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Causes of Nonattendance and Its Effect on Student Achievement at the High School Level

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Causes of Nonattendance and Its Effect

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by

Kelly D. Bracht

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Causes of Nonattendance and

Its Affect on Student

Achievement

by

Kelly D. Bracht
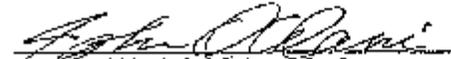
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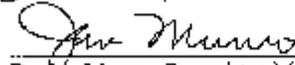
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Dr. Jan Munro, Committee Member   Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Kelly Dawn Bracht

Signature: _KBracht_____ Date: 9/24/10

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Abstract

Many high schools in America have issues with student nonattendance. The researcher designed this mixed methods study to determine the affect of nonattendance on student achievement and to ascertain whether home-related factors or school-related factors were more significant causes of nonattendance. Both the high school in this study and other similar schools may use the results to develop effective nonattendance intervention programs.

The researcher used cluster sampling to determine the sample population. She then collected attendance data (the number of absences each student had during one semester) and achievement data (each student's Grade Point Average during that same semester) about each of the participants. To determine the affect of attendance on student achievement, the researcher found the correlation and regression statistics of the two data sets. The author concluded that, at the high school in question, there was a small negative correlation between student attendance and student achievement; therefore, in most cases, the more absences a student had, the lower his or her Grade Point Average.

The researcher surveyed the same sample population to ascertain whether home-related factors or school-related factors were more significant causes of nonattendance. The survey consisted of four parts, the first three of which were used to collect information regarding the causes of nonattendance. The final part of the survey was used to collect demographic and family background information from the participants. The researcher concluded that home-related factors were more

significant causes of student non-attendance than school-related factors. However, in terms of influencing student attendance, student perceptions of and attitudes about both home and school were found to be equally important. The researcher gleaned some surprising information from the study surveys, the implications of which are vital to solving the problem of nonattendance.

The researcher also noted several areas in which her data indicated that further study would be beneficial. These areas include, but are not limited to, parental perceptions and attitudes about school, the impact of race on student attendance, and the relationship between parents' levels of education and student attendance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Truancy and nonattendance are substantial problems in many high schools today. Many schools have programs in place to combat truancy/nonattendance with the hope of increasing their overall attendance rates. However, these programs can be misguided. Some programs focus on students who skip individual classes (rather than whole days of school). Other programs focus on trying to raise the attendance rates of students who already have good attendance, thus increasing the school's overall Average Daily Attendance rate. Where many of these programs are lacking is in finding ways to motivate students with poor attendance to come to school. In order to do this, the school administrators must know why these students do not come to school. This study is designed to answer that question.

The answer to that question is important for several reasons. Truancy and nonattendance can both lead to a multitude of problems, including dropping out of school altogether, poor academic achievement, and increased engagement in risk behaviors. One example of this comes from San Bernadino, California. According to data collected by the District Attorney's Office, there are several alarming statistics related to truancy and nonattendance. For example, 78% of current inmates had truancy as the cause of their first arrest, and 67% of truants tested positive for drugs at the time they were arrested. In addition, 57% of violent crimes committed by teens happen on school days, and 82% of all prisoners in San Bernadino are high school dropouts. Truants are also at a higher risk of involvement with gangs, drugs, alcohol, and violence (Starr, 2002).

Researchers have documented the relationship between absenteeism and risk behaviors, such as alcohol use, tobacco use, drug use, and sexual behavior, for some time.

This documentation goes back as early as the 1970s and has continued in recent years (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008). Henry (2007) also found a high correlation between truancy and drug use. The social development model suggests a link between absenteeism and risk behaviors, because it states that students with strong bonds to school are less likely to engage in risk behaviors. Since students with strong bonds to school tend to have good attendance, it logically follows that students with poor attendance would be more likely to engage in risk behaviors.

Nonattendance is not an issue unique to the United States. It is also a significant problem in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. In many places, even though schools are spending more and more resources on programs to address the issue, it seems to be getting worse (Davies & Lee, 2006). Eaton et al. (2008) estimated that nearly 10% of students enrolled in United States public schools are absent daily.

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that daily absence rates were as high as 30% in some cities, with New York City public schools having absentee rates of approximately 15%, and Los Angeles, California schools having daily absentee rates of 10%. Some schools within the Boston Public Schools system are missing as many as 20% of their student population on any given day (Starr, 2002). In 2002, Hallfors et al. found that close to 10% of all students enrolled in public schools in the United States are absent every day. A few years later, Eaton et al. (2008) confirmed the earlier finding that in some larger cities up to 30% of students are absent in a single day. Furthermore, in New York, the areas of central Brooklyn, Harlem, and South Bronx reported that approximately 90,000 elementary school students missed at least one month's worth of school in a single school year (Medina, 2008).

A review of the existing literature reveals little research in the areas of reasons for truancy/nonattendance and the relationship between student attendance and achievement. There is a sizeable pool of research from the 1980s, less from the 1990s, and very little from the 2000s. Schools, as well as social and family constructs, have changed during this time, which suggests that reasons for truancy and nonattendance may have changed as well. It is valuable to research this question in the new millennium to ensure that schools' efforts to combat truancy and improve student achievement remain in line with the reasons students do not attend school in the first place.

This study investigated the most prevalent causes for student nonattendance at the high school level and the relationship between attendance and achievement, as indicated by the Grade Point Averages (GPAs) of the students in the study. The researcher conducted the study at a suburban high school in St. Louis, Missouri.

Background of Study

The researcher conducted this study at a suburban high school of approximately 1,390 students in St. Louis, Missouri. The school's demographics, which were downloaded

Table 1
Overall Student Demographics of the High School in this Study

Demographic Group	%
African-American	84%
Caucasian	13%
Other Ethnicity	3%
Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	62%
Special Education Students	16%

from the school's student information system, are shown in Table 1. This school has not met

the state or federal requirements for attendance for the past 5 years. Both the State of

Missouri's Annual Performance Report (APR) and the United States Adequate Yearly

Progress (AYP) report have set a goal of 93% Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The state

uses the APR rating to determine whether they will grant accreditation to the district. The

high school used in this study has consistently had an ADA ranging between 89.1%-92.4%

and, therefore, has not met this standard for accreditation.
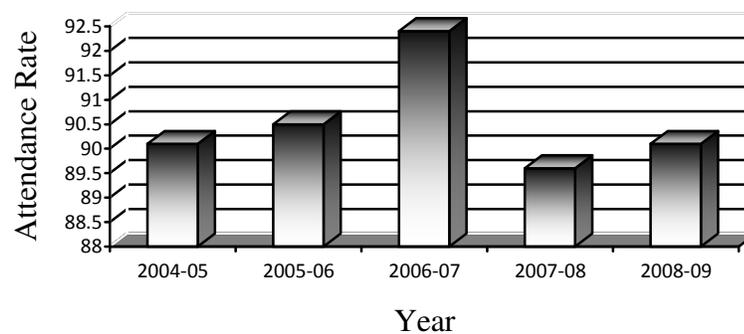
Figure 1. Average daily attendance over the past 5 years

At the time of this study, the high school had an Attendance Contract system to

address the issues of truancy and nonattendance. This program consisted of three steps. The

first step was that the administration mailed home a letter when a student accrued 3 days of

unexcused absences. This letter notified the parent of the absences and of the district

attendance policy. Second, when a student accrued 5 days of unexcused absences, a parent

conference was held (or, in many cases, attempted) during which an administrator talked

with the student and parent(s) about why the student had been missing school and the

importance of attending school. At this point, the administrator also notified the student and

parent that continued unexcused absences might result in the district either dropping or

suspending the student from school for nonattendance. For students who were under the age

of 16, the administrator also sent a truancy referral to the St. Louis Family Court. This

information was communicated to parents in a letter mailed to the home address. Finally,

upon the eighth unexcused absence, according to school district policy, the school either

dropped students from school or suspended them depending on their ages (students 16 years

of age and over were dropped, while students 15 years old and younger were suspended for

nonattendance).

However, this policy was not uniformly enforced. In most cases, the administrator

would try to work with the student and his or her family for quite some time to improve his

or her attendance before finally making the decision to drop or suspend the student for

nonattendance. Over the past 5 years, an average of 32 students have been suspended each

year for issues of nonattendance; however, that number does not include the many students

who have been dropped from school because of absence.

Several years ago, school officials implemented an Attendance Incentive Program to

try to increase the school's ADA. A committee of teachers developed the program, and it has

essentially remained the same since its inception, with only minor changes regarding

attendance prizes. The school's Attendance Incentive Program focused on students with

perfect attendance or students with at least 95% attendance. At the end of each quarter, the

students with either perfect attendance for that quarter or with at least 95% attendance for

that quarter were given a small incentive during lunch, such as a free soda or a free snack.

They were then entered into a drawing for a larger attendance prize, such as a $50 or $25

gift certificate to the local mall. Two students received these prizes at the end of each

quarter, one with perfect attendance and one with at least 95% attendance. At the end of the

school year, any student who had perfect attendance for the entire year had their choice of a $50 gift certificate to the mall, a theme park season pass, or the Major League Baseball stadium. These programs had been ineffective in raising the school's ADA. Therefore, school leaders were looking for new ideas and a new approach to the problem of attendance.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The intents of this sequential mixed method study were to determine the most significant causes of student nonattendance, as well as determine the relationship between student attendance and achievement. In the study, the school's student management system (AS400) was used to obtain the number of days students were absent from school during the first semester of the 2009-10 school year and the respective semester GPAs of those students. The researcher conducted statistical analyses to determine the relationship between the number of days students were absent from school during that time and the students' GPAs during the same period. At the same time, the researcher qualitatively explored the causes for student nonattendance using a questionnaire that she developed for the purpose of this study. To understand the problem in its entirety, she examined both quantitative and qualitative data.

<div align="center">*Quantitative Research Question*</div>

What is the relationship between student attendance and student achievement?

Independent Variable

The independent variable was the number of days the students participating in the study were absent from school during first semester of the 2009-10 school year.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study was the GPA of each student involved in the study. Because the researcher examined a specific semester's attendance, the GPA that she used was also specific to that semester.

Hypothesis

There is a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester). Therefore, the more days a student is absent during a semester (independent variable), the lower that student's GPA (dependent variable) will be for that same semester.

Null Hypothesis

There is not a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester).

<div align="center">*Qualitative Research Question*</div>

Which are more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance: factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds or factors related to school culture and environment?

Hypothesis

Factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds are more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment, as measured by proportional responses to questionnaire categories.

Null Hypothesis

Factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds are not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment, as measured by proportional responses to questionnaire categories.

Significance of the Study

According to Sheldon and Epstein (2004), 15% of teachers in public schools see nonattendance as a major problem. Reid (2008) concluded that staffs working in schools are not equipped to handle the nonattendance problem. Staff members agreed that managing student attendance was a time-consuming activity. The fact that most school officials and teachers lack education in this area makes it difficult to fight the problem (Reid).

This study could serve to increase knowledge about causes of nonattendance and the relationship between attendance and student achievement. This knowledge may make it easier for teachers and administrators at the school to work with and build relationships with students and their parents. Because some research indicates (Davies & Lee, 2006) that schools play a large role in influencing student attendance, school officials could use the qualitative data from this study to make changes to the school climate, making it a more student-centered environment. Furthermore, if school personnel become more adept at working with students on issues of attendance and, in turn, the rate of attendance at the school improves, this may also correlate to an improvement in overall student achievement. Research also shows that there is a correlation between truancy/nonattendance and risk behaviors (Henry, 2007); hence, increasing student attendance may inadvertently lead to a decrease in student engagement in risk behaviors in and outside of school.

Moreover, schools are judged on their Average Daily Attendance at both the state (APR) and federal (AYP) levels. Both of these measures have a standard that schools need to meet. The high school in this study has never met the standard at either the state or federal level. Ideally, school officials would use the data from this study to help the school progress towards meeting those state and federal standards.

Finally, school officials may use the information gleaned from this research to develop programs at the high school in this study (and other similar schools) that will help increase student attendance. These programs may include things like revising the current attendance policies and procedures, making changes to the existing attendance incentive program or creating a new attendance incentive program, professional development programs for teachers, and parental involvement initiatives. The school may also use these results to make additional changes.

The high school in this study is not unique in its problems with attendance. This area is a challenge for schools all over the country. Therefore, similar high schools may also be interested in using the information from this study to address issues of nonattendance in their schools.

Limitations

Parental Consent Forms

Due to the fact that most of the students were minors, the researcher needed signed parental consent forms for the students before they could complete the survey. The researcher attempted to control this limitation by utilizing the schools TeleParent system to inform parents about the study and the need for their children to return the consent form to

school. However, 65% of the students did not return the required permission slip and, therefore, could not participate.

Attendance

The researcher was not able to collect data from students who were absent on the day the survey was conducted. Hence, because the researcher was attempting to learn more about those absentee students, the survey results could be biased because of the self-selected sample.

Students Who Drop Out

The researcher was not able to collect data from students who dropped out of school. Most students who dropped out of school probably began as students who had poor attendance, thus further biasing the results of the study.

Loss of Participants (Mortality)

Another limitation of this study is the loss of students during the duration of the study. Due to the high mobility rate of students in this community, a few of the students who completed the survey in October had transferred schools before the end of the semester. A few other students had been suspended from school before the end of the semester. Therefore, the researcher could not collect GPA and attendance data for those students.

Timeframe of Study

Because the attendance and GPA data was limited to data from one semester, the results of the study may be biased. It is possible that a small number of students who participated in the study had either an unusually good or an unusually bad semester in terms of their grades and/or attendance, biasing the results in either direction.

Socioeconomic Status of Population

Due to the lower socioeconomic status of the students in the study, the results of this study may not be applicable to more affluent student populations.

Sample Demographics

The researcher completed this study at one suburban high school in St. Louis, Missouri. Therefore, the results may be biased due to specific circumstances within that school community. Furthermore, the results may not be entirely accurate when applied to other schools, districts, or geographic locations.

Student Completion of the Survey

The students may not have answered all of the survey questions accurately or honestly, and may not have answered some questions at all. This can lead to biased results or inaccurate results due to a smaller sample size.

Student Schedules

The participants in this study had a varied mix of core content and elective coursework in their academic schedules. The range of difficulty levels between these courses may have contributed to differences in student GPAs.

Instrument

The researcher created the survey for the purpose of this study. While she based the survey on previous research, she was not able to test it for reliability or validity before using it in this study.

Definition of Terms

Absenteeism – Students missing school with parental consent.

Nonattendance – Students missing school either with or without parental consent. Absenteeism and truancy are both forms of nonattendance. All three terms are used in this study. Typically, when citing a specific study, the author used the term that was used in the original study. When the author was not citing a specific study, she used the term *nonattendance* except where otherwise appropriate.

Student Achievement – Measured by each student's GPA on a 4-point scale.

Truancy – Students missing school without parental consent.

Conclusion

Nonattendance occurs for many different reasons and may be a result of school-related factors, home-related factors, or a combination of the two. This study seeks to determine which of those factors plays a more important role in student nonattendance at one high school in suburban St. Louis. In addition, nonattendance may have an effect on student achievement. The researcher is working with the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance and student achievement. However, it is also possible that a statistically significant positive correlation exists between these two variables, or that there is no statistically significant correlation at all.

Student attendance is an important issue for both schools and students. Schools are evaluated on their ADA rates at both the state and federal levels, so increasing student attendance is beneficial to the school. Having a high attendance rate is also important for students in terms of student achievement and a decreased risk of engaging in risk behaviors. Therefore, schools are constantly working to improve student attendance. School officials

will use the results of this research to develop programs at the high school in this study (and other similar schools) that will help increase student attendance.

Chapter 2 contains the review of related literature and research related to the problem being investigated. In the literature review, the author discusses attendance studies that have been conducted in the past. She discusses these studies in terms of the various portions of a research study, including the instrumentation and methodologies used in the studies, the populations that participated in the studies, results of the studies, and implications and recommendations based on the findings of those studies. The author also used this literature to create the survey and develop the research methods, which she discusses in detail in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Background

Most educators would agree that a student must attend class in order to achieve academically. However, student attendance is a two-fold concept. Being physically present is only part of what students must do in order to be successful. They must also be mentally prepared for the task (Dougherty, 1999).

Student attendance can be both the easiest thing to measure and the most difficult. Schools are required to track ADA rates for both state and federal reporting purposes, and measurement of how often a student is absent for these purposes is relatively simple. However, knowing and understanding students' reasons for nonattendance is much more complex. An endless number of variables can influence whether or not a student is present at school.

Many research studies use the words *truancy* and *absenteeism* interchangeably; however, some variations do exist between the actual definitions of the two words. Researchers have used the word truancy to define students who are absent from school without parental knowledge or consent (Williams, 2001). Absenteeism, on the other hand, is often a general term used to describe any student that is habitually absent from school. Absenteeism describes students who have parental consent or students whose status of parental consent is unknown (Williams,). Both truancy and absenteeism are forms of nonattendance, and the author uses all three terms in this study. Typically, when citing a specific study, the author uses the term that was used in the original study. When the author is not citing a specific study, she uses the term nonattendance except where otherwise appropriate.

A Brief History of School Attendance

"The term *compulsory attendance* refers to state legislative mandates for attendance in public schools (or authorized alternatives) by children within certain age ranges for specific periods of time within the year" (Education Encyclopedia, 2010, para. 1). This type of law governs such things as the ages at which students must be enrolled in school, the ages at which students may stop attending school, enrollment requirements, school start and end dates, duration of the school year, hours of instructional time required, and truancy policies.

Attendance requirements in the United States began in 1647, when the Massachusetts Bay Colony enacted the first law requiring student attendance. Between the years of 1647 and 1671, other colonies began to follow. With these new laws, legislators called for the establishment of grammar schools. Governments fined parents who did not send their children to school; in some cases, these parents even lost custody of their children (Rothbard, 1975).

In 1852, the United States government began to enact laws regulating student attendance. By the year 1918, the citizens of all states and territories were to abide by compulsory school attendance laws (Good, 1956). In that same year, the state of Massachusetts placed additional guidelines on student attendance when it passed the Massachusetts School Attendance Act. This Act required that children between the ages of 8 and 14 attend grammar school for at least 12 weeks per year, 6 of which had to be completed consecutively (Good).

Some people would not comply with these requirements, as is the case with any law. As early as 1872, many students would not attend the required days, thereby causing a problem for school officials (Dougherty, 1999). By the year 1900, many state and local

courts, as well as the United States federal government, supported compulsory attendance. Educating children became not only a priority, but also a necessity. The Indiana Supreme Court decided in the 1901 case *State v. Bailey* that "the welfare of the child and the best interests of society require that the state shall exert its sovereign authority to secure to the child the opportunity to acquire an education" (Hudgins & Vacca, 1995, p. 275).

During the 1930s, more than two thirds of student absences were unrelated to an illness (Rohrman, 1993). As time progressed, the problem of nonattendance seemed to go through cycles, increasing and decreasing periodically. Terms such as *truancy* and *cutting class* did not make their way into the vernacular until the mid-1970s and were a sign that nonattendance had become a much bigger problem (DuFour, 1983). By the end of the 1970s, 8% of all students in the United States were absent each day (Rogers, 1980).

During the 1970s and 1980s, schools kept their records and documentation of student absences in an unspecific manner, making it difficult for researchers and school officials to understand the underlying causes of nonattendance. School records made no distinction between valid reasons a student might not be able to attend class, absenteeism due to misbehavior, and truancy (Reid, 1983). As student nonattendance became more prevalent and governments held schools to increasingly higher levels of accountability for student attendance rates, schools began to create categories of reasons for nonattendance. The creation of these categories enabled schools to keep detailed attendance records, thereby allowing researchers and school officials to obtain a clearer understanding of why students were absent from school. In an attempt to raise student attendance rates, schools have used this information to develop new programs and policies focused on attendance.

Currently, the ages for compulsory education vary by state, beginning between the ages of 5 and 8 and ending between ages 16 and 18 (Infoplease, 2007). The State of Missouri first implemented a compulsory attendance law in 1905. Up until the year 2009, Missouri students were required to attend school between the ages of 7 and 16. Beginning in the fall of 2010, Missouri students must attend school until they reach the age of 17 or until they earn at least 16 credits (Missouri State Senate, 2009). Officials at some school districts, such as the one in this study, have chosen to begin enforcing the new requirements in the fall of 2009 rather than wait until the 2010-2011 school year.

An Overview of Research on Nonattendance

The three key components of any research about nonattendance are a) the school environment (and the people who work in it) b) the student and c) the parents, family, and surrounding community. For many years, researchers and scholars have attempted to discover which of these three components has the largest impact on student attendance. Many researchers suggest in their studies that no one component alone is responsible for nonattendance, but rather that a combination of these factors often results in student absenteeism.

Most studies on absenteeism use similar types of groups, consisting of parents, teachers and school faculty, or students. Researchers have surveyed or interviewed parents in several studies. The impact of socioeconomic status and the parents' level of education are two areas of concern when researching the parents of students with regular nonattendance. Researchers have also investigated the interactions of parents with their children to determine whether different types of parent-child interactions have different effects on student nonattendance.

Researchers used the student population in the majority of studies on nonattendance. Student perceptions, motivation, and behaviors are variables that have a great bearing on whether they attend school or not.

Teachers and school faculty have also served as a population for attendance studies. Teacher and staff perceptions have provided some explanations and insights into nonattendance. What teachers do in the classroom and how they develop relationships with their students are important topics, as they may relate to student attendance (or lack thereof) as well.

Environmental factors that influence student attendance were an area of focus during the early stages of attendance research. In these studies, researchers examined the socioeconomic status and home lives of absentees. In addition, a number of studies were student-centered. Most of the student-centered research investigated either student motivation or academic performance. In several studies, as scholars continued investigating nonattendance, they researched the effect of a number of variables on a single population. Researchers began to emphasize the impact of school climate, student perceptions, and participation in risk behaviors. As more extreme risk behaviors began to surface among truants, this variable became more of a primary focus.

In another notable area of exploration, scholars have investigated the psyche of chronic absentees. For example, in 1983, Reid conducted a study that led him to create four categories of absentees. These categories were traditional, institutional, psychological, and generic. Generic absentees were defined as students who were absent because of domestic or employment issues, and the majority of absentees were placed into this category. Reid described traditional absentees as being more introverted and having poor relationships with

peers, compared to the other groups. Institutional absentees were the most extroverted, even compared to the students with good attendance. Psychological absentees were the most unstable emotionally and psychologically. Then, in 1992, Southworth led a study that also explored this area. He utilized Reid's categories of absentees in his study, furthering the available knowledge base into this aspect of nonattendance (Southworth,).

In recent studies, researchers have examined the effectiveness of school polices related to nonattendance. For example, one superintendent had the idea to separate attendance from academics completely (Reeves, 2008). Previously, school officials had linked attendance to academics, so nonattendance had academic consequences. Instead of eliminating the consequences for nonattendance, the superintendent adjusted them. According to the new policy, school personnel were required to notify parents promptly when their children were absent. In addition, because the school district now viewed nonattendance as a behavior, administrators assigned an after-school detention (a behavior consequence) to any student who had an unexcused absence (Reeves). In another study, the principal expanded the services of the school clinic so that students would not have to miss a full day of school each time they had a medical appointment (Medina, 2008). Instead, students could see a doctor at the clinic that had been set up in the school. Both of these studies looked at the effect of the implemented changes on student attendance rates.

There are a number of instruments used to conduct studies on nonattendance, most in the form of surveys. Researchers often create surveys by taking polls and narrowing repeated responses before the surveys are developed and administered. In other studies, researchers used instruments that were already well-established. They often choose to use these types of instruments because of their proven validity over time.

Another way that researchers have collected data is through interviewing the aforementioned groups. Many times, school personnel can measure the frequency of a behavior such as nonattendance; however, determining why this behavior exists is a daunting task. Interviews have proven to be very effective since they provide information related to individuals' perceptions and motivations, which provide some insight into why certain behaviors occur.

The importance of documenting student attendance is fundamentally essential to any research on absenteeism. Schools have used roster cards, grade books, and computerized attendance systems to record student attendance. However, it is important to note that a small amount of human error could exist in these records. Teachers might mistakenly mark the wrong student absent or may neglect to mark a student absent altogether.

A limitation of most attendance studies is that researchers are often attempting to acquire information from a source that is not present. Students that are absent from school are difficult to interview. Many studies begin with a large sample population but then, because a number of those students cannot be located, the results of the research are skewed or not as telling as the researcher might have hoped.

Researchers in Europe (rather than in the United States) have conducted the majority of attendance research. Studies based in Europe have some connection to problems in the United States; however, one must take into account the unquestionable differences in culture that exist between those two locations. The structure of the European school also differs from the structure of schools in the United States. A few of these differences include the ages of the students attending school, how the schools are organized, and the foci of schools in various countries.

Additionally, researchers have conducted a substantial number of studies at the collegiate level. While these studies are indeed valuable, it is difficult to relate them to high school students because individual professors determine most collegiate attendance policies, not the institutions as a whole. Thus, the researcher did not include these studies in this literature review.

Most researchers in the area of student nonattendance have completed a series of studies and, in many cases the researchers are not a part of the school's faculty or staff. This is often with the hope that the student population will give more honest answers to people they do not know and will not see again (Reid, 1983). Teachers have completed other studies (Horton & Annalora, 1974), and social workers have conducted some as well (Berg, Butler, Fairbairn, & McGuire, 1981).

The problem of nonattendance is easy to identify but not easy to solve. There have been many proposed solutions but, because the results of these solutions are inconsistent, stakeholders often see success as a sign of luck than rather than the result of strategy. With such a vast number of variables to consider, school leaders are struggling to find programs that truly motivate students to attend school. To that end, one purpose of this study is to identify some of the most common reasons for student nonattendance. Knowing the causes of nonattendance will allow schools to develop programs and interventions that can effectively combat these causes, thereby increasing student attendance rates.

Organization of the Literature Review

The author of this study organized the literature review by grouping the various aspects of different studies together. For example, the first section discusses the various instruments and methodologies used in these studies. Another section of this chapter

discusses the different populations used in attendance studies, and encompasses all of the

population types discussed in the literature that the author reviewed. A third section

discusses results and findings from the literature. The author of this study organized the

chapter in this manner to suit a specific purpose, which she describes in further detail below.

Throughout the chapter, the author discusses similarities and differences between the

various methodologies, populations, and findings from the studies that she reviewed during

the course of this research. In order to make these comparisons effectively, the author

discussed each aspect of an attendance study in its entirety before moving on to the next.

This ensures that the reader has a comprehensive understanding of each dimension of an

attendance study before attempting to make any comparisons or draw any conclusions about

that dimension of the research.

Literature reviews are often organized in more traditional ways, such as by

discussing each study in chronological order or discussing each study in its entirety before

moving on to the next. However, for the purpose of this study, it was not prudent that the

reader know everything about a particular study before moving on to the next. For example,

because the author compared and contrasted the populations used in several different

attendance studies, it was only pertinent that the reader know about that dimension at that

time. Then the author could move on to another dimension of attendance research. It is not

necessary for the reader to know which population goes with which methodology or which

population yielded which result.

Therefore, the author organized the literature review in this manner to increase the

ease with which both the author and the reader can make comparisons and draw conclusions

about the various aspects of attendance studies. The author began the discussion with the various methods and instruments generally used in attendance studies.

Methodology and Instrumentation

Researchers can use an almost endless variety of methods and instruments in attendance studies. These variables can affect the success, and possibly even the results, of the research. Reviewing the methods and instruments that have been used in past studies will allow the reader to see valuable research trends that have helped to guide this study and that can guide future studies as well.

Methodology

When investigating the problem of nonattendance, researchers have many important things to decide. A few examples of deliberate choices that researchers are required to make include the location of the study, the number of participants, the length of the study, and how to collect data.

Attendance Rates of the Sample Population

How many is too many absences from school? This is one of the most important questions proposed in studies, and this has been an area with great discrepancies between studies. Researchers have rarely described the process of defining this quantity in their studies; however, it is a crucial decision, as it may greatly affect the results. In 1976, Galloway investigated students who missed at least 50% of possible school days in a seven-week period beginning in the fall semester of 1973. In another study, Galloway (1983) also used students who were absent for at least 50% of the previous fall semester. In 1983, Reid studied a group of students who only had 65% (or less) attendance during an entire school year, while Ziesmer's (1984) participants were high school students who had more than 10

unexcused absences during the first quarter. Another study conducted during the 1980s used a similar figure, studying students that came to school less than 67% of the time (Berg, Goodwin, Hullin, & McGuire, 1985). In a 1985 study on nonattendance, Sommer defined truants as having 10 or more absences from school and being listed on the Vice Principal's Irregular Attendance List.

Southworth (1992) examined students who were present in school less than 85% of the possible days to attend, while Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, and Dalicandro (1998) defined absentees as students who missed 15 or more classes during a semester or at least 10 classes of one course. Among all of these studies, there has been a substantial discrepancy in the numbers of days of nonattendance that researchers considered worthy of study. These disparities may be reflected in differences between the results reported by these studies, as there may be great differences between students who miss only 15 classes, for example, and students who miss more than 50% of classes.

Size of the Sample Population

Another important decision researchers must make when conducting studies on nonattendance is what size sample to use. This is an additional area of considerable difference between studies. Some studies have used samples in the thousands in an effort to obtain meaningful, broadly applicable data. For example, in his 1976 study, Galloway used 82,779 students as participants, and an earlier study by Anikeeff (1954) used a roster of 2,654 students.

It is more common for researchers to use sample populations consisting of hundreds of students rather than thousands of students. For instance, Reid (1983) investigated 128 absentees (in addition to two control groups) from large urban schools, while another group

of researchers (Berg et. al., 1985) completed their study by collecting data from 435 boys and 65 girls who were convicted of offenses of juvenile delinquency.

Some researchers thought that it was not only important to have a large population, but also analyzed the composition of the population. In these cases, the researchers noted the age and sex of the participants because these factors were believed to have a significant influence on the findings of the study. For example, Vidler (1980) examined 121 students (57 males and 64 females ranging from 18 to 27 years of age) to provide a more detailed description of the differences between male and female absentees.

For other studies, a smaller population was more suitable. When investigating special circumstances or when attempting to acquire detailed responses from participants, researchers often chose a more manageable population. To examine the specifics of children with school phobia, for example, 19 parents of these children and 12 parents from the general school population made up the participants (Berg et al., 1981). In another study, Sommer (1985) used a population of 16 male and 38 female students ranging between the ages of 15-19 and went on to use an even smaller sample population of only 28 students.

Research Location and Length

Other factors that can dramatically sway results are the location and the length of a study. Some studies have compared locations (i.e., urban vs. rural) because it was suggested that some areas were more prone to the problem of nonattendance. Other studies have used just one of these locations (urban or rural).

Once the overall setting has been determined, the researcher must decide precisely where in that setting to conduct the study. Researchers have collected their data in various locations due to the belief that students may be more honest with them in some areas than in

others. For example, researchers have chosen to collect their data in classrooms, in offices, elsewhere on the school campus, or even off school grounds. Researchers at one school conducted interviews in a youth center on the school campus, but not inside the school building (Reid, 1983). Researchers at another school in the same study used a vacant office in the school building. The school released the students in the control group from their elective classes when it was time for them to participate in the interviews.

Researchers must also choose to investigate the problem of nonattendance over a particular length of time. Studies vary greatly in this capacity as well, spanning lengths of time from weeks to decades. At one school, March was on record as being the month with the highest truancy rates, with many students being truant at least once during that month (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). Therefore, the researchers intentionally conducted their study during that month. Reid (1982) investigated the problem of persistent school absenteeism in a large inner-city school over an eight-week period. Ziesmer (1984) experimented with the same idea, only over a longer period by conducting a study in a Wisconsin high school during the school terms of 1980-1981 and 1981-1982. Galloway, Martin, and Wilcox (1985) completed an even more extensive long-term study by tabulating the number of students who were suspended for at least three weeks during the school years of 1974-1977, in addition to the groups of absentees who missed more than 50% of possible attendance days in the fall semesters of 1974, 1975, and 1976. Hallfors et al. (2002) completed a study in which school districts collected data between the years of 1980 and 2000, making this one of the only studies to span such a long time.

Instrumentation

Some attendance studies have been strictly quantitative in nature. These studies do not use an instrument per se, as the researchers collect and analyze data that is already on hand, such as attendance rates, reasons given for absences, achievement data, or readily available demographic information. For example, Galloway et al. (1985) investigated two important variables: socioeconomic status and school environment. They hypothesized that student attendance and exclusion are influenced by the surrounding communities' economic status more than by school climate. The researchers derived their data for this study from three sources: Local Education Authority records, curriculum data, and the 1971 census, all of which are quantitative sources. However, most attendance studies are at least partially qualitative in nature.

Researchers have used two types of instruments in qualitative studies on nonattendance: instruments that they designed for a specific study and instruments that were established before the study began. Some of these more established instruments appear in several studies. Researchers often use different types of questionnaires or surveys to accumulate data from a large number of participants. These instruments are usually composed of several parts, with each portion seeking specific information. Other researchers place a stronger emphasis on interviewing their participants.

The author of this paper developed a survey to use in her research on nonattendance. In the literature review, therefore, she focuses on other studies that used researcher-developed instruments rather than on studies that used previously established instruments or interviews as their primary method of data collection. She discusses some of these examples below.

In a study focusing on teacher perceptions, the researchers gave forms to the truants' teachers and instructed them to document students' attendance over the previous 10 weeks, their health, behavior, ability, and home life (Berg et al., 1985). In another study, King (1995) gathered male and female students and asked them to complete a questionnaire. He administered a 13-item questionnaire on the first day of class after a brief introduction from the instructor. This inventory sought to determine students' perceptions of their learning preferences. King used this type of instrument so that the focus would be on the students' viewpoints. In order to increase students' commitment to the self-discovery experience, King did not force them to choose one answer per question but allowed them to choose multiple answers. He also did not give them a time limit to complete the questionnaire (King).

Galichon and Friedman (1985) created a four-part survey for their study on nonattendance, which they then administered to undergraduate students. The first part consisted of nine statements reflecting different attitudes about education, grades, attendance, study habits, socialization, alcohol use, and drugs. The second part of the survey required students to rate reasons for intentional class absences on a 4-point scale. Some of these reasons included outside employment, extracurricular activities, disinterest in the class, importance of the class to their chosen career, their attitudes towards the professor, easy access to other students' notes, lack of sleep from staying out late, use of alcohol, marijuana or other drugs, and the weather. The third part of the survey attempted to measure class absences per month, and the last part contained demographic questions (Galichon & Friedman).

Some researchers combined instruments and/or methods during the course of their studies. For example, Galloway (1983) conducted a study that combined interviews and questionnaires. The purpose of this study was to determine the affect of parental neglect on student attendance. He conducted interviews with the parents, and followed up with a health questionnaire to determine attitudes and relationships the parents had with their children. Combining interviews with the surveys allowed Galloway more insight into these student situations.

Researchers also frequently conduct mixed methods research, combining quantitative and qualitative data to reach a more informed conclusion. For instance, Sommer's (1985) study on nonattendance was comprised of three parts. The first part of the study was quantitative in nature, during which she analyzed student documents, including information such as demographics and test scores. The second part of the study consisted of school counselors completing a short survey about the causes of truant behavior, and the final part of the study consisted of student interviews. Combining all three of these research methods gave Sommer a thorough glimpse into factors that may affect student attendance.

Reid (1983) used a combination of a social anthropological approach (using student interviews), questionnaires, and some available quantitative data in his study on nonattendance. An anthropological approach proposes that when seeking an answer to a problem the researcher should go to the source, approaching it as if it was a case study. In the 1980s, researchers placed a special emphasis on student perception and self-concept. Reid investigated the social and cognitive motivation of students with chronic absenteeism, in addition to school environment. Reid also used interviews and questionnaires to gather additional information from several other sources, including teachers, administrators, social

workers, and other students. Furthermore, he examined important documents such as school reports and transcripts. Using this approach allowed him to understand the school routines and climate, and to get a more complete idea of the multiple factors that could be contributing to nonattendance.

For the most part, those who have researched nonattendance have used similar methods and instruments to test their hypotheses and to study cases of truancy. These researchers have been able to identify trends in the factors that lead to nonattendance and the demographics of students with chronic nonattendance. Collectively, these studies have provided scholars and educators with information that helps to explain why truancy is such an issue in schools today.

Populations

The types of participants in studies dealing with nonattendance have remained consistent throughout the history of attendance studies. Students, parents, and school staff all play a fundamental role in student nonattendance. Student background and demographic information have been explored to see if any valuable data lies in this realm. Parents have completed surveys to establish commonalities with regard to the home lives of students with issues of nonattendance. Researchers have analyzed teacher and staff behaviors and attitudes to gain a better understanding of how they influence student attendance. Surveying these individuals is essential to gaining the knowledge needed to identify who is affected by nonattendance.

Demographic Information and Socioeconomic Status

Most students with poor attendance have similar demographic and domestic backgrounds. Nielsen and Gerber (1979) found that boys and girls were truant with the same

frequency, with a major difference being that boys began their truancy in earlier grades. Most truants were older than their classmates were because their absences had held them back a grade level (Nielsen & Gerber). According to Eastwold (1989), typical truants are 11th or 12th grade boys who dislike their classes, have low educational ambition, and have less parental guidance than their peers have. Often, the nonattendance of these students increases throughout the school year.

Ziesmer (1984) noticed that there was an overrepresentation of students in minority groups, and a later study found that black students were more likely to be truant than any other race (Henry, 2007). Eaton et al. (2008) observed a similar overrepresentation of female and black students and that over half of the students who had unexcused absences were black or Hispanic.

Fine (1986) completed a study that referred to the distribution of who was successful in society. White, upper middle class, male students reaped consistently more financial and professional success per additional years of education than blacks, women, and working class/low-income students (Fine). This statement was not surprising, since it quite accurately reflected the composition of American society at that time, and still does, to a degree, today. "Though racial distribution of most urban high schools reproduced social arrangements and models for students the fact that even though schools allegedly are designed to transform society, are controlled by white persons who only minimally invite the input of persons of color" (Fine, p. 398). Fine believed that this powerful stereotype could influence teacher performance and student achievement. The disempowered teacher may help to produce the disempowered student who, more often than not in city schools, drops out (Fine).

Many researchers found an extremely large correlation between absenteeism and students who were economically disadvantaged. Galloway (1976) conducted one of the first studies that examined students who were part of the free and reduced lunch program in an effort to determine the effect of socioeconomic status on student nonattendance. One of Galloway's later studies confirmed that the majority of the absentees were eligible for free lunch (Galloway et al., 1985). Fine's (1986) study also found that students enrolled in school and who had attendance problems came from low income, working class families.

Student Characteristics and Perceptions about School

Several researchers have studied various characteristics of absentees to determine commonalities among students with poor attendance. For example, Reid (1982) compared the educational background and students' attendance history to grades, intelligence, and behavior reports to ascertain the profile of a truant. Southworth (1992) noticed that absentees had lower self-concepts and lower intelligence. In general, truants displayed a lack of connection with school, low academic motivation and, consequently, poor school performance. Studies have indicated that absentees have many different perspectives about school, and that issues arise when students have more feelings that are negative about school than positive. Evidence also suggests that absentees have more negative views of themselves and their academic abilities than their peers do (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979).

Vidler (1980) correctly hypothesized that students who were curious about a subject would not only experience academic success in that area but would also attend class more frequently. In addition, students who planned to graduate from high school and go to college, students with a good record of academic achievement, and students who felt safe at school all attended school on a regular basis (Henry, 2007).

King (1995) proposed that when teachers present information to students in a way that suits the students' preferences, students have an increased ability to succeed academically. Conversely, when students are not succeeding academically because teachers are not presenting information in a way that is conducive to students' learning styles, several problems can arise. King hypothesized that students who favor a kinesthetic learning style do not receive as much instruction that is compatible with the way they learn best and thus are at a disadvantage in the classroom. Working under these conditions decreases students' self-efficacy and leads to a tendency to be absent from school (King).

More often than not, when students have particular needs that are not being met, they also have problems with attendance. Ziesmer (1984) noticed that several participants in her study received special services from the community through court aide. The researcher also noted that a large number of students received services from special education (17%).

Collectively, research has shown that substantial stress and anxiety lead to student nonattendance and antisocial behavior. Hallfors et al. (2002) completed a study that addressed the following questions:

1) To what extent are the risk indicator variables of truancy, GPA, and recent sexual activity linked with likelihood of adolescent substance use? 2) How generalizable are indicators across time, student grade level, community, and type of drug use? and 3) what is the relative utility of each risk variable for the purpose of strengthening evaluation data quality? (p. 206).

Students who were not in class were often doing things that were potentially harmful to themselves or others, and often spent time with other peers that had similar habits (Hallfors et al.). Researchers have not only seen this behavior at the high school level but at the

collegiate level as well. At both levels, students who began opting to take part in risk behaviors attended school less often (Berg et al., 1985).

Absentees reported feelings of depression or anger and some even attempted suicide (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). Other antisocial acts included class disruptions, fighting, stealing, running away, fire setting, vandalism, cruelty to animals, and drug use (Nielsen & Gerber,). Southworth (1992) noticed that students with poor attendance were significantly more unstable, tough-minded, irritable, and had poor relationships with teachers, parents, and peers. On the other hand, according to Nielsen and Gerber's study, 84% of truants had peers with whom they considered themselves to have close friendships.

The majority of truants said that their most negative experiences at school were difficulties they encountered with adults at the school (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). In addition to negative relationships with teachers, there were also reports of negative attitudes toward parents. The truants felt that their parents were not proactive about increasing their school attendance and that if they were, it would help motivate them to attend more often (Nielsen & Gerber).

In many cases, students looked at school attendance itself as a form of punishment. These students skipped school to pursue activities that were more enjoyable and, more often than not, received positive reinforcement for this negative behavior. This positive reinforcement could take the form of attention from adults, getting to watch television, play games, or engage in any number of other activities that the students deemed more enjoyable than going to school (Williams, 2001).

A study by Corville-Smith et al. in 1998 found that absentees and regular attendees differ in personal characteristics, family environment, and their attitudes about school.

Students with good attendance have interactions with their teachers and family members that are more positive than the interactions that absentees have with those same groups (Southworth, 1992). In another study, half of the absentee students reported a stressful family situation, a problem with peers, and a feeling that they did not belong in the school (Ziesmer, 1984).

Family Characteristics and Parental Influence

Much of the previously noted research on nonattendance examined the social environment surrounding the students. Many scholars (Berg et al., 1981; Galloway, 1983; Galloway et al., 1985) have also analyzed the impact of family and community on students' attendance. When considering a student's home life, researchers have established two concepts. Scholars have identified the ideas of *social capital* and *human capital* as two of the most influential factors in student attendance. Social capital refers to the extent to which a student uses family resources to support his or her education, while human capital refers to the educational level of the parents (Kortering & Konold, 2005).

Along with these ideas, family structure has made a notable appearance in many studies. When comparing the social backgrounds of the participants, the researchers examined the marital status of the parents, parents' occupations, family size, the position of the child in the family, housing backgrounds, and the student's delinquency pattern (Reid, 1982). When a student lacked constructive parent/child interactions or had a non-traditional family structure, he or she was more susceptible to dropping out of school. Several studies identified that truants have many of the same family issues in common. In many cases, the truants had siblings who were also truants and had repeated a grade. Forty percent of the students in Nielsen and Gerber's (1979) study had experienced the divorce of their parents,

27% were from single parent families, 40% had moved within the past 2 years, and parental unemployment was an issue in 38% of the cases. Eighteen percent of the students in Ziesmer's (1984) study had experienced the death of a parent. Serious illness, parental discord, and alcoholism were also prevalent. An amazing 76% of truants' families experienced three or more of these types of stressors simultaneously (Nielsen & Gerber,). In Galloway's (1983) study, truants and absentees both had assistance from social work agencies, frequency of parental separation, and low family income.

Absentees reported having negative interactions with most of the adults in their lives, including their parents. Over half of the students had at least one parent who did not graduate from high school, and in 25% of the families, neither parent had graduated (Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). According to Henry (2007), parents who had a college education had children who were less likely to be truant. In addition, students who participated in religious services or had little to no unsupervised time were also less likely to be truants.

Many studies have suggested that sometimes parents condone nonattendance and that this can lead the students to associate negative feelings with school. These negative feelings then result in academic underachievement. Broadwin (1932) described the behavior of truancy as an act of defiance, a need for attention, or a withdrawal from reality. He defined *truancy* as extended periods of time that a child is not present in school. Parents were aware of their child's absence, and the child was usually with the mother or in the home. The child usually explained to the parent that he or she was afraid to go to school. Broadwin discovered that these children found comfort in the home and with their family, and that interactions with teachers or peers caused feelings of fear and anxiety. The parent succumbed to these feelings and justified the child's nonattendance as an act of protection.

In later studies, scholars would call this *school phobia*, but in the mid-1930s, they classified

it as a psychological disorder called *obsessional neurosis*. This condition was said to be

fostered by the attitudes of the parents, in most cases, the mother. Emotional dependency on

family, especially on the mother, characterized the neurotic psychiatric disorder known as

school phobia. Children with school phobia respond to difficulties by seeking out the

security of home. They will often opt to stay in the house instead of interacting with peers.

Earlier studies showed that students who suffer from this condition often receive positive

reinforcement from their family for this behavior (Broadwin).

Berg et al. (1981) hypothesized that there is a relationship between children who

suffer from school phobia and their environment outside of school. Contact of parents with

relatives and friends, parents' leisure activities outside the home, patterns of work, and their

management of domestic affairs were all investigated (Berg et al.). In this study, mothers

made up the majority of the parents interviewed; however, some fathers did participate. In

half of the families the mothers were over the age of 40, and in two thirds of the families the

fathers were over 40. Half of the children who suffered from school phobia were boys over

the age of 13 (Berg et al.).

School Characteristics and Teacher Perceptions

Teacher attitudes have a great influence on whether students feel welcome in the

classroom. Research has shown that students thrive when they feel like an adult in the

school cares about them and their education (Kortering & Konold, 2005). Similarly, students

with learning disabilities also drop out less frequently when they have positive adult

reinforcement (Kortering & Konold,). Sixty-six percent of the students in Ziesmer's (1984)

study attributed their poor attendance to problems with teachers and staff within the school,

and most of them also attributed their nonattendance to boredom in the classroom or dislike of school and teachers.

In Reid's (2006) study on nonattendance, most staff members felt there was little they could do to motivate students to come to school. More than 85% of teachers interviewed in this study had either little or no idea of when their specific pupils' histories of nonattendance began, nor of its original cause. Staff members also described a lack of training in dealing with attendance issues. Staff members attributed nonattendance to problems in society and difficulties in the family unit. They also expressed little faith in the court process and their frustration with national curriculum (Reid).

Reid (2006) noted that most staff members felt that not enough time is spent developing programs to address the problem of student nonattendance. There were few notable differences between the perspectives of staff members whose students have attendance problems and staff members whose students had adequate attendance. One important difference was how the staff members felt about their work experience. Staff members working in the low attendance schools believed that the public judged them unfairly, and that the public should consider the school's location when making judgments about the school or their abilities as teachers. In addition, Reid noticed that the majority of participants had negative perceptions about the way their schools handled student nonattendance.

<div align="center">Results from Attendance Research</div>

After researchers complete their carefully thought out experiments, they can begin to analyze the data they collected. Many have stumbled upon captivating findings during the course of their studies. Studies that provide general data about nonattendance, as well as

those that concentrate on a specific area, have allowed researchers to demonstrate there is a common demographic that exists among students with chronic nonattendance. In addition, the investigations into parental influences and students' home situations have provided some notable information. Examination of student perceptions and motivation has been a major area of study; the evaluation of academic ability and intelligence has also been telling. In some studies, researchers have focused on behaviors and predispositions of students with attendance problems in order to help teachers and staff better understand the dangers of nonattendance. Some results support previous research, while others stand alone as theoretical evidence. All of these findings are of great value and are keys to solving the problem of student nonattendance.

Demographics and Factors Related to Home Life

There has been an effort to label the type of students who do not attend school. Something that has hindered research on nonattendance is the question of how to categorize these students. Like many other researchers, Wilkins (2008) made a definite distinction between the terms *nonattendance* and *truants*. According to Wilkins, the term nonattendance refers to the chronic practice of not attending school for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, Wilkins labeled students who were absent without parental consent or have had legal interventions for their nonattendance as truants. However, the results of many studies suggest that both groups have similar backgrounds. This demographic information is of vast importance because it makes these students easier to identify.

Researchers have come to conflicting conclusions about whether gender plays an important role in nonattendance. Two studies, both from 1985, resulted in opposing conclusions. Sommer (1985) found that there were a larger number of males than females

who had attendance problems. However, results from another study indicated that there was not a significant difference between the attendance rates of males and females (Berg et al., 1985).

The research on the influence of parents and a student's home life on attendance gave way to some notable findings. Berg et al. (1981) found that four out of five families of students with poor attendance had mothers who were predominantly concerned with various aspects of housework, leaving the father to take on the role of decision maker in the family. Mothers were three times more likely to be the primary caregiver to their children. The family's finances were also handled by the mothers in approximately half of the families that were studied. Parents of students with attendance problems spent an average of 2-3 hours per week engaged in a social activity, which more than likely involved a church or a club. Four out of five parents had some contact with relatives during the week before the data was collected. Two thirds of the families lived in their own house. A third of the families had two children, another third had three, and a third had four children or more (Berg et al.). These researchers concluded that there was no notable evidence that suggested that parents of students with poor attendance participate in or make decisions that differ from parents of students in the control group, who had good school attendance (Berg et al.).

In Reid's (1982) study on nonattendance, the results indicated that there was a significant difference in the parents' marital status between students with good attendance and students with poor attendance. The majority of absentees in this study had parents who were separated, divorced, remarried, deceased, unmarried (but living together) or single. Absentees had fathers who worked in lower-level occupations, came from larger families, and had displayed at least one act of delinquency, usually vandalism (Reid).

His results also showed that the absentees had lower self-esteem than students in the control group did, possibly due to their home environment (Reid, 1982). He proposed that because the absentees came from less stable environments and had a lower socioeconomic status than students in the control groups (who had good attendance), their self-concepts were greatly affected, and thus their perceptions of school attendance were affected as well (Reid). Then, in his 1983 study, Reid noted that absentees had parents who did not seem interested in their education and who were not willing to visit the school.

As for child behavior, the parents of truants (students who were absent without parental consent) associated their child's absences with misbehavior and were seldom aware of their child's whereabouts (Galloway, 1983). However, truants make up a minority of students with chronic nonattendance.

Galloway (1983) found that the majority of parents claimed to be aware of their child's nonattendance and, in most cases, reported that the child was at home. These parents associated their child's absences from school with feelings of anxiety about leaving home. They also generally had less tension in their relationships with their children. Still, he found that more than 80% of parents in both groups were passive and inadequate in their ability to control their child's behavior. Galloway concluded that there were no notable differences between the living conditions of truants and other absentees. The most important finding from this study was the difference between these children's behaviors and their relationships with their parents.

According to Fine (1986), additional reasons for nonattendance were family economic and social obligations. Some students felt a strong obligation to help their families in various ways. In many low-income families, students were required to take care of

younger siblings or even elderly family members when needed, regardless of whether or not they should be at school (Fine). Fine also noted that students were surrounded by unemployment and poverty. This fact, when combined with the probability that these students have experienced failure in school, could result in students seeing little hope for their futures (Fine).

Galloway (1976) hypothesized that larger schools would have a greater degree of absenteeism than smaller ones. He also hypothesized that large schools and schools in areas of socioeconomic hardship would suspend more students than schools in other areas with a higher social class. In a later study, he found evidence suggesting that socially disadvantaged communities have the highest amount of absenteeism (Galloway, 1983). The results of Galloway et al.'s (1985) study on nonattendance further supported his earlier hypothesis: looking at a student's community can be the best indicator of student attendance. On the other hand, they found no relationship between school size and nonattendance (Galloway et al.).

School-Related Factors

The feelings that students associate with their school environment can be powerful predictors of attendance habits. Because of this, researchers examined the question of how much school climate really influences student attendance. They found that there is a relationship between school environment and student attendance. However, examining school environment as it relates to attendance is a difficult task because it requires researchers to measure both the atmosphere of the school and teacher performance. Reid's (1983) research implied that learning has a reduced importance once a student establishes a habit of chronic absenteeism. Another important finding from his study was

that members of the control group, who had good attendance, had more social, academic,

and nonacademic reasons for enjoying school when compared to the absentees. A third point

to note was that twice as many absentees (compared to students in the control group)

disliked school because of a teacher, rule, curricula, discipline, or other miscellaneous factor

(Reid). The participants in Sommer's (1985) study responded similarly when asked why

students skip school. Both groups answered that students skip school either because school

is boring or because they dislike their teachers.

Reid's (1983) data also indicated that the absentees had more negative perceptions of

their relationships with their parents and teachers than the control group. Overall, the

absentees had more negative feelings that led them to conclude that their schools did not

care about them compared to the feelings of their peers with better attendance.

Reid (1983) discovered that only a small percentage of students purposely missed

school for reasons attributed to curriculum. Because of this finding, Reid attempted to

investigate the types of courses that students enjoyed and the ones they did not. He found

that the absentees enjoyed the technical and art subjects more than they enjoyed science and

other academic subjects. Reid hypothesized that this subject preference could be attributed

to students' linking the content of the course to a future career. From analysis of his data,

Reid concluded that absentees preferred a curriculum based on mathematics, English,

technical, and relevant vocational subjects. However, other researchers found that students

skipped social studies, English, and math the most (De Jung & Duckworth, 1985).

Teachers

The most important finding from Reid's (1983) study was the effect of teachers'

reactions to poor attendance. Absentees stated that if their teachers treated them like their

peers with good attendance, they might be more motivated to come to school. He noted that

absentees wanted teachers who were strict but fair, gave individual attention, were able to

give remedial help, helped with personal problems, and had such qualities as patience,

understanding, and a sense of humor (Reid).

An overwhelming response from the absentees in Reid's (1983) study was their

overall need to feel that there was someone in authority with whom they could

confidentially discuss their problems when necessary. Some absentees even admitted that if

such a person had existed earlier and had taken the appropriate remedial action, then they

would not only have returned to school, but also participated "wholeheartedly in school life"

(Reid, p. 23).

Seventy percent of absentees in Nielsen and Gerber's (1979) study said that factors

at school were the major reason for their absences. Seventy-five percent of the students said

that experiences with classroom teachers were the worst aspect of school, and only 21% of

the students had positive feelings about teachers. Another interesting finding was that only

9% of students said they had trouble with all teachers, while 80% said they had trouble with

only one or two teachers (Nielsen & Gerber). When they asked more probing questions, the

students related their dislike for a particular teacher to the teacher's "unfriendliness,

authoritarianism, and unresponsiveness to the students' learning needs" (Nielsen & Gerber,

p. 319). The students reported having many arguments with their teachers, resulting in

hostile feelings that lasted for many months (Nielsen & Gerber).

School Policies

Other studies have examined the effectiveness of school policies related to

nonattendance. Many schools do not allow students to make up the work missed if an

absence was unexcused. In one school, for example, the administration lowered students' grades after three unexcused absences; however, this did not deter students from the behavior of skipping school. After seeing that this policy was ineffective, there was a great deal of dialogue regarding attendance between administrators, teachers, and parents. New policies and consequences that were more effective were implemented. When new interventions separating misbehavior from academic consequences were implemented, absences decreased by 42%, the number of disciplinary referrals dropped by 64%, and the number of suspensions dropped by 37% (Reeves, 2008).

An interesting component of Reid's (1983) study on nonattendance was that the researcher asked the students what actions the school could take to reduce student absenteeism. Some of their responses were to call their names out in an assembly, make them complete make-up work after school on a designated afternoon, give two warnings and then fine parents when their children miss school, and send them to a special school for students who have a problem with attendance (Reid).

School Climate

Wilkins (2008) believed that her study showed the impact of school climate on student attendance and indicated ways that traditional schools could improve student motivation. She focused on students who had poor attendance when they were enrolled in a traditional high school but had very good attendance once they enrolled in an alternative high school. The purpose of her study was to determine why this discrepancy existed. She interviewed four of the students, who identified many factors that contributed to their nonattendance. Discrimination, racism, and violence between students were stated as some of the reasons students did not enjoy the traditional school. Wilkins found that a strong sense

of community, learning that truly engages the students, and a strong organizational structure were all said to be characteristics of the alternative school.

Students also reported that teachers and administrators at the alternative schools listened to their reasons for misbehavior (Wilkins, 2008). This dialogue was important to the students because it allowed them to have a voice. In most traditional schools, students who did not behave the way they should were punished, and misconduct was rarely laughed at or treated mildly. At the alternative school, that was not the case, and the students appreciated this leniency (Wilkins). Another characteristic of the traditional school was that there was a standard disciplinary procedure and attitude about misbehavior. More often than not, many students were punished for the actions of a few. Students viewed these group punishments as unfair, and continuous problems with a particular teacher often resulted in an administrator changing the student to a different teacher (Wilkins).

On the other hand, because the alternative school was smaller, the student-to-teacher ratio was more conducive to learning and relationship building (Wilkins, 2008). Another positive quality about the smaller setting was that all the students felt like they knew each other. All four students who participated in the study held important positions within the school. Being involved in this capacity allowed the students to have a sense of belonging and a stronger investment in the school (Wilkins). A recent study by Head supports this, stating that students who do not attend school regularly feel that they "do not belong and their identity as someone who does not belong is reinforced by the relationships within the school" (as cited in Wilkins, p. 14).

The classroom atmosphere at the alternative school was described as calm and peaceful (Wilkins, 2008). There was a smaller emphasis placed on deadlines and more

emphasis placed on student progress. Students appreciated learning in an orderly environment and saw it as a key component to their academic success. Students also explained how extended time to complete assignments helped to make school less stressful. Teacher flexibility and one-on-one attention made school a more enjoyable experience for students at the alternative school (Wilkins).

In addition, students described teachers at the alternative school as people that they could talk to outside of an academic context (Wilkins, 2008). Teachers were seen as friendly and made students feel comfortable. Students felt like the teachers really cared about them because they were willing to take time out to talk to students about their problems and give them academic and emotional support (Wilkins). According to Wilkins, a culmination of all of these positive attributes made students want to attend the alternative school. Therefore, one could conclude that contrasting characteristics in traditional schools may deter students from wanting to attend. After completing interviews with the students in her study, Wilkins found four school-related factors that influence student attendance (or lack thereof): school climate, academic environment, discipline, and relationships with teachers.

Student-Related Factors

Self-concept is combination of an individual's self-image and self-esteem (Southworth, 1992). Self-concept influences attitudes and behaviors and is responsible for our goals and the way we respond to others. Many researchers have sought to understand the relationship between self-concept and a student's experience at school, and at least one study has shown a strong correlation between self-concept and attendance (Southworth). Self-concept may influence students' academic achievement and motivation to attend school; it may also affect students' behavior while at school.

Academics

How students perceive themselves is believed to play a large role in academic success. Negative feelings and attitudes result in academic underachievement. Furthermore, academic ability and intelligence are often tied to nonattendance. In general, scholars suggest that there is a correlation between lower intelligence and nonattendance. Focusing on a link between absenteeism and academic performance is an essential component of any study of this nature. Historically, several researchers have reported a definite correlation between these two factors (Jones, 1984; Launius, 1997; Turner, 1927; Wyatt, 1992), but to what extent these two facets are linked has been heavily debated.

One study found that the intelligence of persistent absentees was significantly lower than the "normal" population at the age of 11, as measured by the test results recorded in their school files (Reid, 1982). This data also showed that the absentees not only had lower grades, but that the longer they were enrolled in school the worse their grades became. The average grade of the persistent absentees was a *D* (Reid). Another researcher discovered a small positive relationship between academic curiosity and both course grade and class attendance (Vidler, 1980).

Reid (1982) also noted that absentees believed that they had a lower academic ability than that of their peers. Galloway (1983) found that 89% of the truants and 58% of the absentees had reading levels two grades lower than the average for their age. The truant group in this study showed lower than average scores in reading, language, and math. In her 1985 study, Sommer reported that truants were in the bottom quarter of their class. On the opposite end of the spectrum, an extremely strong correlation has been shown to exist between standardized test scores and good attendance (Southworth, 1992).

Motivation

Understanding students' perceptions of school is imperative when tackling the problem of nonattendance. The way a student interprets his or her environment determines if the student will succeed or not. When these student attitudes and perceptions of school are understood, schools can more successfully address student motivation. Studies in the area of student motivation have suggested that many students do not attend school because they feel that they do not gain much by being present.

In her 1986 study on nonattendance, for example, Fine found that teaching styles, the curriculum, and the students' perception that what they are learning in school is unrelated to future success all contribute to nonattendance. Fine recorded that few students believed that a high school diploma would give them job security and that students were aware that success is possible without a high school diploma. However, they often felt that in order to get the job they desired they would need to graduate from high school (Fine). She also described a perceived disconnect between what students were learning in school and what was going on in their lives.

In Nielsen and Gerber's (1979) study, only 6% of the participants said that they liked school; 73% disliked school, and 21% had mixed feelings. When the interviewer asked the truants to reflect on their behavior, 80% of them said they regretted their nonattendance, and 70% wanted to graduate from high school and believed they needed to do this in order to reach their future goals. However, when the students were asked if there was anyone they admired at school, 85% said there was no one (Nielsen & Gerber).

Galichon and Friedman (1985) found that absentees felt that attending classes was not very important to their future. They reported that students felt that there was no direct

correlation between attending class and getting good grades (Galichon & Friedman). However, as far back as the 1950s researchers have believed that motivation influences both academic achievement and attendance. One researcher during that time discovered that a notable relationship existed between the number of absences and the student's final grade in a course (Anikeeff, 1954).

Research has indicated various reasons students are motivated to attend school. Kortering and Konold (2005) found that participation in school activities, a strong support system at home or at school, and a genuine desire for a good education are some things that promote good attendance. They reviewed four points of interest that may motivate students to attend school: personal development, socialization with peers, participation in extracurricular activities, and pleasing an authority figure (Kortering & Konold).

They found that some students were motivated to come to school for personal development. Students were motivated to attend school when they saw a benefit in the time that they invested. These benefits could range from developing valuable job skills to preparing for college. Students with learning disabilities sought similar benefits, but placed even more importance on being challenged and on receiving skills that would prepare them for life after school. According to Kortering and Konold (2005), personal development was the most important reason for coming to school.

A second reason students were motivated to come to school was to participate in positive social interactions with their peers (Kortering & Konold, 2005). This type of motivation is one of the most valuable components of education. Through these interactions, students learn how to conduct themselves in a social context. Students that were successful

in this area enjoyed attending school compared to those that struggled to fit in with their peers (Kortering & Konold).

A third reason for coming to school was to participate in extracurricular activities. These types of activities were said to promote an individual's status in the school and their social identification with school (Kortering & Konold, 2005). Participating in extracurricular activities requires students to invest their time and energy into the school's environment. Mahoney (2000) has also argued that participating in extracurricular activities provides youth with an opportunity to a form positive connection with peers, teachers, and school in general. Extracurricular activities provide students with the ability to achieve success and get positive recognition for excelling in a nonacademic area. Kortering and Konold found that when students are involved in these sorts of activities they have a more positive view of themselves, higher academic success, and goals that surpass the goals of their peers who do not participate in extracurricular activities. The findings of this study were important because they explained student motivation in a more logical way and suggested that schools must teach students the relevance of what they are learning.

A teacher's challenge is to create some kind of relevance between the curriculum and the real world. It is clear that students must feel like going to school is "worth it." Students must feel as if they are getting something of value by attending school. Even when they are not interested in the subject matter, if students have meaningful interactions with adults and peers at the school they are more likely to be there.

Behavior

Almost all of the truants in Nielsen and Gerber's (1979) study on nonattendance skipped single classes, and school teachers or administrators had told 81% of them that they

were class disruptions. Sommer (1985) also found that truants have more disciplinary referrals than non-truants do. This leads to another common reason for nonattendance – schools sometimes suspend students from school because of some type of misconduct (Fine, 1986).

Students with poor attendance have less positive relationships with their peers (Southworth, 1992). Nielsen and Gerber (1979) noticed that nearly all of the truants in their study had close friends who were also truants. The small number of students in their study who did not have any close friends felt picked on and ostracized, and reported that this increased when they entered junior high school (Nielsen and Gerber). They reported that "truancy was found to be a useful marker for identifying adolescents with significant problems in all areas of social functioning" (Nielsen & Gerber, p. 323). Seventy-five percent of the truants in this study reported seeing school guidance counselors, but they also reported that these meetings were not productive in solving their attendance problems. The counselors referred approximately one third of the students to a social service or a mental health agency (Nielsen & Gerber). In another study, schools required about 10% of the students with poor attendance to appear in front of the school's attendance committee and took these students to juvenile court (Berg et al., 1985).

Risk Behaviors and Nonattendance

Once a habit of absenteeism is established, students are at a higher risk of participating in delinquent behaviors. As more extreme risk behaviors surfaced in studies regarding truancy, scholars made this variable a more primary focus of their research. They have indicated that truancy can be linked to illegal substance abuse. Cigarettes, alcohol,

marijuana, inhalants, and other hard illegal drugs have all been found to contribute to

student nonattendance (Hallfors et al., 2002).

Seventy-one percent of the truants in Nielsen and Gerber's (1979) study said that

most of their friends engaged in fighting, stealing, and taking drugs. Berg et al. (1985) found

that four main delinquent offenses were common among truants: vandalism, burglary, other

kinds of theft, and assaults. He also found that there was no major difference between the

delinquent behaviors of boys and girls (Berg et al.).

The absentees in Galichon and Friedman's (1985) study reported enjoying drinking

alcohol, and some enjoyed smoking marijuana. The researchers also noticed a correlation

between grade point average and number of absences, as well as a correlation between drug

use and how often students cut class. Furthermore, there was a substantial correlation

between GPA and students who did not attend school due to substance abuse (Galichon &

Friedman).

Adolescents who use drugs also tend to participate in risky sexual behavior (Hallfors

et al., 2002). With support from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Hallfors et

al. gathered data about youth sexual behavior. They found that truancy, low GPA, and recent

sexual activity were all strong predictors of student drug use. Students in the high-risk

groups indicated that they had a 2- to 5-times greater risk of substance abuse compared to

students in the low risk groups. Truancy was the best indicator of drug use, followed closely

by recent sexual activity. Both of these were better indicators of drug use than having a low

GPA (Hallfors et al.).

Recent studies also indicated that students are likely to engage in several risk

behaviors when they are not in school. Eaton et al. (2008) sought to examine whether or not

student absences were excused or unexcused. The researchers found that participation in risk behaviors existed whether a student was absent from school with or without permission, but that students who were absent without permission were twice as likely to engage in health risk behaviors as students who were absent with permission (Eaton et al.). This study was valuable because it addressed indicators of substance abuse and ways that schools could possibly intervene. By implementing programs to prevent drug use, schools can hope to reduce truancy and help students achieve academically (Eaton et al.).

Wide-Ranging Studies on Nonattendance

Broader studies have also produced many significant findings. Looking at many variables at once gives a more comprehensive view of absenteeism. Horton and Annalora (1974) found that there were several reasons for nonattendance. These reasons for nonattendance included the student had some type of health issues, the student had already missed too many days, their parents wanted them to stay home, they had trouble with other students, they had trouble at home, their parents moved closer to another school, and they were required to stay home from school as a consequence for misconduct. These researchers also found that most dropouts liked school in general, and that most of their problems at school were with peers (Horton & Annalora). Ziesmer (1984) also reported that truancy was often a symptom of a problem at home, with the individual student, or with peers.

Students in Galichon and Friedman's (1985) study who missed class more often attributed their absences to their preference to socialize with their friends rather than attend class. Students in this study also identified the major reasons for not attending class as enjoying beautiful weather, finding the class boring, and disliking a professor or class (Galichon & Friedman).

Sommer (1985) also completed a multi-variable study using a population of 25 eighth grade students who were chronically absent from school. She compared them to a control group of 25 eighth graders who had good attendance. Four factors that Sommer identified as contributing to nonattendance were family and home life differences, "friendship patterns and interests, behaviors and attitudes toward school, and cognitive factors including academic ability and achievement" (Sommer, p. 411).

Researchers who conducted another study on nonattendance found that six specific variables determined whether a student was an absentee or attended school regularly: school perceptions, parents' discipline, parents' control, self-concept, conflict, and social competence (Corville-Smith et al., 1998). Then, in 2007, Henry compared a group of 8th-grade absentees with a group of 10th-grade absentees. She found that there were more similarities than differences between these two groups. According to her data, three main reasons for student nonattendance emerged: students' personal feelings about the school environment, students' family involvement, and psychological issues (Henry).

Then, in 2008, Reid found several additional factors that influence nonattendance. These factors were learning difficulties, poor socialization skills, safety problems, low self-concepts, unacceptable school cultures, poor student-teacher relationships, and issues with curriculum content (Reid). Regardless of their results, most researchers agree that student nonattendance is often the result of a combination of factors.

Recommendations

Researchers have many ideas for future studies; they also have suggestions of ways for schools to alter or improve their practices. Several of the recommendations for future studies either address areas in which nonattendance research has been lacking or make

suggestions to improve the quality of the research. Others propose possible changes for schools to consider when attempting to rectify the problem of nonattendance.

Several of these recommendations relate to demographic and student-centered factors that may influence nonattendance. Southworth (1992) suggested that future researchers examine the relationship between tough-mindedness and nonattendance; in addition, he also proposed more studies to gain information about the relationship between absenteeism and self-concept. Galloway et al. (1985) suggested finding out more about the homes of the students. Eaton et al. (2008) said that further research should obtain more information on the reasons for student absences, and that the connection between absenteeism and physical and mental health issues should be examined in greater detail.

Other recommendations are school-centered, focusing on changes in teacher practices, school climate, school curricula, or school policies. Reid (1983) noticed that students in his study desired a more flexible school schedule, an alternative discipline policy/procedure, a more accommodating course selection process, an increase in course rigor, and a more orderly school environment. Researchers who conducted a different study on nonattendance intimated that their study lacked detail when investigating school climate and structure, and that future studies should address this area (Galloway et al., 1985).

When schools silence student opinions, voices, and critical thoughts, there is an increase in nonattendance (Fine, 1986). Southworth (1992) suggested that schools take differences between students into account when implementing programs to improve attendance, ensuring that there is not a "one size fits all" approach to school. Schools need to be ready to adjust programs to fit student needs. School officials need further information on what motivates students to come to school in order to develop an effective action plan on

increasing attendance (Southworth). Anikeeff (1954) believed that motivation influences both academic achievement and attendance, and that future scholars should study this area more intensely. Sommer (1985) recommended that schools create programs that increase personal and social maturity, while also developing academic skills.

There is a need for policy to both protect the students and improve their attendance. According to Reid (2008), a number of questions about attendance policies remain unanswered. What needs to be done in order to increase student attendance? Should schools or governments take the lead in combating nonattendance? Should it be a national initiative or a local one? How should schools manage students with attendance problems? At what point does a school hand over the problem to an external agency, such as the local truancy court (Reid)? All of these questions must be answered before student attendance will improve.

Conclusion

Nonattendance is a large-scale problem that has existed since compulsory education laws were established. Studies on absenteeism have changed greatly over time. A shift in attitudes about parental influence took place. Early studies pointed toward the child's home life as a major contributing factor, concluding that students with poor attendance usually come from less stable environments and have a lower socioeconomic status, and they encouraged future studies to direct attention to this area. On the other hand, recent studies focus more on the school environment, school policies, and establishing programs that will help to correct the problem of nonattendance.

What is the root of nonattendance problems? This is an important question to ask. Is it the concern (or lack thereof) of the parents and community, the quality of the teacher,

school policies, or is the root inherent to the student? The most logical answer to this question is that a combination of all of these factors causes nonattendance. Because much of the existing research on nonattendance has been conducted at the collegiate level, more research on nonattendance should be done at the high school level, as the causes of nonattendance among high school students may differ from the causes of nonattendance among college students. Further research will help to establish programs and innovative strategies used to combat this problem.

Based on the findings of past studies, schools with poor student attendance have several areas to explore for answers. Researchers charge instructors to investigate their teaching methods and schools to examine the effects of school curriculum and class size on nonattendance. Past research suggests that any school that has a problem with absenteeism should adopt programs for the treatment and prevention of this problem. Without such interventions, absenteeism is likely to increase (Reid, 1983).

Much of the previous research has noted that students who are chronically absent from school are more than just unmotivated. In some cases, students developed negative perceptions of school because they felt incapable of succeeding. Schools need educational programs that focus on students' attitudes about school and education, and they need to build a positive and stable environment to fill this void.

Most school districts in the United States report a problem with nonattendance. This is an area worth investigating for a variety of reasons. When students are truant, they are often engaging in other negative behaviors as well. Oftentimes, underachievement, dropping out of school, the use of drugs and alcohol, teen pregnancy, and other forms of delinquency

are taking place. Truancy has been deemed the "steppingstone to delinquent and criminal activity" and is a sign of serious issues in a child's life (Garry, 1996, p. 1).

Studies indicate that student nonattendance leads to risk behaviors that intensify over time. However, many students are not fully aware of the consequences associated with this behavior (Williams, 2001). Not only are the consequences of nonattendance immediate, they are also long lasting. Adults who were truant in school are more likely to take part in violent acts and criminal activity, have unstable marriages and jobs, and often end up in jail (Garry, 1996). On the other hand, attendance at school not only prepares children for employment and economic success, but also prepares them for the development of values and character (White, 1996).

The studies discussed in this literature review show that the causes for nonattendance may be in a constant state of flux; however, the consequences remain the same. Therefore, researchers in this area must continue to make the necessary adjustments. If local attendance rates were expanded to a much larger scale, one could estimate that at least 2.8 million students skip school at least once a month (Henry, 2007), and that the average student misses 20 days of school per school year (Medina, 2008). Thus, the problem of nonattendance cannot be ignored.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Overview

This study investigated the causes for student nonattendance at the high school level, specifically attempting to determine whether school-related factors or home-related factors play a larger role in student nonattendance. In addition, the study also examined the relationship between attendance, indicated by the number of days students were absent during one semester, and achievement, as indicated by the GPAs of those students during that same semester. This was a sequential mixed methods study using both qualitative sources (student surveys) as well as quantitative sources (attendance [number of days absent during one semester] and achievement data [GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester]).

One of the limitations of this study was the demographics of the population. This study was completed at one suburban high school in St. Louis, Missouri. Therefore, the results may be biased due to specific circumstances within that school community. Furthermore, the results may not be entirely accurate when applied to other schools, districts, or geographic locations.

Another limitation of this study was the socioeconomic status of population. Sixty-two percent of the students in this school population were eligible for Free or Reduced School Lunch at the time of this study. Due to the lower socioeconomic status of the students in the study, the results may not be applicable to more affluent student populations.

The researcher conducted the study at a high school, with permission granted by the superintendent of the school district (Appendix A). The author of this study was able to gain access to the students and to the data in question because she is an employee of the school in

which the study took place. While the fact that the author of this study is an employee of the school in question may sometimes be considered a limitation, in this case the author actually believes it to be a delimitation of the study because she believes that being an employee of the school allowed her to acquire a larger sample than she would have been able to acquire had she not been a school employee. For instance, being an administrator at the school in question allowed the author access to the TeleParent system, a system used by the school to communicate important information to parents. The author believes that utilizing this system caused more students to return the required consent forms than would have returned the consent forms without the influence of this system.

The author of this study is currently an Assistant Principal at the school in question. However, before the author held that position, she was the Attendance Administrator at the same school. In the position of Attendance Administrator, the author worked with students who habitually missed school for a variety of reasons. The author also oversaw the school's attendance incentive program. Working in these capacities has given the author a plethora of firsthand knowledge and experience in dealing with issues of student nonattendance.

<div align="center">Research Design and Perspectives</div>

The researcher wanted to look at the "big picture" of student attendance, rather than focus on one small segment of this discussion. To that end, this was a mixed method study. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), mixed method research is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to better understand a research problem. A mixed method approach unites the strengths of two different approaches to analyzing data and solving problems. Individually, research handled solely quantitatively or qualitatively can leave gaps in studies. Using a mixed method

approach allows the researcher to look at data objectively, while also looking at the human perspective, which is difficult to measure with numbers. This kind of research provides results that are more conclusive. Mixed method research may also "produce more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, p. 21).

The researcher decided on a sequential mixed method research design because the steps of this research study had to be conducted in a specific order for practical reasons. She chose the 9th through 12th grade students in the sample based on the English class they were enrolled in during a specific semester. The students in the sample completed the qualitative portion of the study (the student survey) in October of that semester. Then, after that semester had been completed, the researcher collected quantitative data on each student in the sample. This quantitative data consisted of the number of days each student in the sample had been absent during that semester and the corresponding cumulative GPA of each student in the sample for that same semester. Using the same sample of students for both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study allowed the researcher to make comparisons and draw conclusions about the relationship between the two types of data.

Research Perspective 1

The qualitative portion of this study was conducted from a constructivist worldview. From a constructivist perspective, the researcher tries to understand the causes for a particular problem (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In this study, the researcher attempted to gain an understanding of the most important causes of nonattendance at the high school level by conducting a student survey. She then used the results of the survey to determine whether school-related factors or home-related factors had the most influence over student nonattendance.

Research Perspective 2

The quantitative portion of this study, on the other hand, was conducted from a pragmatist perspective. From a pragmatist perspective, the researcher tries to determine the consequences of certain actions and real-world situations (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). For this study, the researcher tried to determine the relationship between student attendance and student achievement. The researcher was attempting to ascertain whether student nonattendance would have a negative effect on student achievement.

Additionally, the information gleaned from both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this study will be applied in a pragmatic fashion to influence real-world practices in situations related to attendance. This information will inform and influence discussions between administrators, staff, students, and parents at the high school that participated in this study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The researcher designed this study to answer two research questions simultaneously. The first question was quantitative: what is the relationship between student attendance (the independent variable) and student achievement (the dependent variable)? The researcher was working with the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester). Therefore, the more days a student is absent during a semester, the lower that student's GPA will be for that same semester.

The second question was qualitative: which are the most prominent causes of student nonattendance at the high school level: school-related factors or home-related factors? For

this question, the researcher was working with the hypothesis that factors related to students'

home environments and family backgrounds are more noteworthy causes of student

nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Instrumentation

Throughout the course of this sequential mixed method study, the author was

attempting to find the answers to two questions. First, the author was working to establish

whether a statistically significant relationship existed between student attendance and

student achievement. Second, the author wanted to determine whether factors related to

school culture and environment were more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than

factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds. Because this was a

mixed method study, the researcher used two different instruments to collect the necessary

data.

Quantitative Instrumentation

The researcher used the school district's student management system, AS400, to

collect the necessary quantitative data. She used this system to generate an Excel

spreadsheet listing student numbers for every student in the school. The spreadsheet also

listed the number of absences during first semester of the 2009-10 school year that was

associated with each respective student number, and the GPA (for that same semester) that

was associated with each respective student number. No student names were shown on the

spreadsheet.

Using the student number at the top of each completed survey, the researcher sorted

the spreadsheet to show the student number, number of absences, and GPA of only the

students who had taken the survey. By utilizing the student number in this manner, the

researcher was able to identify which survey was associated with which grade point average and number of absences, but not which survey was associated with which student name. After the initial use of student names to disseminate the surveys, student names were not used again during the course of this study.

Qualitative Instrumentation

There were two options that the researcher explored when deciding how to collect the data for the qualitative portion of the study. One option was to use the school's student information system, AS400, to collect data on the reasons for student absences. However, there would have been several issues with this type of data collection, as described below.

According to school policy, if a student is absent from school, it is the parent's responsibility to either call the office or send a note to the office explaining the reason for the absence. An office professional then enters the reason for that absence into AS400. If a parent does not call the office or send a note, no reason is entered into the system. Therefore, the collected data using this method would have been incomplete because it would have been limited to data on those students whose parents took the initiative to contact the office about their children's absences.

Another issue with collecting the qualitative data in this manner was that AS400 only allows a limited number of possible absence reasons to be reported. For example, the system allows students to be absent for reasons such as illness, attending a funeral, hospitalization, emergencies, etc. It does not, on the other hand, allow students to be absent because they do not like school, they were avoiding a situation at school, or because their classes are too difficult. Therefore, using this system of data collection would have severely limited the scope of the study.

Because of these limitations, the researcher chose to collect data about the reasons for student nonattendance using a student survey. By using a survey, the researcher was able to collect data about the reasons for nonattendance from the students' perspectives. The survey included questions about why students miss school, student attitudes about school and perceptions of school, home situations and family backgrounds, and demographics.

The choice to use a survey also circumvented the issue of only collecting attendance data from students whose parents had contacted the school to provide reasons for their absences. The researcher was able to survey students about their reasons for nonattendance regardless of whether parents had reported the reasons to the school. Utilizing a student survey to collect data also facilitated the collection of information about student demographics and family background that would not have been available to the researcher under other circumstances.

Information gained from surveys can be inaccurate because it is based on the memory and perceptions of the students. However, the researcher determined that, in order to collect valuable information of the scope discussed above, a survey was the most prudent choice.

Qualitative Instrument Design

The student survey consisted of four parts. Part 1 of the survey asked the students to put a check next to each statement that was a reason they had ever missed school. On part 2 of the survey, the students were to rank a series of eight statements from 1 (*most often*) to 8 (*least often*) according to how often the reason given in each statement caused them to miss school. Part 3 was comprised of a series of statements that the students had to rank on a Likert scale. Most of these statements were related to student perceptions and/or attitudes

about school. The final part of the survey consisted of a series of selected response

questions, most of which were about demographic data and family background. This section

also included two questions related to student attitudes.

Part 1 of the student survey consisted of 25 statements, each a reason that could

cause students to miss school. The students were instructed to put a checkmark next to each

statement that had ever caused them to miss school. This type of question is called a

dichotomous question because there are two possible responses (Trochim, 2006). In this

case, the two possible responses were either to put a checkmark next to the statement or to

leave it blank. The researcher designed this part of the survey in a way that would allow the

students to check more than one response, which is referred to as a multi-option variable.

Multi-option variables are often used to evaluate individual options that are part of a list of

options, so that each option is treated as a separate variable (Trochim). Designing part 1 of

the survey in this manner allowed the researcher to determine which of the given reasons

had caused the highest percentage of students to miss school.

On part 2 of the survey, the students were asked to rank a series of statements from 1

(*most often*) to 8 (*least often*) according to how often the reason in that statement has caused

them to miss school. This is an example of ordinal measurement, which provides a relative

rank order for attributes, but does not tell the researcher how much one attribute is preferred

over another (Trochim, 2006). Structuring part 2 of the student survey in this manner

allowed the researcher to investigate which of the given reasons were the most common

causes of nonattendance.

Part 3 of the student survey consisted of a series of statements designed to measure

student perceptions and attitudes about home and school. The students were asked to rate

how much each statement applied to them on a 4-point Likert scale. This type of item is considered to be a single-option variable because even though there are several possible answers, the respondent can only choose one of them (Trochim, 2006). The possible responses on the Likert scale were *Always, Sometimes, Seldom,* and *Never.* Structuring the Likert scale with only four possible responses forced the students to decide whether they agree more with the *Always* or *Never* end of the scale for each item. This structure did not allow the students to be neutral or undecided in their views, which gave the researcher a clearer picture of students' true perceptions and attitudes.

The researcher also chose to include several reversal items in this portion of the survey. Reversal items are reversed in meaning from the overall direction of the scale, meaning that they are stated in the opposite way from most of the included statements (Trochim, 2006). For example, both "My teachers don't expect much from me" and "I like school" were statements included on the survey. However, the first statement was phrased in a negative way, and the second statement was phrased in a positive way. Therefore, if a student answered that he or she *Seldom* or *Never* likes school, that is a negative statement about school. On the other hand, if a student answered that his or her teachers *Always* or *Sometimes* don't expect much from him or her, that is also a negative statement about school. Phrasing some statements as reversal items helped the researcher determine whether the participants truly read and thought about each statement (Trochim).

The researcher designed the final portion of the survey primarily to collect demographic data and family background information from the students who participated in the study. This section also included two questions on student attitudes about school. All of the questions in this section of the survey were selected response questions, which are

another example of single-option variable items. The selected response format worked well for this part of the survey because it was only possible for there to be one appropriate answer to each question for each student.

Qualitative Instrument Alignment

The survey used in this study was designed to allow the researcher to determine whether school-related factors or home-related factors had a more significant influence on student nonattendance. In reviewing the available literature, the researcher found that there were many possible causes of nonattendance. However, most of these causes could be grouped into general categories. The survey was designed to align with the categories discovered in the research, which include health, peer relationships, school curriculum and academics, school culture and/or relationships with teachers, the home situation and family background, parental attitudes, and student attitudes and perceptions. Several questions were included to address each of these categories, thereby ensuring that the researcher would be able to look at all of these factors from several different perspectives.

Questions 1, 2, and 6 from part 1 of the survey addressed health-related issues that could cause students to miss school. These issues included missing school for a doctor's appointment, personal illness, and missing school to take care of another family member who was ill. Horton and Annalora's (1974) study found that a variety of health-related issues were some of the most common reasons for nonattendance.

Research has also found that an assortment of issues with peer relationships can contribute to nonattendance (Berg et al., 1981; Kortering & Konold, 2005; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979; Sommer, 1985). Several questions linked peer relationships to nonattendance. These included the following statements: "I don't have any friends at school" (part 1,

number 4), "I skipped school to hang out with my friends" (part 1, number 14), "I was avoiding a person or situation at school" (part 1, number 23), "I get bullied or picked on at school" (part 1, number 25), and "I get picked on at school by other kids" (part 3).

There have been many studies, both old and new, that have associated student nonattendance to the school curriculum, academics, and/or student achievement (Galichon & Friedman, 1985; King, 1995; Reid, 1982; Sommer, 1985; Turner, 1927; Vidler, 1980; Wilkins, 2008). Questions 5, 11, 18, 21, 24, and 25 from part 1 of the student survey were designed to include these causes of nonattendance. These questions alluded to student achievement, whether classes were boring, whether students found the curriculum to be either too easy or too difficult, and whether the students were sometimes unprepared for class.

Another general category of research has been the connection between school culture and/or relationships with teachers and student nonattendance (Horton & Annalora, 1974; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979; Reeves, 2008; Reid, 1983; Wilkins, 2008). Part 3 of the survey included six statements designed to investigate this connection. These statements were "My teachers don't care or notice if I'm at school," "My teachers don't expect much from me," "The school gives me consequences when I skip school," "I know that if I come to school I'm going to get in trouble," "The adults at school don't care about me," and "My teachers pick on me."

The survey also included several questions about students' home situations and family backgrounds. This has been an extensive part of past research on causes of nonattendance (Fine, 1986; Galichon & Friedman, 1985; Galloway, 1983; Henry, 2007; Kortering & Konold, 2005; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979). Part 1 of the survey addressed such

issues as transportation to school (numbers 3 and 12), family vacations (number 8), staying home to take care of younger siblings, relatives, or children (numbers 15 and 16), and staying up too late at night due to working (number 19) or due to doing fun things (number 20). Two statements in part 3 of the survey were designed to investigate student perceptions of home ("I would rather be at school than at home" and "I get more support at school than at home"). The demographic portion of the survey (part 4) included five questions that were designed to establish family backgrounds of the participants. These questions asked about parental levels of education (numbers 5 and 6), who the students live with (number 7), how much unsupervised time the students have after school (number 8), and how many hours per week the students work (number 9).

An additional area of research into causes of nonattendance has investigated the effect of parental attitudes on nonattendance (Berg et al., 1981; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Galloway, 1983; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979; Reid, 1983). Part 3 of the survey included four statements connected to this area of research: "My parents don't care if I go to school," "My parents don't expect much from me," "My parents give me consequences when I skip school," and "My parents are too hard on me."

The final category of causes of nonattendance identified in the literature was student perceptions and attitudes. This was also the area that had been studied most extensively in past research (Anikeeff, 1954; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Fine, 1986; Hallfors et al., 2002; Henry, 2007; Horton & Annalora, 1974; King, 1995; Kortering & Konold, 2005; Nielsen & Gerber, 1979; Reid, 1983; Vidler, 1980; Wilkins, 2008). Accordingly, the author included several questions designed to elucidate student perceptions and attitudes about school. Part 1 of the survey asked students if they have ever missed school because they do not like school

(number 10) or because they did not feel like going to school (number 22). Part 3 of the survey included two statements related to student perceptions and attitudes about school: "I like school" and "I don't feel like I can succeed at school." Lastly, the demographic portion of the survey (part 4) included questions about students' perceived likeliness of graduating from high school (number 10) and perceived likeliness of attending college (number 11).

Part 2 of the student survey directed the students to rank a series of eight statements from 1 (*most often*) to 8 (*least often*) according to how often the reason given in each statement has caused them to miss school. Of the reasons given, at least one reason correlated to almost all of the general categories described above. In this way, the author attempted to ensure that part 2 encompassed a representative list of possible causes of nonattendance.

Due to the author's experience as Attendance Administrator at the school in this study, she also chose to include questions in part 1 of the survey that were not linked to past research. The reasons for missing school that were given in these questions were reasons for nonattendance that had frequently been given by students at the school in the past. These reasons included bad weather (number 7), funeral attendance (number 9), a court appearance (number 13), and religious holiday (number 17).

<center>Population and Sampling Procedures</center>

Cluster sampling was used to determine the sample used in this study. In cluster sampling, the researcher does not simply study whoever is available but divides the population into groups, called clusters, by some criteria. Next, some of these clusters are selected. Then, the researcher uses all of the people in the selected clusters as the subjects for the sample (Bluman, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the researcher divided the

population into clusters by English class. Next, the researcher chose some of these English classes and, therefore, the students in those classes, to participate in the study. The author describes this procedure in further detail below.

The school had 1,387 students at the time the sample was chosen. Table 2 shows the demographic makeup of the student population at that time.

Table 2
Population Demographics

| Class | Gender | | Special Education Students | Race | | | Total |
	Female	Male		Black	White	Other	
9	51%	49%	18%	87%	11%	2%	25%
10	47%	53%	11%	89%	10%	1%	27%
11	57%	43%	15%	79%	18%	3%	24%
12	50%	50%	18%	82%	14%	4%	24%
Total	51%	49%	16%	84%	13%	3%	

All students at this high school, grades 9-12, are enrolled in an English class. There are four types of English classes at the school: a) Parallel English classes (for special education students with severe disabilities in the areas of reading and/or writing), b) Class within a Class (CWC) English classes, in which there is both a regular teacher and a special education teacher (for students with mild disabilities in the areas of reading and/or writing), c) regular English classes, and d) Advanced English classes. Because all students at the school are enrolled in one of these four types of classes, the researcher chose to survey

students through English classes to ensure that the sample would be representative of the

student population.

Determining the Eligible Sample Population

The researcher chose English classes at each grade level, making sure that the total

percentage of the sample of students at each grade level was close to the actual percentage

of the population of students at each grade level. The researcher chose the teachers for each

grade level based on which teacher taught the highest number of classes at each grade level.

She did this to keep the number of teachers involved in the study as small as possible,

thereby minimizing the effects of many different teachers administering the survey. By

using this method, the researcher was able to limit the number of teachers involved in the

study to 10.

The researcher was also careful to include each type of English class in the sample for

each grade level. The researcher chose one advanced class at each grade level, several

regular classes (the exact number at each grade level was dependent on class size), and one

or two parallel or CWC classes (depending on the availability of each type of class at each

grade level and the size of each class). This helped to ensure that all types of students were

represented in the sample.

After choosing the classes, the researcher examined the demographic information

from each chosen class and combined the data for all the chosen classes in Table 3 below.

However, Table 3 represents only the students who were eligible to participate in the study,

not the students who actually did participate. The students who were eligible to participate in

the study had to have a consent form signed by a parent. These students also had to be

present on the day the survey was administered in order to be included in the actual sample.

Table 3, when compared with Table 2, illustrates that the demographics of the eligible

sample population were, in fact, very close to the demographics of the actual population of

the school.

Table 3

Demographic Make-Up of Students Eligible to Participate in the Study

	Gender			Race			
Class	Female	Male	Special Education Students	Black	White	Other	Total
9	51%	49%	20%	81%	18%	1%	23%
10	50%	50%	16%	93%	7%	0%	27%
11	55%	45%	9%	82%	16%	2%	24%
12	54%	46%	9%	85%	11%	4%	26%
Total	52%	48%	13%	85%	13%	2%	

Determining the Actual Sample Population

Once the researcher chose the eligible sample as described above, she provided

instructions (Appendix B) to the teachers of the selected English classes on how to distribute

consent forms (Appendix C) to the 644 students enrolled in those classes. These students

represented almost half (46%) of the entire student population.

The consent form required the parent to choose to either allow the child to take the

survey or decline to allow the child to take the survey. The students received 25 extra credit

points in their English class for returning the signed consent form by the requested date,

which was one week after the consent forms were distributed. The 25 extra credit points

were not dependent on whether or not the parent granted the student permission to take the

survey; the 25 extra credit points were dependent only upon returning the signed consent form.

The school in this study has a system called TeleParent, which allows administrators to record a message and then have it delivered to the home of designated students in the form of a recorded message. Each school night during the week that students had to get a parent to sign the consent form and then return the signed form to their English teachers, the researcher recorded a TeleParent message and had it delivered by phone to the home phone number of each student who had received a consent form in class but had not yet returned the signed form to their teacher. This message was a reminder to students to have a parent sign the consent form and then return the signed form to their English teachers on the following day.

Of the 644 students who received consent forms, 228 (35%) of them returned the consent forms. Of the 228 students who returned their consent forms, only 12 of them, or 5%, had parents who declined to allow them to participate in the study. This means that 216 students at the school, or 15.6% of the entire school population, had obtained parental consent to participate in the study. On the day that the survey was conducted, 193 of those students were present and able to participate in the study. These 193 students represent approximately 14% of the entire school population.

<center>Research Design and Procedure</center>

On the date that the consent forms were due, the researcher collected all consent forms from the teachers. The researcher created a packet for each teacher. Each packet contained an envelope for each class that the teacher taught in which a student had returned a consent form granting him or her permission to participate in the study. For example, if a

teacher taught five classes in which students had returned consent forms granting permission to participate in the study, the teacher's packet contained five separate envelopes.

The researcher also created a student survey (Appendix D) for each student who had turned in a consent form granting permission to participate in the study. Each survey had a cover sheet (Appendix E) with the student's name on it to make it easier for the teachers to distribute the surveys. The participating school district assigns each student a number; therefore, it was possible to collect data about students while keeping their identities confidential. To this end, each page of the survey (after the cover page) had the student's number on it. These student surveys, with cover pages attached, were put into the appropriate envelopes for each class, which were then put into the appropriate teacher packets. Each envelope within each packet also included a script (Appendix F) for the teacher to use when administering the survey. This was to ensure that each of the teachers would administer the survey in the same way, which served to minimize variance related to the survey being administered by several different teachers.

On the designated day, teachers surveyed the students during class time. All teachers used the aforementioned script to administer the surveys. The instructions allowed the teachers to use the cover page of the survey to hand out surveys to the correct students, but also required the students to tear off the cover page before turning in the completed survey. This ensured that when the teachers returned the surveys to the researcher, she had no way of knowing which survey belonged to which student. The students had 20 minutes during that class period to complete the survey. The teachers collected the completed surveys (minus their respective cover pages) and then returned them to the author of the study to be analyzed.

Preparing the Data for Analysis

In order to make the task of compiling the data from the surveys less arduous, the researcher created the same survey on the website http://www.surveymonkey.com (Survey Monkey), which is a surveying tool that allows users to create a survey and collect data online. Once the survey responses are collected, the website compiles all of the data into final reports that summarize all of the data collected.

Even though the researcher had access to this tool, she chose to administer the survey using a pencil and paper survey in lieu of an internet survey because the school does not have updated technology. Due to technological constraints, it would not have been possible for all of the students to take the survey online without creating a great inconvenience for the teachers administering the survey.

Once all of the completed surveys were collected, the researcher manually entered the student responses from each survey into the website. As the responses from each survey were entered, the researcher also entered the corresponding student number, the number of days that student was absent during first semester of the 2009-10 school year, and the GPA the student earned during that same semester. These last two pieces of information were taken from the AS400-generated spreadsheet.

After entering all of the data into the online survey, the researcher was able to obtain reports of the compiled data. These reports displayed the number and percentage of each type of response to each question. While it was time-consuming for the researcher to enter manually the student responses into the website, this method of compiling the data provided the researcher with one final report showing all of the data together, which made analyzing the data much more efficient.

Data Analysis

Because this was a mixed methods study, the researcher analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. She examined the quantitative data to determine whether there was a significant correlation between the number of days students are absent from school and the students' GPAs. The author scrutinized the qualitative data to determine whether school-related factors or home-related factors were more prominent causes of student nonattendance. Furthermore, the survey, which was qualitative in nature, consisted of four distinct sections, each of which was analyzed separately. The final portion of the survey collected demographic data on the students who participated in the survey.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The author collected two types of quantitative data for this study. The first type was the number of absences each student in the sample had accumulated during first semester of the 2009-10 school year, and the second type was the GPA each of those students had earned during that same semester. This data was collected for 186 of the 193 students who participated in the survey portion of the study. The remaining seven students in the sample either were suspended or withdrew from school between the time the survey was conducted and the end of the semester when attendance and GPA data was collected.

Because one of the goals of this study was to determine the relationship between student attendance and student achievement, the researcher analyzed this data to find the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient of the two data sets. The correlation coefficient of two variables shows the strength of the relationship between those two things and whether that relationship is positive or negative (Bluman, 2008). The researcher used Microsoft Excel to calculate the correlation coefficient between student attendance and

student achievement. The data used in this calculation was taken from the AS400-generated

spreadsheet showing each student's number of absences and corresponding GPA.

After finding the correlation coefficient, the researcher conducted regression analysis

on the data to determine if it would be possible to predict a student's GPA based on his or

her number of absences. These statistics were conducted with a 95% confidence interval.

The regression analysis enabled the researcher to create a scatter plot of the data with a line

of best fit, which could then be used to predict a student's GPA based on his number of

absences. When analyzing this data, the researcher was working with the null hypothesis

that there was not a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance

(number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a

4-point scale during that same semester).

Qualitative Data Analysis

There were four parts to the qualitative data analysis completed in this study. The

researcher analyzed data from the first section of the student survey to determine whether

there was a significant difference in the influence of home-related factors and school-related

factors on student nonattendance. The second section of the survey asked the students to

rank how often each of a series of statements caused them to miss school. The data analysis

on this portion of the survey consisted of putting these statements in order, from the

statement that caused students to miss school the most often to the statement that caused

students to miss school the least often. The third section of the survey consisted of a series

of statements that students were asked to rank on a Likert scale. The author qualitatively

analyzed student responses to these statements to determine whether home-related factors or

school-related factors had a more prominent influence on student nonattendance. The fourth part of the survey was designed to collect primarily demographic data.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 1

Part 1 of the student survey asked students to place a checkmark next to any of the 25 given statements that were reasons why they had ever missed school. After creating the survey, the researcher classified each of the statements as either *home-related* or *school-related.* Items were classified as home-related if they were a result of the decisions or actions of parents, things the parents had control over, or things that had to do with students' home situations. Items were classified as school-related if they were related to curriculum, school environment or culture, or were the result of decisions or actions of school officials. The researcher determined that a few of the questions in that section were neither home-related nor school-related, so those questions were classified as *neither* and were left out of the data analysis. The statements in part 1 that were classified as home-related were as follows:

- I had a doctor's appointment.

- I missed the bus.

- Someone in my family (other than me) was sick and I had to take care of that person.

- I was out of town.

- I didn't have a way to school.

- I stayed home to take care of younger siblings or relatives.

- I stayed home to take care of my own child/children.

- It was a religious holiday.

- I felt tired/overslept because I was up too late the night before working.

- I felt tired/overslept because I was up too late the night before doing fun things.

The statements in part 1 of the survey that were classified as school-related were as follows:

- I don't have any friends at school.

- My classes are boring.

- I don't like school.

- I'm failing my classes anyway.

- I don't understand what's being taught in my classes anyway – I feel lost a lot of the time in class.

- My classes are too easy – I don't feel challenged at school.

- I just didn't feel like coming.

- I was avoiding a person or situation at school.

- I was unprepared for a test or assignment I would have had to do for school that day.

- I get bullied or picked on at school.

Several statements in part 1 of the survey were classified as neither home-related nor school-related because the researcher determined that they fell outside the control of both the school and the parent. Therefore, the following statements were left out of the data analysis:

- I was sick.

- The weather was bad.

- I had to go to a funeral.

- I had to go to court.

- I skipped school to hang out with my friends.

To analyze whether the difference between the number of students who chose home-related factors and the number of students who chose school-related factors as causes of nonattendance was statistically significant, the researcher began by finding the variance of the two variables. After finding the variance of each variable, the researcher used this information to conduct a z test for the difference of means of the two variables using the hypothesized mean difference of zero. When analyzing this data, the researcher was working with the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Throughout the course of analyzing this data, the researcher noted that there was an overwhelming percentage of students (79.3%) who had placed a checkmark next to the statement "I had a doctor's appointment," meaning that many of the students had missed school due to this reason. To determine whether that statement alone was a common enough reason for nonattendance to make home-related factors appear to be more prominent than school-related factors, the researcher removed that statement from the data. She then found the variance of the home-related variables without that statement, and again conducted the z test for the difference of means of the two variables using the hypothesized mean difference of zero. The researcher used the same null hypothesis that she used for the original analysis, which stated that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 2

Part 2 of the student survey directed the students to rank a series of eight statements from 1 (*most often*) to 8 (*least often*) according to how often the reason given in each statement has caused them to miss school. The researcher classified each of the statements as either home-related or school-related. Items were classified as home-related if they were a result of the decisions or actions of parents, things the parents had control over, or things that had to do with the student's home situation. Items were classified as school-related if they were related to curriculum, school environment or culture, or were the result of decisions or actions of the school. One statement was classified as neither home-related nor school-related. The statements in part 2 that were classified as home-related were as follows:

- I or someone else in my family was sick.

- I went out of town.

- I didn't have a way to get to school.

The statements in part 2 that were classified as school-related were as follows:

- I just didn't feel like going to school/I don't like school.

- I was avoiding a problem or situation at school that involves other students.

- I was unprepared for a test or assignment that had to be done at school that day.

- My teachers don't like me or pick on me.

The statement "I skipped school to be with my friends" was classified as neither home-related nor school-related.

To complete the data analysis on this part of the survey, the researcher did a frequency count of each ranking for each statement to determine which statement was most strongly linked to each rank. Using this information, the researcher was able to put all eight

of the statements in order from the reason that caused students to miss school the most often to the reason that caused students to miss school the least often. This also allowed the researcher to establish whether these home-related factors or school-related factors caused student nonattendance more frequently.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 3

Part 3 of the student survey was comprised of a series of 15 statements designed to gain insight into student perceptions that may be related to nonattendance. The students had to rate on a 4-point Likert scale how often each statement applied to them. The four points the students had to choose from for each statement were *Always*, *Sometimes*, *Seldom*, and *Never*. After developing the survey, the researcher classified each statement as either home-related or school-related by asking of each statement, "if this perception caused a student's nonattendance, which is culpable (home or school)?" For example, the statement "My parents don't care if I go to school" was classified as home-related because the parents would be culpable if this perception contributed to a student's nonattendance. The statements from part 3 of the survey that were classified as home-related factors were as follows:

- My parents don't care if I go to school.

- My parents don't expect much from me.

- My parents give me consequences when I skip school.

- My parents are too hard on me.

- I would rather be at school than at home.

- I get more support at school than at home.

The statements from part 3 of the survey that were classified as school-related factors were as follows:

- My teachers don't care or notice if I'm at school.

- My teachers don't expect much from me.

- The school gives me consequences when I skip school.

- I know that if I come to school I'm going to get in trouble.

- I like school.

- The adults at school don't care about me.

- I don't feel like I can succeed at school.

- I get picked on at school by other kids.

- My teachers pick on me.

Because the researcher included several reversal items on the survey, it was necessary to determine which Likert points were the desired answers for each statement. For instance, both "My teachers don't expect much from me" and "I like school" were school-related statements. However, the first statement was phrased in a negative way and the second statement was phrased in a positive way. Therefore, if a student answered that he or she *Seldom* or *Never* likes school, the school would be culpable for that student's nonattendance. On the other hand, the school would also be culpable for a student's nonattendance if he or she answered that his or her teachers *Always* or *Sometimes* don't expect much from him or her. Thus, for each statement, the researcher noted which responses would make the appropriate factor (home or school) culpable for a student's nonattendance.

After noting the desired responses for each statement, the researcher grouped the responses so that she could effectively complete the data analysis. She grouped the

responses *Always* and *Sometimes* together and the responses *Seldom* and *Never* together. Next, for each category (home-related factors and school-related factors) the researcher counted the number of times that either of the desired responses for each statement was chosen. For example, for the statement "My parents don't care if I go to school," which was classified as a home-related factor, *Always* and *Sometimes* were the desired responses. Twenty-eight students chose *Always* and nine students chose *Sometimes,* for a total of 37 desired responses. She did this for each statement in both categories.

Then the researcher analyzed the data from part 3 of the student survey to determine if there was a statistical difference between the proportion of students who chose the desired responses for home-related factors compared to the proportion of students who chose the desired responses for school-related factors. She began by finding the variance of the two variables. After finding the variance of each variable, the researcher used this information to conduct a *z* test for the difference in proportions of the two variables using a hypothesized mean difference of zero. When analyzing this data, the researcher was working with the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Finally, the researcher also closely scrutinized students' responses to specific statements in this section. She examined the percentage of students who responded *Always, Sometimes, Seldom,* and *Never* to each of the statements. She qualitatively analyzed these responses in order to determine student attitudes and perceptions about specific home-related and school-related factors that may cause nonattendance.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 4

The author designed the fourth part of the student survey to collect primarily demographic data from the sample population. This section included questions about each student's grade level, age, gender, race, and parents' levels of education. It also included two questions about student attitudes about school. All of the items in this section were selected response questions. Survey Monkey provided the researcher with the total number of responses for each answer to each question as well as the percentage of responses for each answer to each question.

Conclusion

Poor student attendance is an issue in many schools today. Student attendance is important not only to schools, which depend on student attendance rates for their accreditation, but also to students. Students with good attendance have a better chance of succeeding academically at school; they are also less likely to engage in risk behaviors. The author of this study investigated the relationship between student attendance and student achievement. In addition, she explored the major causes of nonattendance, as well as whether those causes were home-related or school-related. The purpose of this study was to provide the school in question, as well as other similar schools, with information that would be useful in creating programs and initiatives designed to increase student attendance.

Because there were several parts to this study, the author determined that a sequential mixed method research design would be the best way for her to find answers to her research questions. With the first research question, which was quantitative in nature, the researcher sought to determine what type of relationship existed between student attendance (the number of days absent during one semester) and student achievement (the students' GPAs

during that same semester) at the school in question. She was working with the null

hypothesis that there was not a statistically significant negative correlation between student

attendance and student achievement. The researcher analyzed the attendance and GPA data

to find the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the two data sets. She also

conducted regression analysis on the data to determine if it would be possible to predict a

student's GPA based on his or her number of absences.

The researcher designed the second research question, which was qualitative, to

ascertain whether home-related factors or school-related factors were more prominent

causes of student nonattendance. When attempting to answer this question, the author was

working with the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and

family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of nonattendance than factors related

to school culture and environment. The researcher created a student survey, which she used

to collect the qualitative data needed to answer this research question. Each part of the

survey very closely aligned with previous literature on nonattendance.

The researcher prepared the survey data for analysis by first classifying each of the

statements in parts 1, 2, and 3 as either home-related or school-related. Then she analyzed

the student responses to part 1 of the survey using a z test for the difference of means of the

two variables using the hypothesized mean difference of zero. To analyze the data from part

2 of the survey, the researcher conducted a frequency count of each ranking for each

statement to determine which statement was most strongly linked to each rank. The

researcher analyzed part 3 of the student survey by conducting a z test for the difference in

proportions of the two variables using a hypothesized mean difference of zero. She also

closely examined the students' responses to these statements to determine student attitudes

and perceptions about specific home-related and school-related factors that may cause

nonattendance. Finally, the researcher collected demographic information about the sample

population using their responses to the questions in part 4 of the student survey.

In Chapter 4, the author describes each statistical analysis conducted in the study in

detail. She delves further into the results, discussing the relationship between student

attendance and student achievement, as well as whether a student's GPA can actually be

predicted using his or her attendance. Furthermore, the researcher discusses the most

prominent causes of nonattendance and whether those causes are home-related or school

related. The author also discusses student attitudes and perceptions about home and school.

Finally, the author describes demographic data about the sample population, including grade

level, age, gender, race, and parents' levels of education.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

Nonattendance is a substantial problem in many high schools today. This problem affects both schools and students. Schools are evaluated on their Average Daily Attendance rates at both the state and federal levels, so increasing student attendance is beneficial to the school. Having a high attendance rate is also important for students in terms of student achievement and decreasing the probability that they will engage in risk behaviors. Thus, schools are constantly working to improve student attendance. Because nonattendance can occur for a variety of reasons, many of which are often unknown to the school, the programs school leaders implement to combat nonattendance are often misguided and, therefore, ineffective. School officials may use the results of this research to develop more effective nonattendance intervention programs since the interventions could be specifically tailored to the known causes of nonattendance.

The researcher designed this study to answer two research questions. The first question was quantitative: what is the relationship between student attendance (the independent variable) and student achievement (the dependent variable)? The researcher was working with the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (measured by GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester). Therefore, the more days a student is absent during a semester, the lower that student's GPA will be for that same semester.

The second question was qualitative: which are the most prominent causes of student nonattendance at the high school level – school-related factors or home-related factors? For

this question, the researcher was working with the hypothesis that factors related to students'

home environments and family backgrounds are more noteworthy causes of student

nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

In order to answer the questions asked in her study, the researcher collected and

analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data. She examined the quantitative data to

determine whether there was a statistically significant correlation between the number of

days students are absent from school and the students' corresponding GPAs. The author then

analyzed the qualitative data to determine whether school-related factors or home-related

factors were more prominent causes of student nonattendance.

<div align="center">*Quantitative Data Analysis*</div>

The researcher used two types of quantitative data in this study. The first type was

the number of absences each student in the sample had accumulated during first semester of

the 2009-10 school year; the second type of quantitative data was the GPA each of those

students had earned during that same semester. She collected this data by using the school

district's student management system, AS400, to generate an Excel spreadsheet containing

the necessary information.

One of the goals of this study was to determine the relationship between student

attendance and student achievement. To that end, the researcher analyzed the attendance and

GPA data to find the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient of the two data sets.

The correlation coefficient of two variables shows the strength of the relationship between

those two variables, as well as whether that relationship is positive or negative (Bluman,

2008). Correlation coefficients can range from -1 to +1. A correlation coefficient close to -1

implies a strong inverse relationship between the two variables, while a correlation

coefficient close to +1 implies a strong direct relationship between the two variables. The

closer the correlation coefficient is to 0, the weaker the relationship is between the two

variables. Therefore, a correlation coefficient of 0 means that there is no definitive

relationship between the two variables whatsoever (Bluman).

After finding the correlation coefficient, the researcher conducted a regression

analysis on the data to determine whether it would be possible to predict a student's GPA

based on his or her number of absences. She used a 95% confidence interval when analyzing

the data. Table 4 includes the results from the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation

Coefficient analysis and the regression analysis.

Table 4
Correlation and Regression Statistics for Number of Absences and GPA

Statistical Test	Result
Pearson Correlation Coefficient (R)	-.36
R Square	.13
Adjusted R Square	.13
Standard Error	.89
Observations	185
Confidence Interval	95%

When analyzing this data, the researcher was working with the null hypothesis that

there was not a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance

(number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a

4-point scale). The correlation coefficient found in this study, -.36, suggests a weak negative

correlation between attendance and achievement. This result implies that the negative

relationship between the number of absences and subsequent student GPA is inconclusive.

The regression analysis enabled the researcher to create a scatter plot of the data with

a line of best fit, which, theoretically, she could use to predict a student's GPA based on his

or her number of absences.
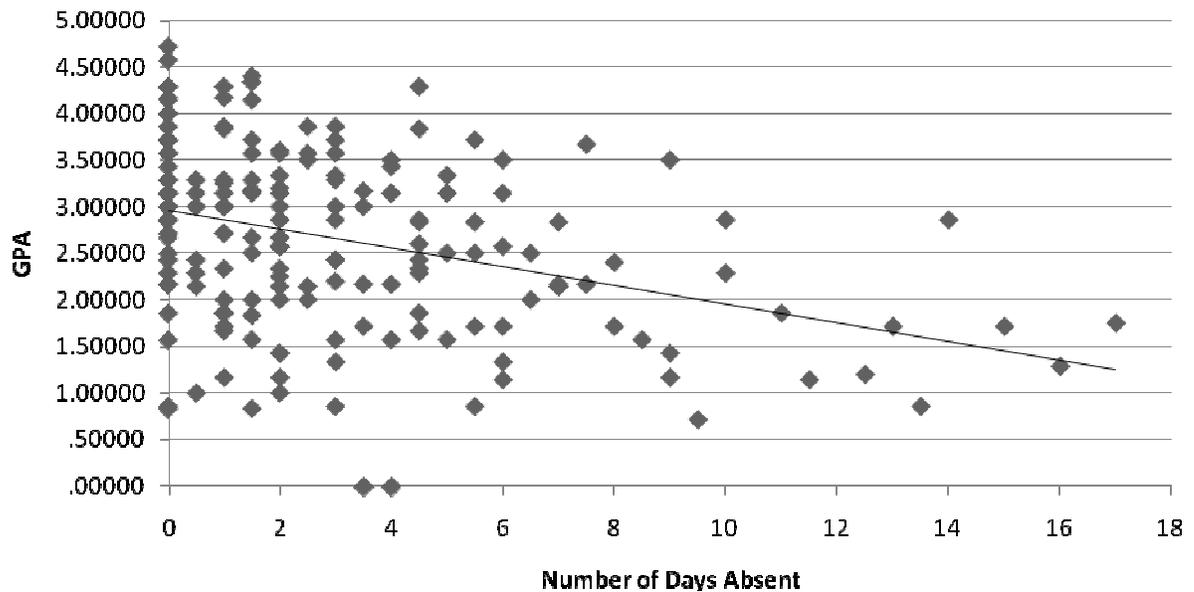
Figure 2. Line of best fit for the predictability of GPA based on number of absences.

The R square value of .13 (13%) indicates that at the 95% confidence interval, the researcher

can state that 13% of the variation in the dependent variable (GPA) can be explained by the

independent variable (number of absences). Figure 2 also clearly illustrates that point. This

connotes that 13% of the time, one could accurately predict a student's GPA based on his or

her number of absences. However, the student's GPA could not be accurately predicted the

other 87% of the time.

Given these results (R = -.36 and R^2 = 13%), the researcher rejected the null

hypothesis that there is not a statistically significant negative correlation between student

attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by

GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester). Furthermore, the researcher supported

the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between student

attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by

GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester). However, because R^2 =13%, the

relationship found between the two variables was weak; therefore, the results are not easily

generalized.

Qualitative Data Analysis

There were four parts to the qualitative data analysis completed in this study. The

researcher analyzed data from the first section of the student survey to determine whether

there was a statistically significant difference between the influence of home-related factors

and school-related factors on student nonattendance. On the second section of the survey,

the students were instructed to rank how often each of a series of statements caused them to

miss school. The data analysis on this portion of the survey consisted of putting these

statements in order, from the statement that caused students to miss school the most often to

the statement that caused students to miss school the least often. The third section of the

survey consisted of a series of statements designed to determine students' attitudes and

perceptions about home and school. The students were instructed to rank each statement on

a 4-point Likert scale from *Always* to *Never*. The author then analyzed student responses to

these statements to determine whether home-related factors or school-related factors had a

more prominent influence on student nonattendance. The fourth part of the survey consisted

of selected response questions. The researcher designed this portion of the survey primarily to collect demographic data. This section of the survey also included two questions regarding students' attitudes towards their future education.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 1

On part 1 of the survey, the students were instructed to place a checkmark next to any of the 25 given statements that were reasons why they had ever missed school. After creating the survey, the researcher classified each of the statements as either home-related or school-related. She classified items as home-related if they were a result of the decisions or actions of parents, things the parents had control over, or things that had to do with the students' home situations. She determined that school-related items, on the other hand, were related to curriculum, school environment or culture, or were the result of decisions or actions of the school.

Table 5 shows each of the statements from part 1 of the survey that the researcher

classified as home-related. Following each statement is the number of students (out of 193

participants) who marked each statement as a reason they have missed school, as well as the

percentage (in parentheses) of students who chose each statement.

Table 5
Home-Related Statements and the Students Who Chose that Statement

Statement	No. (%)
I had a doctor's appointment	153 (79.3)
I was out of town	86 (44.6)
I missed the bus	65 (33.7)
I felt tired/overslept because I was up too late the night before working	48 (24.9)
Someone in my family was sick and I had to take care of that person	45 (23.3)
I felt tired/overslept because I was up too late the night before doing fun things	26 (13.5)
I stayed home to take care of younger siblings or relatives	26 (13.5)
I didn't have a way to school	24 (12.4)
It was a religious holiday	16 (8.3)
I stayed home to take care of my own child/children	6 (3.1)

Table 6 shows each of the statements from part 1 of the survey that the researcher classified as school-related. Following each statement is the number of students (out of 193 participants) who marked each statement as a reason they have missed school, as well as the percentage (in parentheses) of students who chose each statement.

Table 6
School-Related Statements and the Students Who Chose that Statement

Statement	No. (%)
I don't have any friends at school	4 (2.1)
My classes are boring	28 (14.5)
I don't like school	20 (10.4)
I'm failing my classes anyway	4 (2.1)
I don't understand what's being taught in my classes anyway – I feel lost a lot of the time in class	4 (2.1)
My classes are too easy – I don't feel challenged at school	8 (4.1)
I just didn't feel like coming	43 (22.3)
I was avoiding a person or situation at school	15 (7.8)
I was unprepared for a test or assignment I would have had to do for school that day	20 (10.4)
I get bullied or picked on at school	8 (4.1)

Z Test 1. To analyze whether the difference between the number of students who chose home-related factors and the number of students who chose school-related factors as causes of nonattendance was statistically significant, the researcher began by finding descriptive statistics of those two variables. Table 7 shows those statistics.

Table 7
Descriptive Statistics for Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 1 -- Z Test 1

Description	Home-Related Factors	School-Related Factors
Mean	49.50	15.40
Median	35.50	11.50
Mode	26	4
Standard Deviation	43.56	12.75
Variance	1897.39	162.49
Minimum	6	4
Maximum	153	43
Sum	495	154
Count	10	10

After finding the descriptive statistics of each variable, the researcher used this information to conduct a *z* test for the difference of means of the two variables using the hypothesized mean difference of zero. When analyzing this data, the researcher was working with the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related

to school culture and environment, as measured by proportional responses to questionnaire

categories. Table 8 shows the results of the *z* test.

Table 8
Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 1: Z-Test 1 Results

Statistical Test	Result
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
z	2.38
alpha	0.05
Z Critical two-tail	1.95
Confidence Interval	95%

Because the *z* value of 2.38 is larger than the critical value of 1.95 and the *z* value of

-2.38 is smaller than the critical value of -1.95, the *z* value falls into the critical regions on

the normal bell curve. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that factors

related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy

causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Furthermore, the researcher supported her hypothesis that factors related to students' home

environments and family backgrounds were perceived to be statistically more significant

causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Z Test 2. While analyzing this data, the researcher noted that a vast majority of

students (79.3%) had chosen the statement "I had a doctor's appointment" as a reason they

have missed school. To determine whether that reason alone was a common enough cause of

nonattendance to make home-related factors appear to be more significant causes of

nonattendance than school-related factors, the researcher removed that statement from the

data and conducted her analysis again. She began by finding descriptive statistics on the two

variables, which are shown in Table 9.

Table 9
Descriptive Statistics for Qualitative Analysis Part 1 -- Z Test 2

Description	Home-Related Factors	School-Related Factors
Mean	38	15.40
Median	26	11.50
Mode	26	4
Standard Deviation	25.43	12.75
Variance	646.75	162.49
Minimum	6	4
Maximum	86	43
Sum	342	154
Count	9	10

After finding the descriptive statistics of each variable, the researcher used this

information to conduct a z test for the difference of means of the two variables using the

hypothesized mean difference of zero. When analyzing this data, the researcher used the

same null hypothesis that she had used on the first z test, which stated that factors related to

students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of

student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment, as measured

by proportional responses to questionnaire categories. Table 10 shows the results of the *z*

test.

Table 10
Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 1: Z-Test 2 Results

Statistical Test	Result
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
z	2.41
alpha	0.05
Z Critical two-tail	1.95
Confidence Interval	95%

Because the *z* value of 2.41 is larger than the critical value of 1.95 and the *z* value of

-2.41 is smaller than the critical value of -1.95, the *z* value falls into the critical regions on

the normal bell curve. Hence, the researcher again rejected the null hypothesis that factors

related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy

causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Furthermore, the researcher once more supported her hypothesis that factors related to

students' home environments and family backgrounds were statistically more significant

causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment. This

additional *z* test indicated that the home-related factors were perceived to be more

significant causes of student nonattendance even without including the most popular home-

related response of "I had a doctor's appointment" in the data analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 2

Part 2 of the student survey directed the students to rank eight statements according to how often the reason given in each statement has caused them to miss school, with 1 being the reason that causes them to miss school the most often and 8 being the reason that causes them to miss school the least often. The researcher classified each of the statements as either home-related or school-related. She classified items as home-related if they were a result of the decisions or actions of parents, things the parents had control over, or things that had to do with the students' home situations. She determined that school-related items, on the other hand, were related to curriculum, school environment or culture, were the result of decisions or actions of the school. One item was classified as neither home-related nor school-related.

To complete the data analysis on this part of the survey, the researcher did a frequency count of each ranking for each statement to determine which statement was most strongly linked to each ranking. Using this information, the researcher was able to put all eight of the statements in order from the reason that caused students to miss school the most often to the reason that caused students to miss school the least often. This also allowed the researcher to establish whether home-related factors or school-related factors caused student nonattendance more frequently. The following list displays each of the statements in rank order, specifies what percentage of students ranked the item at that number, and indicates whether each statement was classified as home-related or school-related:

1. I or someone else in my family was sick (56.9%) (home-related).

2. I went out of town (30.2%) (home-related).

3. I didn't have a way to get to school (21.4%) (home-related).

4. I was unprepared for a test or assignment that had to be done at school that day (27.1%) (school-related).

5. I just didn't feel like going to school/I don't like school (20.9%) (school-related).

6. I skipped school to be with my friends (26.7%) (neither).

7. My teachers don't like me or pick on me (32.2%) (school-related).

8. I was avoiding a problem or situation at school that involves other students (22.3%) (school-related).

This list reveals that each of the top three ranked reasons for nonattendance was home-related.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 3

Part 3 of the student survey was comprised of a series of 15 statements designed to gain insight into student perceptions that may be related to nonattendance. The students rated how often each statement applied to them on a 4-point Likert scale. The four points the students had to choose from for each statement were *Always*, *Sometimes*, *Seldom*, and *Never*. After developing the survey, the researcher classified each statement as either home-related or school-related by asking of each statement, "if this perception caused a student's nonattendance, which is culpable (home or school)?" For example, the statement "My parents don't care if I go to school" was classified as home-related because the parents would be culpable if this perception contributed to a student's nonattendance.

The researcher included several reversal items on the survey, so it was necessary to determine which Likert points were the desired responses for each statement. Therefore, for each statement, the researcher noted which responses would make the appropriate factor (home or school) culpable for a student's nonattendance. After noting the desired responses

for each statement, the researcher grouped the responses so that she could effectively complete the data analysis. She grouped the responses *Always* and *Sometimes* together and the responses *Seldom* and *Never* together. Finally, for each category (home-related factors and school-related factors) the researcher counted the number of times that students chose either of the desired responses for each statement.

Table 11 shows each of the statements from part 3 of the survey that the researcher classified as home-related. Following each statement is the number of students (out of 193 participants) who marked either of the desired responses for each statement and the percentage (in parentheses) of students who marked either of the desired responses for each statement.

Table 11
Home-Related Statements and the Corresponding Desired Responses

Statement	Desired Responses	No. (%)
My parents don't care if I go to school	Always/Sometimes	37 (19%)
My parents don't expect much from me	Always/Sometimes	31 (16.1%)
My parents give me consequences when I skip school	Seldom/Never	79 (41.3%)
My parents are too hard on me	Always/Sometimes	80 (41.4%)
I would rather be at school than at home	Always/Sometimes	88 (45.4%)
I get more support at school than at home	Always/Sometimes	50 (25.9%)

Table 12 shows each of the statements from part 3 of the survey that the researcher classified as school-related. Following each statement is the number of students (out of 193 participants) who marked either of the desired responses for each statement and the percentage (in parentheses) of students who marked either of the desired responses for each statement.

Table 12
School-Related Statements and the Percentage of Corresponding Desired Responses

Statement	Desired Responses	No. (%)
My teachers don't care or notice if I'm at school	Always/Sometimes	50 (25.8%)
My teachers don't expect much from me	Always/Sometimes	37 (19.2%)
The school gives me consequences when I skip school	Seldom/Never	75 (39.4%)
I know that if I come to school I'm going to get in trouble	Always/Sometimes	27 (13.9%)
I like school	Seldom/Never	62 (32.2%)
The adults at school don't care about me	Always/Sometimes	40 (20.6%)
I don't feel like I can succeed at school	Always/Sometimes	28 (14.4%)
I get picked on at school by other kids	Always/Sometimes	20 (10.3%)
My teachers pick on me	Always/Sometimes	25 (12.9%)

After preparing the data in this manner, the researcher analyzed the data from part 3 of the student survey to determine whether there was a statistical difference between the proportions of students who chose the desired responses for home-related factors compared

to students who chose the desired responses for school-related factors. The researcher began

by finding descriptive statistics for each variable. These statistics are shown in Table 13.

Table 13
Descriptive Statistics for Factors in Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 3

Description	Home-Related Factors	School-Related Factors
Mean	62.5	40.4
Median	64.5	37
Standard Deviation	26.97	18.55
Variance	727.5	344.28
Minimum	31	20
Maximum	98	75
Sum	375	364
Count	6	9

After finding the descriptive statistics for each variable, the researcher used this

information to conduct a z test for the difference in proportions of the two variables using a

hypothesized mean difference of zero. When analyzing this data, the researcher was working

with the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family

backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related

to school culture and environment, as measured by proportional responses to questionnaire

categories. Table 14 shows the results of the z test.

Table 14
Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 3: Z-Test Results

Statistical Test	Result
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
z	0.15
alpha	0.05
Z Critical two-tail	1.95
Confidence Interval	95%

Because the *z* value of 0.15 is smaller than the critical value of 1.95 and the *z* value

of -0.15 is larger than the critical value of -1.95, the *z* value does not fall into the critical

regions on a bell curve. Thus, the researcher did not reject the null hypothesis that factors

related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy

causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

There was not a statistically significant difference between the proportion of students who

chose home-related and the proportion of students who chose school-related factors as

causes of nonattendance.

The researcher also closely examined the student responses to specific statements in

part 3 of the survey. She used Survey Monkey to determine the percentage of students who

responded *Always, Sometimes, Seldom,* and *Never* to each of the statements. Then the

researcher analyzed these responses in order to determine student attitudes and perceptions

about specific home-related and school-related factors that may cause nonattendance. Table

15 shows the percentage of students who chose each response for each specific statement.

Table 15
Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 3: Percentage of Student Responses to Statements

Statement	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
My parents don't care if I go to school	14.4%	4.6%	6.2%	74.7%
My teachers don't care or notice if I'm at school	9.3%	16.5%	16.5%	57.7%
My teachers don't expect much from me	11.9%	7.3%	13.0%	67.9%
My parents don't expect much from me	13.5%	2.6%	4.1%	79.8%
My parents give me consequences when I skip school	46.1%	12.6%	12.0%	29.3%
The school gives me consequences when I skip school	46.3%	14.2%	10.5%	28.9%
My parents are too hard on me	8.8%	32.6%	21.8%	36.8%
I know that if I come to school I'm going to get in trouble	4.1%	9.8%	12.9%	73.2%
I like school	19.2%	48.7%	21.8%	10.4%
I would rather be at school than at home	9.3%	36.1%	27.8%	26.8%
The adults at school don't care about me	7.7%	12.9%	27.3%	52.1%
I get more support at school than at home	8.3%	17.6%	18.7%	55.4%
I don't feel like I can succeed at school	6.7%	7.7%	12.9%	72.7%
I get picked on at school by other kids	7.2%	3.1%	9.3%	80.4%
My teachers pick on me	5.2%	7.7%	11.3%	75.8%

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 4

The researcher used the fourth part of the student survey to collect demographic data from the sample population, including each student's grade level, age, gender, race, and parents' levels of education. It also included two questions about student attitudes about graduating from high school and going to college. All of the items in this section were selected response questions. The author used Survey Monkey to determine the total number of responses for each answer to each question as well as the percentage of responses for each answer to each question.

Grade level and age. According to the results of the survey, 32.5% of the participants were 9th graders, 20.1% were 10th graders, 18.6% were 11th graders, and 28.9% were 12th graders. Figure 3 shows the grade levels of the overall school population compared to the grade levels of the students who participated in the study. Along those same lines, 20.5% of the students who participated in the study were 14 years old, 23.2% were 15 years old, 22.1% were 16, 25.8% were 17, and 8.4% were 18 years old.

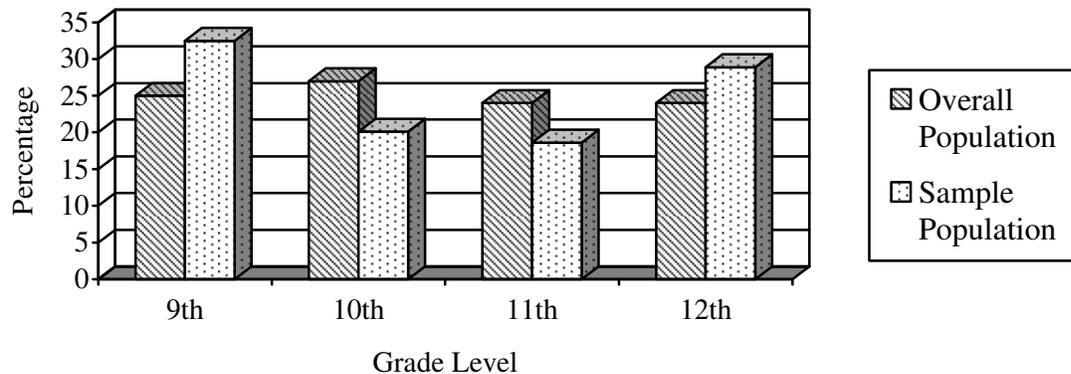

Figure 3. Overall population compared to sample population by grade level.

Gender. Fifty-seven percent of the students who participated in the study were female, leaving 43% of the participants as male. The overall school population is also

predominantly female, but not significantly so, at 51%. The students eligible to participate in

the study also slant this demographic, but only slightly more so than the overall school

population. Fifty-two percent of the selected students who returned the consent forms were

female and were, therefore, eligible to participate in the study; however, on the day that the

surveys were administered, 57% of those eligible students who were present in class were

female. These comparisons are illustrated below in Figure 4.
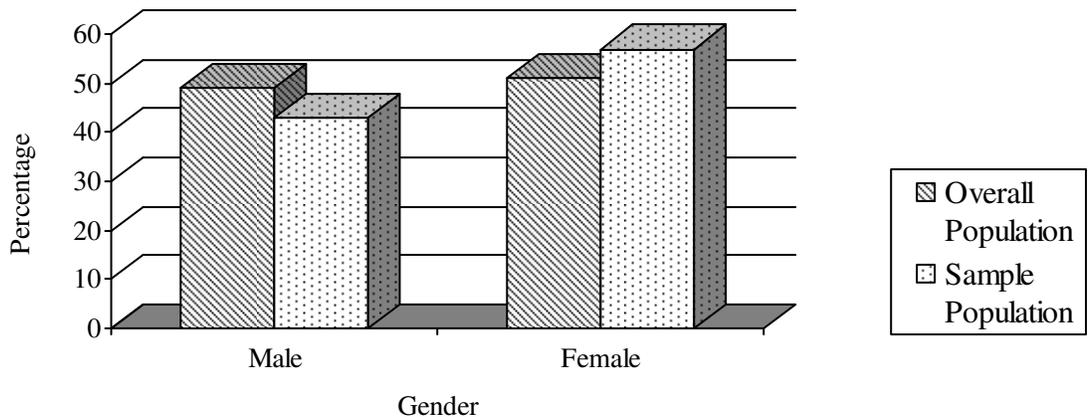
Figure 4. Overall population compared to sample population by gender.

Race. The overall school population has a racial makeup of 84% Black, 13% White,

and 3% Other. The racial makeup of the students who were eligible to participate in the

study mirrors this makeup very closely, with 85% Black, 13% White, and 2% Other.

However, when one looks at the data on those students who completed the necessary

requirements of both returning the consent form on time and being present in class on the

day the survey was administered, only 73.5% of those students were Black. This is more

than 10% below the overall school population of 84% Black. Thirteen percent of the

students who participated in the study were White, which is representative of the overall

school population, and 13.5% of the students who participated in the study classified their

race as Other. This is more than 10% above the overall school population of 3%. Figure 5
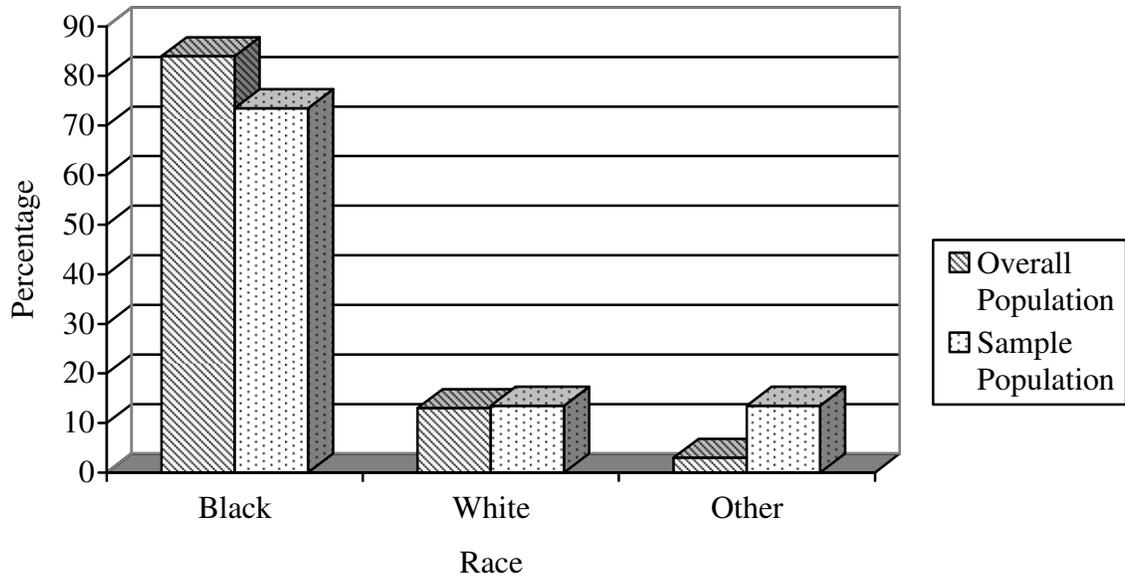
clearly shows these discrepancies.

Figure 5. Overall student population compared to sample population by race.

Parents' levels of education. For the students who participated in the study, Figure 6

shows the contrast between the students' fathers' level of education and mothers' level of

education. There are several details to consider when examining this data. At the first two

levels, *Some High School* and *Graduated High School*, the differences between fathers and

mothers is not very large, and there are fewer fathers than mothers at these two levels. With

respect to higher levels of education, *Some College* and *Graduated College*, the percentage

of mothers is far greater than the percentage of fathers, 27.5% to 9.8%, and 31.1% to 13.9%,

respectively. Finally, the difference between mothers and fathers with an *Unknown* level of

education is the greatest, with 34% *Unknown* for fathers and only 9.3% *Unknown* for

mothers. In addition, 58.3% of the students who participated in the study reportedly live in
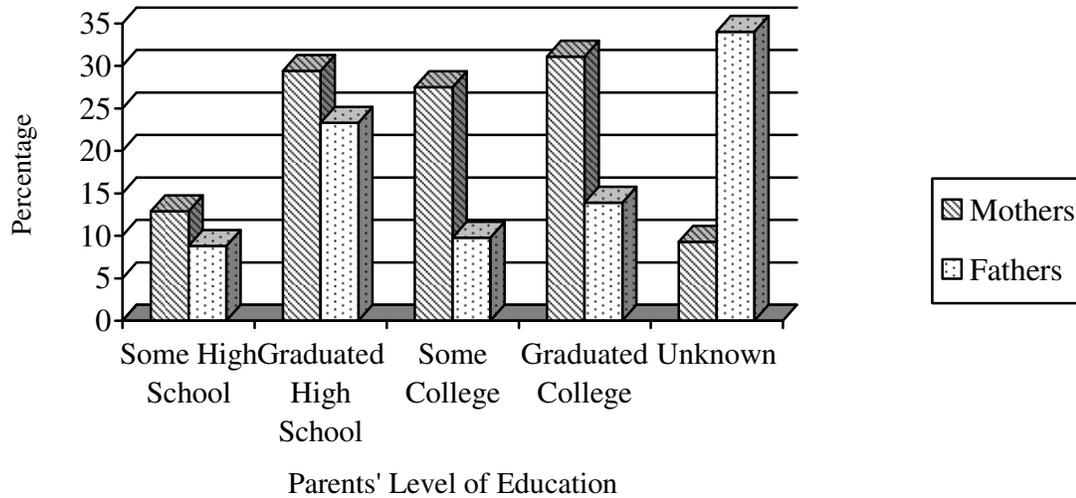
single-parent households.

Figure 6. Parents' level of education.

Student attitudes about the future. The researcher also included two questions asking students how likely they think it is that they will graduate from high school and how likely they believe it is that they will attend college. The results showed that while an enormous 94.3% of students think that that they *Definitely Will* graduate from high school, only 68.8% of those same students said that they *Definitely Will* go to college.

Conclusion

This was a sequential mixed methods study using both qualitative sources (student surveys) and quantitative sources (attendance and achievement data). With this study, the author attempted to answer two main questions. First, the author wanted to determine what relationship exists between student attendance and student achievement. Second, she investigated whether factors related to school culture and environment were more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds.

For the quantitative portion of the study, the author was working with the null hypothesis that there was not a statistically significant negative correlation between student

attendance and student achievement. She analyzed the student attendance and achievement data by finding the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the two data sets. Next, the researcher conducted a regression analysis on the data to determine whether it would be possible to predict a student's GPA based on his or her number of absences. Given the results of these tests, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, thereby supporting the hypothesis that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance and student achievement. However, the relationship between these two variables was weak; therefore, these results are not easily generalizable.

There were four distinct parts to the qualitative data analysis completed in this study. The first three parts were designed to determine whether home-related factors or school-related factors played a more prominent role in causing student nonattendance. For this portion of the study, the author was working with the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment. The researcher prepared the survey data for analysis by first classifying each of the statements in parts 1, 2, and 3 as either home-related or school-related.

Then she analyzed the student responses to part 1 of the survey using a z test for the difference of means of the two variables using the hypothesized mean difference of zero. Based on the results of this test, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, meaning that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were perceived to be statistically more significant causes of nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

To analyze the data from part 2 of the survey, the researcher conducted a frequency count of each ranking for each statement to determine which statement was most strongly linked to each rank. She found that the top three ranked reasons for nonattendance were all home-related.

Next, the researcher analyzed part 3 of the student survey by conducting a z test for the difference in proportions of the two variables using a hypothesized mean difference of zero. The results of this test led the researcher to support her null hypothesis, meaning that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment. The researcher also closely examined the student responses to the statements on part 3 of the survey to determine student attitudes and perceptions about specific home-related factors and school-related factors that may cause nonattendance.

Finally, the researcher collected demographic information about the sample population using their responses to the questions in part 4 of the student survey. Several interesting statistics were derived from this demographic data.

The author uses Chapter 5 as a platform to discuss the implications of the results found in each of the statistical analyses she conducted as part of this study. The researcher makes inferences and summarizes general themes that arose upon in depth analysis of the data. She also explains what these results may mean for school districts in terms of developing programs and initiatives to address issues of student nonattendance, and makes several recommendations for school districts to follow. Finally, the author describes several areas in which schools may benefit from further research.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Many high schools today have issues with student nonattendance. Nonattendance occurs for a multitude of reasons, many of which are unknown to schools. Therefore, many of the programs that schools implement to combat this problem are ineffective. Researchers and school officials may use the results of this research to develop nonattendance intervention programs that would be more successful than the ones that are currently in place.

The researcher focused on two research questions in this study. The first question was quantitative: what is the relationship between student attendance (the independent variable) and student achievement (the dependent variable)? The second question was qualitative: which are the most prominent causes of student nonattendance at the high school level – school-related factors or home-related factors?

The author used both quantitative sources (attendance [number of days absent during one semester] and achievement data [GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester]) and qualitative sources (student surveys) in her research. The students in the sample completed the student surveys in the middle of first semester of the 2009-10 school year. At the end of that semester, the researcher recorded the number of days each student in the sample had been absent during that semester and the corresponding GPA of each student in the sample for that same semester. She analyzed a combination of these different types of data to determine the answers to her research questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher collected and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data in order to effectively answer the research questions asked in her study. With the quantitative data, she was seeking to determine whether there is a statistically significant correlation between the number of days students are absent from school and the students' corresponding GPAs. Through analyzing the qualitative data, she sought to determine whether school-related factors or home-related factors were more prominent causes of student nonattendance.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The first objective of this study was to determine the relationship between student attendance and student achievement. To that end, the researcher analyzed the attendance (number of days absent during one semester) and achievement (GPA during that same semester) data to find the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient of the two data sets. Next, the researcher conducted a regression analysis (using a 95% confidence interval) on the data to determine whether it would be possible to predict a student's GPA based on his or her number of absences. The researcher was working with the null hypothesis that there was not a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a 4-point scale).

The data analysis resulted in a correlation coefficient of -.36 and an R square of 13%. Hence, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there is not a statistically significant negative correlation between student attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester). Moreover, the researcher supported the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant

negative correlation between student attendance (number of absences in one semester) and student achievement (as measured by GPA on a 4-point scale during that same semester). Consequently, the researcher can state that the negative relationship between the number of absences and subsequent student GPA is inconclusive.

Implications

Over time, many researchers have reported a correlation between student attendance and student achievement (Jones, 1984; Launius, 1997; Turner, 1927; Wyatt, 1992). Reid (1982) found that absentees not only had lower grades than their counterparts who had good attendance, but also that the longer those students were enrolled in school the worse their grades became. In a 1985 study, Sommer concluded that most truants placed in the bottom quartile of their class academically. Then, in 1992, Southworth noted that absentees often had lower intelligence than their peers with good attendance, low academic motivation and, as a result, poor performance in school. He also indicated that a very strong correlation exists between high intelligence and good attendance.

However, a correlation coefficient of -.36 suggests only a weak negative correlation between attendance and achievement. This result implies not only that, in some cases, students with a high number of absences also have a low GPA, but also that some students with a high number of absences may also have a high GPA. An R square value of 13% indicates that, at the 95% confidence interval, 13% of the variation in the dependent variable (GPA) can be explained by the independent variable (number of absences). Thus, 13% of the time, one could accurately predict a student's GPA based on his or her number of absences. Conversely, 87% of the time, one could not accurately predict a student's GPA based on his or her number of absences. In this study, therefore, student attendance played

only a small role in influencing student GPAs. These results imply that GPA may be more

strongly linked to other variables that were not addressed in this study, such as instructional

practices, school policies and procedures, school culture, students' work ethics and study

habits, etc.

Recommendations for Further Study

One limitation of this study was the timeframe during which it was conducted. The

researcher analyzed student attendance and achievement data over just one semester, which

is a short period. Any number of extenuating circumstances could have affected student

attendance and/or student achievement during that time, thereby skewing the results of the

study. Investigating a group of students over a longer period of time is one way for

researchers to collect more reliable data concerning the relationship between student

attendance and student achievement. In a new study, the timeframe might range from one

school year to an entire high school career of four years. The longer the timeframe of the

study, the more reliable the results would be.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis completed for this study consisted of four parts. The

researcher analyzed data from the first section of the student survey to determine whether

there was a statistically significant difference between the proportion of students who chose

the influence of home-related factors and the proportion of students who chose school-

related factors on student nonattendance. On the second section of the survey, the students

were instructed to rank how often each of a series of statements caused them to miss school;

then the researcher analyzed those rankings to ascertain whether home-related statements or

school-related statements were ranked higher according to the student responses. The third

section of the survey consisted of a series of statements designed to determine students'

attitudes and perceptions about home and school. The students were instructed to rank each

statement on a 4-point Likert scale from *Always* to *Never*. The author then analyzed student

responses to these statements to determine whether home-related factors or school-related

factors (in terms of student attitudes and perceptions) had a more prominent influence on

student nonattendance. The fourth part of the survey consisted of selected response

questions. The researcher designed this portion of the survey to collect demographic data

about the sample population. This section of the survey also included two questions

regarding students' attitudes towards finishing high school and attending college.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Parts 1 and 2

  Part 1. On part 1 of the student survey, the researcher instructed the students to place

a checkmark next to any of the 25 given statements that were reasons why they had ever

missed school. To facilitate the data analysis for this part of the survey, she classified each

of the statements as either home-related or school-related. She classified items as home-

related if they were a result of the decisions or actions of parents, things the parents had

control over, or things that had to do with the students' home situations. She determined that

school-related items, on the other hand, were related to curriculum, school environment or

culture, or were the result of decisions or actions of school officials.

  The researcher conducted two *z* tests for the difference of means of the two variables

(home-related factors and school-related factors) using the hypothesized mean difference of

zero. The first *z* test included all of the statements that the researcher had designated as

either home-related or school-related. While analyzing this data, the researcher noticed that

a sizable majority of students had chosen the statement "I had a doctor's appointment" as a

reason they have missed school. To determine whether that reason alone was a common enough cause of nonattendance to make home-related factors appear to be more significant causes of nonattendance than school-related factors, the researcher removed that statement from the data and conducted a second z test. For both z tests, she used the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

In both cases, the results of the z test led the researcher to reject the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment. Thus, the researcher supported her hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were statistically more significant causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

Part 2. On part 2 of student survey, the students ranked eight statements according to how often the reason given in each statement has caused them to miss school, with 1 being the reason that has caused them to miss school the most often and 8 being the reason that has caused them to miss school the least often. The researcher classified each of the statements as either home-related or school-related according to the same criteria used in part 1.

Using a frequency count of each ranking for each statement, the researcher was able to put all eight of the statements in order from the reason that caused students to miss school the most often to the reason that caused students to miss school the least often. This also allowed the researcher to establish whether home-related factors or school-related factors caused student nonattendance more frequently. According to this part of the survey, the top

three reasons for student nonattendance were "I or someone else in my family was sick," "I went out of town," and "I didn't have a way to get to school." The researcher had classified all three of these reasons as home-related.

Implications. Upon closer examination of the results from parts 1 and 2 of the student survey, the researcher discovered that the top three reasons for nonattendance in part 1 of the survey were very similar to the top three reasons given in part 2. On part 1, the three statements that students selected most often were "I had a doctor's appointment," "I was out of town," and "I missed the bus." On part 2 of the survey, the top three reasons were "I or someone else in my family was sick," "I went out of town," and "I didn't have a way to get to school."

Ultimately, the top three statements from both part 1 and part 2 of the student survey fell into three general areas (health, out of town, and transportation), all of which the researcher classified as home-related. Furthermore, all three of these reasons are things that parents have some element of control over. While parents cannot control when their children become ill, for example, they can control when they schedule regular doctor's appointments. Likewise, they can control when they take their children on trips out of town. Parents also share some responsibility in getting their children out of bed early enough that they do not miss the school bus. These results support Galloway's (1983) findings that the majority of parents are aware of their child's nonattendance, and that many times the child is at home.

It is possible that many parents of students who attend the school in this study do not realize how crucial school attendance is to the success of their children. It may be beneficial for school officials to implement a parental education program about the importance of attendance. A program of this nature may decrease the number of absences for reasons that

parents could prevent. This may be an effective means of increasing student attendance at the school.

The statements from part 1 of the survey that students chose fourth, fifth, and seventh most often, "I felt tired/overslept because I was up too late the night before working," "Someone in my family (other than me) was sick and I had to take care of that person," and "I stayed home to take care of younger siblings or relatives," are also all home-related reasons for student absences. However, all three of these things may be outside the realm of parental control, as they may be related to living arrangements, unique family situations, or socioeconomic status. Fine drew a similar conclusion in her 1986 study, which stated that family obligations are often a reason for non-attendance in low-income families. She found that, many times, students are required to take care of younger siblings or older family members when needed, even when they should be at school (Fine). Because of the nature of these factors, it may be very difficult for schools to do anything to affect these reasons for nonattendance. However, school officials may investigate partnering with families and social workers or government agencies that could provide resources to assist with these problems, thereby decreasing absences related to these reasons.

Recommendations for further study. The results from parts 1 and 2 of the student survey lead to two issues that could be addressed in future studies. First, it would be very beneficial to conduct a parent survey to determine the validity of the students' responses on the survey. The researcher could ask the same questions asked in the first two parts of the student survey used in this study. This would determine, from a parental point of view, how often students miss school due to the top three reasons the students cited (doctor's appointments, being out of town, and transportation issues). Discrepancies between the

student and parent responses could be a result of two factors: either the students were dishonest on the survey, or parents are unaware that their children are missing school due to these reasons. The researcher could also share the students' responses with the parents to make them aware of the reasons for nonattendance that the students reported.

Approximately 25% of students in the sample population reported missing school because they had been up late the night before working. Future studies may investigate whether or not these students are working because they must contribute to their families' finances. According to Fine (1986), economic obligations often cause nonattendance in low-income families because many students feel a strong obligation to help their families.

It would also be interesting to determine the relationship between the number of hours students work each week and student attendance. Students who are not required to contribute financially to their families may be able to reduce the number of hours they work each week, thereby having more energy to devote to school.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 3

Part 3 of the student survey consisted of 15 statements designed to gain insight into student attitudes and perceptions that may be related to nonattendance. Using a 4-point Likert scale, the students rated how often each statement applied to them. The four points the students chose from for each statement were *Always*, *Sometimes*, *Seldom*, and *Never*. After developing the survey, the researcher classified each statement as either home-related or school-related. Next, the researcher grouped the responses so that she could effectively complete the data analysis. She grouped the responses *Always* and *Sometimes* together and the responses *Seldom* and *Never* together. Then, the researcher counted the number of times

that students chose either of the desired responses for each statement in each category (home-related and school-related).

The researcher analyzed the data from part 3 of the student survey to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the proportions of students who chose the desired responses for home-related factors compared to students who chose the desired responses for school-related factors. She conducted a *z* test for the difference in proportions of the two variables using a hypothesized mean difference of zero. When analyzing this data, the researcher was working with the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment.

The results of the *z* test led the researcher to support the null hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were not more noteworthy causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment. Therefore, the researcher rejected her hypothesis that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were perceived to be statistically more significant causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment. In terms of student attitudes and perceptions about home and school, there was not a statistically significant difference between these two factors as causes of nonattendance.

The researcher also closely examined the student responses to specific statements in part 3 of the survey. She used Survey Monkey to determine the percentage of students who responded *Always, Sometimes, Seldom,* and *Never* to each of the statements. Then the researcher analyzed these responses in order to determine student attitudes and perceptions about specific home-related and school-related factors that may cause nonattendance.

Implications. The results of this data analysis suggest that student perceptions and attitudes about home-related factors and school-related factors are equally important in terms of influencing student nonattendance. This leads one to the conclusion that schools need to focus on both home-related factors and school-related factors when addressing the problem of nonattendance.

Generally, students had mixed perceptions and attitudes about both home and school, and several interesting discoveries arose upon closer examination of the data. For instance, 19% of students said that their parents *Always* or *Sometimes* don't care if they go to school, 16.1% of students said that their parents *Always* or *Sometimes* don't expect much from them, and 41.3% of students said that their parents *Seldom* or *Never* give them consequences when they skip school.

There is a substantial body of research indicating that parental attitudes about school greatly influence student attendance. For example, in 1979, Nielsen and Gerber found that many truants felt that their parents were not proactive about increasing their school attendance and that, if they were, it would help motivate them to attend school more often. In his 1983 study, Reid noted that absentees had parents who did not seem interested in their education and who were not willing to visit the school. Parental education programs about the importance of school attendance may help to change these parental attitudes and behaviors, thereby increasing student attendance.

There were also some shocking results related to student attitudes and perceptions about their teachers and other adults at school. Almost 26% of students said that their teachers *Always* or *Sometimes* don't care or notice if they are at school, 19.2% said that their teachers *Always* or *Sometimes* don't expect much from them, 20.6% of students said that the

adults at school *Always* or *Sometimes* don't care about them, and 12.9% of students said that

their teachers *Always* or *Sometimes* pick on them.

A considerable amount of research infers that teachers have a very strong impact on

student attendance. Nielsen & Gerber (1979) found that most truants identified difficulties

they encountered with adults at school as their most negative school experiences.

Furthermore, 66% of the students in Ziesmer's (1984) study attributed their poor attendance

to problems with teachers and staff within the school. Sommer's (1985) research further

supported these results. Conversely, in 1992, Southworth noted that students with good

attendance seem to have positive interactions with their teachers. Kortering and Konold

(2005) found that most students thrive when they feel that an adult in the school cares about

them and their education, and that many truants linked their truancy to their dislike of

schools and teachers. Reid's (1983) work on reasons for nonattendance also supports this

theory.

The researcher also noted some interesting findings related to student attitudes and

perceptions about school in general. For example, 39.4% of students said that the school

Seldom or *Never* gives them consequences when they skip school, 13.9% of the students

said that they *Always* or *Sometimes* know that if they come to school they will get in trouble,

14.4% of students said that they *Always* or *Sometimes* don't feel like they can succeed at

school, and 32.2% of students said that they *Seldom* or *Never* like school.

These responses are also supported in the existing literature. Southworth (1992), for

instance, stated that issues of nonattendance arise when students have more feelings that are

negative about school than feelings that are positive about school. In Nielsen and Gerber's

(1979) study, only 6% of the participants said they liked school, while 73% said they disliked school, and 21% had mixed feelings.

Sharing the students' responses to this part of the survey with all school personnel may be beneficial. Faculty and staff members may be unaware of students' negative perceptions about school in general and, more specifically, teachers. Once adults within the school are presented with this data, they may recognize the need for change. The administrators, teachers, and staff at this school may benefit from professional development in the area of building positive and personal relationships with their students. Because research indicates that strong positive relationships between students and teachers have a clear impact on student attendance, professional development in these areas may help to increase student attendance. School officials may also determine the need to examine their current structure and procedures in reference to how they allow for the development of these relationships, as well as how they address nonattendance, student discipline, and student achievement.

Recommendations for further study. Only two statements in part 3 of the student survey required the students to make some distinction between their perceptions of home and their perceptions of school. Those statements were "I would rather be at school than at home" and "I get more support at school than at home." If the survey included more questions that required students to make some distinction between home and school with regard to some criteria, it may have yielded different results or additional pertinent information. In the future, researchers may develop a survey of this nature to use when surveying students on their perceptions and attitudes about school and home. This may make for an easier method of determining whether home-related factors or school-related factors

play a larger role in influencing nonattendance, and for identifying specific factors within each of those groups.

Another fascinating area that researchers may wish to delve into is the effect of parental perceptions and attitudes about school on student nonattendance. Researchers could conduct a parent survey or interview parents to gain insight into their perceptions and attitudes about school. The researchers could then compare the parents' results with the students' results, look for discrepancies, and try to determine the reasons behind those discrepancies. Researchers may also wish to determine whether a correlation exists between parent perceptions and attitudes about school and student attendance. The results of a study such as this may be used to educate parents about how their own beliefs and attitudes can positively or negatively influence the beliefs and attitudes and, in turn, the actions of their children. It may also provide educators with knowledge of reasons parents may perceive school in a negative fashion or may be disenfranchised from the school system. This would allow school staff to determine what they may do differently to break down those perceptions and/or feelings and guide them as to what initiatives may assist in this process.

Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 4

The researcher used the fourth part of the student survey to collect demographic data from the sample population. It also included two questions regarding student attitudes about graduating from high school and going to college. All of the items in this section were selected response questions. The author used Survey Monkey to determine the total number of responses for each answer to each question as well as the percentage of responses for each answer to each question.

Grade level, age, and gender. According to the results of the survey, 32.5% of the participants were 9th graders, 20.1% were 10th graders, 18.6% were 11th graders, and 28.9% were 12th graders. Along those same lines, 20.5% of the students who participated in the study were 14 years old, 23.2% were 15 years old, 22.1% were 16 years old, 25.8% were 17 years old, and 8.4% were 18 years old.

One point of interest is that 57% of the students who participated in the study were female, leaving 43% of the participants to be male. The overall school population is also predominantly female, but not substantially so (51%). Of the selected students who returned the consent forms and were, therefore, eligible to participate in the study, 52% were female; however, on the day that the surveys were administered, 57% of the eligible students who were present in class were female. This may be an indication of a larger difference between attendance rates of male and female students.

Several studies have addressed the issue of gender's role in nonattendance, often with conflicting results. In 1979, Nielsen and Gerber found that boys and girls were truant with the same frequency, with the major difference being that boys began their truancy in earlier grades. Two studies conducted during 1985 had conflicting conclusions: Sommer found that there were a larger number of males than females who had attendance problems, while Berg et al. found that there was not a significant difference between the attendance rates of males and females. In a later study, Eaton et al. (2008) noted that the majority of absentees were female. Further study may be necessary to determine if there is, in fact, a relationship between gender and attendance rates.

Race. Another, possibly more important, point of interest related to the demographic data collected in this study is related to race. The overall school population has a racial

makeup of 84% Black, 13% White, and 3% Other. The racial makeup of the students who were eligible to participate in the study mirror this makeup very closely, being 85% Black, 13% White, and 2% Other. However, when examining the data on those students who completed the necessary requirements of both returning the consent form on time and being present in class on the day the survey was administered, only 73.5% of those students classified themselves as Black. This is more than 10% below the overall school population of 84% Black. Even more interestingly, 13% of the students who participated in the study classified themselves as White, which is on par with the overall school population, and a surprising 13.5% of the students who participated in the study classified their race as Other. This is more than 10% above the overall school population of 3% Other.

Several questions arise from examining this data. Most glaringly, what is the cause of the discrepancy between these numbers? Of the students who classified themselves as Other on the survey, what percentage of them are Mixed (Black and White), Asian, Hispanic, etc.? Of the students who classified themselves as Other on the survey, do the Asians, Hispanics, etc. have a better rate of returning items that are sent home (i.e., homework, permission slips, etc.)? Do those same groups of students have better attendance rates than their Black, White, or Mixed peers?

All of these questions would be excellent areas for researchers to address; however, few researchers have addressed these questions in past studies. In 2007, Henry found that Black students were more likely to be truant than any other race. Another study found that over half of the students who had unexcused absences were Black or Hispanic (Eaton et al., 2008). The lack of data related to race indicates the need for further study in this area.

Parents' level of education. One more interesting aspect of the socioeconomic data collected during the course of this study is the contrast between the students' fathers' level of education and mothers' level of education. There are several details to be considered when examining this data. At the first two levels, *Some High School* and *Graduated High School*, the differences between fathers and mothers is not very large, and there are fewer fathers than mothers at these two levels. With respect to higher levels of education, *Some College* and *Graduated College*, the percentage of mothers is far greater than the percentage of fathers, 27.5% to 9.8%, and 31.1% to 13.9%, respectively. Finally, the difference between mothers and fathers with an *Unknown* level of education is the greatest, with 34% *Unknown* for fathers and only 9.3% *Unknown* for mothers. In addition, 58.3% of the students who participated in the study reportedly live in single-parent households.

Several past studies support this data. Nielsen and Gerber (1979) found that over half of absentees had at least one parent who did not graduate from high school, and that in 25% of the families, neither parent had graduated. They also found that 40% of the absentees in their study had experienced the divorce of their parents and that 27% were from single parent homes. Reid (1982) indicated that the majority of absentees had parents who were separated, divorced, remarried, deceased, unmarried (but living together), or single. Kortering and Konold (2005) stated that social capital and human capital are two of the most influential factors in student attendance. According to Henry (2007), parents with a college education had children who were less likely to be truant.

Analyzing the data from this study might lead one to assume that the majority of students who participated in this study live with their mothers in single-parent households. However, this may be an incorrect assumption. Follow-up interviews or surveys would be

necessary to validate this hypothesis. Interviews would also be helpful to determine why so

many students are unsure of their fathers' level of education, as well as what relationship

exists between parents' level of education and student attendance. This might allow school

officials to develop a parental education program about how crucial it is for parents to

discuss school and the benefits of an education with their children. It may also include

discussing methods for indirect and direct parental involvement in their children's

education, both of which are vital to student success in school

Student attitudes about the future. The researcher also included questions on the

survey which asked students how likely they think it is that they will graduate from high

school and how likely they think it is that they will attend college. The results showed that

while an enormous 94.3% of students think that that they *Definitely Will* graduate from high

school, only 68.8% of those same students said that they *Definitely Will* go to college. There

is no indication as to whether these answers correlate to the answers provided about parental

levels of education. This data strongly points to the need for further research into the effects

of parental levels of education on attendance, as well as the correlation between attendance

rates and students' views of the future.

Discussion

Several interesting questions arise from the results of this study. Some of these

questions include the importance of school attendance, acceptable reasons for

nonattendance, and cultural influences on nonattendance. The author will also discuss how

to begin to address the problem of nonattendance, as well as school policies that may

encourage students to attend school more frequently.

The Importance of School Attendance

Schools, as institutions, are dependent on student attendance. Both state and federal governments hold schools accountable for student attendance by requiring them to have high daily attendance rates in order to be accredited. Therefore, governments and schools place a high value of importance on student attendance.

Conversely, many students may not believe that good attendance is necessary or important. In this study, the researcher found only a weak correlation between student attendance and student achievement. Therefore, in terms of student achievement, what a student does at school when he or she attends may be much more important than how many days he or she is present. This may lead some students to believe that they do not need to attend school in order to do well academically, thereby leading to poor attendance for those students. Parents may share this belief, and may express this by allowing their children to stay home when they want to, as long as the children continue to earn high grades at school. If what these students (and parents) believe is true, that they can achieve at high levels academically without attending on a regular basis, then the school may need to review and revise the curriculum to make it more challenging. Another solution might be to place them in more challenging classes.

On the other hand, students at the opposite end of the spectrum may believe that they will not succeed academically regardless of whether or not they attend school regularly. Some parents may share this belief. This belief by either students or their parents may also lead to poor attendance. Schools need to investigate attendance initiatives that may work with this group of students; however, they should not limit their investigation to attendance. These

students may have curricular or other needs that the school is not currently meeting. Addressing these needs may tangentially result in improved attendance for these students.

Acceptable Reasons for Nonattendance

Schools must determine what are acceptable reasons for nonattendance. Who decides which reasons for nonattendance are acceptable and which are not? Both of these questions are important and must be addressed if schools hope to have parental support regarding student attendance.

The school that participated in this study has two categories of absences, *excused* and *unexcused*. Excused absences are limited to personal illnesses, emergencies, religious observances, physician or dental appointments, college visits, school field trips, or bereavement. The school classifies all other absences as unexcused, regardless of whether or not the student has parental permission to miss school or the parent believes the absence should be excused. School District Policy states that students may not receive credit for work they miss due to an unexcused absence. In addition, policy also states that if a student accumulates eight or more unexcused absences, he or she is in danger of being dropped or suspended from school for nonattendance.

School and district personnel developed these attendance policies without parental involvement. The author previously stated that parental education programs about the importance of student attendance may be needed in order to increase student attendance. However, many parents may already believe that school attendance is important; the discrepancy may lie in opposing beliefs between the school and parents as to what constitutes an acceptable reason to miss school. It is imperative that the school and district

work toward consensus with parents to reduce discrepancies in their beliefs about student attendance.

Numerous problems can develop when schools and parents are not in agreement about acceptable reasons for nonattendance. School officials and parents may not be able to communicate clearly regarding their expectations for student attendance. For example, if a parent believes that his or her child's absence should be excused, the parent may fight to overturn consequences assigned by the school for unexcused absences. Changing consequences or leaving policies open to interpretation or individual discretion may lead the community to question the fairness of the school's attendance policy. Unclear expectations or expectations that the community perceives to be unfair may decrease the effectiveness of programs and incentives the school put into place as a means of increasing student attendance.

Cultural Influences on Attendance

Previously, the author of this study suggested the need for further research into differences in attendance patterns and attitudes between races. She made this suggestion because the results of her study led to the question of whether schools with certain demographics may be more susceptible to attendance problems. If that was, indeed, the case, a school's racial and socioeconomic makeup could be predictors of the school's attendance rate.

Furthermore, school attendance problems might represent students' perceptions that school attendance is optional or that school attendance is not a high priority. It is possible that parental beliefs and attitudes have contributed to these beliefs among students. These beliefs and attitudes may be more common among certain races than others. The results of

an investigation into these beliefs among different races could be powerful because they would address inherent attitudes and beliefs about education within certain populations.

Addressing the Problem of Nonattendance

The results of this study indicated that home-related factors had a more significant impact on student nonattendance than school-related factors. However, the results also indicated that, in terms of student perceptions and attitudes, both home-related and school-related factors were important in terms of influencing nonattendance. Therefore, in order to truly impact student attendance rates, school officials may need to develop initiatives to address all of these concerns.

Schools, in conjunction with parents and students, must establish attendance policies, procedures, and initiatives. School officials must then clearly communicate all of these things to the community. School officials and teachers may need to address issues related to school culture and/or climate by attempting to create an inviting atmosphere of which students will want to be a part. Schools should educate both parents and students about the importance of school attendance, as well as the fact that nonattendance puts students at an increased risk of becoming involved in many negative behaviors. To truly deal with the problem of nonattendance, the researcher believes that schools must address all of these areas simultaneously.

Moreover, for schools to see a significant improvement in student attendance, they may need to make some drastic changes. School officials should research incentives and initiatives shown to result in increased student attendance. If these incentives and initiatives are unsuccessful in raising student attendance, then school officials should research corrective actions that may be more effective. Some possible strategies that school leaders

could investigate include requiring students to attend a certain number of days before receiving credit or progressing to the next grade level, implementing effective disciplinary consequences for nonattendance, and researching ways to hold parents to a higher level of accountability regarding their child's attendance.

Conclusion

The author of this study focused on two research questions. First, the researcher wanted to determine what type of relationship existed between student attendance and student achievement. Next, the researcher investigated whether school-related factors or home-related factors had a greater impact on student attendance. She used a combination of quantitative data and qualitative data to answer these questions.

When researching the relationship between student attendance and student achievement, the author compared the number of days students were absent during one semester to their GPAs during that same semester by calculating the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient of the two data sets. She also conducted a regression analysis on this data to determine whether it was possible to predict a student's GPA based on his or her number of absences. The author found a weak correlation (-.36) between student attendance and student achievement, and that students' GPAs could only be accurately predicted using the number of absences 13% of the time.

This study took place over a relatively short period of time. Therefore, it is possible that extenuating circumstances skewed the results in some way. It may be beneficial for researchers to investigate this same question over a longer period of time so that the impact of any extenuating circumstances would be lessened. This would serve to increase the reliability of the results.

The researcher used a student survey to investigate the causes of nonattendance. This survey consisted of four parts. Part 1 asked students to place a check next to any statement that gave a reason they had ever missed school. On part 2 of the survey, students were instructed to rank a series of eight statements according to how often the reason given in each statement caused them to miss school. Part 3 of the survey asked the students to rate a series of 15 statements on a 4-point Likert scale according to how often each of the statements applied to them. The researcher used part 4 of the survey to collect demographic information from the students.

The results of parts 1 and 2 of the student survey led the researcher to the conclusion that factors related to students' home environments and family backgrounds were statistically more significant causes of student nonattendance than factors related to school culture and environment. The most common home-related factors in parts 1 and 2 of the survey were doctor's appointments, travel out of town, and transportation issues. On the other hand, the results of part 3 of the student survey led the researcher to conclude that in terms of student attitudes and perceptions about home and school, there was not a statistically significant difference between home-related factors and school-related factors as causes of nonattendance.

Several findings from this study suggest the need for parental education programs about the importance of school attendance. For example, the top three reasons given for nonattendance (doctor's appointments, travel out of town, and transportation) in both parts 1 and 2 of the student survey were all things over which parents exercise some element of control. In addition, on part 3 of the survey, students stated that 19% of the time their parents don't care if they go to school and 41.3% of the time their parents do not give them

consequences for skipping school. These parental behaviors and attitudes could likely be modified if the school implemented a parental education program about the importance of school attendance, thereby resulting in increased attendance rates.

Part 3 of the student survey also indicated that schools and teachers might play a prominent role in causing student nonattendance. For instance, almost 26% of students said that their teachers don't care or don't notice if they are at school, and almost 21% said that the adults at school don't care about them. Moreover, 14.4% of students stated that they don't feel like they can succeed at school, and 32.2% of them said that they do not like school. Professional development in building positive personal relationships with students may help to change the culture at the school, thus changing student attitudes and perceptions about school and increasing student attendance.

Future studies of this nature may opt to include both a parent survey and a student survey in their methodology as a means of determining the validity of the students' responses. This would also provide a means of finding discrepancies between the responses of the two groups, as well as possible reasons for those discrepancies. Conducting a parent survey would also allow the researcher access to parental attitudes and perceptions about school, and would assist in determining how parental attitudes and perceptions about school influence student attendance.

The results of part 4 of the student survey, which provided primarily demographic information about the students in the sample population, may also lead to some interesting studies in the future. For example, a future study may investigate whether there is a difference in attendance rates between males and females. More importantly, researchers may wish to investigate whether there is a difference in attendance rates between races

(Black, White, Hispanic, etc.) or whether there are differences between races in the reasons for their nonattendance. It may also be beneficial for researchers to study the effects of parental levels of education on student attendance.

Many times in today's American culture, society is very quick to place blame on schools and educators for problems concerning its youth. However, the author believes that factors related to students' home lives as well as students' perceptions and attitudes about home play a significant role in creating the problem of student nonattendance as well. Her research supports this belief. Furthermore, there is no reason to suspect that the influence of home-related factors is limited to the realm of nonattendance. The possibility exists that home-related factors may play a larger role than is commonly suspected in causing many problems, such as poor student achievement or poor behavior while at school. Nevertheless, extensive research into these ideas would be necessary before public opinion on these matters would begin to shift to an attitude of shared responsibility between home and school.

Even so, the author does not believe that schools are exempt in their responsibility for solving these problems. Both parents and schools have a large degree of responsibility when it comes to addressing any of these concerns. There are many things that school officials can do in an attempt to increase student attendance (or solve any other problems that society as a whole currently attributes to schools), but they are limited in their scope and impact. To truly improve student attendance, educators and parents must work together in a partnership, taking similar levels of responsibility and making equal efforts to solve the problem.

APPENDIX A

Kelly Bracht

April 14, 2009

Dear Ms. Bracht,

I am writing to grant your request for permission to use McCluer High School in the Ferguson-Florissant School District as the study site for your doctoral dissertation titled <u>A Mixed Methods Study on Causes for Non-Attendance and its Relationship to Student Achievement in a Suburban High School</u>. I understand you are completing this project through Lindenwood University. I am aware that this study will take place during the fall semester of 2009 and part of this study will include conducting surveys of some of our students (with a pilot survey being conducted during the spring semester of 2009), as well as using the student information system to obtain data related to student attendance and grade point averages.

Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jeff Spiegel
Superintendent

APPENDIX B

Attendance Study Consent Forms

Distribute the Consent Forms on <u>Tuesday, October 13th</u>, to the appropriate classes:

<div>

Baker:
2
5
6
7

Barbero:
3
4
5
6
7

Durnin:
1
2
5

Egan:
1
4

Halpern:
3
4

Ruhland:
5

Burgess:
5
6

Schwarz:
1

Stepanek:
3

Jasper:
2
3
4

</div>

The due date that is on the consent forms is this Friday, October 16th. On the 15th & 16th (Thursday & Friday) <u>please tell the students that they can continue to turn in the consent forms until the 23rd</u>.

Please ask for the consent forms each day in your classes. I can send an aide to your classroom to collect the consent forms OR you can put them in my mailbox. <u>The last day to turn in the consent forms will be Friday, October 23rd</u>. Remember to give the students 25 extra credit points for returning the signed consent form.

The surveys will be given to you (along with a script to read when conducting the survey) on Monday, October 26th. The survey will be given in your classes on Tuesday, October 27th. I will send an aide to your classroom at the end of the day on the 27th to collect the surveys from you.

Thank you so much for helping out with this study!

APPENDIX C

October 12, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Attached please find a consent form for your student's participation in a survey that will be administered at school on **Tuesday, October 27, 2009**. The purpose of the survey is to obtain information about factors affecting student attendance at school. The information obtained from this survey will be used to develop programs and policies that will help increase student attendance at McCluer High School. I will also use the data from this survey in my graduate studies.

The survey is anonymous, confidential, and voluntary. Pursuant to the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment and Board Policy 3062.1, parents/guardians must give consent before their children can participate in the survey. Therefore, I request that you return the attached form by **Friday, October 16, 2009**. Students will be given 25 extra credit points for returning the signed permission form. The 25 points are not dependent on whether or not the student is allowed to participate in the survey, only on returning the signed permission form by the date above.

As explained above, the survey is a research tool that asks questions about health and social factors that affect students' attendance at school. The results will assist me and other school administrators in developing programs and procedures that will improve student attendance at our school. The survey does ask potentially sensitive questions and raises issues including medical issues (no specific questions, simply asking whether students miss school due to personal illness or illness of other family members), bullying, and student attitudes about school. As stated above, the survey is anonymous and confidential.

Again, please return the attached consent form before **Friday, October 16, 2009**, thus ensuring that your child earns the 25 extra credit points. If you should have any questions or would like to view a copy of the survey before granting permission, please do not hesitate to contact me at 506-9458. I appreciate your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Kelly Bracht
Assistant Principal

CONSENT FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN ATTENDANCE SURVEY

I, _____, Parent/Legal Guardian of _____, acknowledge that I have been advised that [the high school] will administer an Attendance Survey to students on **Tuesday, October 27, 2009.**

_____ My child **may** participate in the Attendance Survey.

_____ My child **may not** participate in the Attendance Survey.

_____   _____
Date   Parent/Legal Guardian

********Return this Form to your English teacher by ***Friday, October 16, 2009*********

APPENDIX D

Survey No _____

Attendance Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine the reasons for student absences from school, as well as to determine what factors may contribute to these absences. All of your responses will be kept entirely confidential.

Part 1: Put a check mark next to the items below that are reasons you have ever missed school in the past. Check all that apply.

_____ 1. I had a doctor's appointment.

_____ 2. I was sick.

_____ 3. I missed the bus.

_____ 4. I don't have any friends at school.

_____ 5. My classes are boring.

_____ 6. Someone in my family (other than me) was sick and I had to take care of that person.

_____ 7. The weather was bad.

_____ 8. I was out of town.

_____ 9. I had to go to a funeral.

_____ 10. I don't like school.

_____ 11. I'm failing my classes anyway.

_____ 12. I didn't have a way to school.

_____ 13. I had to go to court.

_____ 14. I skipped school to hang out with my friends.

_____ 15. I stayed home to take care of younger siblings or relatives.

_____ 16. I stayed home to take care of my own child / children.

_____ 17. It was a religious holiday.

_____ 18. I don't understand what's being taught in my classes anyway – I feel lost a lot of the time in class.

_____ 19. I felt tired / overslept because I was up too late the night before working.

_____ 20. I felt tired / overslept because I was up too late the night before doing fun things.

_____ 21. My classes are too easy – I don't feel challenged at school.

_____ 22. I just didn't feel like coming.

_____ 23. I was avoiding a person or situation at school.

_____ 24. I was unprepared for a test or assignment I would have had to do for school that day.

_____ 25. I get bullied or picked on at school.

Part 2: Rank the following statements from 1-8 according to how often each statement causes you to miss school. 1 equals the reason you miss school most often, while 8 equals the reason you miss school least often.

_____ I or someone else in my family was sick.

_____ I was avoiding a problem or situation at school that involves other students.

_____ My teachers don't like me or pick on me.

_____ I skipped school to be with my friends.

_____ I just didn't feel like going to school / I don't like school.

_____ I was unprepared for a test or assignment that had to be done at school that day.

_____ I went out of town.

_____ I didn't have a way to get to school.

Part 3: For each of the following statements, choose on a scale of 1-4 how much this statement applies to you.

| 1 = Always | 2 = Sometimes | 3 = Seldom | 4 = Never |

My parents don't care if I go to school.
    1   2   3   4

I like school.
    1   2   3   4

My teachers don't care or notice if I'm at school.
    1   2   3   4

I would rather be at home than at school.
    1   2   3   4

My teachers don't expect much from me.
    1   2   3   4

The adults at school don't care about me.
    1   2   3   4

My parents don't expect much from me.
    1   2   3   4

I get more support at school than at home.
    1   2   3   4

My parents give me consequences when I skip school.
    1   2   3   4

I don't feel like I can succeed at school.
    1   2   3   4

The school gives me consequences when I skip school.
    1   2   3   4

I get picked on at school by other kids.
    1   2   3   4

My parents are too hard on me.
    1   2   3   4

My teachers pick on me.
    1   2   3   4

I know that if I come to school I'm going to get in trouble.
    1   2   3   4

Part 4: For each of the questions below, choose the answer that best describes you.

1. Grade:
   a. 9
   b. 10
   c. 11
   d. 12

2. Gender:
   a. Male
   b. Female

3. Age:
   a. 14
   b. 15
   c. 16
   d. 17
   e. 18
   f. 19

4. Race:
   a. African-American
   b. Caucasian
   c. Other

5. Father's level of education:
   a. Some high school
   b. Graduated high school
   c. Some college
   d. Graduated college
   e. Unknown

6. Mother's level of education:
   a. Some high school
   b. Graduated high school
   c. Some college
   d. Graduated college
   e. Unknown

7. Who do you live with:
   a. Both parents
   b. Single parent
   c. Other relative
   d. Foster home
   e. Other

8. How much unsupervised time do you have after school?
   a. None
   b. Less than 1 hour
   c. 1-2 hours
   d. 3-5 hours
   e. More than 5 hours

9. How many hours per week do you work?
   a. No job
   b. 5 or less hours
   c. 6-10 hours
   d. 11-15 hours
   e. 16-20 hours
   f. More than 20 hours

10. How likely do you think it is that you will graduate from high school?
    a. Definitely won't
    b. Probably won't
    c. Probably will
    d. Definitely will

11. How likely do you think it is that you will go to college?
    a. Definitely won't
    b. Probably won't
    c. Probably will
    d. Definitely will

APPENDIX E

Student Name: _____

Tear this page off the front of your survey BEFORE you turn it in so that your answers to these questions will remain anonymous.

APPENDIX F

Teacher Directions

Say to students:

The purpose of this survey is to collect information about why students do not come to school. This information will be used to develop programs here at school that will help increase student attendance. These programs may include things like revising the current attendance policies and procedures, creating a new attendance incentive program, professional development programs for teachers, and parental involvement initiatives. The school may also use these results to make other changes. Please be as honest as you can on this survey, and do not leave any questions blank. I'm going to pass out the surveys now, but do not begin yet.

Pass out surveys using the name on the cover page of each survey.

Say to students:

Turn to the second page, and look at the directions for Part 1. In part 1, place an X next to any item that is a reason you have ever missed school. If a statement is not something that has caused you to miss school, leave the item blank.

At the bottom of that page in Part 2 you are asked to rank the items from 1-8, according to HOW OFTEN each reason causes you to miss school. 1 is the reason you miss school most often, and 8 is the reason you miss school least often.

Turn the page. In Part 3 read each statement and rank it on a scale of 1-4 according to how much this statement applies to you. 1 means the statement ALWAYS applies to you, 2 means the statement SOMETIMES applies to you, 3 means the statement SELDOM (or not often) applies to you, and 4 means the statement NEVER applies to you.

In Part 4, choose the one answer that best describes you.

In Part 5, answer the question as truthfully as you can.

As you have probably noticed, your name is on the front of this survey. However, you will tear off the cover page with your name on it BEFORE you turn in the survey, so we will not know which survey is yours. DO NOT write your name on the survey in any other place.

You will have 20 minutes to complete this survey. When you complete the survey, please sit quietly until everyone is finished. Do not get up to turn in your survey. Begin now.

Time 20 minutes.

When everyone is finished with the survey OR 20 minutes has elapsed, say to students:

Tear off the cover page with your name on it, then pass the survey forward.

Collect all surveys. The cover pages with student names can be thrown away. Return all surveys and this instruction sheet to the manila envelope. Ms. Bracht will come to your classroom before the end of the class period to collect the manila envelope and surveys.

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VITAE

Kelly Bracht earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology, with a minor emphasis in Chemistry, from Missouri Baptist University in May 2000. After earning this degree, she remained a student there until she earned her Missouri Teaching Certificate in High School General Science, Biology, in June 2001. Next, she taught Physical Science at Hazelwood Central High School in St. Louis, Missouri, while simultaneously earning another Missouri Teaching Certificate, this time in High School Communication Arts, in January 2002.

After teaching for one year at Hazelwood Central High School, Kelly began teaching at McCluer High School, which is also in the St. Louis area. She taught science (and sometimes English) at McCluer for five years. During that time, in August 2004, Kelly earned a Master of Arts in Educational Administration from Lindenwood University.

Kelly is currently beginning her fourth year as an Assistant Principal at McCluer High School. During her tenure in that position, she has also been working towards earning an Educational Doctorate in Administration from Lindenwood University, with an anticipated graduation date of December 2010.