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An Analysis of Attendance Policies and  
High School Attendance Rates

by

Dawn Michelle Brenner

March, 2011

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

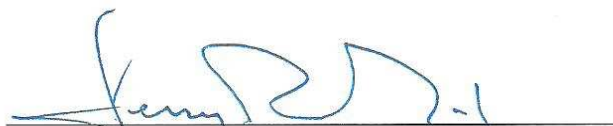
School of Education

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Dawn Michelle Brenner

This dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education

  
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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: Dawn Michelle Brenner

Signature: Dawn Michelle Brenner Date: 3/24/11

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the relationship between the dependent variable, average daily attendance rate, and the independent variables, socio-economic status, student enrollment, and the type of attendance policy implemented in the 85 public high schools in southwest Missouri. The types of attendance policies were sorted into one of three pre-determined categories: punitive, reward, or affective. Data were collected for each of the independent and dependent variables. A percentage was calculated by dividing the number of policy types within each category by the total number of policy types. Then the data were organized based on the average daily attendance rate, student enrollment, and the socio-economic status. Data were analyzed using inferential statistics, including ANOVA, bivariate correlation, and multiple regression. The Pearson  $r$  coefficient was used to determine the significance of the relationship. There was no relationship between average daily attendance and socio-economic status, and no relationship was found between average daily attendance and type of attendance policy. A significant relationship was identified between average daily attendance and student enrollment. Additionally, a significant relationship was found between the independent variables, socio-economic status, and student enrollment. A significant relationship also existed between all three independent variables when compared to average daily attendance rate. Of the 73 school districts participating in the study, 80.8% implemented a punitive attendance policy. The average daily attendance rate of the responding schools was 94.29%. Although a relationship between the punitive type of attendance policy and average daily attendance rate was not established in this study, previous research has found punitive policies have a positive impact on student attendance.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

More than 90,000 of New York City's elementary school students, as well as 40% of high school students and 24% of middle school students, were absent for at least a month during a recent school year (Medina, 2008), and nationally, in the 2004 school year, 540,382 public school students dropped out of grades 9-12 (Sable & Gaviola, 2007). Several factors have been identified as contributing to poor attendance and high school dropout rates: the type of attendance policy implemented in the school district (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001); economic status (Vleminckx & Smeeding, 2003); and the size of the school, or student enrollment (Stevenson, 2006). Researchers have also identified reasons students drop out, such as "poor grades in core subjects, low attendance, and disengagement in the classroom, including behavior problems" (Sable & Gaviola, 2007, p. 1). In addition:

Efforts to improve school attendance cannot be separated from the larger school reform picture. Safe and healthy schools – ones that employ a challenging curriculum and reinforce high expectations for academics, behavior, and social responsibility – are schools that give students the motivation to attend. (California Department of Education, 2000, p. 1)

According to the National Forum on Education Statistics (2009), "in this era of increased accountability for states, districts, and schools, the connection between student attendance and learning is being studied more than ever" (p. 1). Heppen and Therriault (2008) stated, "the transition year to middle school (sixth grade in many districts) is a good starting point for identifying the local risk factors most predictive of whether students graduate or drop out" (p. 8). Furthermore, dropping out of high school

“has been clearly identified as an early warning sign that students are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure” (National Center for School Engagement, 2009, p. 2). Besides the fact that poor attendance predicts dropping out, chronic absenteeism can result in other negative consequences for students and schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). If students are not in school, they have fewer opportunities to learn subject matter which helps them be successful in the future.

### **Background of the Study**

What is truancy? A simple definition of truancy is “an unexcused absence from school” (Virginia Department of Education, 2005, p. 3). There is, however, a distinct difference between the student who incurs one unexcused absence and a student who has several unexcused absences. Since there is no one definition of truancy or chronic truancy, most people think of truant students as those who miss several days (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). The federal government is beginning to take steps to define truancy, since the definition can vary from state to state, division to division, and even school to school (Virginia Department of Education, 2005).

Truancy is a very complex issue. There are certain clear-cut variables that play a part in a student’s behavior and additional variables that link truant behavior to more serious problems. Researchers studying issues of truancy have traditionally examined social, family, and personal variables that place students at risk for such behaviors (Wilkins, 2008). Furthermore:

The literature consistently groups the causes of truancy into four categories with many contributing variables: 1) student demographics; 2) family characteristics; 3) student’s personal or psychological factors; 4) school climate including

attachment to teachers, feelings of physical safety, as well as the effect of specific truancy policies. (Heilbrunn & Seeley, 2003, p. 4)

Student demographics include employment of the student, as well as others living in the household, students who live in single-parent households, students who have parents with multiple jobs, and students whose families lack affordable transportation or childcare (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). Truancy rates have been higher among males, minorities, urban youth, low income families, children living with only one parent, children from large families, and children whose parents do not have high school degrees (Baker et al., 2001).

Not all students come to school well-fed, well-rested, and ready to learn. Family dynamics play a role in the attitudes of students as some homes are chaotic and dysfunctional. Students may not have had the opportunity for enough sleep, have ample time to get ready for school, or to even attend school due to family crisis situations (Carney, 2009). Parents also have an impact on a student's opportunity to go to school. If parents are supportive and value their child's opportunity to go to school, the student's attitude toward school will be more positive. If parents condone absences or do not encourage students to go to school, the task is much more challenging (Scheff, 2007). Other family factors include "lack of parent supervision or guidance, poverty, substance abuse in the home, domestic violence, lack of familiarity with school attendance laws, and varied educational priorities" (Virginia Department of Education, 2005, p. 4). Overall, the home environment largely contributes to the success of the students.

Another contributing variable to truancy is the student's personal or psychological background. This aspect plays a part in whether or not a student skips

school, what kind of mental state the student is in when he arrives at school, and what the student's overall attitude regarding school will be for that day. Students can suffer from problems such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, limited social and emotional competence, mental health problems, or poor physical health (Carney, 2009; Virginia Department of Education, 2005). If these problems go untreated or undiagnosed they can interfere with the student's ability to function at school. Many chronically truant students have a job, have a family to support, or have trouble managing both work and school forcing them to make a choice between personal issues and school (Scheff, 2007). Scheff (2007) concluded that when a "child gets married, gets pregnant and/or becomes a parent the risk of truancy increases" (p. 2). These are just a few of the personal issues that may be a sign of more serious problems.

The school climate variable encompasses many different aspects. Social problems, such as bullying and isolation; school size; and attitudes of teachers, administrators, and other students toward the truant student and the student's feeling of attachment or connection to the school, contribute to the truancy problem (Carney, 2009; Virginia Department of Education, 2005). Bullying is a "prime component in the making of an unsafe school environment; if a child does not feel safe at school, or on the way to/from school, they are much more likely to become truant" (Scheff, 2007, p. 2). A truant student may find it hard to connect in a larger school setting; therefore, it is important to help the student find a niche to feel successful. When a student feels cared for by other adults in the school, it can help overcome many of the causes of truancy (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). Clear expectations and standards are vital to the success of a truant student (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). The student



should know what the expectation is regarding attendance and discipline and be held to that standard by teachers and administrators (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). Schools that make high demands and provide high levels of support often have the best attendance records (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). A school climate that is caring, accepting, and has purpose and structure are imperative when dealing with the truant student.

There are many lifelong effects of not attending school, and the learning environment is affected in many ways. Schools that have higher attendance rates tend to yield students who perform better on achievement tests than schools with lower attendance rates (Sheldon, 2007). The National Forum on Education Statistics (2009) also agreed, “the primary rationale for high-quality attendance data is the relationship between student attendance and student achievement” (p. 1). If the student is not in attendance, that relationship is in jeopardy of not developing. This relationship can appear early in a child’s educational setting.

A recent study found that absenteeism in kindergarten was associated with negative first grade outcomes, such as greater absenteeism in subsequent years and lower academic achievement (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009). There are other serious issues that develop later in a student’s educational career as well. For example, “students who are frequently absent fall behind in academics and miss important socialization concepts that enhance their ability to understand and follow directions or, ultimately, plan for the future” (California Department of Education, 2000, p. 2). Additionally, “high school dropouts have been found to exhibit a history of negative behaviors, including high levels of absenteeism throughout their childhood, at higher

rates than high school graduates” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 1). Students who are absent from school miss the opportunity to develop the social, behavioral, and academic skills necessary to succeed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The attributional theory of achievement, motivation, and emotion (Weiner, 1985) provided a foundation to address the research questions in this study. This theory proposed individuals are affected by causal ascriptions influenced by “three common properties: locus, stability, and controllability” (Weiner, 1985, p. 548). In the context of this study, locus of control refers to one’s intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. One’s internal locus is based on his own decisions and actions (McDaniel, n.d). According to theories proposed by Carl Rogers, “motivation might come from within an individual without any thought to the external reward” (McDaniel, n.d., p. 1). These students are intrinsically motivated because they see the need to achieve without any external stimuli. Intrinsically motivated students attend class because they do not want to miss class, do not want to make up work, and have a desire to succeed in school.

Consequently, if a person believes outside stimuli are responsible for events that occur, this indicates an external locus (McDaniel, n.d.). An example of an extrinsic motivator would be a test exemption policy a school has in place in which a student may not have to take finals if certain attendance criteria are met. Those who provide extrinsic motivation are working under the behaviorist theories set forth by B. F. Skinner. Skinner suggested a “punishment and reward system as a motivational tool” (McDaniel, n.d., p. 1). The external force is often “offered in the form of a system that reinforces the desired behavior or negates undesirable actions” (McDaniel, n.d., p. 1). Through the

direction of positive or negative consequences for behavior, students who respond to extrinsic motivation are more likely to succeed (McDaniel, n.d.). Because students are diverse, different motivational techniques should be adapted to ensure student success (McDaniel, n.d.).

The stability dimension of the theoretical framework “captures whether causes change over time or not” (Weiner, 1974, p. 1). For example, “ability can be classified as a stable, internal cause, and effort classified as unstable and external” (Weiner, 1974, p. 1). How many students make the effort to come to school? The controllability contrasts “causes one can control, such as skill/efficacy, from causes one cannot control such as aptitude, mood, others’ actions, and luck” (Weiner, 1974, p. 1). The type of school attendance policy is an aspect that can be controlled. How students behave as a reaction to the policy is an aspect one cannot control.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is another valid tool in understanding human motivation. The basic premise behind Maslow’s hierarchy is that each person is motivated by needs. Maslow believed human beings must satisfy each need, starting with the lower needs, and only when the lower needs have been met can higher needs be satisfied (Chapman, 2001). However, if the lower needs are not met, then one is no longer concerned about the maintenance of higher order needs (Chapman, 2001).

The first level of needs are biological and physiological needs, such as food, water, air, shelter, warmth, sex, and sleep, (Chapman, 2001). If these needs are not met, one cannot move to the next level of need which is safety. Chapman (2001) defined safety as protection from the elements, security, order, law, limits, and stability. The next level of needs are belongingness and love which includes work group, family, affection,

and relationships (Chapman, 2001). The fourth level is esteem which includes self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, and managerial responsibility. The final level is self-actualization which is realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth, and peak experiences (Chapman, 2001).

Many students do not have their basic needs met outside of school. Schools can provide a stable environment, food, water, shelter, and a sense of belonging that is missing in other areas of students' lives. When the school becomes a major contributor to satisfying a student's needs, attendance will be positively impacted (Chapman, 2001). If the school does not provide this security, the student is no longer concerned about higher order needs and starts to withdraw from school (Kunc, 1992).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sporadic attendance is producing local and national problems (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). Schools in Philadelphia average 20,000 truant students per day (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). In a study by Nemecek and Watson (2007), questionnaires were used to survey high school students, and results showed 78% of the students agreed that poor attendance affects their grades and learning. Low academic achievement is a possible result of poor attendance, as evidenced in a statement from the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA (2008): "students who attend school between 85 and 100 percent of the time pass the state tests in reading and math at much higher rates than students who attend school less than 85 percent of the time" (p. 1). In a variety of studies, lower student performance on compulsory exams has been linked to irregular attendance (Chen & Lin, 2008).

Accountability standards associated with the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act, require each school district to show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in a variety of targeted areas (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2009a). In Missouri, schools are held accountable for student achievement as measured by the state assessment tool. The challenge for school districts is to implement policies that enhance learning opportunities while encouraging attendance since there is no modification for those students who have irregular attendance (Chen & Lin, 2008). The AYP targets are based on criteria that take into account assessment data, attendance rates data, and graduation rate data (MODESE, 2009a). In addition to the No Child Left Behind standards, Missouri law mandates that each school district comply with Missouri's compulsory attendance law (see Appendix A) (Pupils & Special Services, 2008). Furthermore, "[the] compulsory attendance age for the district shall mean seventeen (17) years of age or having successfully completed sixteen (16) credits towards high school graduation in all other cases" (MODESE, 2009b, p. 1).

Not only are attendance rates vital in AYP reporting, the rates have a financial bearing on the school districts in Missouri. Average daily attendance in Missouri is calculated by the "total hours attended in a term by resident pupils between the ages of five and twenty-one by the actual number of hours school was in session plus the summer school average daily attendance (hours attended divided by 1044 hours)" (MODESE, 2010b, p. 284). One school district cited losing \$38.40 per day, per student, in funding, regardless of whether the absence was excused or unexcused (Anderson, 2010). Because this is such an important aspect of a school district's accountability, many districts are

enacting and revising policies to address attendance issues and hold students responsible (Anderson, 2010).

Missouri's school districts have the freedom at the district level to create their own policies to reduce student absenteeism and to examine the effectiveness of policies; therefore, the state does not monitor the fidelity of policy implementation in each district. The overarching questions of this study become: What is the effectiveness of attendance policies in Missouri? What are the different factors that affect the success or failure of these policies? Responding to these questions may allow policymakers, as well as school administrators, to address these challenges.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the average daily attendance rate and determine the relationship between that rate and the socio-economic status of students, size of the high school based on student enrollment, and the type of attendance policy implemented in public high schools in southwest Missouri. For the purpose of this study, the types of attendance policies were categorized as affective, punitive, and reward. An affective policy "offers services (opportunities) to the truant student and/or the parent" (Reardon, 2008, p. 81). In a punitive policy, the student is punished for missing school. School districts implementing a reward policy provide an incentive for a student to attend school (Reardon, 2008).

Reardon (2008) compared the relationship between the type of attendance policies in the high schools of 67 Florida school districts with the size of the school districts, the socio-economic status of the school district, and the average daily attendance of the school district. The study also determined if the relationship between policy type and

attendance rate was moderated by socio-economic status and size. Reardon (2008) examined the Florida high school attendance policies and coded them into one of three pre-determined categories: punitive, reward, or affective.

This study replicated research conducted by Reardon (2008) using the pre-determined categories of policies that Reardon identified; however, data were obtained from southwest Missouri public school high schools. The independent variables for this study were type of attendance policy, socio-economic status, and the number of students attending each public high school in southwest Missouri. The dependent variable was the average daily attendance rate of each public high school in southwest Missouri.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What type of attendance policy – punitive, reward, or affective – is used in each public high school in southwest Missouri?
2. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in each public high school in southwest Missouri?
3. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students enrolled in each public high school in southwest Missouri?
4. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in each public high school in southwest Missouri?

### **Null Hypotheses**

$H_{o1}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{o2}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{o3}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students attending public high schools in southwest Missouri.

### **Alternate Hypotheses**

$H_{a1}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{a2}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{a3}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students attending public high schools in southwest Missouri.

### **Importance of the Study**

There are many factors that can arguably affect attendance rate. Marburger (2006) concluded attendance and academic achievement are interconnected; the greater the attendance rates of the student, the greater the student achievement within the class. Arulampalam, Naylor, and Smith (2008) conducted a study to analyze the factors associated with educational attainment and student performance, and their study exhibited the same results; the higher the attendance, the higher the academic achievement.



A specific and detailed approach is necessary to create a comprehensive plan to reducing absenteeism (Kearney, 2008). Interventions that take aim at the student, family, community, and the student's school are also needed (Baker et al., 2001). Researchers have also contended "that average daily attendance is an output variable that is influenced by the enrollment in a school and the number of schools in a district" (Jones, Toma, & Zimmer, 2008, p. 140). However, other variables may influence attendance:

There is also growing consensus that school level factors such as grades, retention, attendance, and classroom behavior and engagement are better predictors of dropout than fixed status indicators such as gender, race, and poverty, although background factors are indeed often associated with dropout, including being born male, economically disadvantaged students, African American, or Latino. (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 3)

With these conflicting opinions, school personnel are challenged to develop attendance policies that motivate students to stay in school. By examining the types of attendance policies and the effectiveness of these policies, district administrators may benefit from knowing the relationship between the types of policies and attendance rates. The relationship of the policy type to high school size and socio-economic status will also assist in the creation of attendance policies that will benefit individual districts and most importantly, the students.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, terms are defined as follows:

**Attendance policy.** Rules and regulations that have been adopted by a local school district in an effort to reduce absenteeism.

**Average daily attendance (ADA).** Calculation used by Missouri school districts by adding the “total regular hours of attendance divided by hours in session” (Core Data Collection System Manual, 2007, p. 81).

**Excused absence.** An absence from school “due to illness, health condition, family emergency or religious purposes” (Harnett, 2007, p. 39).

**Regular school attendance.** The actual attendance of a student during the school day.

**Southwest Missouri.** The schools in the counties included in the Southwest and Missouri Southern Regional Professional Development Center areas (MODESE, 2010a).

**Unexcused absence.** An absence from school or class “caused by the student or parent oversleeping, student missing the bus, transportation problems, student needed for babysitting, student job requirements, ...” (Harnett, 2007, p. 39).

### **Limitations**

The following limitations were identified:

1. The sample in this study was limited to attendance data at the public high school level of schools located in southwest Missouri. Only high schools which are labeled such by the MODESE were examined.
2. The employees of the state do not monitor the fidelity of policy implementation within each school district.

### **Assumptions**

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. High school personnel followed the attendance policy as outlined by their school district.

2. Individual high schools in each district adhered to their district's attendance policy.

3. The high school personnel responsible for collecting and reporting attendance data did so accurately.

### **Summary**

High school truancy is drawing more and more attention from educators, politicians, and families across America (American Bar Association, 2006). Even though truant students are defined differently across many states, there is a need to address the problem in an effort to help all students. By identifying variables that contribute to truancy, each district can take steps and develop policies that can benefit students. However, the common variable, school attendance, is critical to helping these students be successful.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) reported, "America's secondary schools are failing far too many of their students" (p. 1). As educators address this and other issues, dropouts and those who fail their courses remain the focus. Research has shown that "attendance rate is important because students are more likely to succeed in academics when they attend school regularly" (School Attendance: Issues to Consider, 2008, p. 1). Due to the accountability standards associated with the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act, each school district must meet AYP in a variety of targeted areas. The challenge for school districts is to implement policies that increase student achievement as well as motivate students to attend school. Thus, there is a need to identify the type of policy – affective, reward, or punitive – that will help reduce student absenteeism.

The attributional theory of achievement, motivation, and emotion, as well as models from B. F. Skinner and Maslow provided several platforms to explore. Weiner (1985) discussed the three common properties (locus, stability, and controllability), that have an impact on people and how they react to given situations. Skinner posed the punishment and reward system, specifically regarding extrinsic motivation (McDaniel, n.d.). Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a tool used to understand human motivation and is focused on levels of needs one must satisfy before moving to the next level (Chapman, 2001).

There are many factors affecting attendance rate. Research has shown student achievement and school attendance are related (Marburger, 2006). School districts are challenged to develop a comprehensive intervention model to combat problematic attendance and motivate students to stay in school.

Chapter One presented an introduction to the study. Chapter Two discussed a review of literature. In Chapter Three, the methodology, data collection, and data analysis were detailed. A discussion of descriptive and inferential statistics was also included in Chapter Three. Analyses of data were presented in Chapter Four. Tables and figures representing the descriptive and inferential statistics were discussed and displayed. A summary of findings, as detailed by each research question, and recommendations for further study were also discussed in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

In the review of literature, research regarding chronic student absenteeism and the effects on student/academic achievement, school discipline issues, truancy, and dropping out of school were examined. The review also included factors to be considered when developing attendance policies, types of attendance policies, and how socio-economic status and the number of high school students enrolled in the school district affect attendance rates.

### **Chronic Absenteeism**

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), chronic absenteeism is defined as “one who misses 10 percent or more of the school year, regardless of whether an absence is excused or not” (Ashford, 2009, p. 1). Rothman (2001) suggested, “chronic absenteeism is not a cause of academic failure and departure from formal education, but rather one of many symptoms of alienation from school” (p. 59). Within the United States, “25% of kindergartners, 21% of first graders, 17% of third graders, and 15% of fifth graders are either at-risk or chronically absent” (Romero & Lee, 2007). Guare and Cooper (2003) found that “54.6% of high school students are truant from classes and, of that number, 13.1% have been truant more than 11 days within the school year” (p. 22).

In the Sioux Falls School District, in South Dakota, “twelfth graders exhibited the highest rates of overall chronic absence with more than 40 percent of students missing more than 10 school days during each school year” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 18). Sheldon and Epstein (2004) stated, “students who are chronically absent are more likely than other students to drop out of school” (p. 39). Furthermore,

“dropping out has been associated with an increased likelihood of unemployment, dependency on welfare, and incarceration” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 12). Researchers have studied “issues of school non-attendance, truancy, and dropping out ... [and have] traditionally examined social, family, and personal variables that place students at risk for such behaviors” (Wilkins, 2008, p. 12).

**Truancy.** The structure of a school setting often contributes to how students experience the educational environment. School climate and “culture can influence student absenteeism and truancy” (Harnett, 2007, p. 37). Students who are truant do not have the opportunity to develop relationships with their teachers and oftentimes have trouble making friends and interacting with their peers (Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk, 2003). In addition, the truant student’s friendship groups become smaller or even closed, leading to further isolation. Teachers attribute attention seeking and disruptive behavior to the loss of this confidence (Malcolm et al., 2003). Harnett (2007) explained, “when students feel the system is working for them and on their behalf, they are more likely to stay connected to teachers and the curriculum” (p. 37). Consequently, “when students do not feel the system is supporting them, they disconnect” (Hartnett, 2007, p. 38).

Policies designed to impact truancy must reflect state and local law. State and district policymakers have the autonomy to determine what is considered an excused or unexcused absence (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009). Researchers have concluded, “high school attendance policies are often alike across the spectrum of school sizes and types” (Hartnett, 2007, p. 38). Most school districts deem “illness, injury, and death in the family” (Harnett, 2007, p. 38) as excused absences and usually require a

parent note. Students who have excessive absences due to illness must provide a doctor's note, and planned absences may require students to provide documentation ahead of time (Hartnett, 2007). Unexcused absences fall into one of three categories; failure to submit a note or documentation of an absence, "submitting a signed excuse which does not constitute an excused absence, ...[or] presence on school property but failure to attend assigned class" (Hartnett, 2007, p. 39).

In Alabama, the state board of education has required the parent or guardian of a student who is absent to explain in writing, within three school days, the reason behind the absence (Alabama Department of Education, 2004). Failure to furnish the explanation results in the child being considered truant each day he or she is absent (Alabama Department of Education, 2004). In Wisconsin, truancy is defined as "an unexcused absence from all or a portion of the school day among students aged 6-18 receiving compulsory education" (Eastman, Cooney, O'Connor & Small, 2007, p. 3). Wisconsin has defined simple truancy as a single unexcused absence and habitual truancy as having five unexcused absences in a semester (Eastman et al., 2007). The Pennsylvania School Code emphasized after three days of absence without a lawful excuse, a student is considered truant (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007). Missouri schools do not have a state definition of truancy, whereas a student must be absent 18 times in Illinois to be considered truant (Douglas, 2009).

School districts around the nation are examining attendance data in an effort to improve student attendance. As a result, truancy reduction programs are being implemented in many of those school districts. Overall, each program has the same goal: "to improve school attendance in the short term, with the longer term goals of raising

grades and encouraging high school graduation for students who are at risk of dropping out” (Heilbrunn, 2007, p. 1). Since truancy is so complex, it is important to note an effective approach to truancy reduction involves families, schools, and communities working together “to set rules for school attendance and to enforce those rules quickly and consistently” (Eastman et al., 2007, p. 4).

Aurora Public Schools, in Colorado, instituted a truancy reduction program which featured a “range of interventions such as tutoring, counseling, Saturday school, parent support groups and substance abuse treatment” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 19). The program also included seven district-level truancy specialists who collaborated with the schools, families, and the courts to remedy truancy issues (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009). At the end of the 2007-08 school year, Aurora Public Schools indicated that 78% of their schools decreased the number of students with 10 or more unexcused absences and overall, the number of habitually truant students was reduced by more than 250 students, increasing district funds by \$350,000 (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009).

In an effort to improve attendance, the Alamosa School District, in Colorado, partnered with the community for restorative programs to help families overcome barriers ranging from parents’ late work schedules to the lack of an alarm clock or clean clothes for students (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009). The Montezuma-Cortez School RE-1 District, in Colorado, recently began partnering with parents of students via an annual family contract and parent meetings scheduled once students missed more than 10 days of school (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009). The actions of these school districts are representative of ways to counteract the truancy problem.



Another Colorado school district, Cherry Creek District, used attendance data to reveal possible causes of student truancy (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009). Besides attendance tracking, the district began “intervention with family notification and problem solving” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 21). If attendance does not improve, the student is referred to the Student Attendance Review Board which includes “reps from the school district, human services, and the juvenile assessment center, as well as a social worker, school deans, counselors and mental health staff” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 21) who meet to address the student’s needs. A well-rounded staff is important since “students with chronic absences frequently have personal or family mental health concerns, substance abuse problems, significant family changes, and/or long-standing academic struggles” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 21). These examples highlight the emphasis school districts are placing on student attendance.

### **Legal and Economic Issues**

There are legal and economic consequences that surround the truancy issue. Mandated school attendance began in 1874 “with the state’s [New York] first compulsory education law, which required that all children aged eight to 14 attend private, public, or home school for at least 14 weeks each year” (Maugh-Pugh, 2005, p. 380). There are arguments for and against compulsory education. Those “in favor of compelling education...[have believed] that the health of a democracy relied upon an educated citizenry and that if the state provides schooling for this purpose it must not be thwarted by parents, children or employers” (Maugh-Pugh, 2005, p. 380). However, “critics say

that forcing students to attend school is counterproductive, [and] that students who don't want to be there often become disruptive influences" (Christie, 2007, p. 341).

Most states "typically require school attendance from the ages of six to 16, but variations in laws mean that depending on a child's state of residence, (s)he is required to attend as few as nine or as many as 13 years of school" (Heilbrunn, 2005, p. 2).

Heilbrunn (2005) determined, "only 16 states require attendance until the age typical of high school graduation" (p. 2). In most states, "young people are entitled to receive public education until the age of 21, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that failing students who are expected to lower schools' standardized test scores are often encouraged to withdraw" (Heilbrunn, 2005, p. 2). With the increased standards for No Child Left Behind, school districts are required to report attendance data, "yet differences in state definitions mean that no aggregated national data on truancy will be available even under the new regulations" (Heilbrunn, 2005, p. 2).

Truant students are often directly involved with legal implications. The National Center for School Engagement [NCSE] (2007) reported that many schools' policies require the failing of students for missing a certain amount of classes. The NCSE (2007) also contended that truant students are more likely to be involved with the juvenile system as an indirect legal consequence of poor attendance. Parents are also responsible for their children's lack of attendance. In some extreme cases, parents could face neglect charges, lose custody of their children, or receive jail time (NCSE, 2007). Research has identified "delinquent peer association as one of the most important predictors of an individual's own involvement in delinquency" (Henry & Huizinga, 2007). Children who become involved early in their life with criminal acts are more likely to continue those

acts even as an adult (Henry & Huizinga, 2007). Adult criminalities, such as high daytime burglary rates, vandalism, and weapons-related violence have been linked to the consequences of truancy (Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

The economic consequences of truancy are also increasing. Baker et al. (2001) linked truancy with a high probability of dropping out of school. Dropouts cost society over \$200,000 over a lifetime in government-funded expenditures, but are costly to taxpayers due to increases in juvenile court involvement (NCSE, 2007). Berkeley High School, in California, is losing more than \$100,000 a month in state funding due to absent or truant students (Oakley, 2010). The school district loses \$29.73 per day for each student who is absent which adds up quickly with 3,200 high school students (Oakley, 2010). Additionally, because truant students require more counseling services, need more tutoring, and usually create more discipline referrals, the cost per student increases (NCSE, 2007).

Truancy involves a vicious cycle of economic issues which includes paying fines and missed work time for parents who are required to attend to their children's attendance issues (NCSE, 2007). This could have a considerable impact on families with a low socio-economic status. If these students do not receive a high school diploma, their earning potential is significantly decreased, and dropping out is more likely. Job instability, reliance on public assistance, unemployment, and underemployment are several other consequences of truancy (Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

### **Importance of Attendance Rates**

Collecting accurate attendance data is critical to school districts. Molland (2001), discussed the importance of attendance data and suggested, "although No Child Left

Behind is a federal program, each individual state must develop and implement its own academic standards, test for measuring their achievement, and regulations for administering the program based on guidelines from the United States Department of Education” (p. 126). Furthermore, according to the National Forum on Education Statistics (2009), “high-quality attendance data serves as the foundation for understanding where students are during the school day” (p. 3). Additionally, these data “provide the information needed for schools to formulate practices, programs, and policies to improve attendance rates” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 3). Each school in each district depends on accurate school attendance data to determine if they are “meeting AYP targets under No Child Left Behind” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 3). It is also important that all districts have a uniform set of codes to describe the reason a student missed school.

After the attendance data are collected, it is important to analyze the data into meaningful information that can be utilized by the school district. Then, “education leaders [may clearly] understand how student absences are affecting their community, [and] they are in a position to make the case for changes that will improve student attendance” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 17). There are two types of analysis that can assist a school district in understanding data: qualitative and quantitative. The “qualitative analysis [of data] include[s] taking a closer look at local attendance policies to determine whether they support optimal student attendance” (National Forum on Education Statistics, 2009, p. 17). The National Forum on Education Statistics (2009), continued, “quantitative analyses include investigating whether student

attendance data correlate with student demographic groups, academic performance, grade levels, retention patterns, school completion and graduation” (p. 17).

**Considerations.** Attendance policies are generated due to a variety of reasons. Academic achievement is a high priority; however, it is only one of several reasons. School budgeting relies on attendance since most districts’ budgets “are based on average daily attendance and high absenteeism can result in the loss of funds” (The Chalkboard Project, 2009, p. 1). The Chalkboard Project (2009) used several examples to describe the strength of the fiscal incentive in states that use average daily attendance as the basis of educational funding. For example:

The school finance website for Humble, Texas Independent School District steps teachers, administrators, parents through the fiscal impacts of absenteeism. The site reports the district loses \$32.29 in funding for each student absence and urges parents, students and employees to eliminate unnecessary truancy. (The Chalkboard Project, 2009, p. 2)

The Temecula Valley Unified School District reported losing about \$30.00 for every student who is absent each day (Kabbany, 2005). A superintendent of a Kentucky school district asked parents to keep absences to a minimum and explained how each student absence cost the district \$20.73, while another administrator in a California district eliminated the automated calling system and made personal calls to parents of absentees in an effort to increase student attendance (The Chalkboard Project, 2009). It is important for parents and students to realize the financial ramifications of each student absence. School districts that depend on average daily attendance for a portion of their budget must emphasize the traumatic impact student absenteeism can have on the district budget.

## **Effects of Chronic Absenteeism**

**Academic achievement.** As indicated by No Child Left Behind, “states must set clear timelines for improving student achievement, with particular emphasis on closing achievement gaps between low-income and minority students and their peers” (Molland, 2007, p. 127). Students who have poor attendance are at a disadvantage in regard to student achievement. Research conducted in Chicago “found that nearly 90 percent of freshmen who missed less than a week of school per semester graduated, regardless of their academic history” (Pinkus, 2009, p. 6), and furthermore, “Los Angeles students who were absent for more than ten days in a single school year were half as likely as their peers to graduate” (Pinkus, 2009, p. 6). Pinkus (2009) concluded, “widespread attendance problems contribute to low performance and graduation rates” (p. 6) which coincides with an analysis of national data in which “schools with higher attendance rates had lower dropout rates” (p. 6). In a recent survey of students choosing to leave school without a diploma, Pinkus (2009) found, “missing too many days of school and having trouble catching up was the second most reported reason for dropping out” (p. 6).

**School discipline issues and truancy.** The National Center for School Engagement (2003) determined:

Truancy is a status offense – an act that is a crime due to the young age of the actor, but would not be illegal for someone older. The most common status offenses are running away from home, alcohol use, curfew violations, and ungovernability. (p. 1)

Likewise, Railsback (2004) reported children who have chronically unexcused absences are at risk for being involved in more serious behavioral issues, such as substance abuse,

involvement in criminal activity, and incarceration. National studies have shown “school dropouts are more likely to have higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness along with behavior and disciplinary problems while in school” (Heilbrunn & Seeley, 2003, p. 3). This does not mean all students who are truant become criminals, yet it does suggest truancy in school can be a predictor for more serious criminal activity (Railsback, 2004). Heilbrunn and Seeley (2003) reported that “problems with school to be a risk factor for drug and alcohol use, and for involvement with the juvenile justice system” (p. 3). Truancy is usually directly related to negative behaviors; however, it is also a “red flag that may signal any number of problems in a child’s home, ranging from poverty to mental health issues to physical abuse” (Heilbrunn & Seeley, 2003, p. 3).

**Dropping out of school.** For years “Americans have been warned that U.S. dominance in the world’s economy is fading because of the country’s poor educational performance” (Amos, 2008, p. 1). However, at the same time, “shifts have been taking place in society that portend – unless Americans begin to pay attention and make some significant changes – a major alteration in this positive economic status” (Amos, 2008, p. 1). According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), the changing climate of business, urban infrastructure, and diversity are requiring more years of schooling, specifically, beyond the eighth grade, and, as indicated by “the U.S. Department of Labor, 90 percent of new high-growth, high-wage jobs will require some postsecondary education” (Amos, 2008, p. 1). Furthermore, “many jobs once held by high school dropouts or by individuals who had attained only a high school diploma are being automated or going overseas, leaving minimally educated Americans with increasingly diminished options to support themselves and their families” (Amos, 2008, p. 1). The

Alliance for Excellent Education (2007), reported, 40 years ago, the United States led the world in secondary and higher education rankings, but today many other countries have caught up or surpassed the United States in nearly every category.

There are many areas of society that are affected by dropouts. Affected domains include “the economy, social fabric and security of the nation, states, and local communities” (Amos, 2008, p. 2). Amos (2008) found:

More than four million students across the country will enter the ninth grade.

Over the next four years, a third of these students will drop out before attaining a diploma; another third will graduate without having gained the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in work or postsecondary education. (p. 1)

These statistics are alarming and indicated reforming the nation’s high schools will not be an easy process. Increased accountability standards will “ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed and graduate prepared for the future” (Amos, 2008, p. 3).

### **Development of Attendance Policies**

Marburger (2006) argued, “an enforced mandatory attendance policy significantly reduces absenteeism and improves exam performance” (p. 148). If attendance procedures and policies are unclear, students and their families may become confused about attendance guidelines. Due to the increasingly diverse student populations in local school districts, notification of compulsory attendance laws and school attendance procedures is a vital first step in educating parents (Student Advocacy, 2008). Relaying this information in a variety of methods and languages can help school districts ensure parents know the importance of regular school attendance (Student Advocacy, 2008).



**Why students do not attend school.** In an effort to determine what strategies to use to increase student attendance, educators must look at the reasons why students do not attend school. Students are absent from school for a variety of reasons. The age of the student and each student's individual circumstance affect attendance. Railsback (2004) described "six variables that were statistically significant predictors for distinguishing absentee high school students from regularly attending students" (p. 6). The variables are:

1. Students' school perceptions: Absentees are less likely to perceive school favorably;
2. Perception of parental discipline: Absentees perceive discipline as lax or inconsistent;
3. Parents' control: Absentees believe parents are attempting to exert more control over them;
4. Students' academic self-concept: Absentees feel inferior academically;
5. Perceived family conflict: Absentees experience family conflict;
6. Social competence in class: Absentees are less likely to feel socially competent in class. (Railsback, 2004, p. 6)

Climate and culture also play a vital role in student attitudes towards school.

Furthermore, when students have a purpose and a reason to connect while at school, they can challenge the values of the peer group and build a relationship with teachers, administrators, or staff members who help carry the vision for students (Hartnett, 2007).

Consistent enforcement of a school's attendance policy is the first means to help encourage students to have good attendance. Truancy is rampant in schools that do not consistently enforce attendance policies (Teasley, 2004). Baker et al. (2001) believed

schools should adopt attendance policies which reward good behavior, discourage poor attendance, and have consequences for truancy; however, an attendance policy which relies heavily on consequences may not succeed. Reeves (2008) explained that the Minnetonka high school attendance policy required student's grades be lowered after three unexcused absences and again thereafter. The policy was not effective, and the district decided to disconnect unexcused absences from grades (Reeves, 2008). Under the new policy, when a student missed class, the parent was contacted, and within 36 hours a staff member met with the student regarding the absence (Reeves, 2008). Every unexcused absence resulted in an after-school detention (Reeves, 2008). Since the implementation of the new policy, "unexcused absences have dropped by 42 percent the number of disciplinary referrals has dropped by 64 percent, and suspensions have dropped by 37 percent" (Reeves, 2008, p. 91). Reeves (2008) concluded, "when schools improve grading policies –for example, by disconnecting grades from behavior – student achievement increases and behavior improves dramatically" (p. 91).

An effective attendance policy should have a multi-faceted approach. Overall, schools can help students' attendance by incorporating lessons of problem solving, building relationships with students, monitoring attendance, and communicating with parents (Conchas & Rodriguez, 2009). Affective policies, in which support or counseling is offered to families, or policies in which privileges are taken away, are more effective at decreasing absences. It is important, however, students realize there are consequences for being truant from school (Teasley, 2004). Reardon (2008) found that rewards can be effective, which was confirmed in the study conducted by Nemecek and Watson (2007). Students were given rewards for good attendance, and "75% of the students stated that

positive rewards did make them want to improve their attendance” (Nemec & Watson, 2007, p. 30).

### **The Attributional Theory of Achievement, Motivation, and Emotion**

In 1958, “Heider was the first to propose a psychological theory of attribution, but Weiner and colleagues developed a theoretical framework that has become a major research paradigm of social psychology” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 1). In Heider’s view, “people are like amateur scientists, trying to understand other people’s behavior by piecing together information until they arrived at a reasonable explanation or cause” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 1). Similarly, the attribution theory “is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behavior” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 2).

The attribution theory is relevant to the study of a person’s perceptions, event perceptions, and attitude change, which can lead to the individual increasing his self-esteem, as well as decreasing his levels of anxiety (Motivation, 2008). Williams (2006) described how past and current experiences affect and contribute to one’s behavior. Experiences may be positive or negative, and “individuals attribute their success to some external factor or their downfall to external factors” (Williams, 2006, p. 1). This phenomenon is evidenced when a student fails an exam and attributes the failure to not studying well, studying the wrong material, or the instructor not giving pertinent information, which are external factors (Williams, 2006). When a student externalizes the blame, the responsibility shifts from the student to an external factor. (Williams, 2006).

On the other hand, some individuals externalize thoughts or predictions of possible consequences of a current behavior (Motivation, 2008), such as, “teenagers

buying alcohol and drinking in a vehicle may become grossly anxious knowing what they are doing is illegal” (Williams, 2006, p. 1). Therefore, due to the high level of anxiety, the teenagers may drive slower which makes them more obvious to police officers and eventually leads to being caught (Williams, 2006). Consequently, because it is in direct conflict with their existing value structures, individuals who practice these types of behavior often experience a higher level of anxiety (Williams, 2006).

The “attribution theory has also been used to explain the difference in motivation between high and low achievers” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 5). Accordingly, “high achievers will approach rather than avoid tasks related to succeeding, because they believe success is due to high ability and effort which they are confident of” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 5). Furthermore, “failure is thought to be caused by bad luck or a poor exam and is not their fault [and therefore] does not affect their self-esteem” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 5). However, “low achievers avoid success-related chores because they tend to: a) doubt their ability and/or b) assume success is related to luck or to ‘who you know,’ or c) to other factors beyond their control” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 5). As a result, “even when successful, it isn’t as rewarding to the low achiever because he/she doesn’t feel responsible, [and] it doesn’t increase his/her pride and confidence” (“Attribution Theory,” 2004, para. 5). To summarize, the general principles of the attribution theory are:

- Attribution is a three stage process: 1) behavior is observed, 2) behavior is determined to be deliberate; and 3) behavior is attributed to internal or external causes.

- Achievement can be attributed to 1) effort, 2) ability, 3) level of task difficulty, or 4) luck.
- Causal dimensions of behavior are 1) locus of control, 2) stability, and 3) controllability. (Weiner, 1974, p. 2)

As an external factor, attendance policies provide students with an additional tool for self-justification of attendance. For example, students could use the positive outcomes of attendance – exemptions, awards, or positive teacher feedback – to escape peer pressure. By having a personal stake in the outcome and the ability to influence it, students are empowered to affect their own success.

### **Three Primary Types of Attendance Policies**

When accountability standards are increased, school districts are forced to review their policies to determine how to help students succeed. Attendance policies are the first to be examined because “cracking down on truancy is a growing concern for many administrators, as requirements increase and evidence mounts that children who are in school consistently learn more than students who are absent” (Delisio, 2002, para. 1). Reardon (2008) categorized attendance policies into three main types: affective, punitive, and reward.

**Affective attendance policy.** An affective policy is one:

That offers services (opportunities) to the truant student and/or the parent.

Examples would include but not be limited to: a) individual school counseling being offered to each student with more than a certain number of days absent; b) family counseling being offered to all those related to the student if necessary; c) assignment of a peer mentor/peer counselor to the truant student; and/or d) the

implementation of an individualized contract allowing the student to express the reasons he/she does not attend school. (Reardon, 2008, p. 81)

An affective policy was adopted by a Minneapolis school district after holding many planning and community meetings (Delisio, 2002). As a result, secondary students with four or more unexcused absences had specific interventions before failing the class (Delisio, 2002). The interventions included “discussions with the student after the first and subsequent unexcused absences, personal contact with a parent/guardian, development of an improvement plan with time for the student to implement it, and a referral of the student for interventions within the school” (Delisio, 2002, para. 24).

**Punitive attendance policy.** The punitive policy is:

A policy which punishes the student for missing school. Examples would include but not be limited to: a) any grade percentage deduction as a result of an unexcused absence or tardy; b) the giving of a “0%” in place of all (any) missing assignments given that day; c) a student not being allowed to make up work for an absence/tardy; and/or d) a student not being allowed to attend a school function for missing school. (Reardon, 2008, p. 81)

A punitive policy was enacted at Verdugo Hills High School, in Los Angeles, where the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) issued 4,000 truancy tickets district-wide to students who missed class without an excuse more than four times. Although issued by police, “the citations do not have fines attached to them, but after receiving four a student can receive a truancy ticket under a deal worked out with the District Attorney’s Office, school police, and the local court system” (Llanos, 2009, para. 9).

Another example of a punitive policy in Naugatuck, Connecticut, allowed “police officers to issue fines of \$25 a day to any students who are chronically truant, to their parents, or to both” (Delisio, 2002, para. 6). Another way to punish those with poor attendance is to punish the parents. In 2004, the San Francisco Unified School District reported about 3,500 students had three or more unexcused absences (Lawler, 2004). The district’s *Stay in School Coalition* had parents facing harsh penalties if their child was a repeat offender, and parents faced a \$100 fine and a reduction in welfare if their child continued to skip school (Lawler, 2004). District officials used this as a last option (Lawler, 2004).

**Reward attendance policy.** The reward policy is:

A policy which provides an incentive for a student to attend school. Examples would include but not be limited to: a) the addition of any percentage points given to students for having good attendance; b) the chance for students to be exempt from final exams based upon the attendance of the student; c) the opportunity for students to win a prize (i.e. money) for good attendance; and/or d) the opportunity for a student to earn privileges of his/her choice if he/she attends school for a pre-determined amount of days. (Reardon, 2008, p. 81)

With an emphasis on attendance standards, “many principals are putting a lot of energy into boosting attendance” (Hopkins, 2009, para. 1). The principal at a middle school in Sadler, Texas, presented certificates to students who had a 95% attendance record, and the principal at an elementary school in Conrad, Iowa, awarded special certificates to those with perfect attendance (Hopkins, 2009). In addition, items such as laptops, kids’ bedroom furniture, and even a few automobiles were used as incentives for students in

the Fort Worth, Texas, school system (“Computers Carrots for High Attendance,” 2004). School officials at the Temecula Valley Unified School District hoped incentives would boost attendance from 96% to 98%. Weekly and monthly attendance awards ranged from baseball tickets, gift certificates to local restaurants, and grand prize items, such as computers, ipods, and other small electronics (Kabbany, 2005). A Washington D.C. school district started an initiative to pay students for attending school. The pilot program allowed students to be “eligible for as much as \$100 every two weeks for their attendance, behavior, and academic performance” (Maxwell, 2008, para. 2). These are only a few of the many examples of reward or incentive attendance programs throughout the country.

### **Factors Affecting Attendance and Student Achievement**

There are many factors which affect high school attendance and student achievement. This study examined two main factors: the size of the high school and socio-economic status. Each impacts attendance and student achievement in a unique way.

**Size of high school.** Previously, “larger schools have been advertised as providing a more comprehensive curriculum than possible in smaller schools, while reducing per pupil operating costs” (Stevenson, 2006, p. 1). However, significant questions have been raised about whether “larger schools provide better academic outcomes and when all factors considered; they are less expensive to operate” (Stevenson, 2006, p. 1). Research surrounding school size has led to the conclusion that “as schools get bigger, student achievement declines and larger schools have higher rates of absenteeism, dropouts, and discipline problems” (“How Important Is School Size,”



2008, p. 1). Conversely, “smaller schools produce better academic results and provide a better school climate [and, moreover], smaller schools allow more opportunities for students to be involved in co-curricular activities, and offer more personalization and individual attention than larger schools” (Stevenson, 2006, p. 1).

A study conducted by Driscoll, Halcoussis, and Svorny (2003) compared district size, school size, and class size with test scores and attendance rates. They found district size had a negative effect on student performance as measured by standardized test scores and a negative effect on attendance rates for elementary and middle schools students (Driscoll et al., 2003). The Education Commission of the States (2011) found as school size decreases, student performance, as measured by attendance rates, test scores, and graduation rates, increases. A study by the Legislative Research Commission found that small schools foster higher attendance rates, and when students moved from larger to smaller secondary schools, attendance improved (Hager, 2006). In summary, it is evident that smaller schools provide stronger academic outcomes, which include higher attendance and graduation rates.

**Effect of socio-economic status.** To further complicate the relationship of high school size, student achievement, and attendance, the economic status of students attending the school is also a factor. Research has shown students who live in poverty are at a severe disadvantage with regard to their educational opportunities; however, “the impact of economic well-being on school attendance diminishes with the increasing age of children” (Vleminckx & Smeeding, 2003). Further research has suggested that “children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds perform better academically when served by small schools; [and, furthermore], students from affluent backgrounds

tend to perform better when housed in larger settings” (Stevenson, 2006, p. 1). Research on family structure suggested that students from single-family homes have lower attendance rates than those from two-parent households; however, several other studies did not support these results (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Thompson, Entwisle, Alexander, & Sundius, 1992). Therefore, it is suggested that family practices, rather than family structure, affect student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Railsback (2004) found students from low income homes historically had higher dropout rates and lower attendance rates than students from higher socio-economic environments. The Massachusetts Department of Education (2003) also reported students with a lower socio-economic status had a higher dropout rate and lower attendance rate as compared to students with a high socio-economic status. According to Toutkoushian and Curtis (2005), a study conducted in New Hampshire schools indicated socio-economic factors accounted for a large portion of school level outcomes, such as test scores and average daily attendance rates.

There is a plethora of research describing the effects of poverty on student achievement (Bruce, 2008). The No Child Left Behind Act also ensures the success of these disadvantaged students by holding:

The school alone responsible if the students – whatever social, economic, physical or intellectual handicaps they bring to their classrooms – fail to make sufficient progress every year. Yet a growing body of research suggests that while schools can make a difference for individual students, the fabric of children’s lives outside of school can either nurture, or choke, what progress poor children do make academically. (Schemo, 2006, para. 6)

Furthermore, “reforms aimed at education alone are doomed to come up short, unless they are tied to changes in economic and social policies to lessen the gaps children face outside the classroom” (Schemo, 2006, para. 13). In a Louisiana study, “the strongest predictor of student test achievement was the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch at a school” (Stevenson, 2006, p. 1). In a study conducted by the UNC Center for Civil Rights (2005), student achievement decreased as the poverty level increased. Forty years of scientific studies confirmed that “children who attend high-poverty schools face considerably higher risks of lower academic performance, whatever their individual academic potential” (UNC Center of Civil Rights, 2005, p. 1).

**Effects of district size and socio-economic status.** The effects of the school district size, along with socio-economic status, are emphasized by a series of studies conducted in seven states: Alaska, California, Georgia, Montana, Ohio, Texas, and West Virginia. In a study conducted in Arkansas, it was determined “that smaller schools reduce harmful effects of poverty on student achievement and help students from less affluent communities narrow the academic achievement gap between them and students from wealthier communities” (Johnson, Howley, & Howley, 2002, p. 5). The findings of the Arkansas study are consistent with the findings in the other seven states. The findings included:

- 1) The higher the level of poverty in a community served by a school, the more damage larger schools and school districts inflict on student achievement. In more affluent communities, the impact of school and district size is quite small, but the poorer the community, the stronger the influence;
- 2) The achievement gap between children from more affluent and those from less affluent communities is

narrowed in smaller schools and smaller districts, and widened in larger schools and larger districts; 3) Smaller schools are most effective against poverty when they are located in smaller districts; they are less effective when they are located in larger districts. Poverty dampens student achievement most in larger schools located in larger districts; 4) The relationship between school size, poverty, and student achievement is as much as three times greater in schools with the largest percentage of African American students. (Johnson et al., 2002, p. 5)

A review of literature, by Nguyen, Schmidt, and Murray (2007), suggested there is growing consensus that small schools also promote higher attendance rates. Chicago schools have made an effort to increase the number of small schools within their district. When opening a new building, measures have been taken to assure new schools were smaller in size (Wasley et al., 2000). A range of indicators was examined to assess student achievement, and found students in smaller schools had better attendance rates, as well as higher grade point averages and lower dropout rates (Wasley et al., 2000).

**Extenuating circumstances.** Occasionally, circumstances beyond one's control present themselves, such as tornadoes, floods, or a virulent strain of the flu. Events, such as Hurricane Katrina and the predicted H1N1 virus pandemic, have had an impact on student achievement and attendance.

Due to Hurricane Katrina, more than 1,100 public and private schools were closed for at least two weeks after the storm, and as of October 25, 2005, there were nearly 158,000 displaced students (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Many of the students fled to other school districts, such as the Houston Independent School District. Walnut Bend, a Houston elementary school, enrolled an additional 184 students; more than any

other Houston area elementary school (Spencer, 2005). Revere Middle School, in Houston, became home to an additional 137 Louisiana students, more than any other middle school in the region (Spencer, 2005). With the additional students, district leaders hired more teachers and planned for additional classrooms.

While many students relocated, a portion of the student population returned to New Orleans to finish high school and live with friends or other family members. This was a frightening decision for parents and meant less supervision; not all the students handled their independence well (Montagne, 2006). Discipline became a major problem as teachers spent time dealing with students who refused to heed authority (Montagne, 2006). In contrast, according to Texas school officials, Katrina students made significant academic gains (Hacker, 2010). Scores from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, from the spring of 2006 to the spring of 2009, showed that Katrina students made steady progress and performed better than Texas students of similar demographics and economic backgrounds (Hacker, 2010). Natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, will impact students in different ways. Some students will prosper; others will take the opportunity to withdraw.

A study conducted by the University of Houston found as the number of Katrina evacuees increased at secondary schools, attendance rates declined, and the discipline reports multiplied (Radcliffe, 2009). Another study, by Imberman, Kugler, and Sacerdote (2008), described the internal migration of students in the Gulf coast region. Their study compared the students of the receiving district as well as the effect the migration had on the evacuee (Imberman et al., 2008). The results of this study concluded that the influx of

Katrina evacuees decreased attendance rates for students within the receiving district as well as the actual evacuees (Imberman et al., 2008).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010) explained the 2009 H1N1 virus was first detected in America in April 2009 and has spread much like regular seasonal influenza viruses, but in a way that is leading to pandemic proportions. On June 11, 2009, “the World Health Organization declared that a pandemic of 2009 H1N1 flu was underway” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, para. 1). Therefore, the H1N1 virus has caused concern in many of the nation’s schools. Fear of the virus has spread throughout the country as schools prepared for lower attendance rates and increased parental anxiety.

Schools in Michigan, where the absentee rates soared, 194 schools reported shutting their doors for a short time hoping to curtail the spread of the virus (Knowles, 2009). An elementary student in California died from the virus, and after her death was announced, school attendance dropped 25% (Knowles, 2009). The H1N1 has hit children the hardest, as 53% of the people hospitalized have been under the age of 25 (Knowles, 2009).

School officials are concerned about attendance rates since attendance is a part of the No Child Left Behind standards that schools must meet. Houston County schools, in Alabama, were excited to receive a letter stating they could “request a waiver from meeting 95 percent attendance requirements if they’ve seen high absenteeism rates because of the flu” (Blackwell, 2009, para. 6). Since the first 20 days of class is crucial to meeting that attendance rate, school leaders hoped the flu outbreak did not affect their AYP designation (Blackwell, 2009). The state legislature passed an amendment to

alleviate funding issues and AYP requirements due to low attendance as a result of the illness (Blackwell, 2009).

With the H1N1 on the minds of students and parents, many have asked how schools plan to continue to enforce an attendance policy yet encourage those who are sick to stay home. A school district in Richmond County, Georgia, suspended their attendance policy for six weeks (Andre, 2009). The usual attendance policy required a doctor's note after five absences; however, during the six-week period, only a parent note was required (Andre, 2009). An Oklahoma school district considered changing their attendance policy due to the H1N1 virus (Sit, 2009). Several parents expressed concern over the school's test exemption policy as several students wanted to come to school while sick so as not to miss their test exemption (Sit, 2009). Even though the policy had been in place for several years, the administration asked the board to double the amount of allowable absences for students to maintain their exemption (Sit, 2009). The district encouraged those who were sick to stay home so there would be a safer environment for all students (Sit, 2009).

### **Summary**

A variety of factors contribute to chronic absenteeism including social, family, and personal variables (Wilkins, 2008). Other effects of chronic absenteeism include academic, discipline, truancy issues, and an increased risk of dropping out of school. In addition, the legal and economic impact felt by school districts through AYP accountability and lost average daily attendance revenues have led to the implementation of three primary types of district attendance policies. The three types of policies include reward, punitive, and affective (Reardon, 2008).

The attributional theory of achievement, motivation, and emotion (Weiner, 1974) served to demonstrate the difference between high and low achievers and their rate of success. A person's perception becomes his reality and this can affect past and current experiences as well as contribute to one's behavior. Other factors that affect student achievement include the size of the high school and the socio-economic status of the student. Nguyen et al. (2007), suggested that smaller schools promote higher attendance rates and research surrounding school size has led to the conclusion that as school size increased, student achievement declined. There is also a significant amount of research that described the effects of poverty on student achievement (Stevenson, 2006). The higher the level of poverty in a community served by a school the greater the impact on student achievement within that school district (Toutkoushian & Curtis, 2005).

Overall, chronic student absenteeism affects student achievement, school discipline issues, truancy, and dropping out of school. The type of attendance policy, the different factors considered when developing those policies, and the socio-economic status of the students are other factors which impact absenteeism, student daily attendance, and student achievement.

In this chapter, a review of relevant literature surrounding the factors contributing to student absenteeism was examined. School discipline issues, dropping out of school, and student demographics were discussed. Factors considered when developing attendance policies, the types of attendance policies, how socio-economic status and student enrollment affect attendance rates were reviewed. In Chapter Three, the methodology, data collection, and data analysis were detailed. An analyses of data was



presented in Chapter Four. A summary of findings, as detailed by each research question, and recommendations for further study were discussed in Chapter Five.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the average daily attendance rate and determine the relationship between that rate and the socio-economic status of students, size of the high school based on student enrollment, and the type of attendance policy implemented in public high schools in southwest Missouri. This study replicated Reardon's (2008) research and data were gathered from southwest Missouri public high schools. For the purpose of this study, the types of attendance policies were categorized as affective, punitive, and reward.

#### Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What type of attendance policy – punitive, reward, or affective – is used in each public high school in southwest Missouri?
2. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in each public high school in southwest Missouri?
3. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students enrolled in each public high school in southwest Missouri?
4. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in each public high school in southwest Missouri?

#### Null Hypotheses

$H_{01}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{02}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{o3}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students attending public high schools in southwest Missouri.

### **Alternate Hypotheses**

$H_{a1}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{a2}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{a3}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students attending public high schools in southwest Missouri.

### **Variables**

**Independent and dependent variables.** The independent variables were type of attendance policy, socio-economic status, and the number of students attending each public high school in southwest Missouri. The dependent variable was average daily attendance rate of each public high school in southwest Missouri.

### **Context and Access**

The sample for this study consisted of public high schools covering 20 counties in southwest Missouri (see Appendix B). The demographics (see Table 1) of the southwest region included a total population of 884,673 with a median household income of \$35,904 (Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis [OSED], 2009). The ethnic composition (See Table 2) of the counties is primarily White/Caucasian (96%), with a smaller percent comprising other races: Hispanic/Latino (3.34%); Black, American Indian, Alaska Native, or Asian (0.66%) (OSED, 2009).

Table 1

*Demographics of Southwest Missouri*

Population	Percent
Population under the age of 5	7%
Population under the age of 18	24%
Population over the age of 65	16%
Population 5 years of age or older who speaks a language other than English at home	4%
Population 25 years of age or older who are high school graduates	77%
Persons below the poverty level	17%

*Note.* Adapted from Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis [OSED A], 2009.

Table 2

*Ethnic Composition of Southwest Missouri*

Ethnicity	Percent
White/Caucasian	96.00%
Hispanic or Latino	3.34%
Black, American Indian, Alaska Native or Asian	0.66%

*Note.* Adapted from Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis [OSED A], 2009.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Although 85 high schools comprised the sample for this study, data were accessible for only 73 (86%) of the high schools. This study examined the current attendance policies of southwest Missouri high schools. Documents were collected for each of the independent and dependent variables. For this study, the 2008-2009 attendance policies from southwest Missouri school districts were examined. Public school districts are required to post attendance policies on the district's websites, either through policy manuals or student handbooks. Districts that did not publish their attendance policy online were contacted via email or phone and hard copies were requested (see Appendix C). All electronic documents were obtained via the Internet. The number of high school students (grades 9 through 12), the percentage of high school students receiving the free or reduced price meal program, and the average daily attendance rate of each high school were obtained via the MODESE website (MODESE, 2010a).

### **Data Analysis**

Data were collected for each of the independent and dependent variables. The type of policy was identified and recorded. The number of policies within each district was also recorded. A percentage was calculated by dividing the number of policies within that category by the total number of policies. These percentages were recorded for statistical analysis and applied to the research questions. The data were organized based on the average daily attendance rate, number of students enrolled, and the socio-economic status in the 73 public high schools in southwest Missouri to determine the correlation between the independent and dependent variables.

**Descriptive statistics.** Descriptive statistics were used to depict the basic features of the data in this study and provided a synopsis of the sample with graphic analysis, which is appropriate for quantitative studies (Trochim, 2006). The descriptive statistics used in this study include frequency distribution, minimum, maximum, mean, median and mode, as well as standard deviation of the number of students enrolled in each high school, type of attendance policy, and socio-economic status.

**Frequency distribution.** Frequency distribution is one of the most common ways to express a single variable. Trochim (2006) defined frequency distribution as a “summary of the frequency of individual values or ranges of values for a variable” (p. 2). In this study, data were grouped into categories, values were clustered into ranges, and the frequencies determined. There are three common methods of graphing a distribution: a histogram (bar graph), the frequency (or percentage) polygon, and the ogive curve (Glass & Hopkins, 1996). A histogram “depicts a frequency distribution where frequencies are represented by bars. The length of the bars represents the number of cases (frequency) falling within each interval” (Glass & Hopkins, 1996, p. 19).

In this study, a frequency histogram was used to describe the type of attendance policies utilized in the public high schools in southwest Missouri. The data depicted each type of attendance policy and established a baseline for the descriptive statistics. Frequency distribution tables were created for each variable in relation to the attendance policy.

**Mean, median, and mode.** Mean, median, and mode are most commonly used to measure central tendency, or what the data are centered around. The mean, commonly known as the average, is the sum of all the values divided by the number of values

(Trochim, 2006). The median is the “central value of an ordered distribution” (Brase & Brase, 1999, p. 92). The median is found by placing the numbered values in numerical order and locating the middle number. When the median is given, there are an equal number of values above and below it. The mode is “the value or property that occurs most frequently in the data” (Brase & Brase, 1999, p. 90).

It is possible to have multiple modes, or no modes, if none of the numbers are repeated. In this study, student enrollment, average daily attendance, and socio-economic status data were compared for evaluation purposes. Although the mean is the most common measure of central tendency, the median and mode can be more effective when values in the data are outliers (Brase & Brase, 1999). These values were identified and visually displayed in each of the tables.

***Standard deviation.*** Standard deviation is a “measure of the extent to which scores in a distribution deviate from their mean” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 133). Because of its stability, standard deviation is the most commonly used measure of variability in research studies (Gall et al., 2003). If the standard deviation is small then the data vary insignificantly around the mean; however, if the standard deviation is large, then the responses are more highly dispersed around the mean. In this study, standard deviation data with regard to student enrollment, average daily attendance, and socio-economic status were compared for evaluation purposes.

***Inferential statistics.*** Statistics that include analysis, interpretation, and forming conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data are called inferential statistics (Trochim, 2006). Inferential statistics are used to infer from the data what a population might think or to make judgments of probability between groups. In this study,

attendance policies from 73 schools were examined and the results were tallied to determine the attendance policies of the public high schools in southwest Missouri.

***Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).*** An ANOVA is a “statistical procedure that compares the amount of between-groups variance in individuals’ scores with the amount of within-group variance” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 307). If the ratio of between-group variance to within-group variance is high, there is more difference between the groups in their scores on a particular variable than within each group (Gall et al., 2003). In this study, an ANOVA was used to determine if a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) existed between the attendance policy type, number of students enrolled, socio-economic status, and average daily attendance.

***Bivariate correlation.*** Glass and Hopkins (1996) stated, “the interpretation of correlation has close ties with the normal distribution and the bivariate normal distribution. Correlation describes the way in which scores on a variable X are related with scores on a second variable Y, a bivariate relationship” (p. 118). A bivariate correlational analysis was used to determine if a relationship existed between any of the independent and/or dependent variables. Comparison was made between each of the four variables to determine if there was a significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ). The results of each comparison were expressed as  $r$  values (coefficient of correlation). If the value is close to zero, there is little to no relationship; whereas, the closer the value is to one or negative one, the stronger the relationship between the two variables.

The bivariate analysis yields the same results as linear regression, but allows for an analysis on all variables at one time, instead of two at a time. Scatterplots were used to



graphically depict the relationships between the two variables. The main purpose of the scatter plot is to illustrate:

The nature of the relationship between two variables. The scatter plot also enables one to see whether a computed  $r$  will accurately summarize the relationship between the two variables;  $r$  is appropriate only for linear relationships. The relationship between two variables is linear if a straight line, a regression line, more closely fits the dots of the scatter plot than does a smooth curve. (Glass & Hopkins, 1996, p. 104)

***Coefficient of determination.*** The coefficient of determination “gives the proportion of the variance (fluctuation) of one variable that is predictable from the other variable [and] determines how certain one can be in making predictions from a certain model/graph.” (“Correlation Coefficient,” 2010, para. 10). The coefficient of determination is also a:

Measure of how well the regression line represents the data. If the regression line passes exactly through every point on the scatter plot it would be able to explain all of the variation. The further the line is away from the points, the less it is able to explain. (“Correlation Coefficient,” 2010, para. 14)

The coefficient of determination was used to determine if one variable predicted the outcome of the other variable. For this study, the coefficient of determination was determined by comparing the four variables against each other using bivariate analysis and linear regression. The closer the value to one, the stronger the ability to predict. A coefficient of determination of zero represents no ability to predict, because there is no relationship between the variables. The coefficient of determination was also determined

by comparing the three independent variables versus the dependent variable, average daily attendance, using multiple regression.

**Multiple regression.** The term multiple regression is defined as “the statistical method most commonly employed for predicting Y from two or more independent variables” (Glass & Hopkins, 1996, p. 170). Multiple regression was used to determine the relationship between the average daily attendance and the three independent variables: type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri, number of students enrolled in public high schools in southwest Missouri, and socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

**Pearson  $r$  coefficient.** The Pearson  $r$  coefficient “is a mathematical expression of the direction and magnitude of the relationship between two measures that yield continuous scores” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 633). It is also “the most widely used bivariate correlational technique because most educational measures yield continuous scores and because  $r$  has a small standard error” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 334). The “ $r$  is computed when both variables that we wish to correlate are expressed as continuous scores” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 334). The  $r$  coefficient is always between 1 and -1. The closer the coefficient to zero the smaller the relationship, and the closer the coefficient to 1 and -1, the greater the relationship. The  $r$  coefficient is also known as the coefficient of correlation.

**Reliability and validity.** Reliability is “the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 460). To ensure reliability of the coding, all policies were examined and reviewed by a second rater. The second rater was required to have a doctoral degree from an accredited university and be willing to review

the information on the different types of attendance policies. Interpretive validity refers to “judgments about the credibility of an interpretative researcher’s knowledge claims” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 462). Since the data for this research were obtained from a state approved website, it is considered to be valid (MODESE, 2009).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted using secondary data as the major source of information. An expedited IRB indicating no involvement with human participants was approved by the Lindenwood University IRB committee (see Appendix D). There were no risks or sensitive topics related to this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of schools were respected by assigning a data code to each school (see Appendix B).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the average daily attendance rate and determine the relationship between that rate and the socio-economic status of students, size of the high school based on student enrollment, and the type of attendance policy implemented in public high schools in southwest Missouri. The independent variables were type of attendance policy, socio-economic status, and the number of students attending each public high school in southwest Missouri. The dependent variable was average daily attendance rate of each public high school in southwest Missouri. The sample for this study consisted of public high schools covering 20 counties in southwest Missouri. The demographics of the southwest region included a total population of 884,673, a median household income of \$35,904, and an ethnic composition of primarily White/Caucasian (96%) (OSED, 2009).

Attendance policies were collected for each of the independent and dependent variables. All electronic documents were obtained via the Internet. The type of attendance policy was identified and tallied, and through data collection via the MODESE website, socio-economic status percentage, average daily attendance rates, and number of students enrolled in each high school were contrasted. A percentage was calculated by dividing the number of policies within that category by the total number of policies.

Basic descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, minimum, maximum, mean, median, and mode, as well as standard deviation, were collected. A frequency histogram was used to display the types of attendance policies utilized in the public high schools in southwest Missouri. Frequency distribution tables were created for each variable. Standard deviation data with regard to student enrollment, average daily attendance, and socio-economic status were compared for evaluation purposes.

After analyzing the descriptive statistics, several inferential statistics were applied. The inferential statistics included ANOVA, bivariate correlation, and multiple regression. An ANOVA was used to measure if there was a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the attendance policy type, number of students enrolled, socio-economic status, and average daily attendance. A bivariate correlational analysis was used to determine if a relationship existed between any of the independent and/or dependent variables. A comparison was made between each of the four variables to determine if a significant relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) existed. The results of each comparison were expressed as  $r$  values (coefficient of correlation).

Multiple regression was used to determine the relationship between the average daily attendance and the three independent variables: type of attendance policy used in

each public high school, number of students enrolled in each public high school, and socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri. A correlation was calculated using the Pearson  $r$  coefficient as well. To ensure reliability of the coding, all policies were examined and reviewed by a second rater. Additionally, there were no risks associated with this study since secondary data were used. The confidentiality and anonymity of each school were also respected.

In Chapter Three, the methodology, data collection, and data analysis were detailed. A discussion of descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, minimum, maximum, mean, median, mode and standard deviation were discussed. A description of inferential statistics including ANOVA analysis, bivariate correlation, multiple regression, and linear regression were defined. Tables and figures representing the descriptive and inferential statistics were discussed and illustrated in Chapter Four. A summary of findings, as detailed by each research question, and recommendations for further study were also discussed in Chapter Five.

### Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the average daily attendance rate and determine the relationship between that rate and the socio-economic status of students, size of the high school based on student enrollment, and the type of attendance policy implemented in public high schools in southwest Missouri. For the purpose of this study, the types of attendance policies were categorized as affective, punitive, and reward. The abbreviations to denote the dependent and independent variables used for this chapter are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

#### *Variables and Abbreviations*

Abbreviation	Description of Variable	Type of Variable
ADA	Average daily attendance rate	Dependent
AFF	Affective Policy	Independent
PUN	Punitive Policy	Independent
REW	Reward Policy	Independent
SES	Socio-economic status	Independent
SIZE	Number of students in each public high school	Independent
TYPE	Type of attendance policy	Independent

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

The descriptive statistics used in this study include frequency distribution, minimum, maximum, mean, median, mode as well as standard deviation. During the data collection for this study, 73 of the 85 schools were represented. Several schools did not

have the necessary information on their websites and did not respond to the request for hard copies of their attendance policies (see Appendix C); therefore, *n*, for this study was 73.

**Size.** The smallest district studied had 84 students as compared to the largest district with 2,127 students (see Table 4). The schools with the highest and lowest student enrollments implemented a punitive style attendance policy. This wide range of school sizes throughout the southwest Missouri area is indicated by the standard deviation. Schools with reward and punitive attendance policies had a wide range of student enrollment. The schools with an affective type of attendance policy had a smaller range of student enrollments. The average size of the student enrollment in a southwest Missouri school district at the time of this study was 570.45 students.

Table 4

*Student Enrollment*

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Affective	97	679	295.75	203.5	N/A	269.37
Punitive	84	2127	568.20	374	218	489.42
Reward	107	1539	693.60	356	N/A	612.14
Combined Enrollment	84	2127	570.45	372	218	499.12

*Note.* Decimal values rounded to the hundredth place.

**Average daily attendance.** The lowest average daily attendance for a school district was 90.30% as compared to the highest attendance rate of 97.20% (see Table 5). The schools with the highest and lowest average daily attendance implemented a punitive style attendance policy. The mean average daily attendance was 94.29% with a standard deviation of 1.19%. The small standard deviation indicates very little variance in the average daily attendance of the schools.

Table 5

*Average Daily Attendance*

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Affective	92.30%	94.60%	93.80%	94.15%	N/A	1.06%
Punitive	90.30%	97.20%	94.27%	94.40%	94.40%	1.25%
Reward	93.30%	96.00%	94.57%	94.60%	N/A	0.87%
Combined ADA	90.30%	97.20%	94.29%	94.40%	94.40%	1.19%

*Note.* Decimal values rounded to the hundredth place. Average daily attendance (ADA).

**Socio-economic status.** The lowest percentage of students receiving the free or reduced price meal program was 15.40% as compared to the highest rate of 74.10% (see Table 6). The schools with the highest and lowest percentage of students receiving the free or reduced price meal program implemented a punitive style attendance policy.



Table 6

*Socio-economic Status*

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Affective	41.70%	53.70%	47.98%	48.25%	N/A	5.050%
Punitive	15.40%	74.10%	46.41%	44.10%	30.50%	13.61%
Reward	23.70%	63.40%	42.48%	41.90%	N/A	12.35%
Combined SES	15.40%	74.10%	45.95%	44.10%	30.50%	13.09%

*Note.* Decimal values rounded to the hundredth place. Socio-economic status (SES).

### **Data Analysis**

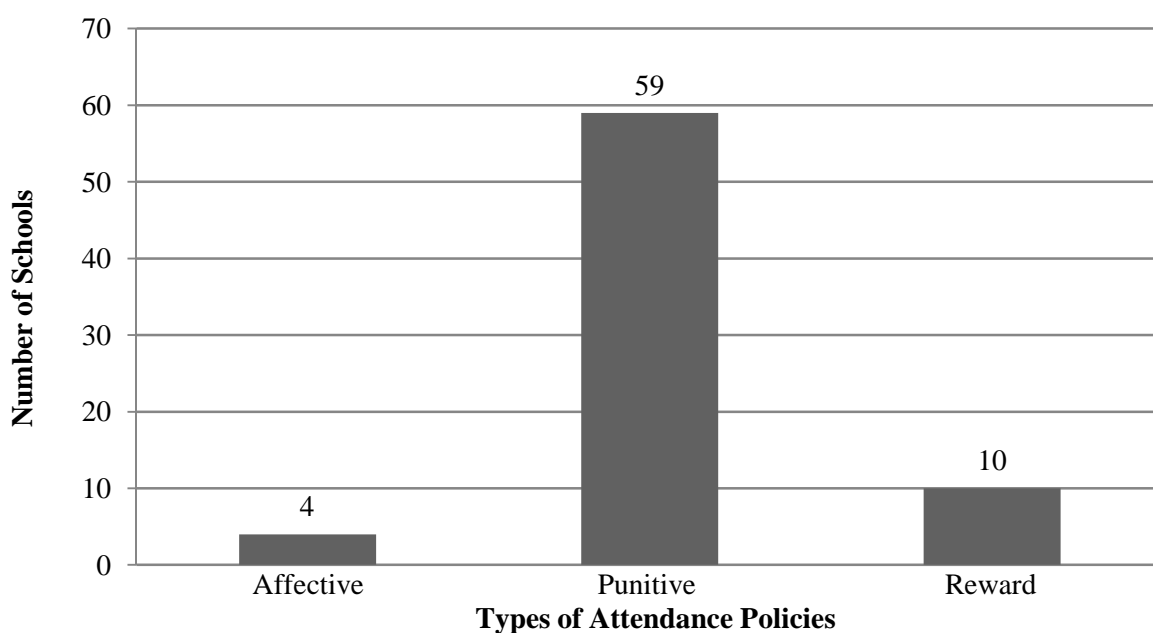
Basic descriptive statistics including frequency distribution, minimum, maximum, mean, median, and mode, as well as standard deviation, were applied. A frequency histogram was used to display the types of attendance policies utilized in the public high schools in southwest Missouri. After analyzing the descriptive statistics, several inferential statistics methods were used. The inferential statistics included ANOVA, bivariate correlation, and multiple regression. The following research questions guided this study:

*Research question 1. What type of attendance policy – punitive, reward, or affective – is used in each public high school in southwest Missouri?*

This study determined the type of attendance policy used in 73 southwest Missouri public high schools. A data table (see Appendix B) was created to display the type of attendance policy used by each high school and the average daily attendance,

school size, and percentage of students participating in the free and reduced price meal program. The policy types were tallied and percentages were calculated for each type.

Of the 73 high schools, the schools using either attendance policy were: 59 (80.8%) punitive, 10 (13.7%) reward, and 4 (5.5%) affective. The data reflects the findings of Reardon (2008) who found 81.14 % of Florida schools used a punitive policy. High schools in Missouri using a punitive policy ranged from a student enrollment of 84 to 2,127 with mean average daily attendance of 94.27% and mean socio-economic status of 46.41%.



*Figure 1.* Number of schools using each type of attendance policy.

*Research question 2. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in each public high school in southwest Missouri?*

As indicated by the trend line in Figure 2, there was no significant relationship between average daily attendance and type of attendance policy. The coefficient of correlation was -0.030 which is close to 0 indicating a small negative relationship. A  $p$  value of 0.798 (0.05 level of significance) resulted in no significant relationship (see Table 8). Thus, the type of attendance policy did not significantly affect average daily attendance. Bauer (1996) conducted a study that compared different attendance policies in Illinois and found no difference in effectiveness but limited his sample to three high schools. While these two studies had similar results, each of the studies was conducted at individual schools whereas this study examined 73 high schools. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) reported that different attendance policies were more effective than others; however, sample populations were small and results varied over time.

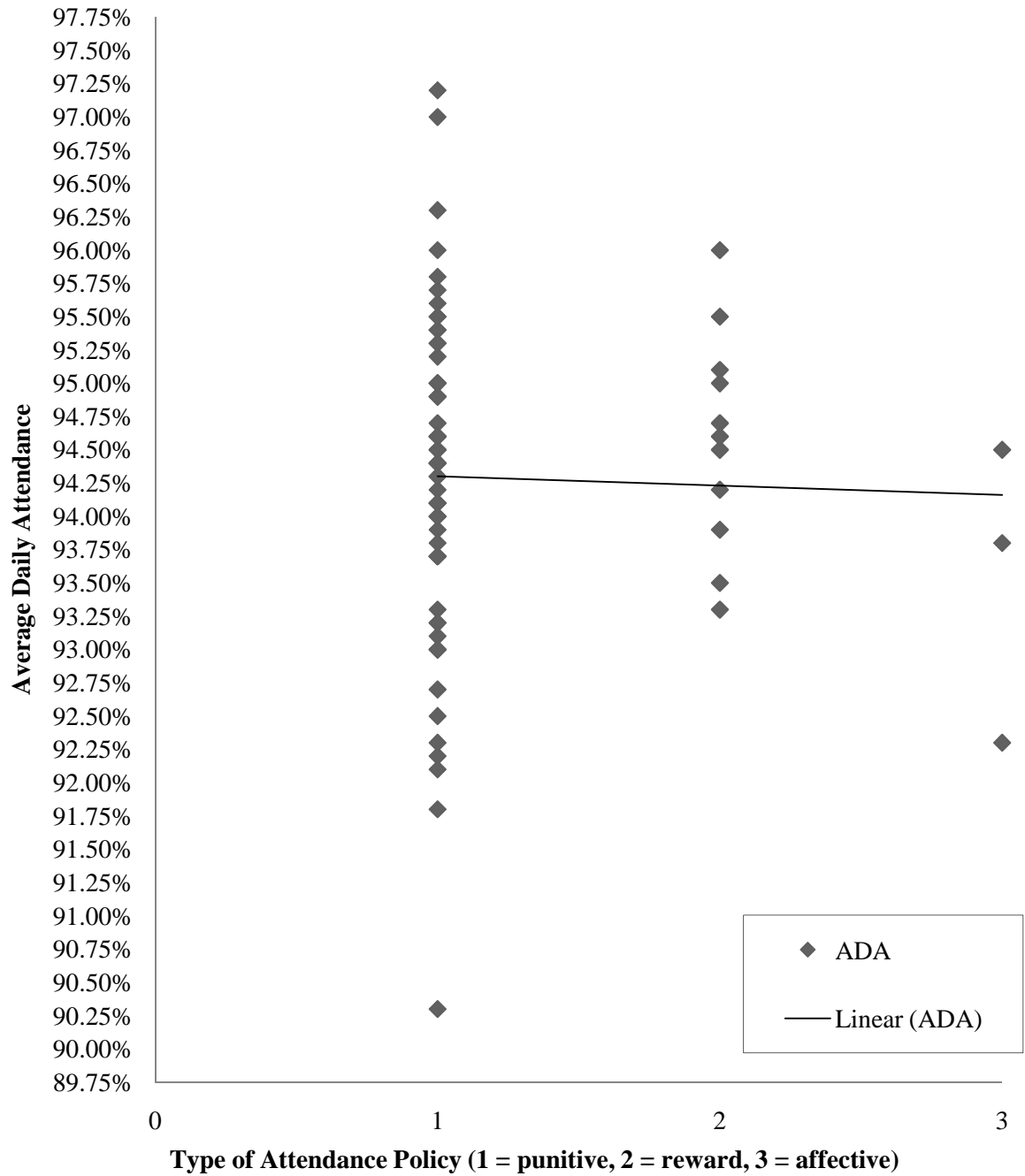
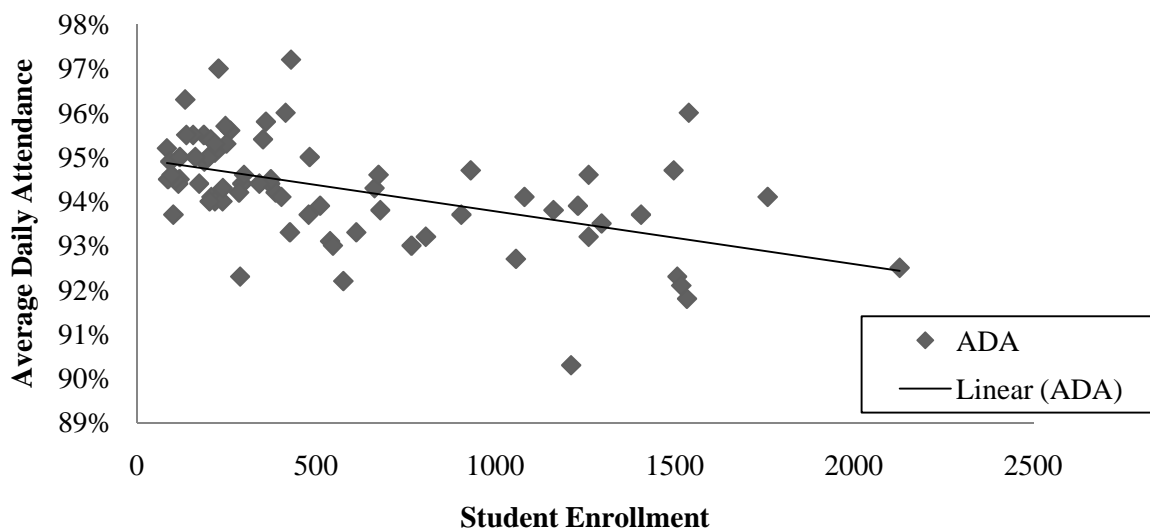


Figure 2. Scatter plot of ADA versus type of attendance policy. Average daily attendance (ADA).

*Research question 3. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students enrolled in each public high school in southwest Missouri?*

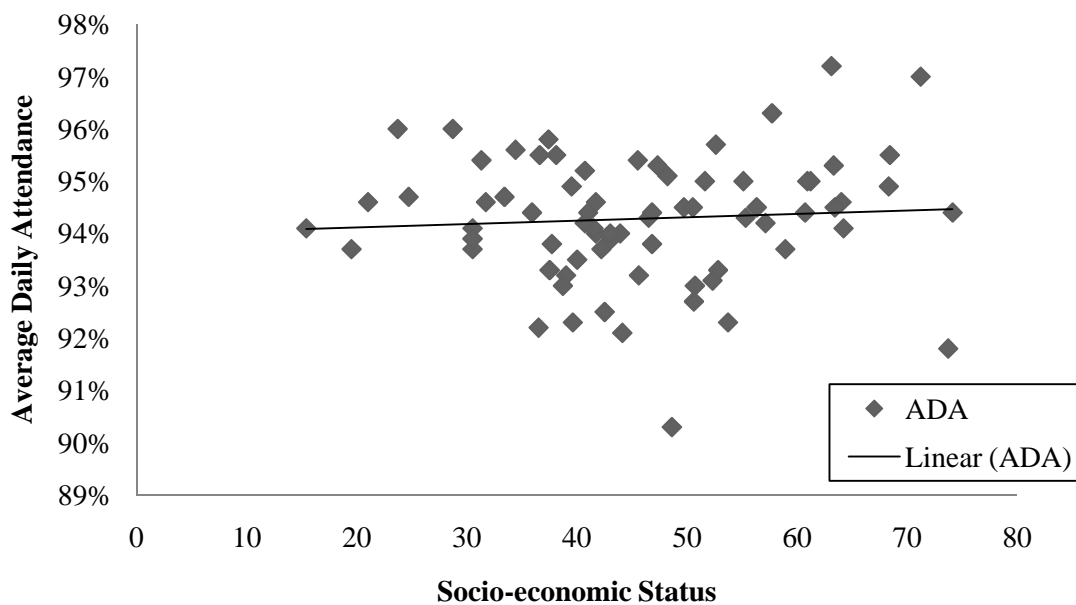
A significant relationship was indicated between average daily attendance and student enrollment (see Figure 3). The coefficient of correlation was -0.496 which is not close to 0 indicating a significant inverse relationship. The average daily attendance and student enrollment had a  $p$  value of 0.000 resulting in a significant relationship at 0.05 level of significance (see Table 8). Therefore, student enrollment significantly affected average daily attendance. Driscoll et al. (2003) found that district size has a negative effect on student performance as measured by standardized test scores and has a negative effect on attendance rates for elementary and middle schools students but was statistically insignificant at the high school level. A study conducted by the Legislative Research Commission also found that small schools foster higher attendance rates (Hager, 2006).



*Figure 3.* Scatterplot of ADA versus number of high school students enrolled. Average daily attendance (ADA).

*Research question 4. What relationship exists between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in each public high school in southwest Missouri?*

As indicated by the trend line in Figure 4, there was no relationship between average daily attendance and the socio-economic status of the students in each public high school in southwest Missouri. The coefficient of correlation was 0.071 which is close to 0 indicating a small positive relationship. The  $p$  value (0.548) indicated no significant relationship at 0.05 level of significance (see Table 8). The socio-economic status of the students did not significantly affect average daily attendance rate. Railsback (2004) and Massachusetts Department of Education (2003) found students from low income homes historically have had higher dropout rates and lower attendance rates than students with a higher socio-economic status.



*Figure 4.* Scatterplot of ADA versus SES. Socio-economic status (SES) reported in percentages.

The application of ANOVA to the policy types and variables, average daily attendance, socio-economic status, and student enrollment, showed no significant difference between the affective, punitive, and reward mean values (see Table 7). Policy type did not significantly affect the average daily attendance, socio-economic status, or student enrollment of the public high schools in southwest Missouri.

Table 7

*ANOVA*

Variable	Affective Mean	Punitive Mean	Reward Mean	<i>p</i>
ADA	93.80%	94.27%	94.57%	0.546
SES	47.98%	46.41%	42.48%	0.408
SIZE	295.75	568.20	693.60	0.654

*Note.*  $p < 0.05$ .

As shown in Table 8, the linear regression analysis results indicated a significant relationship between average daily attendance and student enrollment, since the *p* value was less than 0.05. No significant relationship was found between average daily attendance, socio-economic status, or type of attendance policy.

Table 8

*Regression Analysis for Average Daily Attendance*

Variable	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> squared	<i>p</i>
TYPE	-0.030	0.000	0.798
SES	0.071	0.005	0.548
SIZE	-0.496	0.246	0.000

*Note.*  $p < 0.05$ .

The results of the bivariate analysis, comparing the four variables, are shown in Table 9. The results showed significant relationships between the variables average daily attendance and student enrollment and between socio-economic status and student enrollment.

Table 9

*Bivariate Analysis*

	ADA		SES		SIZE		TYPE	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
ADA	1.000	-	0.071	0.549	-0.497	0.000*	-0.022	0.855
SES	0.071	0.549	1.000	-	-0.442	0.000*	-0.036	0.762
SIZE	-0.497	0.000*	-0.422	0.000*	1.000	-	-0.049	0.680
TYPE	-0.022	0.855	-0.036	0.762	-0.049	0.680	1.000	-

*Note.*  $p < 0.05$ .

The results of multiple regression analysis comparing the average daily attendance to the three independent variables (type of attendance policy, socio-economic status and student enrollment) are shown in Table 10. The results indicated a significant relationship at a 0.05 level of significance between average daily attendance and all three independent variables. This result is significant because it can be used as a better predictor of average daily attendance than using student enrollment as the only independent variable. When using student enrollment as the only independent variable, the coefficient of correlation was -0.496; however the three independent variables together, using multiple regression, had a coefficient of correlation of -0.526.



Table 10

*Multiple Regression Analysis for Average Daily Attendance*

Variables	$r$	$r$ squared	$p$
TYPE, SES, SIZE	-0.526	0.277	0.000

**Null Hypotheses**

$H_{o1}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{o2}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{o3}$ : There is no relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students attending public high schools in southwest Missouri.

The results of this study failed to reject  $H_{o1}$  and  $H_{o2}$  and failed to accept the  $H_{o3}$ .

**Alternate Hypotheses**

$H_{a1}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{a2}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

$H_{a3}$ : There is a relationship between the average daily attendance rate and the number of students attending public high schools in southwest Missouri.

Through the application of inferential statistics and analyses of data a significant relationship was indicated between average daily attendance and the number of students attending public high schools in southwest Missouri. Therefore,  $H_{o3}$  was rejected. No

relationships were found between average daily attendance and the type of attendance policy and average daily attendance and the socio-economic status of students in public high schools in southwest Missouri; therefore, the decision to fail to reject  $H_{o1}$  and  $H_{o2}$  was substantiated.

### **Summary**

This study identified the type of attendance policy used in each of the 73 public high schools in southwest Missouri. The most common type of attendance policy was punitive in nature. The smallest district had 84 students as compared to the largest district of 2,127 students. The average size of the student enrollment in a southwest Missouri school district was 570.45 students.

The lowest average daily attendance for a school district was 90.30% as compared to the highest attendance rate of 97.20%. The average daily attendance was 94.29% with a standard deviation of 1.19%. The small standard deviation indicated little variance in average daily attendance. The socio-economic status percentages ranged from 15.40% to 74.10%, indicating a wide range of those receiving the free or reduced price meal program.

Linear regression, multiple regression, and ANOVA analyses were applied to address the research questions. Of the 73 high schools, 59 schools used a punitive type of attendance policy (80.8%), 10 schools used a reward type of attendance policy (13.7%), and 4 schools used an affective type of attendance policy (5.5%). It was determined that no significant relationship existed between the average daily attendance and type of attendance policy.

It was also determined a significant relationship existed between average daily attendance and number of students enrolled in the high school. The  $p$  value of 0.000 indicated the number of students enrolled in each public high school in southwest Missouri was related to average daily attendance. Additionally, no relationships were found between the average daily attendance rate and the socio-economic status of the students in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

There was no significant difference between the affective, punitive, and reward mean values for each of the variables: average daily attendance, socio-economic status, and student enrollment. The application of an ANOVA indicated that the policy type does not significantly affect the average daily attendance, socio-economic status, or number of students enrolled in the public high schools in southwest Missouri. It was determined there was a significant relationship between average daily attendance and student enrollment using linear regression analysis.

The bivariate analysis compared the four variables, and the results indicated there were significant relationships between the variables: average daily attendance and student enrollment and between socio-economic status and student enrollment. Through a multiple regression analysis, average daily attendance was compared to the three independent variables: type of attendance policy, socio-economic status, and student enrollment. The results indicated there was a significant relationship between average daily attendance and the three independent variables.

Analyses of data were presented in Chapter Four. Tables and figures representing the descriptive and inferential statistics were discussed and displayed. Each research

question was addressed and concluded. A summary of findings, discussion of theory, implications, and recommendations for further study were discussed in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Five: Findings and Recommendations**

The issue of student absenteeism is a concern that exists in education and continues to challenge school districts to motivate students to attend school. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the average daily attendance rate and determine the relationship between that rate and the socio-economic status of students, size of the high school based on student enrollment, and the type of attendance policy implemented in public high schools in southwest Missouri.

The independent variables were type of attendance policy, socio-economic status, and the number of students attending each public high school in southwest Missouri. The dependent variable was average daily attendance rate of each public high school in southwest Missouri.

### **Summary of Findings**

The research questions were addressed using linear regression, multiple regression, and ANOVA analyses. No relationships were found between average daily attendance, type of attendance policy, and socio-economic status. It was also determined there was a significant relationship between average daily attendance and student enrollment when applying the Pearson correlation analysis. An additional relationship was indicated between two of the independent variables: socio-economic status and student enrollment.

Attendance policies were coded and sorted into one of three pre-determined categories: punitive, reward, or affective. The type of attendance policy most used in the high schools in southwest Missouri was punitive (80.8%), as compared to reward (13.7%) and affective (5.5%). With such a high number of high schools implementing a

punitive type of attendance policy and the higher overall average daily attendance rate of the high schools in southwest Missouri (94.29%), one might suggest that high punitive policy implementation yields high attendance rates, although that was not established by this study.

The ANOVA analysis showed that the type of attendance policy did not significantly affect the average daily attendance, socio-economic status, or student enrollment of the public high schools in southwest Missouri. These findings agreed with previous studies. The most widely used policy type was punitive in nature (Baker et al., 2001; Reardon, 2008). Baker et al. (2001) also concluded that punitive policies have a positive effect on a district's attendance rate.

Although the study showed a high number of schools implementing a punitive type of attendance policy, no significant relationship between type of attendance policy and average daily attendance rates existed. Due to the low implementation of reward and affective types of attendance policies, their effectiveness could not be fully addressed. Although the majority of southwest Missouri schools did not implement the reward or affective type of attendance policies, Epstein and Sheldon (2002), supported the effectiveness of these types of attendance policies.

Research question two was posed to determine the relationship between average daily attendance rate and type of attendance policy in public high schools in southwest Missouri. The coefficient of correlation was  $-0.030$  indicating a small negative relationship; however, the  $p$  value was  $0.798$  which showed no significant relationship. There are several studies that placed a focus on attendance policies and the effectiveness of the policies that yielded similar results (Baker et al., 2001; Marburger, 2006).

Vaishnav (2005) compared average daily attendance rates after punitive and reward policies were implemented and found no significant difference in the effect of policy type. However, only one high school was used for this comparison.

Similarly, Bauer (1996) conducted a study that compared different attendance policies in Illinois and found no difference in effectiveness but limited his sample to three high schools. While these two studies had similar results, each of the studies was conducted at individual schools; whereas, this study examined 73 high schools. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) reported that different attendance policies were more effective than others; however, sample populations were small and results varied over time.

Research question three was formed to determine the relationship between average daily attendance rate and number of students enrolled in public high schools in southwest Missouri. The coefficient of correlation was  $-0.496$  indicating an inverse relationship. The  $p$  value was  $0.000$  resulting in a significant relationship between the two variables.

The Education Commission of the States (2011) reported that as schools became smaller student performance improves as measured by attendance rates, test scores, and graduation rates. Furthermore, a study conducted by the Legislative Research Commission found that small schools foster higher attendance rates (Hager, 2006). Driscoll et al. (2003) found that district size has a negative effect on student performance as measured by standardized test scores, and has a negative effect on attendance rates for elementary and middle schools students but was statistically insignificant at the high school level.

Research question four was presented to determine the relationship between average daily attendance and socio-economic status of the students in public high schools in southwest Missouri. The coefficient of correlation was 0.071 which indicated a weak positive relationship. Additionally, the  $p$  value was 0.548 which indicated no significant relationship existed between the variables.

According to Tourkoushian and Curtis (2005), a study of New Hampshire schools indicated socio-economic factors account for a large portion of school level outcomes, such as test scores and average daily attendance rates. Railsback (2004) found students from low income homes historically have had higher dropout rates and lower attendance rates than students with a higher socio-economic status. The Massachusetts Department of Education (2003) reported students with a lower socio-economic status had a higher dropout rate and lower attendance rate as compared to students with a high socio-economic status.

### **Attributional Theory of Achievement, Motivation, and Emotion**

The attributional theory describes people as amateur scientists trying to understand other people's behavior ("Attribution Theory," 2004). The challenge to public schools is to influence student behavior through intrinsic or extrinsic motivators. The types of attendance policy used in school districts in southwest Missouri are examples of intrinsic or extrinsic motivators. Based on the findings in this study, the majority of the public high schools in southwest Missouri used a punitive type of attendance policy. The type of attendance policy has been used as an extrinsic motivator to encourage students to attend school; however, there was no relationship found between the type of attendance policy and the average daily attendance rate in this study.



Research on the effect of the size of the high school on student achievement and attendance has determined that smaller schools have better achievement and attendance rates (Hager, 2006). In this study, a relationship between average daily attendance and student enrollment was found; therefore, the main extrinsic motivator was student enrollment. This study also found there was no relationship between average daily attendance and socio-economic status. Therefore, policy type and socio-economic status have little apparent extrinsic motivation. Further study would be warranted to determine the intrinsic motivation of policy type and socio-economic status.

### **Implications**

Although this study has not provided a definite answer to the policy type that will produce the highest average daily attendance rate, the study has contributed to research with respect to the effects of the types of attendance policies on attendance rates, school size, and socio-economic status. Before implementing any type of attendance policy, one should take time to consider the school environment, traditions, and the community members. As shown in this study, policy has less of an impact than size or socio-economic status; therefore, policy should be used to promote a positive environment regardless of student enrollment or socio-economic status. The size of the school has the greatest impact on average daily attendance and should be taken into account when determining how to develop a district policy. It is incumbent upon school leadership to focus resources on addressing the issue of student absenteeism.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, additional school policies should be included in the evaluation of the data. Many school districts have other policies in place that could

affect average daily attendance. For example, school districts may implement test exemptions based on the students' daily attendance rate. This is identified as a test exempt policy and not a part of their attendance policy. The fidelity or degree to which the attendance policies were implemented was not examined in this study. Although it is assumed each district adhered to their attendance policy, there is a need for a more detailed analysis of individual school policies and the degree to which they are implemented.

Expanding the sample size to include all school districts in Missouri or comparing schools in each Regional Professional Development Center area may provide insight into the effect of geographical on average daily attendance. Another consideration is to determine the effect a truancy reduction program would have on average daily attendance.

A study in which students with high and low attendance are interviewed would yield qualitative data. Interviewing current students with regular or irregular attendance and those who have dropped out or graduated, to identify factors influencing average daily attendance, should be considered. These recommendations allow for a deeper analysis of school absenteeism and truancy in schools in southwest Missouri.

### **Summary**

This study was conducted in an effort to examine student absenteeism, truancy, and the relationship of the type of attendance policy, socio-economic status, and number of students enrolled in public high schools in southwest Missouri to high school attendance rates in southwest Missouri. No relationships were found between average daily attendance and socio-economic status or type of attendance policy using linear

regression and ANOVA analyses. However, there was a significant relationship identified between average daily attendance rate and student enrollment using linear regression and Pearson correlation analysis. A relationship was found between two of the independent variables, socio-economic status and size, using the Pearson correlation analysis. These results indicated a significant relationship between average daily attendance rate and the three independent variables using multiple regression analysis.

Several recommendations were posed based on the findings of this study.

Although this study has not provided a definite answer to the policy type that will yield the highest average daily attendance rate, it has informed the research on types of attendance policies and the effect on attendance rates. The results of this study indicated the size of the school has the greatest impact on average daily attendance rate and should, therefore, be taken into account when determining how to develop a district policy. Even though policies and programs vary in each school district, the goal of motivating students to attend school continues. Student absenteeism remains a challenge and hopefully through additional studies of school district attendance policies and procedures, more creative measures to motivate students to attend school can be constructed. It is incumbent upon school leadership to focus their resources on addressing the issue of student absenteeism.

## Appendix A

*Missouri Revised Statutes***Chapter 167**  
**Pupils and Special Services**  
**Section 167.031**

August 28, 2009

**School attendance compulsory, who may be excused--nonattendance, penalty--home school, definition, requirements--school year defined--daily log, defense to prosecution--compulsory attendance age for the district defined.**

167.031. 1. Every parent, guardian or other person in this state having charge, control or custody of a child not enrolled in a public, private, parochial, parish school or full-time equivalent attendance in a combination of such schools and between the ages of seven years and the compulsory attendance age for the district is responsible for enrolling the child in a program of academic instruction which complies with subsection 2 of this section. Any parent, guardian or other person who enrolls a child between the ages of five and seven years in a public school program of academic instruction shall cause such child to attend the academic program on a regular basis, according to this section.

Nonattendance by such child shall cause such parent, guardian or other responsible person to be in violation of the provisions of section 167.061, except as provided by this section. A parent, guardian or other person in this state having charge, control, or custody of a child between the ages of seven years of age and the compulsory attendance age for the district shall cause the child to attend regularly some public, private, parochial, parish, home school or a combination of such schools not less than the entire school term of the school which the child attends; except that:

(1) A child who, to the satisfaction of the superintendent of public schools of the district in which he resides, or if there is no superintendent then the chief school officer, is determined to be mentally or physically incapacitated may be excused from attendance at school for the full time required, or any part thereof;

(2) A child between fourteen years of age and the compulsory attendance age for the district may be excused from attendance at school for the full time required, or any part thereof, by the superintendent of public schools of the district, or if there is none then by a court of competent jurisdiction, when legal employment has been obtained by the child and found to be desirable, and after the parents or guardian of the child have been advised of the pending action; or

(3) A child between five and seven years of age shall be excused from attendance at school if a parent, guardian or other person having charge, control or custody of the child makes a written request that the child be dropped from the school's rolls.

2. (1) As used in sections 167.031 to 167.071, a "home school" is a school, whether incorporated or unincorporated, that:

(a) Has as its primary purpose the provision of private or religious-based instruction;

(b) Enrolls pupils between the ages of seven years and the compulsory attendance age for the district, of which no more than four are unrelated by affinity or consanguinity in the third degree; and

(c) Does not charge or receive consideration in the form of tuition, fees, or other remuneration in a genuine and fair exchange for provision of instruction.

(2) As evidence that a child is receiving regular instruction, the parent shall, except as otherwise provided in this subsection:

(a) Maintain the following records:

a. A plan book, diary, or other written record indicating subjects taught and activities engaged in; and

b. A portfolio of samples of the child's academic work; and

c. A record of evaluations of the child's academic progress; or

d. Other written, or credible evidence equivalent to subparagraphs a., b. and c.; and

(b) Offer at least one thousand hours of instruction, at least six hundred hours of which will be in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies and science or academic courses that are related to the aforementioned subject areas and consonant with the pupil's age and ability. At least four hundred of the six hundred hours shall occur at the regular home school location.

(3) The requirements of subdivision (2) of this subsection shall not apply to any pupil above the age of sixteen years.

3. Nothing in this section shall require a private, parochial, parish or home school to include in its curriculum any concept, topic, or practice in conflict with the school's religious doctrines or to exclude from its curriculum any concept, topic, or practice consistent with the school's religious doctrines. Any other provision of the law to the contrary notwithstanding, all departments or agencies of the state of Missouri shall be prohibited from dictating through rule, regulation or other device any statewide curriculum for private, parochial, parish or home schools.

4. A school year begins on the first day of July and ends on the thirtieth day of June following.

5. The production by a parent of a daily log showing that a home school has a course of instruction which satisfies the requirements of this section or, in the case of a pupil over the age of sixteen years who attended a metropolitan school district the previous year, a written statement that the pupil is attending home school in compliance with this section shall be a defense to any prosecution under this section and to any charge or action for educational neglect brought pursuant to chapter 210, RSMo.

6. As used in sections 167.031 to 167.051, the term "compulsory attendance age for the district" shall mean:

(1) Seventeen years of age for any metropolitan school district for which the school board adopts a resolution to establish such compulsory attendance age; provided that such resolution shall take effect no earlier than the school year next following the school year during which the resolution is adopted; and

(2) Seventeen years of age or having successfully completed sixteen credits towards high school graduation in all other cases.

The school board of a metropolitan school district for which the compulsory attendance age is seventeen years may adopt a resolution to lower the compulsory attendance age to sixteen years; provided that such resolution shall take effect no earlier than the school year next following the school year during which the resolution is adopted.

7. For purposes of subsection 2 of this section as applied in subsection 6 herein, a "completed credit towards high school graduation" shall be defined as one hundred hours or more of instruction in a course. Home school education enforcement and records pursuant to this section, and sections 210.167 and 211.031, RSMo, shall be subject to review only by the local prosecuting attorney.

(L. 1963 p. 200 § 8-3, A.L. 1977 H.B. 130, A.L. 1986 S.B. 795, A.L. 1990 S.B. 740, A.L. 1993 S.B. 380, A.L. 2004 S.B. 968 and S.B. 969, A.L. 2006 H.B. 1182, A.L. 2008 H.B. 1550, A.L. 2009 S.B. 291)

(Source: RSMo 1959 § 164.010)

CROSS REFERENCES:

Average daily attendance defined for apportionment of school money, RSMo 163.011

Provisions affecting metropolitan school district effective for school year beginning 2007-2008 and terminates after school year ending 2011-2012, RSMo 167.052

(2005) To be actionable, failure to cause child to attend school regularly must be done knowingly or purposely. *State v. Self*, 155 S.W.3d 756 (Mo.banc).

## Appendix B

### School District Data Table

<b>School #</b>	<b>Type of Policy</b>	<b>ADA</b>	<b>School Size</b>	<b>SES</b>
School 1	Punitive	96.0%	415	28.7
School 2	Punitive	92.2%	576	36.5
School 3	Punitive	95.0%	482	61.2
School 4	Punitive	94.1%	208	64.2
School 5	Punitive	94.0%	218	43.9
School 6	Punitive	93.2%	806	39.0
School 7	Reward	93.5%	1296	40.0
School 8	Punitive	93.7%	905	30.5
School 9	Reward	93.9%	1230	43.1
School 10	Punitive	94.3%	663	46.5
School 11	Punitive	91.8%	1534	73.7
School 12	Affective	94.5%	119	49.7
School 13	Punitive	95.6%	260	34.4
School 14	Punitive	94.0%	239	41.7
School 15	Punitive	95.2%	84	40.7
School 16	Punitive	93.1%	539	52.3
School 17	Punitive	94.4%	294	41.0
School 18	Punitive	94.9%	188	68.3
School 19	Punitive	93.0%	547	50.7
School 20	Punitive	94.4%	372	35.9
School 21	Punitive	94.9%	93	39.5
School 22	Punitive	95.4%	352	31.3
School 23	Punitive	95.5%	187	38.1
School 24	Punitive	94.2%	387	57.1
School 25	Punitive	94.6%	299	64.0
School 26	Reward	95.1%	218	48.2
School 27	Punitive	93.7%	1406	19.5
School 28	Punitive	90.3%	1211	48.6
School 29	Reward	93.3%	427	52.8
School 30	Punitive	94.4%	174	74.1
School 31	Punitive	96.3%	135	57.7

<b>School #</b>	<b>Type of Policy</b>	<b>ADA</b>	<b>School Size</b>	<b>SES</b>
School 32	Punitive	92.5%	2127	42.5
School 33	Punitive	94.1%	1759	15.4
School 34	Punitive	94.1%	403	41.5
School 35	Punitive	92.3%	1507	39.6
School 36	Punitive	94.4%	116	60.7
School 37	Punitive	94.6%	674	21.0
School 38	Reward	94.5%	107	63.4
School 39	Reward	95.0%	199	51.6
School 40	Punitive	94.5%	374	50.5
School 41	Punitive	94.4%	342	46.8
School 42	Punitive	94.7%	931	33.4
School 43	Punitive	92.7%	1057	50.6
School 44	Affective	92.3%	288	53.7
School 45	Punitive	93.3%	612	37.5
School 46	Punitive	93.7%	479	42.2
School 47	Punitive	93.2%	1260	45.6
School 48	Punitive	93.0%	766	38.7
School 49	Reward	96.0%	1539	23.7
School 50	Punitive	94.5%	87	56.3
School 51	Reward	94.7%	1497	24.7
School 52	Punitive	92.1%	1518	44.1
School 53	Punitive	95.3%	250	47.3
School 54	Reward	94.2%	285	40.7
School 55	Punitive	97.0%	228	71.2
School 56	Affective	93.8%	679	46.8
School 57	Punitive	94.1%	1081	30.5
School 58	Punitive	97.2%	430	63.1
School 59	Punitive	93.9%	511	30.5
School 60	Punitive	94.3%	240	55.3
School 61	Affective	94.6%	97	41.7
School 62	Punitive	95.7%	247	52.6
School 63	Punitive	94.0%	203	43.0
School 64	Punitive	95.4%	206	45.5
School 65	Punitive	95.8%	360	37.4



<b>School #</b>	<b>Type of Policy</b>	<b>ADA</b>	<b>School Size</b>	<b>SES</b>
School 66	Punitive	95.5%	157	68.4
School 67	Reward	95.5%	138	36.6
School 68	Punitive	93.8%	1162	37.7
School 69	Punitive	95.3%	218	63.3
School 70	Punitive	94.6%	1260	31.7
School 71	Punitive	93.7%	102	58.9
School 72	Punitive	95.0%	163	55.1
School 73	Punitive	95.0%	120	60.9

## **Appendix C**

### **Email/Phone Script**

Hello,

My name is Michelle Brenner, and I am an assistant principal at Branson High School.

I am currently completing my doctoral dissertation and would like information about your attendance policy. I have referenced several web sites to retrieve this information and was unable to find the policy on your web site. Is there a possibility you could e-mail to me a copy of your handbook or attendance policy? Or, if it is on your web site, could you let me know how to access it? I know everyone is very busy, and I truly appreciate your help.

Thank you,

Michelle Brenner  
Doctoral Student  
Lindenwood University

**Appendix D**

11-01  
IRB Project Number

**LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY**  
**Institutional Review Board Disposition Report**

**To: Dawn Michelle Brenner**  
**CC: Dr. Sherry DeVore**

The IRB has reviewed your application for research. Your proposal has been approved.

Ricardo Delgado 8/11/10  
Institutional Review Board Chair Date

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### Vita

Dawn “Michelle” Brenner earned a bachelor’s degree in education from Missouri State University in 1996. She worked as a physical education and science teacher while attending graduate school and graduated from Missouri State University in 2003 with a Master’s Degree in Secondary Administration. In 2007, she earned a Specialist Degree in Educational Administration from Lindenwood University.