participating in the interviews online, which they all chose, the researcher recognized that participants preferred answering the questionnaire more than the actual interview. Participants preferred being able to answer the questions at their leisure. As stated previously the participants were also more vulnerable during the questionnaires. Society has become very comfortable with some of the flexibility that was presented when the pandemic first began; a participant even requested to not turn on his/her camera during the interview.

Another barrier during the interview process was the timeframe for interviews. Due to IRB approval, the researcher requested that participants participated in the study during the summer. However, for teachers this is typically a time off in which they do not have to focus much on school related activities and are able to travel and have personal time. Despite, there being individuals that were interested in the research topic, personal requests for participation, social media requests, requests via word of mouth, and more there was still a limit on number of teachers that would commit to participate in the full study (questionnaire and interview). Some teachers would verbally show interest and commit but would not answer the questionnaire that

was sent via email. Other teachers would complete the questionnaire and then no longer communicate with the researcher. Due to the complexities of participant recruitment, it being summer vacation, and some prospective members only wanting to complete the initial interview there was a small sample size for the study. The researcher sought to have at least eight to ten participants to ensure there was an appropriate sample size. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to secure the intended number of research participants. This process and lack of participation was very discouraging for the researcher and even reminded her of attempts to communicate with students, families, teachers, and school staff while trying to address chronic absenteeism in her role as a school counselor.

A primary limitation of small sample sizes in qualitative studies is the lack of generalizability (Krysiak, 2018). Consequently, the researcher cannot assert the finding's claims to the general population of teachers outside this sample. However, the overall goal of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Despite the small sample size, the researcher achieved saturation by ensuring no new information emerged from the data during data collection. Therefore, the study fulfilled the goal of qualitative research by expanding the knowledge surrounding teacher's perception of his/her role in addressing chronic absenteeism.

Implications for Future Study

It is evident that research in chronic absenteeism must continue in order for the field of education to continue to grow and adapt. It is also imperative for research to continue because the area of concern is evolving, new areas of concern are arising, and students attending school more often is beneficial to their current and future success. To further contribute to the research on teachers' perceptions of their roles in addressing chronic absenteeism, future replications of this study should increase the sample size. An increased sample size would provide a sample

more representative of the population of teachers working with students in underserved schools experiencing attendance challenges. Future replications of this study should also consider the perceptions of teachers working in school demographics beyond urban settings; this may include the perceptions of teachers working in rural or suburban schools with high levels of absenteeism. Expanding the study may also include interviewing elementary and middle school teachers and comparing their perceptions to those of high school teachers.

Additionally, research surrounding chronic absenteeism and school attendance could also benefit from the implementation of focus groups that allow teachers, school administrators, and school counselors to openly discuss chronic absenteeism. Focus groups could allow educators to further unpack the complex issue of chronic absenteeism that impacts all their roles and the students that they serve. Conducting focus groups could also be pivotal in allowing educators to work together to create attendance policies and interventions that could impact their schools.

Recommendations for Practice

Understanding the history and causes of chronic absenteeism could be beneficial for all individuals that work in schools with students. While it is understood that that chronic absenteeism is a concern, there seems to be little effort utilized to truly unpack the layers of chronic absenteeism and how they impact schools. The study's findings suggest that it could be beneficial for school officials and others that work closely with chronic absenteeism to conduct research on the attendance trends at their school, in their district, in their city, and in their state. It is important for each school to become comfortable with absenteeism as it relates to their community, because attendance trends that are national are not always a reflection of local policy (Teasley, 2004). For this reason, localized awareness and knowledge could be more impactful on individual schools.

Once school-based and local-level research is conducted, school officials should create and present what is learned to school staff in the form of summer professional development. During the professional development the attendance history, attendance data from the previous school year, the school's attendance policies and procedures, interventions that have been utilized in the past, and current roles/responsibilities for addressing chronic absenteeism should be shared with the school staff. This would ensure more clarity and that all school staff are familiar with absenteeism and how it impacts the school in which they work. Schools could also benefit from turning the summer staff professional development into a parent/family presentation that would be shared at the beginning of the school year during orientation, open house, and more. This information could also be shared in school newsletters, on the school's website, on teacher websites, and other platforms that students and parents frequent often.

Another practice recommendation is for schools to create attendance teams consisting of various stakeholders. The reality is that it should not be the responsibility of any one person to address chronic absenteeism in schools. Often, individuals such as school counselors, social workers, and/or administrators work in silos while addressing chronic absenteeism and this does not work. Chronic absenteeism is too heavy of a load for one role to carry. Also, if a school has a history of having an attendance team it should be common school knowledge and the team should work together with fidelity. The researcher suggests that the attendance team at each school consists of the following: an administrator from each grade, a school counselor or social worker, a teacher from each grade, a local police officer, a local attorney, the school nurse, a trusted parent representative, and members of school partnering organizations. The team should meet weekly to discuss the attendance data from the week before. The team should work together to create interventions for students.

The interventions developed by the attendance team should incorporate specific attendance expectations. For example, an expectation could be that once a student has missed 5 days of school, parents/guardians receive an attendance letter. Once a student misses 10 days, a meeting should be requested for parents/guardians to join the attendance team. Parents/guardians should also be required to sign an attendance contract at the end of the meeting. As a part of this recommended intervention, middle or high school students should also sign attendance contracts to reflect their understanding of the importance of attendance, and their agreement to adhere to the contract. Once a student misses 15 days, a home visit should be conducted with members from the attendance team. During this home visit, the parents/guardians and students (if applicable) should sign another letter. A mentor assigned by the attendance team should also be present during the home visit. Once a student misses 20 days, the student and family should be required to attend a school hearing. As an intervention component, students should not be able to participate in extracurricular activities or attend school events when out of compliance with their attendance contract. The goal of this consequence would be to encourage students to improve their attendance by making them active participants in their education responsibilities.

The third recommendation is to give teachers and students a more active role in addressing chronic absenteeism. Teachers and fellow student are aware of a student's attendance issues before anyone else. It would be beneficial for teachers to submit a referral to the attendance team when one of their students has missed two or more days in a school week. In addition to submitting the referral to the attendance team, teachers should contact home to alert families of the attendance, gain insight, and show concern. Teachers would also submit a referral if a student misses four or more days in their class within a month. Teachers' active role could also consist of them creating individual attendance plans with students that are chronically

absent. This plan could include incentives, check-ins, a plan for making up work, and a peer buddy.

Having peer buddies for addressing chronic absenteeism would allow students to play an active role in supporting their peers in addressing attendance. Teachers could also utilize a peer buddy when they become aware that particular students are missing school often. With permission, the peer buddy would receive the student's contact information and contact the student to provide them with homework when he/she is absent. The peer buddy will also provide the student with assistance while completing the assignments. Most importantly, the peer buddy would check-in with the student and let them know that they are missed from school. It is vital for students to feel connected to school and increasing the role of teachers and students can help.

Conclusion

Chronic absenteeism is an issue that has been prevalent in education for years and is still a concern today. However, there is work in schools and research in academia that needs to be done to help decrease chronic absenteeism among students. While there are some causes of chronic absenteeism that are hard to address, there are still interventions that can be utilized when working with chronically absent students. For chronically absent students to be successful at school and in the future, it is imperative that their attendance trends are addressed aggressively and early on. When addressing chronic absenteeism in schools, this should be a collaborative effort that no one person is responsible for. Forcing one individual or role to be responsible for such a complex issue, is unfair and a disservice to students, families, and schools. Addressing chronic absenteeism requires research, planning, communication, and commitment.

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Appendix A

Signed Informed Consent Document Northeastern University, Doctor of Education

Name of Investigator(s): Sara Ewell, Ashlee Razor

Title of Project: Unpacking Chronic Absenteeism: Teachers' Perceptions of Absenteeism Among High School Students

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Key Information

- Your consent is being sought for participation in a research project and your participation is voluntary.
- The purpose of the research is to better understand the experiences and perspectives of high school teachers as it relates to chronic absenteeism and students that are chronically absent. The purpose is also to get a better understanding of how teachers perceive their role in understanding and improving student absenteeism.
- The anticipated amount of time that your participation will take will be an hour and a half.
- The procedures that you will be asked to complete will be:
 - An online demographic questionnaire to provide the research with some information about yourself.
 - This should take no more than 30 minutes.
 - A virtual one-on-one interview.
 - This will be approximately an hour.
- There are no foreseeable risks to participants. Participants are able to share to their level of comfort.
- Participating in this research will allow researchers to share and reflect on their experiences of teaching students that are chronically absent.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this research study, because you are a high school teacher and have had experience teaching students that are chronically absent. Your role as a teacher is valued and your experiences could contribute to the research related to attendance in schools.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to get teacher perspectives as it relates to chronic absenteeism, which is a concern in schools nationwide. This research study will add to the field of education and attendance research. This research study is also a component of the researcher's doctoral program and will aide in their studies as a scholar-practitioner.

What will I be asked to do?

- If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to complete a questionnaire.
 - The questionnaire will provide the researcher with demographics about yourself, such as how long you have been teaching, the grade level that you teach, if you have ever worked with chronically absent students, and the number of schools that you have taught at.
- You will also be asked to participate in an one-on-one interview.
 - During the interview you will be able to share your experiences with teaching students that are chronically absent.
 - You will also be able to share with the researcher the steps that you have taken when working with chronically absent students.
 - You will be able to share your understanding of chronic absenteeism and its relationship with your role as a teacher.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed utilizing an online/virtual platform, such as Microsoft TEAMS or Zoom. The interview will take about an hour.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There are no foreseeable risks to participants. Participants are able to share to their level of comfort. If at any time you do feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed, you can decline to answer a particular question. You can also ask the research to pause the interview and give you a break.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may play a role in how you view attendance moving forward.

Who will see the information about me?

Your identity will be kept confidential and anonymous. At no time, will your name or name of school be shared. You will be given a pseudonym for when the information and data is shared. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project. No one will have access to the data other than the researcher and her advisor, the principal investigator. The data shared during the data will be kept on the researcher's computer that is protected by a pin/password. The recordings from the interviews will be destroyed once the study is completely done.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. It will not be held against you if you choose not to participate in the study. The researcher also will not have any further contact with you as it relates the study.

Even once a participant signs this informed consent and agrees to participate in the study, he/she can leave the research at any time. study or continue with participating in the study. If you decide to withdraw from the research prior to the end of the study, your data will not be included in data analysis.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

The risk of research-related injury is not anticipated. If there is some unexpected adverse effect from the research, no special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research. Please remember, this research is voluntary and is centered around an one-on-one interview.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, there is no penalty.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Ashlee Razor at haynes.a@northeastern.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Sara Ewell at s.ewell@northeastern.edu, the Principal Investigator.

Appendix B

Pre-Interview/Demographic Questionnaire

1. What grade level do you currently teach?
 - a. 9th Grade
 - b. 10th Grade
 - c. 11th Grade
 - d. 12th Grade
2. In what city and state do you currently teach?
3. Are there students that you teach that qualify for free or reduced lunch? (Mark only one response).
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Years of Teaching Experience (Mark only one response.)
 - a. This is my first year teaching.
 - b. 1-5 years
 - c. 6-15 years
 - d. More than 25 years
5. Are you familiar with the term chronic absenteeism? (Mark only one response.)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Chronic absenteeism is a major concern in high school. (Mark only one response.)
 - a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
7. The teacher has a role in addressing student attendance.
 - a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
8. The teacher has a role in improving student attendance.
 - a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
9. The student-teacher relationship plays a role in student attendance.
 - a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
10. The teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student misses more than one day of school in a week.
 - a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2

- c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
11. The teacher has a responsibility to call home when a student's absences are hindering the student's academic success.
- a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
12. The teacher should provide students and families with a protocol for informing the teacher of absences
- a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
13. The teacher has a responsibility to notify the appropriate school official when a student has missed several days of school or has an alarming attendance trend.
- a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
14. The teacher should be invested in student attendance.
- a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
15. As a teacher, I am comfortable talking to students and families about attendance.
- a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
16. As a teacher, I feel equipped with the necessary skills needed to address student attendance.
- a. 1: Strongly Disagree
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4: Strongly Agree
17. Who should you report to if you are concerned with student attendance?
18. Are you familiar with your school's attendance policy?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
19. If you are interested in participating in this study and sharing your experiences working with students that have attendance concerns, please confirm your email address for an individual interview.
20. Are you available for an interview during the week of June 13th or the week of June 20th?
If so, what days and/or time work best for you?

21. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this study please share them here.

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Participant (Pseudonym):

Briefly describe the research & interview procedures, ensure confidentiality, and remind the participant that he/she has the ability to decline answering any question during the interview. Also, remind the participant that he/she can pause or stop the interview at any time.

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. Have you always taught on the high school level?
3. How long have you been a teacher at your current school?
4. If applicable, how many other schools have you taught at?
5. Are there students that you teach that qualify for free or reduced lunch?
6. Have you always worked with this population of students?
7. How would you describe the overall attendance trends in your classes?
8. What do you do when a student misses your class?
9. What do you do when you realize that a student has missed your class more than 5 times?
10. When a student returns to your class after being absent for several days, what do you do?
11. Why do you feel like your students do not show up to your class?
 - a. Or to school overall?
12. Tell me about a high school student that you taught that was chronically absent?
 - a. What actions did you take to address this student's attendance?
 - i. What were the results?
 - b. Did you contact the student's parents?
 - c. Is there anything that you wish you would have done differently?
 - d. What kind of overall relationship did you have with this student?

13. In your role as a teacher what do you feel like you can do to address chronic absenteeism?
14. Who is responsible for addressing student attendance concerns at your school?
 - a. What are his/her responsibilities
15. What is the attendance policy at your school?
16. Describe the attendance practices in your school?
 - a. How are these different than other schools that you have worked at?
17. Overall, do you feel like you have a role in responding to attendance concerns?
18. Is there anything additional that you would like to add?