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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE,
SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND PRINCIPALS' EMPHASIS ON
ATTENDANCE ISSUES IN SELECTED FLORIDA SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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in the College of Education
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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Major Professor: William Bozeman

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ABSTRACT

Much of the historical research that has taken place over the past 50 years regarding student absenteeism has focused on influences on students over which the principal had very little control such as student demographics, family characteristics and the student personal or psychological factors. Researchers have begun analyzing school climate and its effect on student attendance from the perspectives of students and teachers. School climate is the one aspect that influences a student attendance patterns and can be modified by the principal. This study sought to identify if there was a relationship between the high school principals' perspective on student absenteeism and the percentage of average daily attendance of the school.

Much of the emphasis placed on improving attendance has been examined at the school level. This study, though focused on student absenteeism from the principal's perspective, was also approached in regard to actions within the school's control. It may well be, that districts need to take a stronger leadership role with respect to attendance. Providing more information to principals could contribute initially to improving principals' desire to be proactive in regard to attendance. District officials should examine carefully the support they provide that will result in proactive policies in the schools. It would seem appropriate that district level and building level policies would be examined by district and building leaders with a goal of establishing policies that not only support building leaders but also support individual teachers and encourage them to be proactive in their approach to attendance for every student in the class room.

To my wife, Dawn, without whose support, encouragement, and patience I would never
have been able to accomplish my dream.

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The earning of this degree ends a long journey I began when I became an educator. During this journey I have been given guidance from many people, some of whom are no longer with us. My father, who passed away while I was pursuing this dream, was a major influence on me to return to school and attain a higher degree. Dr. Hudson, my first advisor, gave me guidance and inspiration to earn my Bachelor's degree and continue toward greater goals. I will not be able to share this moment with them in person, but I hope they are both pleased with my achievement. Other supporters are those who have given me words of encouragement when I have been ready to surrender.

My thanks to Dee Bozeman and Terry Sypolt for their assistance in identifying the “gaping hole” in the research on attendance. Without their assistance this dissertation area of interest would not have emerged.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM AND ITS CLARIFYING COMPONENTS.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Definitions.....	3
Delimitations.....	5
Limitations	5
Significance of the Study	6
Research Questions.....	7
Design of Study.....	7
Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study	8
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RELATED RESEARCH	9
Introduction.....	9
Early Research	9
Management.....	12
Defining the Problem.....	17
Causes of Student Absenteeism	22
Effects of Absenteeism On Student Behavior	23
Effects of Absenteeism on Student Achievement.....	25
Importance of Attendance.....	26
The Effects of Consolidation	31
District Policies and Procedures Effects on Attendance.....	33
Summary	39
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	40
Introduction.....	40
Statement of the Problem.....	41
Population and Sample	41
Research Questions.....	43
Instrumentation and Other Sources of Data.....	43
Principals’ Policies and Procedures: Survey Items One-Five.....	46
Principals’ Perspectives on Attendance Issues: Survey Items Six-Nine ..	52
Pilot Test and Validation of the Survey.....	59
Data Collection	61
Data Analysis	62

Summary	66
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA	68
Introduction.....	68
Population and Sample	68
Demographic Characteristics of Sample High Schools	71
Descriptive Statistics.....	73
Research Question 1	86
Research Question 2	89
Ancillary Analysis	91
Summary.....	95
CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	96
Introduction.....	96
Purpose.....	96
Summary of the Findings.....	96
Research Question 1	97
Research Question 2	98
Discussion.....	99
Implications for Policy and Practice	104
Recommendations for Future Research	107
APPENDIX A ATTENDANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES SURVEY	109
APPENDIX B UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA’S INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	117
APPENDIX C SCHOOL DISTRICTS’ PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY	119
APPENDIX D COMMUNICATION WITH PRINCIPALS.....	126
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	130

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Percentage of Average Daily Attendance by Points for School Grades	17
Figure 2. Percentage of Average Daily Attendance by Policies and Procedures	87
Figure 3. Percentage of Average Daily Attendance and Principals' Emphasis on Attendance	90
Figure 4. Principals' Emphasis on Attendance Issues and Policies and Procedures.....	92
Figure 5. Total Principal Survey Responses and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	94

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Pearson Correlation: Points for School Grades and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	18
Table 2 Student Absenteeism Research by Category, Contributing Variables, and Researchers	23
Table 3 Summary of Absentee Research Studies and Key Findings.....	35
Table 4 Student Membership of School Districts	42
Table 5 Results of Pilot Test of Survey (N = 15)	60
Table 6 Results of Evaluation of Survey	61
Table 7 The Relationship Between Survey Items and Research Questions	65
Table 8 All Florida High Schools: Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	69
Table 9 Sample High Schools: Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	70
Table 10 Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Principals	72
Table 11 School Level Application of Attendance Policies and Procedures.....	75
Table 12 Survey Results: Principals' Responses Regarding Notifying Parents	79
Table 13 Survey Results: Principals' Opinions About Attendance Issues	81
Table 14 Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest	86
Table 15 Pearson Correlation: Policies and Procedures and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	88
Table 16 Pearson Correlation: Principals' Emphasis on Attendance Issues and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	91
Table 17 Pearson Correlation: Principals' Emphasis on Attendance Issues and Policies and Procedures	93
Table 18 Pearson Correlation: Total Principal Survey Responses and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	94

CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM AND ITS CLARIFYING COMPONENTS

Introduction

Poor student attendance has long been considered an issue worthy of attention in predicting whether a student will graduate from high school on time and in increasing graduation rates in the nation's schools. According to Allensworth and Easton (2007), attendance and grade point average are the best indicators in predicting if students will graduate with their cohorts. Nearly 90% of freshmen in Chicago's public schools who missed less than a week of school per semester graduated within four years. Missing five to nine days a semester was enough to drop the graduation rate to 63% (Allensworth & Easton).

Poor attendance has been identified as a major indicator of student alienation and disengagement and may lead to students' permanently dropping out of school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). Every student's absence jeopardizes the ability of that student to succeed at school and jeopardizes the school's ability to achieve its mission. Students who are not at school cannot receive instruction. Some students who are truant from school engage in behaviors that are illegal (Reid, 2007).

From an administrative perspective, attendance has most commonly been addressed as a policy issue (Railsback, 2004). Administrators have been charged with establishing policies and procedures that encourage and support attendance for the

school's student population with a major emphasis being placed on safety of all students and maintaining order so that learning can take place.

Purpose of Study

This study was focused on school principals and the emphasis they placed on attendance in their buildings. School principals review the needs of their students and determine where to apply the limited resources available to them to maximize student achievement. They set priorities for the staff and ultimately impact their schools' cultures. Past research focused on attendance from the perspectives of students, teachers, parents, and school districts (Allensworth & Easton, 2005, 2007; Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson & Kirk, 2003; Railsback, 2004; Reid, 2007). This study was focused on the principal's role in addressing attendance issues.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to (a) explore the relationships between the secondary school principal's application of attendance policies and procedures and the school's average daily attendance rate and to (b) investigate the extent to which the principal's perspectives were proactive or reactive in addressing attendance issues.

Definitions

Absence--Absence is the nonattendance of a student at scheduled times when attendance is to be taken on days school is in session. Under Florida Department of Education Administrative Code, Rule 6A-1.044, any student must be counted absent who is not physically present at school or at a school activity during the prescribed count time as defined under the compulsory attendance law. In the administration of the daily compulsory attendance law and local school system policies, a student's absence in grade levels PK-12 may be considered as "excused" or "unexcused" and appropriately identified. In all cases, however, the student who is not present is counted absent. In addition, beginning with the 2006-07 school year, Florida Statute, 2009, Section 1003.02(1)(b), included the following provision: "District school boards are authorized to establish policies that allow accumulated unexcused tardies, regardless of when they occur during the school day, and early departures from school to be recorded as unexcused absences" (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook*, 2008).

Aggregate days absent--The sum of all days absent for all students in membership (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook*, 2008).

Aggregate days absent, unexcused not related to discipline--For all students in membership, the sum of all days absent that are coded as unexcused (based upon district policy) and are not related to discipline (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook*, 2008).

Aggregate days attendance--The sum of days present for all students in membership while school was in session (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook, 2008*).

Aggregate days membership--The sum of aggregate days attendance and aggregate days absent of students for days school was in session (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook, 2008*).

Attendance--Attendance is the presence of a student during the prescribed count time on days school is in session. The student must be actually at the school or schools to which he or she has been assigned or present at an educational activity which constitutes part of the approved school program for that student (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook, 2008*).

Average daily attendance--The average number of students that are presents each day school was in session. Average daily attendance equals aggregate days attendance divided by the total days school was in session. Typically, average daily attendance is calculated for the 180 day school year. However, these calculations may be for other periods of time (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook, 2008*).

Excused absence--The allowable absence in accordance with school district policy. Students, in accordance with district policy, may be allowed to make up missed work (Jones, 2009).

Habitual truancy--A student who has 15 unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge or consent of the student's parent. This student is subject to compulsory school attendance (Florida Statutes, 2009, Section 1003.01).

Unexcused absence--Absence which is not in accordance with school district policy. Students can be prevented from making up missed work (Jones, 2009).

Delimitations

This study was restricted to the relationships between Florida secondary school principals' application of attendance policies and procedures and secondary school percentage of average daily attendance. Issues regarding student achievement, truancy, student behavior, and dropout rates were addressed only as they related to attendance policies and procedures in the schools.

The instrument developed for surveying school principals addressed only issues related to the implementation of attendance policies and procedures. It was used to determine the extent to which secondary school principals were proactive or reactive with regard to student attendance.

Limitations

The population, as a result of the district population restriction of student populations between 50,000 and 100,000, were schools primarily located in suburban communities in Florida. This limited the ability to generalize the findings beyond this

population. The results may have limited applicability to rural and urban communities or those with significantly different demographics.

Florida statutes, district policies and procedures of the selected districts (population) provided the foundation upon which survey items were developed. This may have resulted in an instrument less sensitive in other districts in Florida as well as in other states. Also, inferences from the results of the research were limited by the number of respondents to the survey and the accuracy of their responses.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was in the potential to better inform principals as to the possible consequences of efforts to improve student attendance. School principals identify priority issues in their schools and can determine those policies and procedures that should be of concern to faculty and staff. For many administrators and faculty, student absenteeism has been viewed as an inappropriate student behavior that requires negative or punitive reinforcements to deter and correct. This is counter to utilizing the indicator as a method of identifying students that may be in need of assistance (Railsback, 2004).

This study was also a contribution to the body of knowledge related to student attendance. There has been extensive research conducted on the issue as it relates to students, parents, teachers, socio-economic status and school districts (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Attwood & Croll, 2006; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Davies &

Lee, 2006; DeSocio et al., 2007; Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazan, 2005; Henry, 2007; Reardon, 2008; Reid, 2007; Sheppard, 2007; Southwell, 2006; Teasley, 2004). In prior research, however, the effects of school principals' decisions on how to address student attendance and the school's percentage of average daily attendance of the school have not been sufficiently explored.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent is there a relationship between the application of attendance policies and procedures at the school level and the school's percentage of average daily attendance?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between the emphasis (proactive or reactive) the school leader places on attendance and the percentage of average daily attendance of the school?

Design of Study

In his review of the literature, the researcher was not able to identify an existing survey that could be used to quantify a principal's emphasis on attendance. Thus, this study involved the development of a survey instrument and the development of a scale which was used in determining the extent to which principals and their staffs were proactive or reactive to attendance issues.

Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study

In summary, student absenteeism has been a concern for school principals for over 50 years. Early research focused on the management, causes and effects of poor student attendance. More recent research identified student attendance as an indicator for identifying students that were at risk of disengaging from school, being retained, and ultimately dropping out of school. Current researchers have indicated that though poor student attendance remained an issue in some schools, other schools have been successful in reducing absenteeism and increasing graduation rates (Allensworth and Easton, 2005, 2007; Jerald, 2006). Thus, the need to examine the relationship between the perspective of the school principals and student absenteeism was warranted.

Chapter 2 contains a review of relevant literature related to school principals' perspectives in managing student absenteeism, the causes and effects of absenteeism, and the importance of student's attendance. Chapter 3 contains the methodology of the study and includes a description research setting, participants, sample, instrumentation, data gathering strategies, and analytical procedures. Chapter 4 presents a summary of the results of the data analysis. Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of the findings organized around the research questions. Conclusions and recommendations for future research in the field of educational leadership are offered.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RELATED RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter contains a review of the literature and related research on student non attendance and effects including achievement, retention and dropping out of school. The review of literature addresses early research from a principal's perspective, management of attendance, its importance to student achievement, and the effects of school consolidation on the resources available to address student attendance.

Early Research

“Student absenteeism continues to be a serious problem for the secondary school administrators” (Thomson & Stanard, 1975, p. 1). This opening statement from the first edition of *The Practitioner*, a newsletter published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) could have been written in the 21st century with many of the same issues that were addressed in the 1975 article being prevalent. The National Association of Secondary School Principals surveyed its members in 1973 and 1974 and found that poor student attendance was the most frequently listed student problem. The 1975 article identified numerous reasons for poor student attendance. These included inadequate curricula, family attitudes, social forces, peer pressure, economic situations, home-school relationships, school size, student age, and health issues.

Additional causes that were listed were erosion of parental control, winter vacations, novel lifestyles, economic affluence, and lax court enforcement of attendance laws.

Thomson and Stanard (1975) identified attendance and the lack of research as a problem, stating “Although the trend toward poor attendance has been apparent for sometime; research is in short supply” (p. 5). They identified Levanto’s (1975) study of the student attendance records of 3100 students in a Connecticut high school during 1971 and 1972.

Levanto’s (1975) research led to his dissertation which was focused on identifying and analyzing high school absentee factors and was “designed and developed a systematic method for the identification and analysis of factors related to secondary school absenteeism” (p. 20). He summarized his findings as follows:

1. Distinguishable patterns of absenteeism are displayed when daily absentee data are graphically plotted. For example; weekly cyclical patterns are apparent, with Wednesdays and Thursdays having the lowest absenteeism, and days of important test and examination reflecting a drop in absenteeism.
2. The boys in the first three years of high school generally have lower rates of absenteeism than girls at the same grade level. Boys in the senior year of high school have a slightly higher rate of absenteeism than girls in the same class.
3. With each succeeding class and age group, from the ninth grade through the twelfth, absenteeism increased.
4. Students who lived with both parents generally had a lower rate of absenteeism than those who lived with one parent or guardian.
5. Students in the college preparatory program generally had the lowest rate of absenteeism followed by students in the business education and general program respectively.
6. For senior students in the study, absenteeism generally is lowest for students with the highest I.Q. scores.
7. For senior students, absenteeism generally is lowest from students with the highest class ranks in academic achievement.

8. Students who participated in both school sponsored athletic and non-athletic type activities, generally have lower rates of absenteeism than those who participate in one or none of these activities.
9. The absentee rate generally was higher for Black students than for White students.
10. Students of the Jewish faith had the lowest rate of absenteeism, followed in order by Catholics, other religions, Protestant, and those who reported no religion.
11. The poorer the students' personality rating by the teachers, on a scale developed for this study, generally the higher the rate of absenteeism.

(pp. 21-22)

Thomson and Stanard (1975) also noted that many secondary school principals expressed the concern that addressing the issue of poor student attendance diverted time and resources away from more constructive tasks in the following statement: "The quality of teaching, counseling, and administering can easily be affected by a landslide of attendance minutia" (p. 1). In response to polls indicating the high concerns of administrators regarding attendance, the NASSP Research Department identified schools that were successful at reducing absentee rates, collected school policies and identified common themes that were present in most of the successful policies. The six themes that were identified were:

1. The policies are strong. When little or nothing is done about attendance, the problem gets worse. Schools making headway on attendance are schools which expend considerable thought and effort to solving the problem.
2. Participation in the formulation of attendance policy is broadly based. Administrators, teachers, students and parents frequently are involved in policy making.
3. Policies clearly specify in writing attendance expectations and delineate the outcomes of good and poor attendance.
4. Policies are well publicized. Each parent and student repeatedly has been informed to attendance requirements.

5. Policies are consistently enforced. At each level of enforcement--teacher, counselor, dean, and principal--compliance with policy is expected.
6. Immediate follow-up on absence is made by a letter, telephone call to the home or some other means.

(p. 7)

All of the schools shared a common feature in their dedication to finding acceptable solutions to their attendance problems. The Research Department categorized the policies into eight categories. Some schools used multiple approaches simultaneously to improve attendance. The eight categories identified were:

1. Transferring chronic truants to alternative schools or programs
2. Exempting students with good attendance from final examinations
3. Withholding course credit for excessive absences
4. Lowering student grades for excessive absence
5. Enlisting volunteers to telephone the home of each absentee and the offices of working parents
6. Mailing weekly or monthly attendance reports to each home
7. Appointing school-court coordination personnel to gain a better partnership between the courts and schools
8. Suspending or expelling for excessive truancy.

(p. 8)

Thomas and Standard indicated that interesting and appropriate curricula alone would not improve increase attendance rates. The focus was, therefore, placed specifically on the management of attendance.

Management

In 1986 Duckworth and deJung conducted a detailed attendance management study of six secondary schools for Oregon University, Center for Educational Policy and

Management. The research for the study began at the beginning of the 1983–1984 school year and was concluded at the end of the 1984–1985 school year. Duckworth and deJung (1986a) developed surveys for their research on school personnel and students. In addition, they interviewed administrators in the second year to determine any differences in the policies and procedures used by each of the schools (deJung & Duckworth, 1986a). The report addressed student attendance from four perspectives: (a) Monitoring and recording, (b) excusing absences, (c) imposing penalties, and (d) interventions. Their research was conducted during a time in which the use of computer technology was still in its infancy. As such, the report captured information regarding early methods of data collection and responses to student absenteeism. The surveys were administered to a large population and provided validity as the information related to the schools that were involved in the research.

Duckworth and deJung (1986a) identified that the introduction of computer technology for monitoring student attendance was considered to be slow and frustrating. Prior to the use of computers to collect data, attendance was monitored and maintained by instructors using attendance rolls in classrooms. Instructors decided what was excused or unexcused; the information was then given to the administration to be recorded on the permanent records maintained by the school. The use of computers for collecting data resulted in an additional step in the process for the instructor tracking attendance. Instructors were required to maintain their attendance rolls and provide attendance data to the administration each period in the form of a Scantron form or attendance sheet to be

inputted into a computer data base. Data were collected either in school-based computers or a district level computerized system. The two systems were independent, and districts utilized only one of the two systems. Neither system provided real time feedback to the instructor. Also, the computerized data were not as accurate as that collected from students' report cards which were completed by the instructor based on their individually maintained records. This was in part a result of instructors utilizing their discretion in adjusting their attendance rolls to reflect new information at later dates than allowed for by the computerized system.

Administrators found that enormous amounts of data collected from long lists of daily absences resulted in enormous amounts of unusable data. Identifying reasons for each class absence from a previous day was an impossible task and required a significant amount of time to clear each individual student. While the use of computer technology during the time of this research was received negatively, the researchers did speculate that the future would evolve as microcomputer technology at the school level was integrated with the larger data collecting capabilities of the district level. During this time period, school districts left the decision to excuse absences to the discretion of instructors. This created frustration among instructors because of the lack of consistency in determining what was considered excused and unexcused. Some teachers wanted to eliminate the difference, but school administrators acknowledged that this method of resolving teacher issues would create problems with parents. Centralizing the excusing issue in a single office provided an effective solution at one of the schools involved in the

survey. Administrators in other surveyed schools believed that teachers' involvement would provide a better deterrent to student attempts to cover up skipping (Duckworth & deJung, 1986a).

Interviews with administrators and faculty revealed dissatisfaction with parental involvement concerning attendance issues. Parents were viewed as lacking awareness of their children's attendance activities. Routine phone calls home in the event of student absences for the purpose of making parents aware of absences and attendance policies had been initiated by the schools. "Parents were seen as wanting exceptions to be made for their children; which was interpreted by teachers as parents assigning low priority to the school's program" (Duckworth & deJung, 1986a, p. 83).

The systems were also designed to make the schools aware of parents who seemed uninterested in their children's attendance. The researchers observed that the use of tape-recorded messages and automatic dialing machines might limit the awareness gained by a personal contact which was more effective at alerting parents to the school's attendance policies and identifying parents that were uncooperative. "Whether using new computer resources to widen but automate school-home communication is inferior to using human resources in a limited but adaptable effort--cannot be answered with our data, but it should be kept in mind." (Duckworth & deJung, 1986a, pp. 83-84).

The researchers found that imposing penalties had limited positive effects on student attendance and in many situations contributed towards increased withdrawal from school. Though increased administrative oversight was associated with increased teacher

satisfaction with school procedures, there was very little evidence of a correlated reduction in student absenteeism. Penalties were most likely to provide incentives for students that wanted to stay in school. The researchers observed that “Any tendency towards administration of cut-and-dried penalties would seem to require renewed efforts at the school level to intervene early with students whose fundamental educational motivation is weak” (Duckworth & deJung, 1986a, p. 86).

Administrators in some schools created lists of students to be monitored for attendance and other problems. This resulted in increased interaction by student personnel employees with instructors regarding students’ problems in school and at home. Students identified with issues might be provided the services of a social worker or with special programs designed to correct their academic issues and attendance behavior. Such efforts had only a 50% success rate. Despite the low success rate, administrators were reluctant to respond with the legally-mandated disenrollment after 10 consecutive unexcused absences. Interviews with administrators and teachers indicated that though teachers viewed administrators as being lenient, administrators seemed more concerned with the long-term consequences of students’ dropping out than did teachers.

Based upon their research Duckworth and deJung (1986a) concluded their report with this final statement:

Thus, we advocate paring increased strictness with more ambitious interventions into academic problems of chronic truants, including efforts to improve teaching quality and make classes seem more interesting or relevant. The outcomes of such interventions will be increased student skills, and such outcomes may have greater reward value for administrators that reduced skipping. Managing absenteeism may be more effective where such a dual strategy is employed (pp. 89-90).

Defining the Problem

The Florida legislature recognized the need for students to attend class and the relation between student attendance and student achievement. Florida Statute, 2009, Section 1003.26 states, “The Legislature finds that poor academic performance is associated with nonattendance and that school districts must take an active role in promoting and enforcing attendance as a means of improving student performance.” When reviewing the points each school accumulated during the 2008-9 school year for their school grades and comparing them to the percentage of average daily attendance, a strong relation is seen.

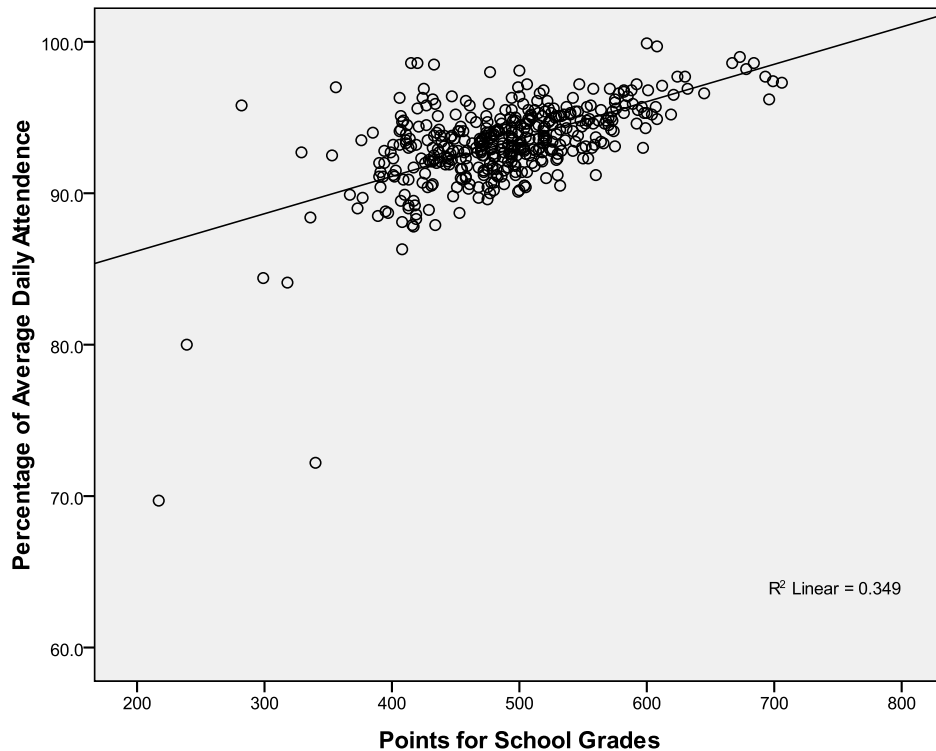


Figure 1. Percentage of Average Daily Attendance by Points for School Grades

Figure 1 indicates that there may be a linear relationship between the points for school grades and the percentage of average daily attendance during the 2008-09 school year. The figure indicates that as the percentage of average daily attendance declines the points a school accumulates for their school grade declines. Because the points are not loosely scattered around the line of best fit in Figure 1 a strong relationship was indicated. According to Cohen (1988), $r^2 = 0.349$ would be interpreted as a large effect. Because the review of the scatter plot suggested that a linear relationship between the variables was feasible, correlation analysis was performed.

The correlation between the points for school grade and the percentage of average daily attendance is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Pearson Correlation: Points for School Grades and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance

Points for School Grades	Percentage of Average Daily Attendance
Pearson correlation	.591
Significance (2-tailed)	.000

*p = < .01

The results of the Pearson correlation ($r_{xy} = .591$), according to Cohen (1988), were large and indicated that there was significant relationship ($p = .000$) between the points earned for school grades and the percentage of average daily attendance. This reaffirms the statement by Florida Statute that poor academic performance is associated with nonattendance. This effect is apparent at even at the building level.

Absenteeism has been defined as the "chronic absence (as from work or school)" (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, 2010). School absenteeism has not been as well defined. The simple practice of identifying students as present or absent in class is at the heart of the problem, and the teacher recording attendance is the only person that can accurately make the determination of the non attendance of a student in a class. Attendance records have often lacked accuracy as a result of inconsistent procedures of teachers. Discretion of the teacher impacts almost all facets of attendance recording (deJung & Duckworth, 1986b). Reid (2005) summarized the complexities of the issues well in the following statement:

One of the key issues when considering 'school absenteeism' and 'truancy' is to understand correctly the meaning and definition of the terms. This is not quite as simple as it sounds. There are various types of school absenteeism. They include specific lesson absence, post-registration absence, parentally condoned absence, psychological absence, school refusal and school phobia. This is where the 'problem' begins. For some, specific lesson absence, post-registration absence and parentally condoned absence are not truancy. For others they are, and are often re-titled specific lesson truancy, post-registration truancy and parentally condoned truancy. For some, 'absent without good reason' can be equated with truancy. For others, having a reason for the absence--for example, being a parentally condoned absentee--means by definition that this form of behaviour is not truancy (p. 59)

These complexities have led researchers to specify and carefully define terms relative to research on attendance. As one example, Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, and Kirk (2003) used three terms to describe pupils' non-attendance:

- 'truancy' means absences which pupils themselves indicated would be unacceptable to teachers

- ‘unacceptable absences’ are absences which are unacceptable to teachers and local education authorities but not recognized as such by pupils; and
- ‘parentally condoned absences’ result from parents keeping pupils away from school (p. 4).

The standards set forth by the Florida Department of Education and Florida Statutes were used in conducting this research. Florida Statute 1003.23 identified any student not physically present at school or at a school activity during the prescribed count time has been counted as absent as defined under the compulsory attendance law. Field trips, clinic appointments, or office appointments with guidance counselors or administrators may be defined as school activities but require policy or procedural decisions to insure the accuracy of attendance records.

In the administration of the daily compulsory attendance law and local school system policies, a student’s absence in grade levels PK-12 may be considered as “excused” or “unexcused” and appropriately identified. In all cases, however, the student who is not present is counted absent. In addition, beginning with the 2006-07 school year, Florida Statute, 2009, Section 1003.02(1)(b) included the following provision: “District school boards are authorized to establish policies that allow accumulated unexcused tardies, regardless of when they occur during the school day, and early departures from school to be recorded as unexcused absences” (Automated Student Attendance Record Keeping System, 2009, p. 3). It is the responsibility of the teacher or other individual as designated by the school’s principal taking daily attendance to determine which

student(s) on the official school rolls are absent (*Automated student attendance recordkeeping system handbook*, 2008).

According to Florida statute, school districts had the obligation to differentiate between excused and unexcused absence:

Each district school board shall establish an attendance policy that includes, but is not limited to, the required number of days each school year that a student must be in attendance and the number of absences and tardiness after which a statement explaining such absences and tardiness must be on file at the school. Each school in the district must determine if an absence or tardiness is excused or unexcused according to criteria established by the district school board. (Florida Statute, 2009, Section 1003.24)

Florida Statutes, 2009, Section 1003.21 and 1003.24 provided specific reasons that students' absences will not be counted against them. These reasons include: (a) Absences were for religious instruction and holidays; (b) the absence was with permission of the head of the school; and (c) attendance was impracticable or inadvisable because of sickness or injury, attested to by a written statement of a licensed practicing physician.

Florida Statute, 2009, Section 1003.26 stated that district school board policies shall require the parent of a student to justify each absence of the student, and that justification will be evaluated based on adopted district school board policies that define excused and unexcused absences. The policies must provide public schools to track excused and unexcused absences. If the absence is an excused absence, as defined by district school board policy, the school shall provide opportunities for the student to make up assigned work and not receive an academic penalty unless the work is not made up

within a reasonable time. Though these excused absent days have been recorded and counted in the schools Average Daily Attendance, they have not counted against the student with regard to the minimum number of days of attendance required for students.

Causes of Student Absenteeism

Extensive research has been conducted to investigate the many causes of absenteeism. Atkinson (2005) grouped these causes into four categories: (a) student demographics, (b) family characteristics, (c) students' personal or psychological factors, and (d) school climate. Researchers have identified and researched many of the variables that contribute to the characteristics of student absenteeism. The specific issues and contributing variables addressed by researchers are presented in Table 2. The table identifies specific variables that researchers have identified as contributing causes to student absenteeism. Irrespective of cause, most researchers agree that truancy and other forms of non-attendance cause harm, and most harm is done to the non-attenders themselves (Reid, 2008)

Table 2
Student Absenteeism Research by Category, Contributing Variables, and Researchers

Categories and Contributing Variables	Researchers
Student Demographics	
Higher truancy among males	Bilchik, 1997; Duckworth, & deJung, 1986b; Henry, 2007; Teasley, 2004
Minorities	Henry, 2007
Location of school	Ball & Connolly, 2000; Teasley, 2004
Family income	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Reid, 1999; Zhang, 2003
Single parent homes	Henry, 2007; Reid, 1999
Family size	Reid, 1999
Parents' education	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Henry, 2007
Student age	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Ball & Connolly, 2000; Henry, 2007
Family Characteristics	
Parental involvement with school and homework	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Reid, 1999
Parental condoned absence	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk, 2003; Reid, 1999; Sheppard, 2007
Parental negative attitudes toward education	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Malcolm et al., 2003; Reid, 1999; Sheppard, 2007
Families with criminal records	Ball & Connolly, 2000; Reid, 1999
Low socioeconomic status	Malcolm et al., 2003, Reid, 1999
Personal or Psychological Factors	
Students' negative perceptions	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998
Chronic illness	Miller & Plant, 1999; Taras & Brennan, 2008
School Climate	
School attachment/relationships	Allensworth & Easton, 2005; 2007; Jerald, 2006
Feelings of physical safety	Attwood & Croll, 2006; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Davies & Lee, 2006; Henry, 2007
School climate/learning atmosphere	Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Davies & Lee, 2006; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Lee & Burkam, 2003

Effects of Absenteeism On Student Behavior

In their research, Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, and Kirk (2003) identified multiple impacts of attendance issues on students. They found that absentees were directly affected in that they failed to learn the specific information presented by the instructor.

They were expected to master the material independently and be able to keep pace upon their return to class. Even a single missed class period could result in confusion for the learner, and as the class progressed, the problem could be compounded as the learner fell further behind. There was also potential for additional confusion and a disconnection between the learner and the education system. For students that come from a background that is supportive of learning, the issue is often corrected by assistance from parents. For those students not supported, the cycle can lead to further problems such as inappropriate behavior, additional absenteeism and a decrease in achievement. Poor attendance has provided an early indicator which, if recognized, can be used as a flag to identify students in need of assistance. Often, however, no system is in place that can be used to provide needed assistance (Malcolm et al., 2003).

Malcolm et al. (2003) also identified the effect that returning students have on other students in the class and the instructor as a secondary impact of poor student attendance. When students return from an absence, they can disrupt the learning environment for all students and the teacher. In the best scenario, students would have actively pursued learning at home to maintain their progress. Students lacking in support, however, may do nothing to maintain their learning and return to class without the background knowledge required for them to proceed. An instructor can risk redundancy (and general class inattentiveness) by reviewing in order to assist such students. In the worst case scenario, returning students who are ignored and not prepared to proceed become disruptive, often creating distractions in the classroom. This typically results in

punitive actions from the instructor that reinforces the issues of disconnection from school. As students disconnect from the learning environment increases, their interest in learning may decrease, their attendance may decrease, and ultimately their achievement levels may decrease.

Effects of Absenteeism on Student Achievement

Attendance is a requirement for earning course credit as well as learning course material. Teachers' grading practices may be affected by absences. Teachers may reward good attendance with more lenient grading practices and demonstrate fewer leniencies in the grading of students who seem to be making less effort and missing classes. The dilemma may be compounded by poorly performing students who are less likely to be interested in attending class. The result may be a downward spiral. Missing class leads to poor performance, and poor performance leads students to avoid class. Researchers such as Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) have studied students dropping out of school have characterized the process as a gradual disengagement. Students miss more and more school, making it increasingly difficult to return. Attendance has also been highly predictive of students achieving higher grades. As with course failures, attendance has been a strong predictor of overall grades. Allensworth and Easton (2007) reported that almost all students who had good attendance records also had average or higher grades.

Importance of Attendance

Student attendance has often been viewed in a simple context--students who are not in class will not have the opportunity to learn. Recent research on students' dropping out of school has identified student attendance as an early identifier of those students who are disengaging from their education and becoming the most likely to drop out of school and not complete their education. According to Jerald (2006), monitoring student attendance to utilize it as a predictor of student disengagement is the reason attendance is so critically important for early intervention with students.

In response to the release of *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform. An Open Letter to the American People. A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education* by Gardner and the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), the policies of social promotion were replaced with efforts to raise standards in schools. The report attributed declines in student achievement to lenient policies that led to a dilution in standards. As a result, many school systems drafted stricter promotion policies which favored retention and resulted in increased rates of non-promotion. A side effect of the change in policy was an increase in the percentage of students dropping out of school (Roderick, 1994). In conducting a longitudinal study of an urban district in Fall River, Massachusetts, Roderick addressed the impact of grade retention on middle school-age students.

Roderick (1994) found that students who were retained in one grade had a 2.24 times greater probability of dropping out of school when compared to those who had not

been retained. The probability of dropping out rose to 3.00 times for students who had been retained in two or more grades. Roderick also studied students who had been retained in the early K-3 grades and found that they had an increased risk of dropping out of 75% [$1.75 = \exp. (.560)$] compared to those who were retained in grades 4 thru 6 where the risk of dropping out increased to 90% [$1.90 = \exp. (.640)$]. He determined that the grade level at which students were retained was not statistically significant at the .05 level [χ^2 calc (d.o.f. = 6) = 9.04].

Roderick (1994) also identified a group of students who, though overage, had not been retained. Like those students who had been retained a grade, these students were not progressing through their education with their modal cohort and were overage by an average of one year compared with their classmates. This group had a drop-out rate similar to those students who had been retained one grade.

Between the sixth and the eighth grades, 23% of students who were overage for grade in grade 6 dropped out of school compared to 5% of their counterparts. Even those overage students who went on to high school were showing signs of withdrawal in the eighth grade. This disengagement was not reflected in the student's grades but was reflected in significant declines in his or her attendance. By the end of middle school, students who ended the sixth grade overage for grade and who had not dropped out were absent more than 7 days, on average, than those enrolled at their modal grade level, even when accounting for differences in grades and attendance just two grades prior. In summation, these findings lend support to the hypothesis that being overage for grade places students at risk of school dropout because they are more likely than other youths to become disengaged from school during adolescence. (Roderick, 1994, pp. 745-746)

Neild and Balfanz (2006) studied risk factors that contributed to students being retained in ninth grade in the Philadelphia school system. Their analysis of the data

confirmed much of Roderick's (1994) work regarding non graduation and narrowed the focus. Their analysis of the data indicated that retained and overage students were more likely to be retained again in the ninth grade. Another set of predictors for students at risk of retention and non-promotion was found for students who were assessed at being below the seventh grade level when they were administered the SAT 9 assessment in either mathematics or reading and had attendance rates of less than 80% during their eighth grade year. In 20 of 22 comprehensive neighborhood high schools, less than 20% of the population was identified as not being at risk. Approximately 10% of the entire population was considered to be at low risk. Of all the predictors of student performance in the ninth grade, eighth-grade attendance was determined to be a powerful predictor of non-promotion in ninth grade. Neild and Balfanz (2006) found that "each additional percentage point increase in attendance decreases the odds of repeating ninth grade by 5%" (p. 132).

The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago began studying the academic performance indicators of Chicago area first-year high school students in the mid-1990s. The Consortium developed the "On track indicator" that has been used in the Chicago school system to identify students who have become disengaged from the education system. The on track indicator has used number of credits earned and number of student failures of core courses during the freshman year and has been viewed as the most accurate method for identifying graduates and non-graduates (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Absences have been slightly less predictive than grade

point averages because they have not distinguished students who are attending school but performing poorly in their classes from those who are attending and performing well. One advantage, however, is that the information on absences has been available early in the school year and has provided the most practical indicator for use in identifying students for early intervention. According to Allensworth and Easton (2007), course attendance has been eight times more predictive of course failure in the freshman year than eighth-grade tests scores. They also indicated that freshman absences could be used to predict 63% of the variation in course failures among freshmen, while eighth-grade mathematics and reading scores together predicted only 8% of the variation in course failures. Allensworth and Easton (2007) reported that disengagement from school was not necessarily limited to students with extremely low attendance. One to two weeks of absences per semester have been associated with a substantially reduced probability of students' graduating.

Reid (2007) found, in his research, that poor attendance was often associated with lower socio-economic status. In contrast, however, research from the University of Chicago indicated that when controlling for test scores, mobility, and age, only a small relationship was observed between poverty and absenteeism. Those students from high poverty neighborhoods were found to be absent only 1.5 days more, on average, than students from low-poverty neighborhoods. Despite being significantly related to absence, test scores, mobility, and age (when combined) explained less than one-fifth of the total variation in absence rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

In contrast, there has been substantial variation from one school to another in regard to attendance patterns, and this has held true for students with similar achievement and background characteristics. After removing differences in absence rates that could be explained by students' prior achievement and backgrounds, Allensworth and Easton (2007) found that absence rates varied across schools by about 6.5 days per semester. When restricting the comparison to schools serving similar populations, absence rates varied by about 4.4 days per semester. Absenteeism was also found to vary by semester. Students in some schools missed as much as an additional week or more of classes in the spring semester than they did during the fall semester. In other schools, absence rates have been found to be similar for both terms. These substantial differences in absence rates across schools suggested to Allensworth and Easton (2007) that there were school effects on attendance.

The relationship between academic preparation and attendance has often been found to be dependent on the school that a student attends. The policies and practices of the school have been likely to moderate the relationship between academic background and course performance. Student performance has been reported to be better where students report higher levels of trust for their teachers and where they report that teachers provide personal support to them. Schools with strong teacher-student relationships have been more likely to have greater student engagement, reduced absences, and better graduation rates. Weak teacher-student relationships have tended to make it difficult for teachers to adequately monitor and support students (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Lee &

Burkam, 2003; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987; Wasley et al., 2000). Jerald (2006) summarized the importance of understanding the problem, building data systems and arriving at interventions for schools most in need of developing supportive environments for students:

Knowing which students are at greatest risk for dropping out and which schools most exacerbate the problem is the first step to reducing dropout rates. Fortunately, today's education leaders have better research and data than were available 20 years ago.

If policymakers heed the most current research, avoid the mistakes of the past, and invest sufficient up-front "research and development" dollars, they can build data systems to identify a good many students on the path to dropping out early enough to make a difference. And district administrators can intervene in schools that contribute the most to the dropout problem, changing them from institutions that "push students out" into challenging and supportive environments that keep teenagers in school and on track for a diploma. (p. 40)

The Effects of Consolidation

Jones, Toma, and Zimmer (2008) conducted research in Texas to determine if there was a relation between the size of a class, a school and a district and their corresponding Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rates. Their analysis revealed a negative correlation, and the effect was more pronounced as the size difference was measured in the smaller unit. Increasing the number of high schools in a district by one had a corresponding decline of .0036 % in ADA. Increasing enrollment in a high school by a student resulted in a 0.02% decrease in ADA, and increasing enrollment in a class by one student resulted in a 0.14% decrease in ADA.

Jones et al. (2008) indicated that "The underlying cause of this negative relationship between school and district size and attendance rates could be related to the

incentives for schools and districts created by the budgeting process as well as the educational effects on students that stem from size” (p. 147). They attributed the driving force behind growth in size of schools and districts to the consolidation process that resulted in the reduction of school districts and expansion of school size. Between 1940 and 1980 the number of regular public school districts in the United States declined from 117,108 to 15,912 and the total number of schools was reduced from 226,762 to 85,982 (NCES, 2003a). During the same time period, the number of students enrolled in elementary and secondary education grew from 25,434,000 to 41,651,000 (NCES, 2003b). Though most of the reduction in the number of schools was a result of the elimination of 112,679 one-teacher elementary schools, the reduction by 1105 secondary schools resulted from (a) the drive to consolidate and make education more cost effective and (b) provide students with a wider selection of subjects. During this same time, the enrollment in secondary schools grew from 6,601,000 to 13,616,000 students resulting in the population of the average high school more than doubling (NCES, 2003b).

The drive to consolidate schools to make education more cost effective was examined by Streifel, Foldes, and Holman (1991). Six expenditure categories (Administration, Instruction, Transportation, Operations and Maintenance, Total Costs, and Capital Projects) were analyzed in surveys of the 50 state departments of education to determine which categories produced savings as a result of school consolidation. The only category that produced any statistically significant savings in the analysis was Administration (Streifel et al., 1991). This savings resulted in school size increasing, but

the number of schools and the number of administrators did not increase. The number of students per principal on average doubled from 1940 to 1980. The result has been that the resource of the principal's time has become more limited.

District Policies and Procedures Effects on Attendance

Reardon (2008) conducted a non-experimental correlation study to determine the relation between the types of attendance policies each district had and the high school students' average daily attendance rates for the district. The independent variables of district high school population size, the district's socioeconomic status as measured by its free and reduced lunch rate, and the district's type of attendance policies (punitive, reward or affective) were used to conduct a Pearson correlation with the dependent variable average daily attendance rate.

After determining the district's policy type, Reardon (2008) reviewed all of the policies of each district to determine what percentage of the policies in the district were punitive, reward or affective. The districts were then assigned a rating as to what percentages of the policies were assigned to each of the types. Punitive type policies were used in all districts. The percentage of punitive policies ranged from 20% to 100%, with a mean of 81% of the policies in the districts being punitive. The percentage of reward policies ranged from 0 to 25%, with a mean of 1.6% of the policies in the districts being reward. The percentage of affective policies ranged from 0 to 80%, with a mean of 17.3% of the policies in the districts being affective. Despite the high percentage of districts

using punitive policies and the wide range of application of policies, there was a low correlation to average daily attendance rates. The Pearson correlation for district punitive policies to district average daily attendance rates was $r = -.183$ with the probability of $p = .139$. Of all of the independent variables, punitive policies had the highest correlation.

Reardon's (2008) research could not reject any of his null hypotheses. The outcome from his analysis on Florida districts was that there was no statically significant difference in the districts' average daily attendance rates as related to the districts' attendance policies, size, or socioeconomic rates.

Reardon (2008) performed an additional analysis of a single, large southern school district comparing the size and socioeconomic rates of individual high schools to the average daily attendance rates. In this analysis he found a statistically significant correlation between the socioeconomic status of the high schools and their average daily attendance ($r = -.588, p = .001$). His data did not allow him to analyze the schools' attendance policies.

In Reardon's (2008) conclusion he stated:

An investigation of the relationship between a school's individual policy, size, SES level, and the attendance rate (using the school as the unit of analysis) should be conducted. This examination should include in depth interviews with school administrators to understand better the up close picture as to what is occurring at the ground level (p. 61).

Student absenteeism has been a concern and researched for extensively.

Researchers have identified and surveyed many different populations regarding the many causes, effects and effective methods to address poor student attendance. Table 3

provides a summary of the research on absenteeism. Contained in the table are the researchers, the year of the research, a brief description and major findings of the studies.

Table 3
Summary of Absentee Research Studies and Key Findings

Researcher (Year)	Study and Key Findings
Levento (1973)	<p>Study: Two-year study of 3100 student attendance records at the building level.</p> <p>Findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distinguishable patterns for days of the week. 2. Girls had higher absenteeism in the first three years of high school. 3. Students from single family homes had higher absenteeism. 4. Student absenteeism increased by grade level. 5. Students on college preparatory track had lower absenteeism. 6. For senior students, absenteeism was lowest for highest class ranks in academic achievement. 7. Students who participated in school sponsored activities had lower absenteeism. 8. Absenteeism was higher for blacks. 9. Teachers who were rated as having poorer personalities had students with higher absenteeism.
Thomson & Stanard (1975)	<p>Study: NASSP identified schools that were successful at reducing absenteeism rates.</p> <p>Findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong policies. 2. All stake holders involved with the formulation of attendance policies. 3. Clear written policies. 4. Well publicized policies. 5. Policies consistently enforced. 6. Immediate follow-up on absence.
Thomas & Stanard (1975)	<p>Study: National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) identified poor student attendance as most frequently listed student problem.</p> <p>Findings: A list of causes for poor student attendance was developed. The list included: inadequate curricula, family attitudes, social forces, peer pressures, economic situations, home-school relationships, school size, student age, and health issues. Additional causes listed were erosion of parental control, winter vacations, novel lifestyles, economic affluence, and the breakdown in court enforcement of attendance laws.</p>

Researcher (Year)	Study and Key Findings
Duckworth & deJung (1986)	<p>Study: Detailed attendance management study of six secondary schools conducted by Oregon University, Center for Educational Policy and Management.</p> <p>Findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers manual attendance rolls were more accurate than computerized data collection. 2. Administration was unable to effectively address massive daily collection of data. 3. Parents were seen, by administration and faculty, as assigning a low priority to school programs. 4. Little evidence that imposing penalties for poor attendance correlated with reducing absenteeism. 5. Intervention efforts had a low success rate. 6. Administrators were more concerned about the long-term consequences of students dropping out than teachers. 7. School Absenteeism was not well defined.
Steifel, Foldesy, & Holman (1991)	<p>Study: Survey of 50 state departments of education to examine economic gains of consolidation.</p> <p>Findings: Of six expenditure categories (Administration, Instruction, Transportation, Operations and Maintenance, Total Costs, and Capital Projects), only Administration produced statistically significant savings.</p>
Roderick (1994)	<p>Study: Longitudinal study of the Fall River school district, an urban Massachusetts school district, addressing (a) effect of grade repetition on dropping out and (b) effect of grade retention on school engagement</p> <p>Findings: Disengagement was not reflected in the students' grades but was reflected in significant declines in attendance. Findings lent support to the hypothesis that being overage for grade placed students at risk of school dropout because they were more likely than other youths to become disengaged from school during adolescence.</p>
Allensworth & Easton (2005)	<p>Study: The University of Chicago began studying the academic performance indicators of Chicago area first year high school students in the mid-1990s.</p> <p>Findings: The "On track indicator" used in the Chicago school system to identify students that have become disengaged from the education system was developed. Using the number of credits earned and the number of student failures of core courses during the freshman year, this indicator has been viewed as the most accurate method for predicting graduates and non-graduates.</p>

Researcher (Year)	Study and Key Findings
Reid (2005)	<p>Study: A review of recent research into school absenteeism and truancy.</p> <p>Findings: This research made a contribution in understanding correctly terms related to: definitional issues, the causes of truancy and non-attendance, out-of-school provision, the Office for Standards in Education position, the role of parents, the link between truancy and crime, current trends, and the Children Act 2004.</p>
Jerald (2006)	<p>Study: Identification of potential dropouts.</p> <p>Findings: Monitoring student attendance and utilizing it as a predictor of student disengagement was critically important for early intervention with students.</p>
Neild & Balfanz (2006)	<p>Study: Analysis of students records of Philadelphia public school children to identify predictors for ninth grade students at risk of retention.</p> <p>Findings: Analysis of data indicated that retained and overage students were more likely to be retained again in the 9th grade. Other predictors for students at risk of retention and non promotion included students that were assessed at being below the 7th grade level when they were administered the SAT 9 assessment in either Math or Reading and had attendance rates of less than 80% during their 8th grade year.</p>
Allensworth & Easton (2007)	<p>Study: Predictive value of absences vs. grade point averages. Absences were slightly less predictive than grade point averages because they did not distinguish students who were attending but performing poorly in their classes from those who were attending and performing well.</p> <p>Findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on absences has been available early in the school year and has provided the most practical indicator for use in identifying students for early intervention. 2. One to two weeks of absences per semester have been associated with a substantially reduced probability of students' graduating. 3. There has been substantial variation from one school to another in attendance patterns. This is true even when comparing students with similar achievement and background characteristics. 4. Absenteeism has been known to vary by semesters. Students in some schools miss as much as an additional week or more of classes in the spring semester than they do in fall semester. In other schools, absence rates are similar for both terms. These substantial differences in absence rates across schools suggest there are school effects on attendance. 5. Schools with strong teacher-student relationships have been more likely to have greater student engagement, reduced absences, and higher graduation rates.

Researcher (Year)	Study and Key Findings
Jones, Toma, & Zimmer (2008)	<p>Study: Analysis of the relationship between Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rates and size (class, school, and district).</p> <p>Findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing the number of high schools in a district by one had a corresponding decrease in the ADA by 0.0036%. 2. Increasing enrollment in a high school by one student resulted in a 0.02% decrease in ADA. 3. Increasing enrollment in a class by one student resulted in a 0.14% decrease in ADA. <p>The underlying cause of this negative relationship between school and district size and attendance rates could be related to the incentives for schools and districts created by the budgeting process as well as the educational effects on students that stem from size.</p>
Reid (2008)	<p>Study: Survey of staff and professionals who attended three separate attendance workshops.</p> <p>Findings: Irrespective of cause, researchers agreed that truancy and other forms of non-attendance caused harm, and most harm impacted the non-attenders themselves.</p>
Reardon (2008)	<p>Study: <i>An analysis of Florida's School District's attendance policies and their relationship to high school attendance rates.</i></p> <p>Findings: An investigation of the relationship between a school's individual policy, size, SES level, and the attendance rate (using the school as the unit of analysis) should be conducted. This examination should include in depth interviews with school administrators to understand better the up close picture as to what is occurring at the ground level.</p>
Reid (2008)	<p>Study: Survey of staff and professionals who attended three separate attendance workshops.</p> <p>Findings: Irrespective of cause, researchers agreed that truancy and other forms of non-attendance caused harm, and most harm impacted the non-attenders themselves.</p>

Summary

Student non-attendance and effects including achievement, retention and dropping out of school were reviewed in Chapter 2. The review of literature addressed early research from the perspective of principals, management of attendance, the importance of attendance to student achievement, and the effects of school consolidation on the resources available to address student attendance. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings of the identified in the literature review. Many of the causes and effects have been researched in depth. Recent research by Allensworth and Easton (2005 & 2007) have identified attendance as being an early indicator of students that are beginning to disconnect from their education as opposed to behavior that required modification. In addition their research identified characteristics about schools that either promoted or discouraged students' success which resulted in some schools having higher dropout rates. Despite extensive research on the subject of student attendance, the issue continues to be one that has not experienced improvement. Chapter 3 contains detailed information about the methods, instrumentation, and procedures used to examine the principals influence on building level attendance policies and procedures in public secondary schools in Florida.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study was conducted to examine building level attendance policies and procedures in public senior high schools in Florida to determine if they had a statistically significant relationship to the schools' percentage of average daily attendance. The researcher surveyed secondary school principals to determine the emphasis that principals placed on attendance through the use of their instructional staffs. Surveyed schools were categorized as being proactive or reactive in addressing attendance issues. Interventions requiring teachers to reinforce school attendance policies and procedures within the first five days of absenteeism were considered to be proactive in rating the school. Proactive intervention included a parental/guardian contact by the teacher for each instance students did not provide documentation for an absence from class. Additional proactive interventions included teachers' contacting parents after three absences in a semester and a request to the guidance counselors to conduct an attendance child study on the student after five absences in a semester. Interventions from administrators were ranked as reactive as opposed to interventions from instructors. Interventions that took place after students had missed more than five days of unexcused absences were considered reactive as opposed to early interventions for unexcused absences. The closer to the time that the student was absent by a teacher that an intervention was provided the greater the

proactive ranking. The more notification provided to the parents when students were absent the greater the ranking of being proactive in the policy and procedure section.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to (a) explore the relationships between the secondary school principal's application of attendance policies and procedures and the school's average daily attendance rate and to (b) investigate the extent to which the principal's perspectives were proactive or reactive in addressing attendance issues.

Population and Sample

The schools selected for this study were senior high schools from public school districts in Florida that had student populations between 50,000 and 100,000. All schools were identified by the Florida Department of Education as regular education, non charter, and had students in grades 9-12 in attendance. The population consisted of principals from all of the high schools in Brevard, Lee, Osceola, Pasco, Polk, Seminole, and Volusia Counties. Primary or middle grade schools, combination schools, charter schools, vocational schools, and private schools were excluded from the study. Osceola County did not respond to the application to conduct research and was removed from the study. The remaining principals of the 58 high schools were invited to participate in the study. Of the 58 principals invited to participate, 36 completed the survey resulting in a 62% participation rate. Of those that did not participate, six indicated they did not wish to

participate and were removed from the study, and 16 did not respond. Nine of the principals responded that they were in their first year as principals of the schools they were at. The responses from these principals were excluded from the analysis because their responses were not the result of the previous year's average daily attendance of the school. The data analysis was conducted on the remaining 27 principals. Research by Reardon (2008) indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between Florida school district procedures and policies as related to average daily attendance. Thus, the need to survey all high school principals in the state of Florida was unnecessary, and a sample was selected to conduct the research. Table 3 provides the student populations for school districts invited to participate in the study.

Table 4
Student Membership of School Districts

School District	Student Membership
Brevard	74,371
Lee	80,541
Osceola	52,742
Pasco	66,313
Polk	94,164
Seminole	65,355
Volusia	64,570

Research Questions

Two questions were used to guide the research. The following questions concerned the application of attendance policies and procedures and the emphasis placed on attendance by the school leader:

1. To what extent is there a relationship between the application of attendance policies and procedures at the school level and the percentage of the school's average daily attendance?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between the emphasis (proactive or reactive) the school leader places on attendance and the percentage of average daily attendance of the school?

Instrumentation and Other Sources of Data

In his review of the literature, the researcher was not able to identify an existing survey that could be used to quantify a principal's emphasis on attendance. It was necessary, therefore, to develop a survey instrument and a scale that could be used in determining the extent to which principals and their staffs were proactive or reactive to attendance issues. The instrument and informed consent form are included in Appendix A.

Research by Allensworth and Easton (2007) showed that utilizing students attendance as an early indicator of students who were disconnecting from school was statistically more effective than utilizing test scores from the previous school year.

Grades indicating how a student had performed during the school year was the most accurate method of forecasting if a student would eventually drop out,, but that information was available after the student had failed and the disconnect process was well underway. Utilizing attendance as an early indicator of students who are beginning to disconnect from school provides an opportunity to be proactive in addressing student achievement. On the other hand, when attendance is utilized as criteria for receiving a grade, its value is to deter students from missing school; and the response was reactive towards the absence.

Since no survey was available to examine the high schools percentage of average daily attendance as it related to the principal an original survey needed to be developed. The survey developed for this research was designed to determine if principals utilized attendance to improve student achievement by early intervention or to deter students from being absent. The survey is original and developed from the research conducted to improve student achievement and reduce student drop out rates. The survey questions addressed issues that specifically applied to the school's principal and addressed the following subjects; documenting student attendance, making up missed assignments and lessons, notification of parents or guardians, purpose of student attendance records, students skipping class, use of resources, and impact on student grading.

The survey was comprised of four sections: (a) background information, (b) school policy and procedure, (c) administrative opinion, and (d) a final section for the principals to write comments about their own experiences and ideas to reduce student

absenteeism, class cutting, and tardiness. Section I was used to gather demographic information from principals. The information included gender, age, education level, and years of administrative experience.

The responses to items 1-4 and 6-9 were ordered from very reactive to very proactive and were based on the flexibility that school districts granted principals. Each survey item served as an indicator of either a proactive or reactive response to a specific attendance issue. Principals were asked to select from four possible responses to each item that best described their school's policies and procedures (items 1-5) and that best described their perspectives (items 6-9). Point values ranging from 1-4 were assigned for each response (Answer 1 = 1 point, Answer 2 = 2 points, Answer 3 = 3 points, and Answer 4 = 4 points). For item 5, which required principals to choose all methods used to convey attendance information to parents, respondents received 1 point for each method selected. Points were totaled for Section II (Policies and Procedures) and Section III (Opinions) for each respondent, and principals were ranked from highly reactive to highly proactive based on their total scores. Section II total scores could range from 5 to 21. Section III total scores could range from 4 to 16. The higher the score the more proactive was the principal in regard to attendance issues.

For the purposes of the survey, the terms reactive and proactive were defined as follows: Proactive was defined as actions, in the context of student attendance, taken by the school's staff for early interventions to minimize students missing class or school. The closer to the first absence, regardless of reason for the absence an action was taken,

the more proactive was the principal's position on attendance. Reactive was defined as actions, in the context of student attendance, taken by the school's staff when students met or exceeded a preset threshold. The greater the time lapse between the first absence and action taken regardless of reason for absence, the more reactive was the principal's position on attendance.

Principals' Policies and Procedures: Survey Items One-Five

Section II of the survey contained five items addressing the policies and procedures used at the principals' schools. The responses from this section were used to answer the first research question as to the extent to which there was a relationship between the application of attendance policies and procedures at the school level and the percentage of the school's average daily attendance. The first four items in this section addressed attendance documentation and make-up lessons missed as a result of absenteeism. Item 5 instructed the principal to select all choices that applied regarding the methods by which parents were notified of student absenteeism. Following is a detailed explanation of the five items and each of the response choices related to policies and procedures in the study.

Survey Item One

Item 1 queried the principals as to the school's policy and procedure regarding who was responsible for the identification of a student who was absent from class or participating in an approved on campus activity such as being at the guidance department or a school assembly. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) the student, (2) an administrator, (3) the attendance clerk or (4) the teacher.

Students following the procedures for attending school related activities would have done nothing wrong, and to hold them accountable for identifying their location would be a punitive response to their appropriate behavior. In addition, students could not serve as agents of the school witnessing the participation in an appropriate activity. As such, students cannot be used for self reporting in the collection of the information. Selecting students for identifying their location was ranked as a *very reactive* response because it placed the burden of accounting for a student's location on individuals who were not agents of the school.

Administrators would only become involved if student attendance issues reached a preset threshold or a violation of policy occurred. Students' locations during the day may not be identified for several days, if ever, and then the purpose of the identification would be to determine if a policy of procedure had been violated. This response was ranked as *somewhat reactive* because of the delay in response and the punitive nature of

the response. The only positive component of the response is that administrators, as agents of the school were accountable for the documentation.

The use of an attendance clerk as a clearing point for entering data collected regarding student attendance provides a dedicated person at a single location to insure that students' locations would be appropriately and consistently documented. This was ranked as a *somewhat proactive* response because the individual would be dedicated to insuring the information regarding all of the students' locations was as accurate as possible and closer to real time. This was not considered to be the ideal solution because attendance clerks would not have actually observed students but would be utilizing data provided to them. This data may have been inaccurate, or they may have interpreted the data incorrectly. This response was ranked as proactive because the dedicated person would provide a more current record of the student's locations and standardized the recording of the data.

Teachers would be the only school agents who could directly observe whether students were present in their classes. If students were not present in class, teachers should be knowledgeable of the student's location if they were participating in a school approved activity. As such, the *very proactive* response by principals was the teacher.

Survey Item Two

Item two queried the principals as to the school's policy and procedure regarding how failure to provide appropriate documentation within a prescribed period of time after

a student was absent was initially addressed. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) referral to an administrator, (2) only a recording of no documentation in student's attendance record, (3) conference with a guidance counselor, (4) parent contact by the teacher.

A referral to an administrator would be associated with a negative consequence used to deter student absenteeism. This action would be performed by a third party, and the response time would be delayed. This action, which would result in only negative and punitive experiences for students and parents, was considered to be a *very reactive* response. Recording the failure to provide documentation was classified as *somewhat reactive* because it represented the collection of data with no effort made to account for the incident. A conference with a guidance counselor would provide counseling for some but would result in delayed action and was considered to be a *somewhat proactive* response. Teachers, as direct observers of students' absence from class, would be quicker to identify students who had failed to bring in documentation since they see students every day and track attendance. They would also be able to intervene with both students and parents before an excessive amount of time had elapsed. Selecting the parent contact by the teacher represented a *very proactive* response to item two.

Survey Item Three

Item three asked principals about the school's policy and procedure regarding students being allowed to make up class assignments and tests within a prescribed period

of time after being absent from school. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive indicating that students were allowed to make up assignments and tests as follows: (1) for absences that are excused, (2) for absences that are considered acceptable, (3) for absences that have appropriate documentation, (4) for any absences.

Principals who responded that students should be able to make up work only for excused absences were considered to be *very reactive* due to the narrow limits imposed on students' ability to continue uninterrupted in their educational activities. The make-up policies for absences considered acceptable required some judgment and were considered to be less restrictive and *somewhat reactive*. Making up work for absences with appropriate documentation were even less restrictive, required even more judgment and were considered to be *somewhat proactive*. Principals who responded that students should be able to make up work for any absence were rated as *very proactive* because the policy placed the students' learning as the highest priority. These students were not placed at any additional disadvantages because of their absences. Absence had resulted in loss of student/teacher time which did not need to be aggravated by a negative policy.

Survey Item Four

Item four queried the principals as to the school's policy and procedure regarding teachers providing tutoring to assist in making up work for students who were absent. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very

proactive indicating the extent to which tutoring and make-up time were provided by the teacher as follows: (1) is suggested either before or after school, (2) is suggested both before and after school, (3) is required either before or after school, (4) is required both before and after school.

Principals who only suggested that their teachers provide opportunities for tutoring (a) either before or after school or (b) both before and after school were rated as *very reactive* and *somewhat reactive*, respectively, because the choices to provide additional academic support were left to teachers. These principals were seen as unwilling to guarantee the use of limited resources to assist students in this way.

Principals who required teachers to provide students with opportunities for tutoring (a) either before or after school or (b) both before and after school were rated as *proactive* and *very proactive*, respectively, because of their insistence in using limited resources for students to receive additional academic support. The less willing principals were to use their resources for tutoring before and after school the more reactive the principal was ranked.

Survey Item Five

Item five inquired about the school's policy and procedure regarding notification of parents as to students being absent from school. Principals could select as many responses as were applicable to their school from the five that were provided. The more interventions they selected the more proactive they were ranked. One to two

interventions resulted in a *very reactive* ranking. Three interventions yielded a *reactive* ranking. Four and five interventions resulted in *proactive* and *very proactive* rankings, respectively. The interventions the principals could select were: (1) automated phone call, (2) letter to parent, (3) contact by guidance counselor, (4) contact by a school administrator, and (5) teacher contact.

Principals' Perspectives on Attendance Issues: Survey Items Six-Nine

Section III was used to elicit information as to principals' perspectives regarding attendance issues. The responses from this section were used to answer the second research question as to the extent to which there was a relationship between the emphasis (proactive or reactive) the school leader placed on attendance and the percentage of average daily attendance of the school. Four items (items 6-9) addressed the use of resources, purpose of attendance, skipping class or school, and the relationship between attendance and grades. Following is a detailed explanation of the four items and each of the response choices in the study related to principals' perspectives regarding attendance issues.

Survey Item Six

In item six, principals were asked to share their opinions regarding the primary purpose of maintaining student attendance records. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) identify

students who are skipping and require intervention by the dean or truant officer, (2) identify students who have exceeded their allowable absence and cannot receive credit for class, (3) identify students who miss class and need to make up missed lessons, (4) identify students for early intervention who are becoming disconnected from school.

Principals who believed the primary purpose of taking attendance was to identify students who were skipping classes and, therefore, required intervention by a dean or truant officer saw the issue as one of inappropriate behavior which required corrective action after the student had violated a policy. This response was rated *very reactive*, because the opinion reflected the perception that student absenteeism was a policy issue which needed to be addressed after a policy had been violated.

Principals who indicated they believed the purpose of maintaining attendance records was to identify students who had exceeded their allowable absences and could not receive credit for class reflected an opinion that attendance was directly related to the mastery of instruction being delivered. This response was rated as *somewhat reactive* because while the achievement levels of students' with better attendance may have been higher than that of more absent students, attendance, alone, does not measure any component of mastery of class content. In addition, this consequence only occurred at the end of a grading period, and its sole purpose was one of deterring students from missing school.

Principals who indicated that the primary purpose of being attentive to attendance was to identify students who missed class and needed additional time to make up work

and time for tutoring were considered to be *somewhat proactive*. These principals were using attendance data to address the effects of absenteeism on student achievement. This belief was ranked as somewhat proactive because it addressed students' learning deficit caused by their absences.

Principals who had the opinion that the primary purpose of maintaining student attendance records was for early intervention of students who were becoming disconnected from school were considered to be *very proactive*. These principals viewed attendance as an early indicator of students who may be in need of assistance. This view reflected the need to take action before problems related to absenteeism escalated and students became at risk of dropping out of school.

Survey Item Seven

Item seven queried the principals as to their opinions regarding the best method to reduce the number of students skipping class or school. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as to the initial action that should be taken for students who were identified as missing class for inappropriate reasons as follows: (1) be given an appropriated disposition to deter the behavior, (2) be denied participation in non curricular activities to deter the behavior, (3) be referred to guidance to identify reason, (4) have a parent/teacher conference.

Principals who indicated they believed in the use of an appropriate disposition to deter the behavior were considered to be *very reactive*. This response reflected a single

response to the inappropriate behavior and no attention to its underlying cause. It is negative reinforcement used to modify a student's action without addressing the cause of that action. By not addressing the causes of the behavior, the student may be inclined to repeat the behavior, which may result in an escalation of the method used to modify the behavior. As such, this response was rated as the most reactive opinion.

Similarly, principals who believed that being denied participation in non curricular activities to deter the behavior were considered to be somewhat reactive was also a negative reinforcement and was considered to be *somewhat reactive*. The denial of a benefit would not be as harsh as the punitive response of very reactive principals. It would, however, impact students negatively, only to a lesser degree.

The option of referring the student to a guidance counselor to identify reasons for absence would allow the cause of the issue to be explored and then addressed. The option was considered to be one taken by principals who were *somewhat proactive*, because it not only had the potential to modify the behavior but to address the underlying cause to the behavior.

Principals who indicated they believed that having a parent/teacher conference enabled the family to be involved in the solution were considered to be *very proactive*. This belief provided the greatest chances of successful modification of student behavior in that the cause of the problem could be addressed and the solution could be supported and reinforced by the parents.

Survey Item Eight

Item eight asked principals to share their opinions about resources (time, effort, and financial) that are or could be consumed addressing absenteeism. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) are better utilized addressing other student programs to improve student achievement, (2) do not contribute to student achievement but fulfills the mandates regarding attendance, (3) yield results but at a high expense, (4) are an effective way to reduce long term expenses in education and improve student achievement.

Principals who believed that their resources were better utilized addressing other student programs to improve student achievement were considered to be *very reactive*. These principals likely viewed this as a high cost/low yield problem in addressing the needs of a small percentage of students who did not want to be at school or in class. These principals would typically hold the belief that resources would be better utilized with students who would respond more readily. This response failed to consider the long term expenses associated with absent students as it relates to poor achievement, repeating classes, and possibly dropping out of school.

Principals who viewed the use of resources to address attendance as strictly meeting the requirements mandated by the district and/or state and did not consider the information provided from attendance supported improvement of student achievement were rated as *somewhat reactive*. These principals were unwilling to utilize attendance information to identify students who may be disconnecting from school and class. For

these principals, attendance records would serve only to identify those students who did not have enough time in class to receive credit.

Principals who selected the third option indicated they believed that there were results from attendance policies but that those results came at a high expense. These principals were rated as being *somewhat proactive* on the issue, because they recognized attendance provides a method to identify students who may be in need of support. When viewed from its immediate impact on school resources, the expense would be considered high for the number of students who would benefit.

Principals selecting the fourth option expressed the belief that they considered the resources used to address attendance as an effective way to reduce long term expenses in education and improve student achievement. These principals were considered to be *very proactive* in recognizing the long term costs that can result from not providing early interventions to address student attendance issues. Students who perform poorly require additional services, e.g., remediation or repeating courses, the cost of which greatly exceeds the expense schools shoulder to address issues if they can be identified early before they become problematic.

Survey Item Nine

Item nine sought principals' opinions regarding students' grades being adjusted by the instructor as a result of the students' absenteeism. Principals were asked if teachers who had students with semester averages that were bordering on a higher letter

grade should consider the students' absenteeism. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) show no leniency to students with attendance issues, (2) not take attendance into consideration, (3) consider the students attendance only if the absences were for valid reasons, (4) consider student attendance as a mitigating cause to give the student a higher grade.

The response of showing no leniency to students with attendance issues reflected a punitive response to a selected group of students. This response implied that students who had good attendance should be given the benefit of doubt in a borderline grade situation, but that the same consideration should not be given to students with poor attendance records. This response was ranked as a *very reactive* response.

Principals who indicated they believed that attendance should not be taken into consideration in regard to grading were considered to have provided a *somewhat reactive* response. The response was lacking in that it failed to address the effects students experience by missing class time and those lessons associated with class. Students may have ultimately performed better had they attended class. To ignore attendance does not encourage positive behaviors that may lead to improved academic achievement.

The response of considering students' attendance only if absences were for valid reasons, addresses the effects of students' absenteeism for those students who have valid reasons for absence. It also reflects the principal understands that absenteeism is a possible mitigating factor in student achievement. This response was ranked as *somewhat proactive* because principals who selected this choice recognized that students

missing class have lost valuable background knowledge that may affect their levels of achievement.

In the fourth option, principals were asked to consider student attendance as a mitigating cause for giving a student a higher grade, without qualification. Because the consideration was given without any qualifiers, principals who selected this choice were ranked as *very proactive* in that their recognition that student absenteeism may have a negative effect on student achievement and as such the reasons for the students' absenteeism should not be an issue.

In summary, the scores for the principals represented their perspectives and their utilization of resources available to them in addressing attendance issues. Survey item responses were also correlated with the percentage of average daily attendance to determine if any patterns existed that were consistent with schools that had higher percentages of average daily attendance. The results of this study reflected the responses of principals based on implementation in the 2009-2010 school year as a result of the 2008-2009 school year percentage of average daily attendance.

Pilot Test and Validation of the Survey

The online survey was pilot tested and validated using a cohort of 19 doctoral students from the University of Central Florida who were also school administrators. This group of students was enrolled in a doctoral program in Educational Leadership and had completed core leadership courses and a series of three graduate level statistics courses.

As part of the pilot-testing and validating process, the researcher sought to draw on cohort members' experience as administrators. The 19 members of the cohort received an initial e-mail explaining the purpose of the research and inviting them to participate in the pilot test. Of the 19 cohort members, 15 agreed to be part of the pilot test and were also invited to evaluate the survey to identify any areas of the survey that were unclear and needed improvement. Based on the responses from the validation survey, the principal survey was modified. Tables 5 and 6 display the results of the pilot test and evaluation of the survey.

Table 5
Results of Pilot Test of Survey (N = 15)

Survey Items	Distribution of Pilot Test Survey Responses			
	1	2	3	4
Item 1	0	1	3	10
Item 2	1	8	2	4
Item 3	4	0	0	10
Item 4	10	4	0	0
Item 5*	11	7	10	11
Item 6	3	0	0	9
Item 7	4	1	2	7
Item 8	1	1	1	8
Item 9	0	9	3	1

Note. Respondents could select as many answers as applied.

Table 6
Results of Evaluation of Survey

Evaluation Questions	Yes	No
Did you have any difficulties accessing the survey? If “yes” please comment.	1	14
Were the directions clear? If “no” please comment.	14	1
Were there any ambiguous questions or items that you didn’t understand? If yes, please comment.	7	8
Were there any items that made you uncomfortable? If yes, please comment	3	12
Is there anything you would change about the instrument? If “yes” please comment.	11	4

Data Collection

After developing the survey and identifying the eligible schools, approval of the research by the University of Central Florida’s Institutional Review Board was obtained (Appendix B). Permission to conduct the study and to survey principals of participating high schools was also sought and obtained from the individual school districts (Appendix C). One school district did not grant permission to conduct the survey and was excluded from the study. The final number of participating districts was six.

The initial contact with potential participants was through a letter sent to each principal’s school on February 24, 2010 using U. S. mail. This was followed by a second contact sent via email on March 1, 2010 to the 58 principals in the respective counties to explain the purpose of the survey and provide a link to the on-line survey.

Follow-up e-mail letters were sent to non respondents each week during the month in which the survey was conducted. Of the 58 principals invited to participate, 36 (62%) completed the survey. Of those who did not participate in the survey, six withdrew from the survey, and 16 did not respond. The useable return rate was 62%. Of the 36 who did respond, nine were not included in the analysis because they were first year principals. Copies of all communications with principals are included in Appendix D.

Average daily attendance (ADA) was obtained from the Florida Department of Education as a percentage for each of the schools for the 2008-2009 school year. The 1999 Florida Legislature initiated steps to incorporate ADA into the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) as follows:

Beginning with the 1999-2000 school year, each school district shall also document the daily attendance of each student in membership by school and by district. An average daily attendance factor shall be computed by dividing the total daily attendance of all students by the total number of students in membership and then by the number of days in the regular school year. Beginning with the 2001-2002 school year, the district's full-time equivalent membership shall be adjusted by multiplying by the average daily attendance factor. (Florida Statutes, 1999)

The districts must provide information to the Florida Department of Education for a prior school year by March of the subsequent school year. Thus, the data for 2008-2009 were made available to the public in April, 2010.

Data Analysis

Two research questions were used to guide the study. The first question concerned the application of attendance policies and procedures. The second research question was used

to investigate the emphasis placed on attendance by the school leader. The data analysis for each question is presented in the following paragraphs.

Principals' responses to Section II of the survey were utilized as ordinal data to rank the principals' application of policy and procedures implemented in their high schools. Policy and procedure scores represented principals' utilization of resources available to them in addressing attendance issues. Each survey item served as an indicator of either a proactive or reactive response to a specific attendance issue. Principals were asked to select from four possible responses to each question that best described their schools' policies and procedures. Responses were presented in sequence in the survey to display choices from very reactive to very proactive.

The points earned for the five policy and procedure items were summed to achieve a total score for each principal. Scores ranged between 5 and 21. The data obtained were correlated with the percentage of average daily attendance (ADA) from each school to determine if there was a relationship between the policies and procedures of the school and percentage of average daily attendance of the school.

Principals' responses to Section III of the survey were utilized as ordinal data to rank the principals' perspectives reflected in their opinion responses. Opinion scores for the principals represented their emphasis on attendance issues. In items six through nine, principals were surveyed as to their attitudes/intentions in regard to student absenteeism. The same four point scale used for items one through four was applied for items six through nine.

The points earned for the four items were summed to achieve a total score for each principal. Scores ranged between 4 and 16. School leaders with lower scores were determined to be more reactive in their beliefs as they related to principals with higher scores. Conversely, higher scores were indicative of more proactive beliefs on the part of principals as they related to principals with lower scores. The scores provided a ranking value relative only to other principals surveyed. The rankings of the principals were correlated with the schools' ADA to further investigate any possible relationship between principals' proactivity or reactivity and schools' percentage of average daily attendance. Table 7 displays the relationship of each survey question to the research questions.

Table 7
The Relationship Between Survey Items and Research Questions

Survey Items	Research Questions
Survey Section II	
1. Identifying if a student is absent from class or participating in an approved on campus activity (guidance department, school assembly, etc.) is the responsibility of	1
1. The student	
2. An administrator	
3. The attendance clerk	
4. The teacher	
2. Failure to provide appropriate documentation within a prescribed period of time after a student is absent initially results in	1
1. Referral to an administrator	
2. Only a recording of no documentation in student's attendance record	
3. Conference with a guidance counselor	
4. Parent contact by the teacher	
3. Students are allowed to make up class assignments and test within a prescribed period of time	1
1. For absences that are excused	
2. For absences that are considered acceptable	
3. For absences that have appropriate documentation	
4. For any absences	
4. Tutoring and make up time provided by the teacher	1
1. Is suggested either before or after school	
2. Is suggested both before and after school	
3. Is required either before or after school	
4. Is required both before and after school	
5. Parents receive attendance information by the following methods (choose all that apply):	1
1. Automate phone call	
2. Letter to parent	
3. Contact by guidance counselor	
4. Contact by school administrator	
5. Teacher contact	

Survey Section III

- | | |
|---|---|
| 6. The primary purpose of maintaining student attendance records is to | 2 |
| 1. Identify students that are skipping and require intervention by the dean or truant officer | |
| 2. Identify students that have exceeded their allowable absence and cannot receive credit for class | |
| 3. Identify students that miss class and need to make up missed lessons | |
| 4. Identify students for early intervention that are becoming disconnected from school | |
| 7. In order to reduce the number of students skipping class or school, students that are identified as missing class for inappropriate reasons should initially | 2 |
| 1. Be given an appropriated disposition to deter the behavior | |
| 2. Be denied participation in non curricular activities to deter the behavior | |
| 3. Be referred to guidance to identify reason | |
| 4. Have a parent / teacher conference | |
| 8. The resources (time, effort, and financial) that are or could be consumed addressing absenteeism | 2 |
| 1. Are better utilized addressing other student programs to improve student achievement | |
| 2. Does not contribute to student achievement but fulfills the mandates regarding attendance | |
| 3. Yields results but at a high expense | |
| 4. Is an effective way to reduce long term expenses in education and improve student achievement | |
| 9. Teachers that have students with semester averages that are bordering on a higher letter grade should | 2 |
| 1. Show no leniency to students with attendance issues. | |
| 2. Not take attendance into consideration | |
| 3. Consider the students attendance only if the absences were for valid reasons | |
| 4. Consider student attendance as a mitigating cause to give the student a higher grade | |
-

Summary

The methodology and procedures used to conduct the study have been described in this chapter. The sample identified for the study was comprised of 58 public high schools in six Florida school districts. The sample was narrowed by restricting the district

size and using only high schools that were listed as regular education and had students in grades nine through 12 in attendance. The researcher-developed online survey was pilot tested using a cohort of doctoral students from the University of Central Florida. After completing the survey, the participants completed an evaluation survey. The survey was modified to improve its reliability and validity using the responses from the evaluation of the survey.

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

This study was conducted to determine the relationship, if any, between (a) the average daily attendance of high schools in six Florida public school districts, (b) the student absenteeism policies and procedures the high schools implemented, and (c) the perspective of the principals toward attendance issues. The percentage of average daily attendance for each school from the Florida Department of Education was obtained from the 2008-2009 school year. Survey data were gathered from principals during the 2009-2010 school year. Survey responses reflected the perspectives of principals in regard to the previous year's school attendance. As such the independent variable for the study was the percentage of average daily attendance of the high schools. The dependent variable was the data collected from the surveys principals completed.

Population and Sample

The population in this study was comprised of all the public high schools in Florida. The sample consisted of Florida high schools from districts that had populations between 50,000 and 100,000. The percentage of average daily attendance for all of the public high schools in Florida for the 2008-2009 school year was provided by the Florida Department of Education. These data enabled the determination of the number of schools in the population, the mean, and the standard deviation for the population.

The z-test was selected to determine if the sample high schools' mean percentage of average daily attendance was statistically equal to the mean of the population high schools. Tables 8 and 9 display the respective descriptive statistics for all Florida high schools and the 27 sample high schools.

Table 8
All Florida High Schools: Percentage of Average Daily Attendance

Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	Statistics	Standard Error
Mean	93.251	.1509
95% Confidence interval for mean		
Lower	92.955	
Upper	93.548	
5% Trimmed mean	93.446	
Median	93.500	
Variance	9.536	
Standard deviation	3.0880	
Minimum	68.4	
Maximum	99.9	
Range	31.5	
Interquartile range	2.8	
Skewness	-3.306	.119
Kurtosis	22.635	.238

Table 9
Sample High Schools: Percentage of Average Daily Attendance

Percentage of Average Daily Attendance	Statistics	Standard Error
Mean	94.467	.2826
95% Confidence interval for mean		
Lower	93.886	
Upper	95.048	
5% Trimmed mean	94.492	
Median	94.800	
Variance	2.157	
Standard. Deviation	1.4686	
Minimum	91.7	
Maximum	96.8	
Range	5.1	
Interquartile range	2.7	
Skewness	-.301	.448
Kurtosis	-1.013	.872

The null hypothesis stated that there is no statistical difference significant between the population mean ($\mu = 93.251$, $S = 3.0880$, $n = 419$) of all of the Florida high schools and the sample mean ($\bar{x} = 94.467$, $S = 1.4686$, $n = 27$) of the selected high schools.

$$H_0 : \mu = 93.251$$

The alternative hypothesis stated that there is a statistical significant difference between the population mean ($\mu = 93.251$, $S = 3.0880$, $n = 419$) of all of the high schools and the sample mean ($\bar{x} = 94.467$, $S = 1.4686$, $n = 27$) of the selected high schools.

$$H_1 : \mu \neq 93.251$$

At an alpha level ($\alpha = .01$), the z-value would need to be greater than 2.576 to reject the null hypothesis. The two-tailed z-value for the sample was 2.046153 ($p = 0.0407$). Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was not enough evidence to support the claim that the sample schools' percentage of average daily attendance was statistically different from the percentage of average daily attendance of all of the Florida high schools.

The confidence interval ($\alpha = .01$) for the population mean was 91.72369% to 94.77831%. The sample had 93.251% and was within the range. Again, there was not enough evidence to support the claim that the percentage of average daily attendance of the sample was statistically different from the percentage of average daily attendance of all of the Florida high schools.

As a result, the null hypothesis was not rejected. It was determined that the 27 sample high schools' mean percentage of average daily attendance was not statistically different from that of all of the Florida high schools.

Demographic Characteristics of Sample High Schools

Principals completing the survey were asked to share information regarding selected their age, gender, level of education, years of experience as a principal and total years of experience. Table 10 displays the frequencies and percentages for each of the demographic characteristics.

Table 10
Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Principals

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
37-45	5	18.5
46-54	14	51.9
55-63	8	29.6
Gender		
Male	20	74.1
Female	7	25.9
Highest level of education		
Bachelor's Degree	0	0
Master's Degree	22	81.5
Doctoral Degree	5	18.5
Years as Principal		
2-5	10	37.0
6-10	12	44.5
11-15	4	14.8
15+	1	3.7
Total years of administrative experience		
6-10	5	18.5
11-15	4	14.8
16-20	11	40.8
20+	7	19.6

Over half of the principals surveyed, (14, 51.9%) were between the ages of 46 and 54 years of age. Eight (29.6%) were between 55 and 63 years old. The remaining five principals (18.5%) were between 37 and 45 years of age. The great majority (20, 74.1%) of principals were male. There were only 7 (25.9%) females among those surveyed. Five (18.5%) of the principals had earned a doctoral degree. The remaining 22 (81.5%) held a master's degree. In terms of years of experience as a principal, only 5 (18.5%) had more

than 10 years as a principal. Those principals with less than 10 years experience totaled 22 (81.5%). The total years of experience in administration presented a similar picture with one third (9) of the principals reporting between six and 15 years of experience and two thirds (18) of the principals indicating 16 to 20 years of experience

Descriptive Statistics

The percentage of average daily attendance of the surveyed schools used in the study was for the 2008-2009 school year and was provided by the Florida Department of Education. The results of the study reflected the responses of principals made in the 2009-2010 school year. Opinion scores for the principals represented their emphasis on attendance issues. Policies and procedure scores represented principals' utilization of resources available to them in addressing attendance issues.

Each survey item served as an indicator of either a proactive or reactive response to a specific attendance issue. Principals were asked to select from four possible responses to each item the answer that best described their schools' policies and procedures (Section II, items 1-5) and that best described their emphasis on attendance issues (Section III, items 6-9). Point values for items 1-9, with the exception of item 5, ranged from one through four. Responses were presented in sequence in the survey to display choices from very reactive to very proactive (response choice 1 = 1 point or very reactive, response choice 2 = 2 points or somewhat reactive, response choice 3 = 3 points or somewhat proactive, and response choice 4 = 4 points or very proactive). For item 5,

which required principals to choose all methods used to convey attendance information to parents, respondents received one point for each method selected. The selection of one or two responses resulted in 1 or 2 points being awarded and was determined to be very reactive; selection of three responses = 3 points and a classification of somewhat reactive; four responses yielded 4 points and indicated a somewhat proactive response; selection of all five possible responses generated 5 points and resulted in a very proactive classification.

Points were totaled for Section II (Policies and Procedures) and Section III (Opinions) for each respondent, and principals were ranked from very reactive to very proactive based on their total scores for Sections II and III. Section II total scores could range from 5 to 21. Section III total scores could range from 4 to 16. The higher the score the more proactive the principal was in addressing attendance issues.

The results of the analysis for items 1-5 are displayed in Table 11. Shown in the table are the frequencies and percentages and mean scores reflecting the principals' application of attendance policies and procedures at the school level.

Table 11
School Level Application of Attendance Policies and Procedures

Items	Range	Principal Responses								Mean Score	
		Very Reactive		Somewhat Reactive		Somewhat Proactive		Very Proactive			
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	μ
Item 1	1 – 4	0	0.0	4	14.8	5	11.1	20	75.0	27	3.59
Item 2	1 – 4	2	7.4	23	85.2	0	0.0	2	7.4	27	2.07
Item 3	1 – 4	9	33.3	2	7.4	6	22.2	10	37.0	27	2.63
Item 4	1 – 4	12	44.4	12	44.4	2	7.4	1	3.7	27	1.70
Item 5*	1 – 5	4	14.8	4	14.8	6	22.2	13	48.1	27	3.96

*For item 5, choice of 1-2 items = very reactive, 3 items = somewhat reactive, 4 items = somewhat proactive, and 5 items = very proactive.

Item 1 queried the principals as to the school’s policy and procedure regarding who was responsible for the identification of a student who was absent from class or participating in an approved on campus activity such as being at the guidance department or a school assembly. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) the student, (2) an administrator, (3) the attendance clerk or (4) the teacher.

No principals reported themselves as being very reactive by relying on the student. A small number of principals (4, 14.8%) indicated that they relied on the administrator and were, therefore, determined to be somewhat reactive. Three of the principals were categorized as somewhat proactive (3, 11.1%) in their use of an attendance clerk for identification purposes. A total of 20 principals (74.1%) indicated that they were very proactive in that teachers were cited as being responsible for identifying student absence. The principals’ mean response to item one ($\mu = 3.59$) reflects

that principals' policies and procedures were largely proactive in recording student attendance.

Item two queried the principals as to the school's policy and procedure regarding how failure to provide appropriate documentation within a prescribed period of time after a student was absent was initially addressed. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) referral to an administrator, (2) only a recording of no documentation in student's attendance record, (3) conference with a guidance counselor, (4) parent contact by the teacher.

A small number of principals (2, 7.4%) reported themselves as being very reactive by having the student's referral directed to an administrator to address the issue. Most of the principals (23, 85.2%) indicated that they were reactive by only having the attendance record reflect that there was a lack of documentation regarding the student's absence. Two principals (7.4%) were very proactive by having the teachers contact the parents or guardian if the student failed to bring in documentation for the student being absent. The principals' mean response to item two ($\mu = 2.07$) reflects that principals' policies and procedures were largely reactive in addressing the students failure to provide documentation for being absent.

Item three asked principals about the school's policy and procedure regarding students being allowed to make up class assignments and tests within a prescribed period of time after being absent from school. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive indicating that students were allowed to

make up assignments and tests as follows: (1) for absences that are excused, (2) for absences that are considered acceptable, (3) for absences that have appropriate documentation, (4) for any absences.

A number of principals (9, 33.3%) reported themselves as being very reactive by only allowing make up work for students with excused absences. Two of the principals (7.4%) indicated that they were reactive by allowing for make-up work for absences that were considered acceptable. A parental note indicating the student would be away from school for a given period of time was considered to be acceptable, but the reason for the student being absent may not have qualified for the stricter requirements of an excused absence. Six of the principals (22.2%) were proactive requiring that the student only provide documentation of their absence to be eligible to complete make up missed work. The largest number of principals (10, 37%) was very proactive by permitting students to make up work missed during an absence without any qualifications on the part of the student. The principals' mean response to item three ($\mu = 2.63$) reflects that principals' policies and procedures were slightly proactive regarding students making up work when they returned to school after being absent.

Item four queried the principals as to the school's policy and procedure regarding teachers providing tutoring to assist in making up work for students who were absent. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive indicating the extent to which tutoring and make-up time were provided by the teacher as follows: (1) is suggested either before or after school, (2) is suggested both

before and after school, (3) is required either before or after school, (4) is required both before and after school.

There were 12 principals (44.4%) who reported themselves as being very reactive by only suggesting that tutoring be provided either before or after school. Another 12 principals (44.4%) indicated that they were reactive by suggesting that teachers provide tutoring both before and after school. Thus, an overwhelming majority of principals (24, 88.8%) indicated that tutoring was suggested rather than required. Two principals (7.4%) required tutoring to be provided either in the morning or the afternoon, and only one principal (3.7%) required tutoring to be provided both in the morning and the afternoon for absent students. The principals' mean response to item four ($\mu = 1.70$) reflects that principals' policies and procedures were largely reactive regarding the issue of tutoring and make-up time provided by the teacher to assist students in making up missed work.

Item five inquired about the school's policy and procedure regarding notification of parents as to students being absent from school. Principals could select as many responses as were applicable to their school from the five that were provided. The more interventions they selected the more proactive they were ranked. One to two interventions resulted in a very reactive ranking. Three interventions yielded a reactive ranking. Four and five interventions resulted in proactive and very proactive rankings, respectively. The interventions the principals could select were: (1) automated phone call, (2) letter to parent, (3) contact by guidance counselor, (4) contact by a school administrator, and (5) teacher contact.

All 27 principals (100%) reported that they utilized automated phone calls to notify parents of a student’s absence. For this reason, the threshold for being very reactive was set at two interventions. Parents received attendance information by letter from 21 (77.8%) of the schools. Information was provided by a guidance counselor from 16 (59.3%) of the schools when students were absent. School administrators contacted parents concerning student absenteeism in 20 (74.1%) of the schools. Teachers also contacted parents at 23 (85.2%) of the schools that were surveyed. The frequencies related to principals’ the responses regarding notifying parents are displayed in Table 12.

Table 12
Survey Results: Principals’ Responses Regarding Notifying Parents

Contact Method	Principals’ Response	
	Frequency	Percentage
Automated Phone Call	27	100
Letter to Parent	21	77.8
Guidance Counselor	16	59.3
School Administrator	20	74.1
Teacher Contact	23	85.2

Two principals (7.4%) used only one method to contact parents, and two principals (7.4%) used two methods to contact parents. These four principals (14.8%) were ranked as very reactive. Four (14.8%) of the principals used three methods to notify parents of student absenteeism. Six (22.2%) of the principals used four methods to notify students of absenteeism and 13 principals (48.1%) used all five methods to notify parents

of absenteeism. The principals' mean response to item five ($\mu = 4.9630$) reflects that principals' policies and procedures were largely proactive regarding the notification of parents regarding their child's absenteeism.

Each item in the policies and procedures section was designed to collect data in the same sequence. The principals' mean response to item one ($\mu = 3.59$) reflects that the principals policies and procedures were proactive in recording student attendance. The mean response to item two ($\mu = 2.07$) reflects that the principals' policies and procedures to be reactive regarding the parental documentation of student absenteeism. The mean response to item three ($\mu = 2.63$) reflects that the principals' policies and procedures to be slightly proactive regarding students making up work when they are absent. The mean response to item four ($\mu = 1.70$) reflects that the principals' policies and procedures to be reactive regarding tutoring students that have been absent. Finally, the mean response to item five ($\mu = 3.9630$) reflects that the principals' policies and procedures to be proactive regarding the parental notification of student absences.

In items six through nine, principals were also surveyed as to their attitudes/intentions in regard to student absenteeism. The same four point scale used for items one through four was applied for items six through nine. Responses were awarded points using a four-point scale where 1 = Very Reactive, 2 = Somewhat Reactive, 3 = Somewhat Proactive, and 4 = Very Proactive. The frequencies and percentages related to principals' opinions about attendance issues are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13
Survey Results: Principals' Opinions About Attendance Issues

Items	Range	Principal Responses									
		Very Reactive		Somewhat Reactive		Somewhat Proactive		Very Proactive		Mean Score	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	μ
Item 6	1 – 4	2	7.4	6	22.2	2	7.4	17	63.0	27	3.26
Item 7	1 – 4	14	51.9	1	3.7	4	14.8	8	29.6	27	2.22
Item 8	1 – 4	3	11.1	6	22.2	10	37.0	8	29.6	27	2.85
Item 9	1 – 4	2	7.4	12	44.4	11	40.7	2	7.4	27	2.48

In item six, principals were asked to share their opinions regarding the primary purpose of maintaining student attendance records. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) identify students that are skipping and require intervention by the dean or truant officer, (2) identify students that have exceeded their allowable absence and cannot receive credit for class, (3) identify students that miss class and need to make up missed lessons, (4) identify students for early intervention that are becoming disconnected from school.

Two principals (7.4%) reported themselves as being very reactive by indicating that the purpose for student attendance records was to identify students who were skipping and required intervention by a dean or a truant officer. Six of the principals (22.2%) indicated that they were reactive by indicating that the purpose was to identify students that had exceeded their allowable absences and could not receive credit for class. Two of the principals (7.4%) were proactive, indicating that the purpose was to identify students who missed class and needed to make up missed lessons. The majority of the

principals (17, 63.0%) were categorized as very proactive in that they indicated the purpose of maintaining attendance records was to identify students who were becoming disconnected from school for early intervention. The principals' mean response to item six ($\mu = 3.26$) reflects that overall, principals' opinions were very proactive regarding the primary purpose of maintaining student attendance records.

Item seven queried the principals as to their opinions regarding the best method to reduce the number of students skipping class or school. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as to the initial action that should be taken for students who were identified as missing class for inappropriate reasons as follows: (1) be given an appropriated disposition to deter the behavior, (2) be denied participation in non curricular activities to deter the behavior, (3) be referred to guidance to identify reason, (4) have a parent/teacher conference.

Half of the principals (14, 51.9%) responses were recorded as being very reactive by indicating that they believed students should be given an appropriate disposition to deter them from missing class for inappropriate reasons. Only one of the principals (3.7%) indicated that the best initial way to respond to students who were identified as missing class for inappropriate reasons would be to deny them participation in non curricular activities. This response was recorded as a reactive response. Four of the principals' (14.8%) responses were recorded as proactive by their selection of referring students to the guidance counselor to identify the reason the students that were identified as missing class for inappropriate reasons. Eight of the principals (29.6%) were rated as

very proactive by their selection of having a parent/teacher conference for as an initial action for students identified as missing class for inappropriate reasons. The principals' mean response to item seven ($\mu = 2.22$) reflects that principals' opinions were reactive regarding the best method to reduce the number of students skipping class or school.

Item eight asked principals to share their opinions about resources (time, effort, and financial) that are or could be consumed addressing absenteeism. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) are better utilized addressing other student programs to improve student achievement, (2) do not contribute to student achievement but fulfills the mandates regarding attendance, (3) yield results but at a high expense, (4) are an effective way to reduce long term expenses in education and improve student achievement.

Three principals (11.1%) reported that resources used to address attendance were better utilized addressing other student programs to improve student achievement. This response was recorded as being very reactive. Six of the principals (22.2%) indicated that using resources to address attendance did not contribute to student achievement but fulfilled the mandates regarding attendance. Their responses were recorded as being reactive. The largest number of principals (10, 37.0%) responded that addressing absenteeism yielded results but at a high expense. This was recorded as a proactive opinion. There were eight principals (29.6%) who were of the opinion that resources utilized to address attendance was an effective way to reduce long term expenses in education and improve student achievement. This was recorded as a very proactive

response. The principals' mean response to item eight ($\mu = 2.85$) reflects that principals' opinions were proactive regarding the resources (time, effort, and financial) that are or could be consumed addressing absenteeism.

Item nine sought principals' opinions regarding students' grades being adjusted by the instructor as a result of the students' absenteeism. Principals were asked if teachers who had students with semester averages that were bordering on a higher letter grade should consider the students' absenteeism. Principals could select from responses that were ordered from very reactive to very proactive as follows: (1) show no leniency to students with attendance issues, (2) not take attendance into consideration, (3) consider the students attendance only if the absences were for valid reasons, (4) consider student attendance as a mitigating cause to give the student a higher grade.

Two principals (7.4%) reported that teachers should show no leniency to students with attendance issues. This response was recorded as being very reactive. Half of the principals (12, 44.4%) indicated that teachers should not take attendance into consideration. These responses were recorded as reactive. There were 11 principals (40.7%) who recorded an opinion that student attendance should be considered only if the absences were for a valid reason. This response was recorded as a proactive response. Two of the principals (7.4%) were very proactive indicating that teachers should consider student attendance as a mitigating cause to give the student a higher grade. The principals' mean response to item nine ($\mu = 2.48$) reflects that principals' opinions were

split between being reactive and proactive regarding students' grades being adjusted by the instructor as a result of the students' absenteeism.

Each item in the opinions section was designed to collect data in the same sequence as was utilized in the policies and procedures section. The principals' mean response to item six ($\mu = 3.26$) reflects that the principals' opinions were proactive regarding the purpose of maintaining student attendance records. The mean response to item seven ($\mu = 2.22$) reflects that the principals' opinions to be reactive regarding the how to address students that have missed school or class for an inappropriate reason. The mean response to item eight ($\mu = 2.85$) reflects that the principals' opinion to be slightly proactive regarding the resources used to address student attendance. Finally, the mean response to item nine ($\mu = 2.48$) reflects that the principals' opinion to be split proactive to reactive regarding the affects attendance should have on students grades.

Data were analyzed to determine the maximums, minimums, means, and standard deviations for the (a) sample schools' percentage of average daily attendance, (b) principals' opinion scores, and (c) policies and procedures scores. The principal's opinion scores could range from 4 to 16. The policies and procedures scores could range from 4 to 21. Table 14 presents the descriptive statistics for these tested variables.

Table 14
Descriptive Statistics for Variables of Interest

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Percentage of average daily Attendance	91.7	96.8	94.467	1.4686
Policy and procedure score	7.00	17.00	13.9630	2.24433
Principals' opinion score	6.00	15.00	10.8148	2.64629

Research Question 1

To what extent is there a relationship between the application of attendance policies and procedures at the school level and the school's percentage of average daily attendance?

The null hypothesis was that there is no relationship between the principals' attendance policies and procedures and the sample high schools' percentage of average daily attendance.

$$H_0: \rho_{xy} = 0$$

The alternative hypothesis was that there is a relationship between the principals' attendance policies and procedures and the high schools' percentage of average daily attendance.

$$H_0: \rho_{xy} \neq 0$$

A significance level (alpha level) of $\alpha = .05$ was selected for the analysis. The relationship between the school's policy and procedures and the previous school year's percentage of average daily attendance is plotted in Figure 2.

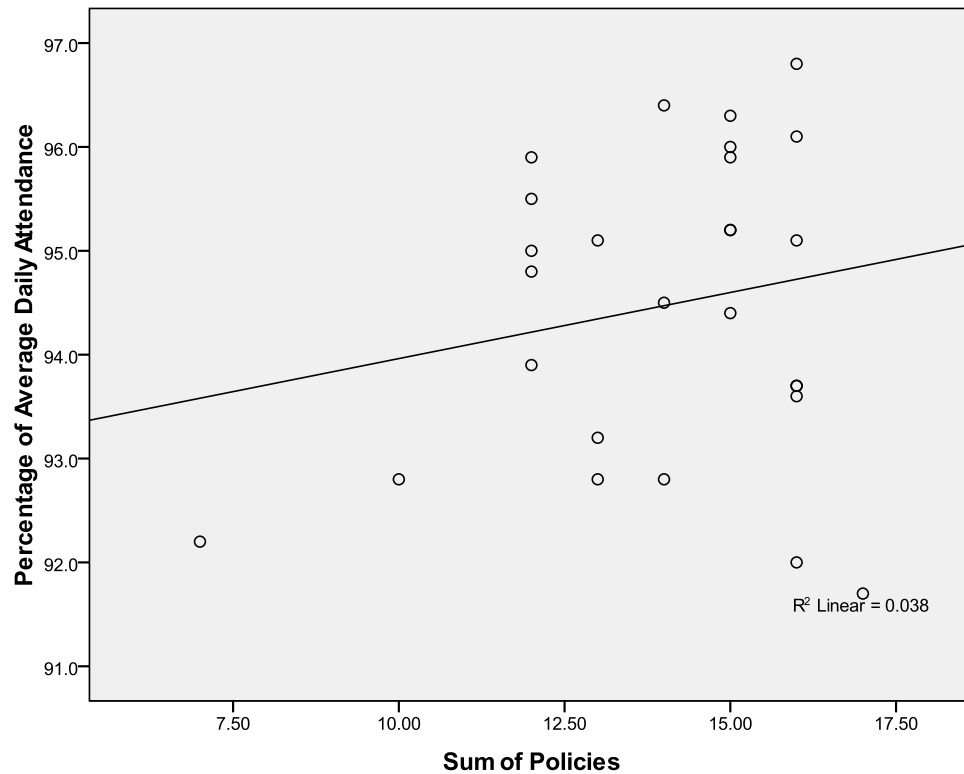


Figure 2. Percentage of Average Daily Attendance by Policies and Procedures

Figure 2 indicates that there may be a linear relationship between the policies and procedures the school implements and the previous year’s percentage of average daily attendance. The figure indicates that principals who had a lower percentage of average daily attendance tended to implement more reactive policies and procedures compared to those who had a higher percentage of average daily attendance. Because the points are loosely scattered around the line of best fit in Figure 1, however, a strong relationship

was not indicated. According to Cohen (1988), $r^2 = 0.038$ would be interpreted as a small effect. Because the review of the scatter plot suggested that a linear relationship between the variables was feasible, correlation analysis was performed.

The correlation between the schools' policy and procedures and the previous school year's percentage of average daily attendance is displayed in Table 15.

Table 15
Pearson Correlation: Policies and Procedures and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance

Policies and Procedures	Percentage of Average Daily Attendance
Pearson correlation	.194
Significance (2-tailed)	.331

* $p < .05$

The results of the Pearson correlation ($r_{xy} = .194$), according to Cohen (1988), were small and indicated that there was not a significant relationship ($p = .331$) between the principals' attendance policies and procedures and the high schools average daily attendance rate. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was no evidence that the type of policies and procedures the sample high schools implemented were related to the percentages of average daily attendance of the schools.

Research Question 2

To what extent is there a relationship between the emphasis (proactive or reactive) the school leader places on attendance and the percentage of average daily attendance of the school?

The null hypothesis was that there is no relationship between the principals' emphasis of attendance and the high schools' percentage of average daily attendance.

$$H_0: \rho_{xy} = 0$$

The alternative hypothesis was that there is a relationship between the principals' emphasis of attendance and the high schools' percentage of average daily attendance.

$$H_0: \rho_{xy} \neq 0$$

The significance (alpha) level selected was: $\alpha = .05$. The relationship between the principals' perspective and the previous school year's percentage of average daily attendance is displayed in Figure 3.

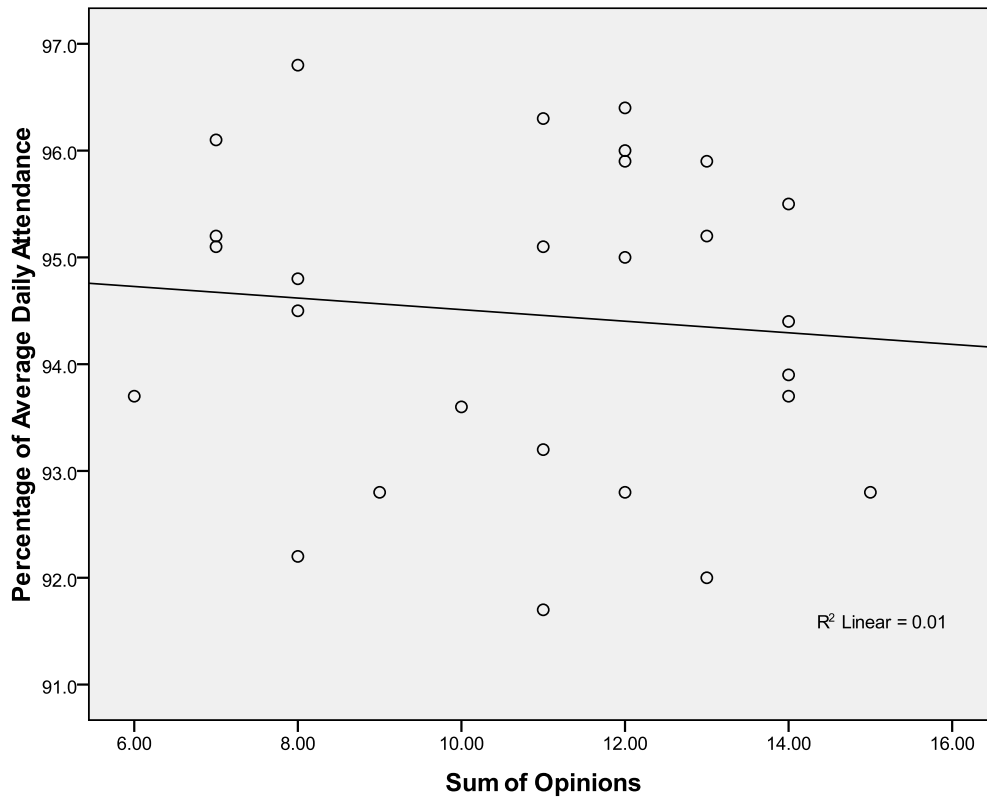


Figure 3. Percentage of Average Daily Attendance and Principals' Emphasis on Attendance

Figure 3 indicates that there may be a linear relationship between principals' emphasis on attendance and the previous year's percentage of average daily attendance. This indicates that principals who had schools with a lower percentage of average daily attendance tended to have a more proactive perspective regarding attendance as compared to principals who had a higher percentage of average daily attendance. Because the points are loosely scattered around the line of best fit, there was not a strong

relationship. According to Cohen (1988), $r^2 = 0.01$ would be interpreted as a small effect. A review of the scatter plot of the variables suggested that a linear relationship between the variables was feasible. Thus, the researcher performed a correlation analysis.

The relationship between the principals' emphasis on attendance and the previous school year's percentage of average daily attendance is displayed in Table 16. The results of the Pearson correlation ($r_{xy} = -.098$) were small and indicated that there was not a significant relationship ($p = .628$) between the principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the high schools' percentage of average daily attendance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was no evidence that the principals' emphasis on attendance issues was related to the percentage of average daily attendance of the school.

Table 16
Pearson Correlation: Principals' Emphasis on Attendance Issues and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance

Emphasis on Attendance	Percentage of Average Daily Attendance
Pearson correlation	-.098
Significance (2-tailed)	.628

* $p < .05$

Ancillary Analysis

Though there was no significant relationship between the percentage of average daily attendance and the principals' emphasis on attendance issue or the schools' policies and procedures, a further analysis was performed to investigate the extent to which principals' emphasis on attendance was aligned with their actions in applying policies

and procedures. This was accomplished by creating a scatter plot and using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to test for any relationship between principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the policies and procedures they implemented. Figure 4 displays the relationship between the principals' emphasis and their implementation of policies and procedures. Table 17 provides the results of the Pearson correlation analysis. The results showed almost no relationship ($r = .025$, $p = .903$) between the principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the policies and procedures that were implemented at the sampled high schools.

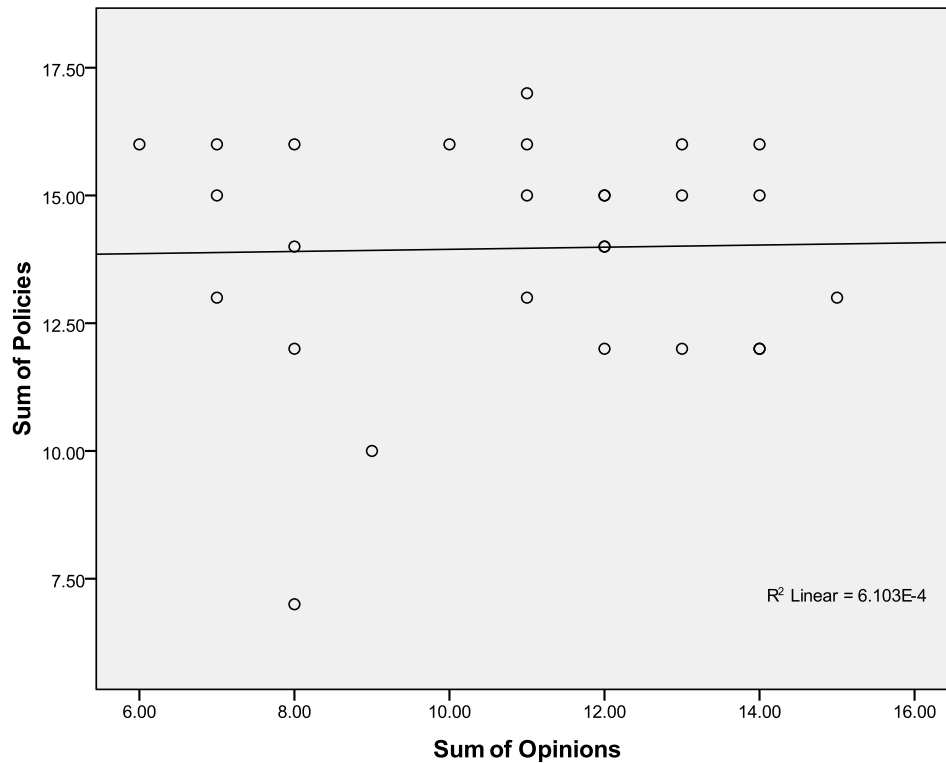


Figure 4. Principals' Emphasis on Attendance Issues and Policies and Procedures

Table 17

Pearson Correlation: Principals' Emphasis on Attendance Issues and Policies and Procedures

Emphasis on Attendance	Policies and Procedures
Pearson correlation	.025
Significance. (2-tailed)	.903

*p = < .05

One final analysis was performed. The combined totals of principals' emphasis on attendance issues responses and policies and procedures responses were plotted along with percentage of average daily attendance to determine if there was any relationship between the two. A Pearson correlation was also performed. The results of these analyses are shown in Figure 5 and Table 18.

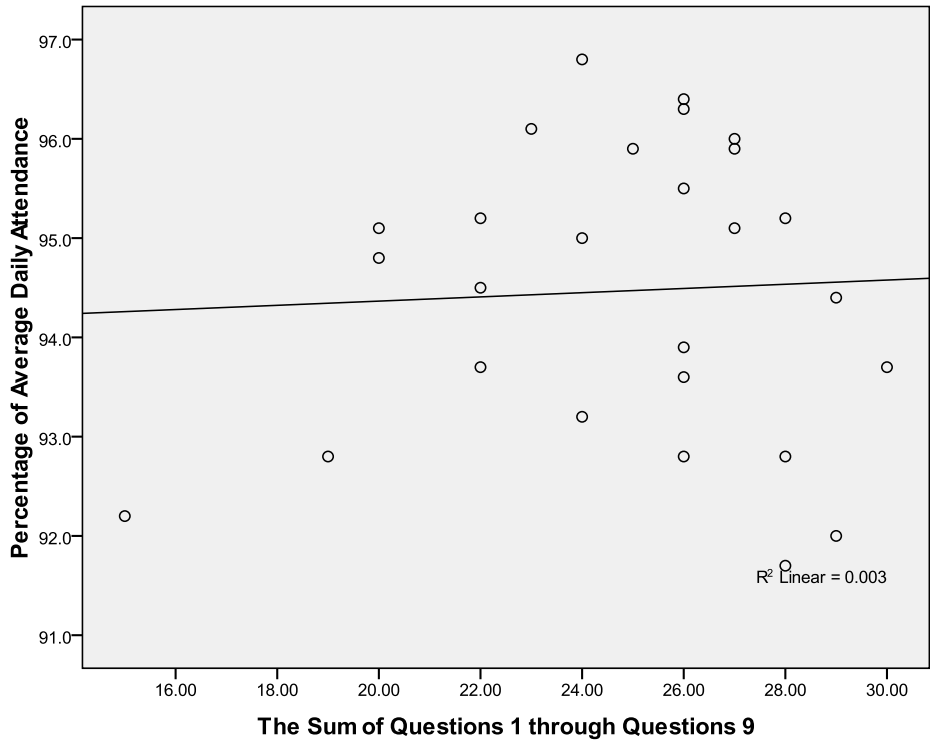


Figure 5. Total Principal Survey Responses and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance

Table 18

Pearson Correlation: Total Principal Survey Responses and Percentage of Average Daily Attendance

Total Survey Responses	Percentage of Average Daily Attendance
Pearson correlation	.051
Significance (2-tailed)	.802

*p = < .0

The results showed almost no relationship ($r = .051$, $p = .802$) between the combined totals of principals' emphasis on attendance issues and implemented policies

and procedures responses and the schools' percentage of average daily attendance for the 27 high schools in the study.

Summary

The survey designed for the study was intended to determine the relationship between the average daily attendance of high schools in six Florida public school districts and (a) student absenteeism policies and procedures the high schools implemented and (b) the emphasis principals placed on attendance issues. It was determined using the Z-test, that the sample population was similar to the population of all of the high schools in Florida. It was also determined that no statistical relationship existed between the percentage of average daily attendance of the high schools and (a) the principals' emphasis on attendance issues and (b) the high schools policies and procedures. In addition, it was determined that there was somewhat of an inverse relationship between the principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the policies and procedures they implemented in that they were often in direct opposition to one another.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter has been developed to present a summary and discussion of the findings of the study. It is organized around the two research questions. Also offered are implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between student attendance as measured by the percentage of average daily attendance of the school and the principals' emphasis on attendance issues and school policies and procedures. This non-experimental correlation study involved one independent variable (percentage of average daily attendance) and two dependent variables (principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the implemented policies and procedures).

Summary of the Findings

Student absenteeism has been documented as a major concern of principals for over 50 years. Much of the historical research focused on influences on students over which the principal had very little control, e.g., student demographics, family characteristics and the student personal or psychological factors. In recent years, researchers have begun analyzing school climate from student and teacher perspectives

including its effect on students' attendance. Researchers (Allensworth & Eaton, 2005; Balfanz, Herzog & Mac Iver, 2007; Corville-Smith, Rayan, Adams & Dalicandro, 1998; deJung & Duckworth, 1986; Levanto, 1975; Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson & Kirk, 2003; Reid, 1999; Thomason & Standard, 1975) have reported on these effects and interviewed principals to identify specific policy and procedure information. School climate is the one aspect that influences a student attendance patterns and can be modified by the principal. This study was conducted to further examine the extent to which principals in the study emphasized attendance issues and whether their school policies and procedures reflected their beliefs.

Research Question 1

To what extent is there a relationship between the application of attendance policies and procedures at the school level and the school's percentage of average daily attendance?

The null hypothesis was not rejected because there was no statistical evidence ($p = .331$) that the type of policies and procedures the high school principal implemented was related to the percentage of average daily attendance of the school. The Pearson correlation results did indicate that there was a small relationship ($r_{xy} = .194$) between the principals' attendance policies and procedures and the high schools average daily attendance rate (Cohen, 1988). When reviewing the scatter plot of the percentage of average daily attendance as it related to policies and procedures, a trend could be observed toward the use of more reactive policies in response to lower average daily attendance. One explanation for this may be that principals of schools with a higher

percentage of average daily attendance may have been less pressured to address attendance issues and the policies and procedures in their schools. Their responses may, therefore, have reflected a lower need to react to student attendance. This posture, then, resulted in the trend for principals at schools with higher average daily attendance to utilize more lenient and proactive policies and procedures.

In contrast, principals of schools with a lower percentage of average daily attendance may have experienced a greater pressure to address attendance issues and have considered attendance to be a high priority. Their actions, however, as evidenced in their reports of policies and procedures, gravitated toward being more reactive. They utilized more reactive responses towards absenteeism to deter poor attendance.

Research Question 2

To what extent is there a relationship between the emphasis (proactive or reactive) the school leader places on attendance and the percentage of average daily attendance of the school?

The null hypothesis was not rejected because there was no statistical evidence ($p = .628$) that the high school principals' emphasis on attendance issues was related to the percentage of average daily attendance of the school. The Pearson correlation results indicated that there was a small relationship ($r_{xy} = -.098$) between the principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the high schools' percentage of average daily attendance (Cohen, 1988). There was a trend towards principals being more proactive in emphasizing attendance issues in response to lower average daily attendance.

In explanation of this trend, principals of schools with a higher percentage of average daily attendance may have felt less pressure to address attendance issues and as such did not consider attendance to be a high priority. Their lack of emphasis as evidenced in their survey responses may indicate their opinions that attendance is an issue that maintenance of the status quo is a sufficient goal and requires little attention.

Principals of schools with a lower percentage of average daily attendance, on the other hand, may feel a greater pressure to address attendance issues and as such consider attendance to be a high priority. Their emphasis on attendance issues may have reflected their need to be proactive in improving the percentage of average daily attendance. These conflicts in regard to the reactive policies and procedures and the proactive emphasis expressed by principals may also reflect a lack of knowledge regarding student attendance and strategies for dealing with the issues. In regard to both dimensions, the results may be counterproductive. When the opinions of the principals were added to the policies and procedures enacted by principals and the sum total was graphed with the schools' percentage of average daily attendance, the lack of relationship became even more apparent.

Discussion

This researcher sought to identify a possible relationship between principals' perspective on student absenteeism and the actions principals took regarding the policies and procedures that were implemented in their high schools. The population selected to

participate in this research was restricted to regular (not charter) high schools from districts that had between 50,000 and 100,000 students. Six school districts agreed to participate in the research, and 36 high school principals completed the on-line survey.

The sample population, while statistically the same as the population of all Florida high schools from which it was drawn, displayed a narrower range and standard deviation than did the larger population. Though the standard deviation was not zero the variations between the principals' schools were very small and may have made any effects small. As the group becomes more similar on the variables measured, the variance decreases. If a group is sufficiently homogenous on variables of interest for a correlation coefficient, the variance tends toward zero.

The analyses of the principals' application of policies and procedures did not show a statistically significant relationship to the schools' percentage of average daily attendance. The sample did, however, show a small correlation between variables indicating that as the percentage of average daily attendance decreased the policies and procedures implemented were more reactive. In schools that had a lower percentage of average daily attendance the principals' policies and procedures reflected actions taking place after students missed a number of days or by secondary persons such as administrators.

In contrast, as the percentage of average daily attendance increased the policies and procedures were more proactive. In schools that had a higher percentage of average daily attendance, principals' policies and procedures reflected actions taking place closer

to the time of the absence and by a person in closer contact with the student such as the instructor.

Though the findings regarding the actions of principals were not as anticipated in the present research, they reaffirmed much of the prior research indicating that the earlier the intervention the lower would be the chances students would become disconnected from their education. Allensworth and Easton (2007) wrote,

Students' academic preparation for high school is far less important for simply passing courses than is their behavior in high school, particularly their course attendance. *Course passing rates are primarily determined by attendance.* Almost all students who have good attendance finish their freshman year on-track. Schools know almost which students are missing school or class, allowing them to determine why and develop strategies to improve attendance. This means working with student and parents, and it means thinking about attendance policies and instructional practices at the school. (p. 39)

Attendance provides educators the ability to intervene early with students, and utilizing a student's attendance as an early indicator reduces the risk of a student disconnecting from school. The earlier the intervention, the less likely the student will miss additional time from class. In the present study, there was a tendency to use more reactive policies to deter student absenteeism.

The analysis showed that principals' emphasis on attendance issues was not significantly related statistically to the schools' percentage of average daily attendance. The sample did however show a small correlation between the variables. As the percentage of average daily attendance increased, the emphasis principals placed on attendance issues was more reactive. Principals of schools with higher percentages of average daily attendance had lower total scores in regard to the emphasis they placed on

attendance (items 6 through 9 of the survey) than did principals from schools with lower percentages of average daily attendance. This response may indicate that principals of schools with a higher percentage of average daily attendance placed a low priority on the issue because they believed they needed to simply maintain the status quo and expend their resources on other issues.

As the percentage of average daily attendance decreased, principals' emphasis on attendance became more proactive. Principals of schools with lower percentages of average daily attendance expressed opinions that reflected the need to improve attendance and were more willing to expend their resources addressing attendance issues.

The ancillary analysis reflected the conflict that occurred between schools with higher and lower percentages of average daily attendance. In this study, the schools that had a higher percentage of average daily attendance had principals who were not interested in expending their resources to decrease absenteeism. Those students who could be identified as disconnecting from school would be assumed to be a low priority for these principals. These principals would be expected to believe that their resources were better used addressing other issues. The schools that had a lower percentage of average daily attendance, however, had principals who indicated they were willing to utilize their resources to improve attendance. Still, they appeared, as reflected in policies and procedures, to be more inclined to use those resources to deter absenteeism than to be proactive in identifying students early before they disconnected from school. The conflict was particularly apparent when opinions (emphasis on attendance issues) were correlated

with actions (implementation of policies and procedures). The correlation was almost zero ($r = .025$). The correlation of the sum of the principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the implementation of the schools' policies and procedures when correlated to the percentage of average daily attendance also approached zero ($r = .051$).

The correlations were small in the analysis of the two research questions. The correlations did not support each other. In essence, the summed scores negated both of the effects. This may reflect inconsistencies in the understanding of school leaders as to the value of attendance as an early indicator of future problems. The earlier student absence is acknowledged and addressed, the less likely students will be to disconnect from their education and the fewer resources will be required to deal with the consequences of the absence.

This study focused on student absenteeism from the principal's perspective. The results of the data analysis showed that statistically there was no relationship between principals' emphasis on attendance issues and the schools' percentage of average daily attendance. This may partially explain the documented lack of progress in addressing student absenteeism. Much of the earlier research was conducted in urban populations that were documented as having high drop-out rates and poor attendance rates. This study focused the research on a population that did not suffer from the issues that were common in much of the previous research. The results were that, unlike school districts that are aggressively pursuing solutions, the sample used in this research placed a lower value on pursuing methods for addressing students that had poor attendance and may be

showing signs of disengagement. Principals tended to be very reactive in combating poor attendance or reactive in their opinion if they viewed attendance as not being an issue at their school. In either situation the principals failed to use student absenteeism as an early indicator of students' are becoming disconnected from their education.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Student absenteeism has been documented as a major concern of education leaders for over 50 years. The causes for students' absenteeism that are beyond the control of the principal have been well researched and documented. Recently, there has been increased research regarding the actions within the school that cause student absenteeism. Despite the long history of searching for solutions, there has been very little change regarding student attendance (Allensworth & Easton, 2005, 2007; Balfanz et. al., 2009; Davies & Lee, 2006; Henry, 2007; Jerald, 2006; Malcolm et. al., 2003; Reid, 2008)

Much of the emphasis placed on improving attendance has been examined at the school level. This study, though focused on student absenteeism from the principal's perspective, was also approached in regard to actions within the school's control. It may well be, that districts need to take a stronger leadership role with respect to attendance.

Recent changes in schools accountability have increased the emphasis on reducing student drop out rates. These changes in accountability have been endorsed by the President of the United States with the goal of making the country globally more competitive as we progress into this new century. Principals can no longer utilize policies

that are designed to deter students from being absent. Instead the need for early identification of students that are beginning to disconnect from school is needed. Research from Allensworth and Easton (2005) has demonstrated that student attendance provides one of the best tools available for early indication that a student may be disconnecting from school. The earlier an intervention is provided to students that are beginning to disconnect from school the greater the chances of reversing the trend. Principals that value students' attendance as an indicator of students potentially becoming disconnected from school are more likely to utilize proactive responses to intervene. This new perspective and use of student attendance requires a paradigm shift in how administrators and teachers view students that are missing school. Reactive response after a student has been absent to deter the student from future absences does not identify the students that are becoming disconnected from education and instead may reinforce the problem. A proactive response when a student has been absent may serve to identify the underlying cause from which assistance or intervention can be provided.

The instrument used in this research was an attempt to determine a school principal's perspective on attendance. The instrument asked their opinions on student attendance and measured the actions the school took in response to student attendance. The adage "actions speak louder than words" was then tested as their responses were correlated to the schools average daily attendance. While the tool may have lacked the sensitivity to generate statistically significant results, it did show trends that indicate most

principals fail to recognize or use attendance as an early indicator of students disconnecting from school.

School districts that wish to address the issue of students disconnecting from school and increase student achievement may want to look at their policies regarding student attendance and begin utilizing the information that is provide to identify students that are at risk of disconnecting from school.

Initially, there may be a need to provide more education for principals on this topic. As a first step, it may be important for district leaders to reinforce with principals, using structured staff development, the potential for both short- and long-term negative effects on individual students. This would involve devoting substantive attention to the potential for students dropping out of school, the likely negative employment consequences for these students, and ultimately the impact of large groups of unemployed or under-employed workers in the United States workforce. This could help influence the mindset of principals and prepare them to take more proactive steps in regard to attendance in their schools.

Districts may also need to re-examine their attendance policies to determine how proactive the district policies are. If policies are sufficiently flexible to permit continual reactive rather than proactive behavior at the school level, the district may wish to strengthen policies to require more proactive policies be implemented.

Providing more information to principals could contribute initially to improving principals' desire to be proactive in regard to attendance. District officials should

examine carefully the support they provide that will result in proactive policies in the schools. It would seem appropriate that district level and building level policies would be examined by district and building leaders with a goal of establishing policies that not only support building leaders but also support individual teachers and encourage them to be proactive in their approach to attendance for every student in the class room.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, recommendations for future research on the issue should include the following.

1. Conduct a longitudinal study to measure changes in student absenteeism that result from the policies and procedures implemented in high schools. The study should include the percentage of average daily attendance of the school from both the previous school year and the end of the current school year.
2. Conduct a study that would aspire to better inform a school district's principals of the importance of attendance as an indicator of potential success/failure. The study could include a second school district as a control group and compare results. Both school districts would need to have all the principals participate to yield the best results.
3. Replicate the present study to include all of the high schools in Florida. With the increased population, the homogeneous effect encountered in this study may be moderated.

4. Replicate the study for all of the middle schools in Florida. Early intervention in the middle schools utilizing attendance as one of the indicators for students at risk may prevent students from disconnecting from their education.
5. Replicate the study for all of the elementary schools in Florida. Early intervention in the elementary schools utilizing attendance as one of the indicators for students at risk may prevent students from disconnecting from their education.
6. Conduct a study of how districts assess their principals as it relates to student attendance rates. Determine if there is a relationship between how an administrator is assessed and the school's average daily attendance rates.

APPENDIX A
ATTENDANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES SURVEY

School Absenteeism Study

Informed Consent

Principal Investigator: Michael Arnett
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William Bozeman
Sponsor: University of Central Florida, Education Leadership

Introduction

Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study which will include about 60 high school principals from Florida public schools.

You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study. Because the researcher is a graduate student he is being guided by Dr. William Bozeman, a UCF faculty supervisor in Education Leadership.

What you should know about a research study

- A research study is something you volunteer for.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You should take part in this study only because you want to.
- You can choose not to take part in the research study.
- You can agree to take part now and later change your mind.
- Whatever you decide it will not be held against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Purpose of the research study

The purpose of this study is to determine what the affects of a high school principal's response towards student attendance issues has upon the schools average daily attendance rate. Student absenteeism has been extensively researched for over fifty years. Researchers have surveyed students, parents, teachers and community stake holders on a variety of issues affecting student attendance. Previous research lacks information from the perspective of the school's principal. This studies purpose is to begin providing missing information concerning student attendance that can be gained from data provided by a school's principal.

What you will be asked to do in the study

The survey consists of ten questions. Five questions are based on your opinions and five question concern policies and procedures of the school you are the principal of. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Confidentiality

We will limit your personal data collected in this study to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of UCF.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you talk to Michael Arnett, Graduate Student, Education Leadership, College of Education, (321) 264-2067 or by e-mail at Arnett.michael@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. William Bozeman, Department Chairman, Education Leadership, College of Education at (407) 823-1471 or by email at Bozeman@mail.ucf.edu

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint

Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901. You may also talk to them for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Withdrawing from the study

If you decide to leave the study, contact the investigator by e-mail at Arnett.michael@knights.ucf.edu so that the investigator can delete the information you provided by your survey.

Acceptance of the Informed Consent

By checking the “I understand and accept” box you are indicating that you understand and accept the Informed Consent Agreement and you wish to continue with the survey. Include your first and last name and the Unique ID that was provided with your invitation to participate in this survey.

I understand and accept

What is your name (First Last)?

What is the Unique ID number that was provided to you in your invitation?

Section I--Background Information

Please read and then answer the following demographic questions concerning yourself and your experience as an administrator. The information provided will only be used for statistical analysis and will be maintained in the strictest confidentiality.

What is your age (Years)?

What is your sex?

1. Male
2. Female

What is the highest level of education you have?

1. Bachelor's Degree
2. Master's Degree
3. Doctorate

How many years have you been the principal at this school?

How many years have you been an administrator altogether?

Section II--Schools Policy and Procedure

Please read the following statements regarding student absenteeism at the school you are an administrator of and select the answer that best describes your school.

Identifying if a student is absent from class or participating in an approved on campus activity (guidance department, school assembly, etc.) is the responsibility of

1. The student
2. An administrator
3. The attendance clerk
4. The teacher

Failure to provide appropriate documentation within a prescribed period of time after a student is absent initially results in

1. Referral to an administrator
2. Only a recording of no documentation provide in students attendance record
3. Conference with a guidance counselor
4. Parent contact by the teacher

Students are allowed to make up class assignments and test within a prescribed period of time

1. For absences that are excused
2. For absences that are considered acceptable
3. For absences that have appropriate documentation
4. For any absences

Tutoring and make up time provided by the teacher

1. Is suggested either before or after school
2. Is suggested both before and after school
3. Is required either before or after school
4. Is required both before and after school

Parents receive attendance information by the following methods (choose all that apply):

1. Automate phone call
2. Letter to parent
3. Contact by guidance counselor
4. Contact by school administrator
5. Teacher contact

Section III--Principals opinions

Please read the following statements regarding student absenteeism and select the answer that best describes your opinion.

The primary purpose of maintaining student attendance records is to

1. Identify students that are skipping and require intervention by the dean or truant officer
2. Identify students that have exceeded their allowable absence and cannot receive credit for class
3. Identify students that miss class and need to make up missed lessons
4. Identify students for early intervention that are becoming disconnected from school

In order to reduce the number of students skipping class or school, students that are identified as missing class for inappropriate reasons should initially

1. Be given an appropriated disposition to deter the behavior
2. Be denied participation in non curricular activities to deter the behavior
3. Be referred to guidance to identify reason
4. Have a parent / teacher conference

The resources (time, effort, and financial) that are or could be consumed addressing absenteeism

1. Are better utilized addressing other student programs to improve student achievement
2. Does not contribute to student achievement but fulfills the mandates regarding attendance
3. Yields results but at a high expense
4. Is an effective way to reduce long term expenses in education and improve student achievement

Teachers that have students with semester averages that are bordering on a higher letter grade should

1. Show no leniency to students with attendance issues.
2. Not take attendance into consideration
3. Consider the students attendance only if the absences were for valid reasons
4. Consider student attendance as a mitigating cause to give the student a higher grade

How would you compare the number of absences in your school for this school year (2009--2010) to the number in the previous school year (2008--2009)?

1. More than before
2. Less than before
3. About the same
4. New here; I don't know

Section 4--Principal Comments

This section is for you to write comments about your own experiences and ideas about reducing student absenteeism, class cutting and tardiness.

The information provided will be kept in the strictest of confidence. This information may provide additional information on effective best practices that are used in schools to improve or maintain student attendance

APPENDIX B
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA'S INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**
To: **Michael Arnett**
Date: **November 12, 2009**

Dear Researcher:

On 11/12/2009, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: ATTENDANCE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AND THEIR
INFLUENCE ON SECONDARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
RATES
Investigator: Michael Arnett
IRB Number: SBE-09-06520
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 11/12/2009 11:52:19 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX C
SCHOOL DISTRICTS' PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

School Board of Brevard County
2700 Judge Fran Jamieson Way Viera, FL 32940-6699
Dr. Brian Binggeli, Superintendent



December 4, 2009

Dear Mr. Arnett,

Thank you for your application to conduct research in the Brevard Public Schools. This letter is official verification that your application has been accepted and approved through the Office of Accountability, Testing, & Evaluation. However, approval from this office does not obligate the principal of the schools you have selected to participate in the proposed research. Please contact the principals of the impacted schools in order to obtain their approval. Upon the completion of your research, submit your findings to our office. If we can be of further assistance, do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Mijuskovic

Sylvia Mijuskovic, Resource Teacher
Office of Accountability, Testing, and Evaluation

Office of Accountability, Testing & Evaluation
Phone: (321) 633-1000 FAX: (321) 633-3465

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY

Page 1 of 1

Michael Arnett

From: Itzen, Richard [RichardJI@LeeSchools.Net]

Sent: Friday, January 15, 2010 2:40 PM

To: michaelarnett1@bellsouth.net

Subject: RE: School Absenteeism Study

Michael,

Our District Research Committee has reviewed your proposed study, " Attendance Policies and Procedures and Their Influence on Secondary School Attendance Rates", and approved your proceeding to contact folks in our school system.

We would request that it be made clear to folks that their participation is voluntary.

Also, we would like a copy of your write-up of results when your study is completed.

Thank you for your interest in conducting research in the School District of Lee County.

Richard Itzen, Director
Dept. of Accountability, Research, and Continuous Improvement
(239) 335-1448

1/18/2010



District School Board of Pasco County

7227 Land O' Lakes Boulevard • Land O' Lakes, Florida 34638 • 813/794-2000

Heather Fiorentino, Superintendent

www.pasco.k12.fl.us

Research and Evaluation Services
Peggy Jones, Ph.D., Director
813/ 794-2338 Fax: 813/ 794-2116
727/ 774-2338 TDD: 813/ 794-2484
352/ 524-2338 pejones@pasco.k12.fl.us

December 9, 2009

Mr. Michael Arnett
3925 Eagle Point Way
Mims, Florida 32754

Dear Mr. Arnett:

Attached you will find an approval to conduct your Research Project in Pasco County Schools entitled *Attendance Policies and Procedures and Their Influence On Secondary School Attendance Rates*. If possible, please add social worker as additional source for parent to get attendance information. The purpose of this research project is to explore the relationships between the secondary school principal's application of attendance policies and procedures and the school's average daily attendance rate and to investigate the extent to which the school staff's behaviors are proactive or reactive in addressing attendance issues.

We are always interested in the outcome of research conducted in our school system. When your study is complete, please forward a brief summary of your findings to the Research and Evaluation Department.

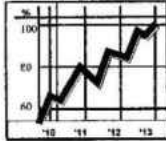
Best of luck as you pursue the subject of your research.

Sincerely,

Peggy Jones, Ph.D.
Director

/jg
Attachments

xc: Selected Principals



ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION

SCHOOL BOARD OF POLK COUNTY
 1915 SOUTH FLORAL AVENUE
 BARTOW, FLORIDA 33830
 PHONE (863) 534-0688
 FAX (863) 534-0770



Wilma Ferrer
 Senior Director
 (863) 534-0691
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Candy Amato
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 Senior Coordinator
 (863) 534-0690
 51490

Yakup Bilgili, Ph.D.
 Research & Evaluation
 Senior Coordinator
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 51534

Donna Buckner
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 Senior Coordinator
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 51515

Rob Campbell
 Testing & Data Analysis
 Senior Coordinator
 (863) 647-4895
 68246

Eileen Schofield
 Administrative
 Secretary
 (863) 534-0688
 51488

"The Mission of Polk County Public Schools is to ensure rigorous, relevant learning experiences for our students that result in high achievement."

February 18, 2010

Michael Arnett
 3925 Eagle Point Way
 Mims, FL 32754

Topic: High School Attendance Rate

The Polk County Public Schools Research Review Board has **approved** your "Attendance Policies and Procedures and their Influence on Secondary School Attendance Rates" research proposal for the period of February 18, 2010 to July 1, 2010. Approval is contingent on:

- Notifying the school district of any major changes to the protocols or project.
- Providing a copy of your final and any supplemental reports to the district.

Please submit copies of your final reports to my attention at the Office of Research and Evaluation upon dissemination of the report.

If you have any questions, or if I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Yakup Bilgili, Ph.D.
 Chair, Research Review Board
 Polk County Public Schools
 P: 863-534-0736 (51534) F: 863-534-0770



SEMINOLE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BILL VOGEL, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Educational Support Center
400 E. Lake Mary Boulevard
Sanford, Florida 32773-7127

RONALD L. PINNELL, Ed.D.
*Executive Director of
Secondary Education*

WALT GRIFFIN
*Executive Director of
Secondary Education*

Telephone: (407) 320-0039
Facsimile: (407) 320-0293
Suncom: 351-0038

Visit Our Web Site
www.scps.k12.fl.us

December 2, 2009

Mr. Michael Arnett
3925 Eagle Point Way
Mims, FL 32754

Dear Mr. Arnett:

I am in receipt of the proposal and supplemental information that you submitted for permission to conduct research in the Seminole County Public Schools. After review of these documents, it has been determined that you are granted permission to conduct the study described in these documents under the conditions described herein with modification of the means in which you are planning on contacting the principals. This will need to be done by US mail or phone. The district does not allow researchers the use of the SCPS email or courier mail to disseminate research requests.

Each high school principal has the authority to decide if he/she wishes to participate in your study. Therefore your first order of business is to contact the principals that you wish to involve in your research to explain your project and seek their participation approval.

A school address list is attached with the principals' names. The high schools are highlighted for your use.

Please forward a summary of your project to my office upon completion.
Good Luck!

Sincerely,

Ronald L. Pinnell, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Secondary Education

RP/jr



Dr. Margaret A. Smith
Superintendent of Schools

P.O. Box 2118
DeLand, Florida 32721-2118

200 North Clara Avenue
DeLand, Florida 32720

DeLand
(386) 734-7190

Daytona Beach
(386) 255-6475

New Smyrna Beach
(386) 427-5223

Osteen
(386) 860-3322

School Board of Volusia County

Mrs. Diane Smith, Chairman
Ms. Candace Lankford, Vice-Chairman
Ms. Judy Conte
Mr. Stan Schmidt
Dr. Al Williams

December 3, 2009

Mr. Michael Arnett
3925 Eagle Point Way
Mims, FL 32754

Dear Mr. Arnett:

I have received your request to conduct research within Volusia County Schools. I have approved your request to conduct research on the topic of "Attendance Policies and Procedures and their Influence on Secondary School Attendance Rates." As with all requests to do research; participation is at the sole discretion of the principals, teachers and parents of all students involved. Parent Consent Forms will be necessary for all data gathered from the students of Volusia County Schools.

By copy of this letter, you may contact the school principals who allow this research to be conducted with their faculty and students. We request that you conduct your survey with as little disruption to the instruction day as possible.

I would appreciate receiving a copy of your project at the completion of your study.

Sincerely,

Chris J. Colwell, Deputy Superintendent
Instructional Services

CJC/mh

An Equal Opportunity Employer

APPENDIX D
COMMUNICATION WITH PRINCIPALS



SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY

February 24, 2010
3925 Eagle Point Way
Mims, Florida 32754
(321) 543-2067
michaelarnett1@bellsouth.net

««AddressBlock»»

««GreetingLine»»

In January 2010 I conducted an on-line survey of school principals regarding their views on the subject of student attendance. In an attempt to improve the validity of the results of the research I am asking for you to reconsider submitting a response to the on-line survey. «SCHOOL_NAME» is a significant part of the study being conducted for my research dissertation which looks at student attendance and programs to improve attendance. This research survey has been authorized by the public school district of «DISTRICT_NAME» County.

You will receive another series of e-mails from me in the beginning March 1, 2010 with a link to complete the online survey. Please click on the link and fill out the survey; it should take you no longer than 20 minutes. The survey will request your name and unique identifier. Your Unique Identifier is «UNIQUE ID». This information is for the purpose of identifying respondents to reduce unnecessary follow up reminders. No one in your school or district will see your answers. The last page of the survey is for you to share your own experience and ideas in managing absenteeism. Please respond before March 31, 2010.

All information collected on this survey will be held in strictest confidence. The use any identifier is for our data management needs. No report, oral or written, of the project results will identify individual administrators or schools.

Thank you.

Michael Arnett

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY

March 1, 2010

Dear «Title» «First_Name» «Last_Name»,

«SCHOOL_NAME» is part of a study being conducted for a research dissertation to look at student attendance and procedures to improve attendance. As a part of the study I am asking all principals in a number of Florida high schools to complete an online survey. I hope that the results from the study will provide some solutions to some of the problems of student attendance and the way schools deal with these problems in the future.

The survey will begin with an informed consent section. After reviewing the informed consent section you will be asked for your name and a unique identifying number. *Your unique identifying number is «UNIQUE_ID»*. Providing this information constitutes your consent to participate in this research. The information you provide will remain confidential and will not be available in any format that would enable the participant to be identified.

The last page of the survey is for you to share your own experience and ideas in managing absenteeism.

All information collected on this survey will be held in strictest confidence. The use of any identifier is for my data management needs. No report, oral or written, of the project results will identify individual administrators or schools.

Follow this link [School Absentee Study](#) to the survey; it should take you no longer than 10 minutes to complete the survey.

Thank you.

Michael C. Arnett

Michael Arnett

SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM STUDY

Date

Dear «Title» «First_Name» «Last_Name»,

I recently sent you an invitation to participate in a research study on student attendance in high schools. The survey consists of an informed consent section, five demographic questions about you and ten questions regarding «SCHOOL_NAME». Past respondents took on average less than ten minutes to complete the survey. The information you provide is critical to the results of the research. Only specific schools were selected to participate in the study because of their unique characteristics. Please take a few minutes to complete the study. Click on the link below to begin the survey.

The survey will begin with an informed consent section. After reviewing the informed consent section you will be asked for your name and a unique identifying number. *Your unique identifying number is «UNIQUE_ID».* Providing this information constitutes your consent to participate in this research. The information you provide will remain confidential and will not be available in any format that would enable the participant to be identified.

All information collected on this survey will be held in strictest confidence. The use of any identifier is for our data management needs. No report, oral or written, of the project results will identify individual administrators or schools.

Thank you.

Michael C. Arnett

Michael Arnett

Start School Absentee Study

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