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INCREASING STUDENT ATTENDANCE IN A TITLE I SCHOOL

by

Jennifer Roberts

A Doctoral Project Submitted to,
the College of Education and Human Sciences
and the School of Education
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Chronic absenteeism has been identified as a problem of practice at Lizana Elementary School. Student absenteeism has created issues due to students missing instructional minutes and important social interactions. Additionally, funding has been decreased due to funding being calculated based on daily attendance rates. The purpose of this project is two-fold. First, the project will aim to identify factors that contributed to chronic absenteeism to improve student attendance. Teacher input will then be used to identify incentives and interventions that can be used to decrease student absenteeism rates.

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This project would not have been able to be completed without the support of the administrators at Lizana Elementary. I would like to acknowledge the faculty and staff at the University of Southern Mississippi for providing me with opportunities to collaborate with peers and colleagues in order to develop my craft as an educator. Without the support of my advisors and instructors, I would not have been able to complete this study.

DEDICATION

I would like to show my gratitude for those who played a vital role in the completion of this project. To my family, I could not have worked full time as an educator and pursued my dreams of obtaining a doctoral degree without your support. Thank you for all the times you have cared for my children, prepared meals for my family, and for believing in my abilities. For this, I am eternally grateful. To my husband, thank you for your patience and your ability to encourage me when I have felt defeated. I would also like to acknowledge my friend and colleague, Heather Yenawine. You have not only been my colleague; you have always mentored me unknowingly. Thank you for sharing words of wisdom and your unique perspective.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CSR</i>	Comprehensive School Reform
<i>LEA</i>	Local Education Agency
NCLB	No Child Left Behind

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown that chronic absenteeism is associated with negative student outcomes that included lower achievement scores in reading and math, social isolation, behavioral disorders, and grade retention (Balfanze and Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried, 2010; Hendron and Kearney, 2016; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Morrissey, Hutchinson, & Winsler, 2014; Sugrue, Zuel, & LaLiberte, 2016). Balfanz (2018) reported that students in lower elementary grades who experienced high rates of absenteeism were correlated to lower achievement scores in upper grade levels. According to McConnell and Kubina (2014) chronic absenteeism can lead to high school drop out because absenteeism is a problem that starts in the primary school grades and develops into a more significant issue.

Identified Problem of Practice

Lizana Elementary is a K-6 school located in a rural community in Gulfport, Mississippi. It is part of the Harrison County School District which is the second largest school district in the state of Mississippi. During the 2016-2017 school year, 564 students were enrolled. Out of those students, 75% received free and reduced lunch. At Lizana Elementary, student attendance rates were identified to be an issue for students, teachers, and administrators. The average daily attendance at Lizana is 91%. Although the daily attendance is higher than the state average of 90%, attendance rates were lower than many neighboring schools.

Schools in Mississippi receive funds based on average daily attendance. Because of lower daily attendance rates, the school received a lesser amount of funding. As a result, several areas of the school were impacted. Additionally, when students do not

attend school regularly, they miss instructional minutes as well as opportunities for important social interactions. Consequently, these students have lower achievement scores and more discipline referrals than their peers who attend school regularly.

In order to address chronic absenteeism and improve student attendance, policies and practices must be implemented. Attendance policies and practices were not clearly conveyed to parents or faculty members. Students who missed school frequently were often overlooked due to inconsistent practices and a lack of communication between teachers, administrators, and parents. Although the school utilized some components of Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, incentives for student attendance and achievement were not fully implemented. Students often lacked motivation and incentives which impacted attendance.

Chronic absenteeism was linked to socio economic status. Past studies have identified socio economic status to be correlated to decreased attendance rates (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazan, 2005; McConnel & Kubina, 2014; Morrissey, Hutchinson, & Winsler, 2014). It was noted that students who came from low income families often exhibited higher rates of absences due to chronic illness such as asthma, epilepsy, kidney disease, etc. (Gotfried, 2010). Chang and Romero (2008) and Ready (2010) indicated that students who lived in low income households also experienced a lack of material resources such as books, other printed text materials, and access to technology. Conditions in the home and neighborhood were also identified to be factors that contributed to chronic absenteeism. These factors included unsafe neighborhoods and lack of parental supervision due to the demands of a single-family household (Chang & Romero, 2008; Chen & Weikart, 2008; Gottfried, 2010; Ready, 2010).

Rationale for the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify major factors that influence student attendance. Once the factors have been identified, research will be conducted on how to address absenteeism. Findings from the research study will be used to make recommendations to Lizana Elementary administrators and staff in order to improve student attendance rates. The study will allow educators to become aware of policies and practices that impact attendance, identify and mitigate factors that lead to chronic absenteeism, and implement interventions that can be used to motivate students and celebrate achievement in order to increase daily attendance rates.

CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to conduct an exploratory research project in order to identify factors associated with student absenteeism to develop school-based interventions and school-community partnerships to increase student attendance rates in a school that qualifies for Title I funds. The variables that will be examined in this study include socioeconomic status, school-based interventions, school climate, and student attendance rates. In this chapter, conceptual frameworks, theoretical foundations, and the historical context of individual variables will be examined. The information collected throughout the study will be used to address a problem of practice in Lizana Elementary School.

School and District Overview

Lizana Elementary is a K-6 school located in a rural community in Gulfport, Mississippi. During the 2016-2017 school year, 564 students were enrolled. Lizana Elementary is a part of the Harrison County School District which is the second largest school district in the state of Mississippi. There are twenty-one individual schools within the district, and the district serves approximately 14,100 students.

At Lizana Elementary, student attendance rates were identified to be an issue for students, teachers, and administrators. Chronic absenteeism also impacted school funding (London et al., 2016). In the state of Mississippi, Average Daily Attendance (ADA) must be recorded each day. Funding is provided based on the number of students present on a given day.

Lizana Elementary follows attendance policy guidelines that are set forth by the state of Mississippi and the Harrison County School Board. According to the Harrison

County School District Handbook (2017), the district adheres to the parameters established in the MS Code §37-13-91 (2013). The law distinguished between excused and unexcused absences, and it defined each type of absence. An absence is deemed excused when there is written documentation from a physician, absence resulting from the death of an immediate family member, a school sponsored activity that has obtained approval from the superintendent, attendance of the proceedings of court, or observance of a religious event that the superintendent has granted approval. According to House Bill 1530, any student who missed more than 37% of a school day must be marked absent for the entire school day.

Morrissey, Hutchinson, and Winsler (2013) have identified broad categories that determined the reason that students were chronically absent from school that included forces outside of school, threat avoidance, disengagement, and faculty beliefs. In districts that met the criteria for Title I fund, there were family situations that forced students to be absent that included caring for younger siblings or elderly family members, home instability, or chronic illness. In districts that had negative school climates due to violence and gang related activity, students missed school more frequently in order to avoid dangerous situations (Balfanz, 2016). Students who also experienced negative school environments due to lack of engagement as a result of poor instruction or negative teacher interactions, were absent more often. Lastly, faculty disposition and beliefs played a large part in student attendance rates due to inconsistent beliefs and communication between stakeholders (Balfanz, 2016, Gottfried, 2010, and Morrissey et al, 2013).

The Harrison County School District handbook (2017) stated that a student can miss up to ten days of school with a written note provided by the parent stating the reason the child was absent. A school attendance officer is notified after the fifth unexcused absence, and the officer is notified again at the tenth unexcused absence. Following the twelfth unexcused absence, the attendance officer gains access to educational records, and the parent may be required to submit further documentation. The district handbook also stated that a student who misses twenty or more consecutive days will be withdrawn from the school roster unless there are special circumstances approved by the superintendent of the district. In the event of unexcused and unlawful absences, law enforcement will be called to investigate all cases.

Absenteeism and Student Attendance

According to London, Sanchez, and Castrechini (2016), chronic absenteeism has been identified to be a nationwide issue. Chronic absenteeism occurred when students missed school repeatedly for excused or unexcused reasons. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year (Chang and Romero, 2008; London et al., 2016; Sugrue et al., 2016). Chang and Romero (2008) argued that truancy differed from absenteeism. Truancy was defined as repeated, unexcused absences as compared to chronic absenteeism that included excused and unexcused absences (Chang & Romero, 2008; London et al., 2016). The literature stated that schools contributed to student attendance in early elementary grades, and it stated that schools should provide clear communication regarding attendance policies. Epstein and Sheldon (2007) indicated that communication improved attendance because teachers and administrators are viewed as respected figures within the community. Teachers that communicated with parents

regarding student attendance were positively correlated to increased attendance rates because parents felt that teachers cared about their child. Regular communication also provided an opportunity for teachers to review the attendance policy with the parent and communicate concerns related to chronic absenteeism (Chang & Romero, 2008).

Researchers argued that higher attendance rates were positively correlated with student performance (Balfanz, 2016; Sugrue, Zuel, & LaLiberte, 2016). Students who attended school regularly were provided more exposure to instructional methodologies, content material, and peer interactions (Balfanz, 2016; London et al., 2016; Morrisey et al., 2013; Sugrue et al., 2016). Studies identified positive correlations between higher attendance rates and higher achievement scores (Gottfried, 2010; London et al., 2016; Rendleman, 2017). Lower rates of attendance have been associated with lower test scores due to fewer instructional minutes and negative social interactions due to students feeling alienated from peers (Gottfried, 2009).

According to Chang and Romero (2008) chronic absenteeism had greater impacts on Latino students and students living in poverty. It was also indicated that students who came from low socio-economic households had higher rates of absenteeism (Gottfried, 2010). Wood et al. (2012) suggested that absenteeism can be viewed as a symptom of childhood disorders that included conduct disorder and social phobia. The literature stated that the effects of chronic absenteeism can cause social isolation that resulted in depression and low self-esteem. Studies conducted by Chen and Weikart (2008) and McConnell and Kubina (2014) showed that students who experienced high absenteeism in elementary years were more likely to drop out of high school. High school dropouts

had higher incidences of self-destructive behaviors, criminal violence offences, and higher rates of unemployment.

Chang and Romero (2008) suggested that conditions in the home, school, and neighborhood were predictors of attendance rates. The researchers claimed that school attendance rates indicated whether schools, communities, and families were able to meet the needs of children. The literature indicated that absenteeism is addressed differently throughout districts in the state and the country (Chang and & Romero, 2008; London et al., 2016). Attendance should be monitored closely, schools should appear inviting to families, and school community relationships should be established with other agencies in order to improve student attendance rates (Balfanz, 2016; Chang & Romero, 2008). In poverty-stricken neighborhoods, there are often single-family households that experienced many challenges due to low income, lack of family support, and lack of reliable transportation. According to researchers, school personnel should highlight student strengths and develop partnerships with families and community members (Balfanz, 2016; Bryan & Henry, 2008; Sugrue et al., 2016).

Socioeconomic Status

In an article published by *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, Brito and Nobile (2014) stated, “Socioeconomic status is defined as an individual's access to economic and social resources, as well as the benefits and social standing that come from these resources. It is most often measured by educational attainment, income, or occupation.” (p. 1). Research conducted on social class and academic outcomes indicated that students who came from low socioeconomic (SES) households were less likely to experience school success as compared to peers who came from higher SES households.

The National Center for Children in Poverty (2009) reported that 41% of all children who lived in low income families, and 19% of children live in poor families. Poverty is a term used to compare income levels as compared to the number of individuals within a family. Families that were low income households had an income of \$44,100 for a family of four. The national federal poverty level was identified to be \$23,850 for a family of four. Information regarding income and poverty levels are used to describe home conditions. Families experienced issues as a result of low income and poverty due to several circumstances that included generational poverty, unexpected circumstances, unemployment, or economic recession (Brito & Noble, 2014).

Ruby Payne (2013), claimed that educators must be aware of the challenges that students face due to financial hardships, and they must be able to understand the thinking of individuals who live in generational poverty. The researcher referred to poverty in terms of an individual or family surviving without a lack of resources. In Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty (2003), poverty occurs in all races, and it is relative to the home environment. Although most educational institutions operate from a middle-class mindset, students function based on hidden rules of the social class in which they were raised. According to Payne (2013), there are hidden rules that exist among all social classes as well as in ethnic groups and other groups of people. Hidden rules are about the unspoken understandings that cue members of the group that a given individual does or does not fit. Hidden rules also apply to food, dress, decorum etc. The most important information is nonverbal, and one of the main values of an individual to the group is the ability to entertain. (p. 10). Researchers argued that the concept of hidden

rules of social class is important for educators to understand because it effects relationships with students and their families.

London et al. (2016) and Ready (2010) claimed family disparities and a lack of neighborhood resources negatively impacted students in early elementary grades. Students who entered kindergarten who lived in low SES households often demonstrated social and academic deficits which caused them to perform below grade level peers. Chang and Romero (2008) indicated that attending school regularly in kindergarten was identified to be especially important for Latino students and students living in poverty. Cognitive differences were noted in students in kindergarten and first grade due to the lack of linguistic and cognitive stimulation (Brito & Noble, 2014).

Morrisey et al. (2013) claimed that achievement gaps existed between students who were raised in low income households as compared to peers who were raised in households that families had a greater amount of income. The literature suggested that parents who had higher incomes were able to provide children better access to material resources such as number of books, multimedia learning tools, and access to other learning opportunities (Payne, 2013). Due to scarce resources and parent's work schedule, students encountered multiple obstacles that impeded their ability to arrive on time for school or to attend school regularly. Income also impacted residential mobility and was linked to decreased student outcomes (Morrisey et al., 2013; Sugrue et al., 2016). According to Chang and Romero (2008), mobility was highly correlated with lowered attendance rates. The literature stated that students who transferred schools frequently missed school more often while they obtained new a new residency and

enrolled into a local school. Mobility also created further attendance challenges due to students adjusting to curriculum and social changes associated with transferring schools.

Gotfried (2010) argued that social class impacted student absenteeism. Ready (2010) claimed that students who came from low SES households had three times the amount of absences due to a high prevalence of chronic health issues such as asthma, kidney disease, epilepsy, and other diseases. According to Wyatt and Hauenstein (2008), asthma was indicated to be one of the leading health concerns that led to student absenteeism. A lack of health care was indicated to cause increased absences because families were not always able to get immunizations or follow up with health concerns before they developed into serious health conditions (Chang & Romero, 2008).

Environmental factors within the home heightened health issues due to behaviors of parents and guardians. Factors often associated with poverty included tobacco- related issues, lead, and other pollutants within the home. The research also suggested that disadvantaged students are more likely to be absent from school due to a lack of parental support, housing instability, lack of material resources, and oppositional behavior (Chang & Romero, 2008; Gottfried, 2010; Ready, 2010).

According to Chen and Weikart (2008), the community plays an integral part in an individual's development. Studies showed that children who are raised in poverty experienced greater behavioral and emotional issues due to environmental factors that included a parent's stress and depression due to neighborhood safety and a lack of material resources. Chang and Romero (2008) argued that issues within the home and conditions of the community impacted school attendance. Communities that provided support for families with limited resources enabled children to be successful at school.

Conceptual Framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner proposed the Ecological Systems Theory (1979) that stated that an individual's development is shaped through a series of systems that included the micro system, mesosystem, exosystem and macro system. The microsystem is an individual's immediate environment, and it includes their home, school, and church. Relationships with peers, family, teachers, and spiritual advisors are individual components within the microsystem. The mesosystem is the interrelationships between individual microsystems. Interactions that take place between the parent and the school are factors within the mesosystem because they impact the individual's development. The exosystem has an indirect effect on the individual's development, but components of the exosystem can include events that happen at a parent's workplace or in dysfunctional relationships that impact how a parent interacts with their child (Ashabi & O'Neal, 2015). Bronfenbrenner's framework is used to provide an understanding for contributing factors to student absenteeism and the role parental involvement played in elementary school setting. (Sugrue et al, 2016).

Federal Funding

Federal programs were established to assist schools with funding in order to improve instruction, provide resources, and increase parental involvement. The No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2001) was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and it redefined the federal government's involvement in education. Title I funds were designed to increase educational opportunities for disadvantaged students. It aimed to provide local education agencies (LEA) with grants that offered financial assistance in order to improve student

literacy and mathematics skills. In order to qualify for Title I funds, schools must have at least 40% of students who come from low income families. Family income information is obtained through free and reduced lunch programs. Funding formulas are based on the cost of education and poverty estimates. Funds must be used to target students who are failing or at risk of failing.

According to Miller (2011), there were approximately one million students in the United States who were identified as homeless during the 2009-2010 school year. McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act (2002) was created in order to assist homeless youth. It was identified to be part of the No Child Left Behind Act, and it was originally implemented in 1987. "Homeless students are defined as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (section 103(a)(1))." Section 725 further explained the term homeless as children who live with other people due to economic hardship. The term homeless student also referred to children living in cars, camping grounds, motels, shelters, abandoned locations, or foster care placement. It aimed to promote educational outcomes, provide access to free and appropriate education, and to ensure that students had access to the same educational activities and services as other children in the school setting. Miller (2011) indicated that families living in poverty are at risk of becoming homeless due to limited financial resources. Due to economic recession, jobs and affordable housing has decreased.

Parental Involvement

According to the No Child Left Behind (2001), "Parental involvement is defined as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication regarding student academic learning and other school activities." The term parent refers

to the natural parents or other guardian who is legally responsible for the school-aged child. The literature indicated that parental perceptions of their involvement was an indicator of their actual involvement in their child's schooling (Bartel, 2009; Walker et al., 2005). According to No Child Left Behind Title I provisions, funding can be used for parent education or adult education (Bartel, 2011). Parent involvement has been a key component of Title I due to the impact on student learning outcomes.

In an article published by Child Care and Early Education Research Connections, Barrueco, Smith, and Stephens (2015) identified two types of parent involvement that impacted student achievement in educational settings. The first type of parental engagement included nurturing responses between parents and their children that take place in the home and the community that help children develop skills needed for school success. It also described parent engagement as interactions between parents, teachers, and other providers in educational settings that help to promote student achievement.

According to the literature, students have higher attendance rates, better grades, and are more likely to graduate from high school when there is consistent parent involvement. For students who live in poverty or live in low income households, there was a lack of parental involvement due to factors that included parents feeling uncomfortable in the school setting, single-parent households, lack of understanding of policies and procedures, or health-related factors (Morrissey, 2014; Sugrue et al., 2009;). Chang and Romero (2008) argued that many families who lived in poverty wanted to be involved in their child's education; however, they lacked the knowledge or skills needed to provide effective support.

Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005) examined a theoretical model of parental involvement that was first introduced by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995). The model provided a conceptual understanding of the varying degrees that parents participated in their child's education. A research study was conducted on various levels within the model. The first level of the model identified the following factors that contributed to the parents' involvement: parent's attitudes and beliefs regarding how they should be involved in their child's education, parent's self-efficacy, and parent's perceptions of school invitations. The second level of the model involved contextual factors such as time, energy, and location influenced how parents participated. Level three referred to the methods used by the parents that included instruction, modeling of productive behaviors, and reinforcement. Level four referred to the parents' ability to identify the child's developmental needs in order to provide the type of support that the child needed. It also referred to the parent's ability to identify and meet the school's expectations of parental involvement. The fifth level of the theoretical map referred to the student outcomes that were associated with the parent's level of involvement (Walker et al., 2005).

Padak and Rasinski (2010) claimed that families are more involved when they feel welcomed and they feel a connection to the school. The literature indicated strategies to increase parent involvement that included school calendars and newsletters, providing school fact cards with contact information for all members, incorporating parent friendly signs in multiple languages, greeting visitors immediately, displaying student work, creating a parent area with brochures and parent resources, and reaching out to new families. Barrueco, Smith, and Stephens (2015) stated that professional development

must be provided in order to provide teachers with training to increase positive communication with families that come from linguistically diverse households and disadvantaged households.

School Climate

Chen and Weikart (2008) claimed that school climate is based on a school's structure and its culture. A student's success in school is critical for their development and for their ability to grow into self-sustaining adults (Velasco et al., 2012). A school's climate can influence parental involvement, student attendance, and student achievement (Chang & Romero, 2008). Studies indicated that positive school climate played a critical part in implementing school improvement plans and improving educational outcomes (Velasco et al., 2008). According to Cohen, Guffey, Higgins-Allessandro, and Thapa (2013), "School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures." (p. 358) School Climate incorporates every aspect of the school and reflects the day-to-day interactions within a school setting. It includes the quality of instruction, school-community relationships, structural features of the school, organization, and communication.

Pickeral, Evans, Hughes, and Hutchinson (2009) stated, "Positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society." (p. 3). Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the school setting as an important component in a child's development due to the interrelationships between parents, teachers, administrators, and students. Bryan and Henry (2008) claimed that schools with a positive school climate encouraged open

communication, focused on the quality of instruction, and implemented academic and behavioral interventions that lead to positive student outcomes.

John Dewey (1916) argued that the structure of the school environment played a critical role in student learning. Students must be actively engaged, and they learn best through the constructive process. The environment must be designed in a manner that promotes investigation and inquiry. The National School Climate Council (2007) has created standards that present a framework for developing and maintaining a positive school climate. The literature stated that there should be a shared vision and a plan to improve and maintain a positive school climate. The school community should have policies implemented that address professional knowledge, communication, disposition, social, and emotional aspects of learning. Within the plan, there should be a system that identifies learning barriers and ways to reengage students and improve teaching. The school community must have practices in place that promote learning and teaching of the whole child by utilizing school-wide activities. The school infrastructure must be organized and operate in a manner that can meet learning expectations. The next standard states that the school community must create an environment that all members of the community feel welcome regardless of socioeconomic status, education, race, or gender. The standard stated that the school must be committed to social justice (Pickeral et al., 2009).

School climate directly influenced family involvement, student attendance, and the ability to develop school community partnerships. School leaders must be able to develop trusting relationships with stakeholders, manage instruction, promote change, and encourage shared decision making (Valli et al., 2018). The literature indicated that

leaders must demonstrate effective leadership characteristics and employ sound leadership strategies in order to improve school climate (Blank, 2015; Valli et al., 2018). Kilinc (2014) argued that school climate relied heavily on school characteristics, leadership styles, and organizational behaviors.

School Leadership

Sahin (2011) stated that the leadership style of the principal played an important role in developing and maintaining a healthy school culture. Research identified principals who acted as instructional leaders contributed to a positive school climate. Velasco, Edmonson, and Slate (2012) identified transformational leadership theory to be a type of leadership style that enabled the principal to inspire and motivate members of the school. The transformational leader builds trust and acceptance by providing teachers and staff with individualized attention and modeling a high degree of ethics. The transformational leader communicates high expectations while providing alternative ways to solve problems. Sahin (2011) claimed that school leaders should model effective teaching modalities, communication practices, and promote problem solving and teamwork in everyday activities.

According to a study conducted by Kelley, Thornton, and Daughtery (2005), there were four strategies that principals used to encourage teachers to professionally develop their craft. The first strategy was to be mindful of interactions with the teachers. Teachers should be treated as a whole person who had their own style, beliefs, and needs. Next, the principal should evaluate the teacher's needs and listen to their concerns. The literature then indicated that principals should develop a school culture based on collaboration and professional growth. Lastly, principals should treat administrative duties as opportunities

to promote teacher empowerment. Through those opportunities, principals should promote an understanding of the school mission and vision by modeling good practices and positively influencing achievement.

Distributed leadership theory was identified to be a type of leadership practice that utilized shared decision making. The leadership style allowed teachers to become leaders within in their school. Kilinc (2014) stated, “The teacher leadership model is one in which teachers, both as learners and teachers, contribute to the policies, vision, and mission of school and take initiative in and outside of the classroom.” (p. 1731) The literature stated that distributed leadership is commonly referred to as shared leadership. The leadership practice may look differently at individual school sites; however, leadership teams are typically created, and responsibilities are distributed throughout the school setting.

Research conducted by Great Schools Partnerships (2013) has shown that teachers and other stakeholders are more productive when provided opportunities to take on responsibilities. Making decisions allowed teachers to feel more invested in the outcomes of the school. Kilinc (2014) argued that teacher leaders focus on institutional improvement, professional improvement, and collaboration with stakeholders. Teachers assumed leadership roles within the school, and improved student learning through challenging lessons that engaged diverse learning groups. Professional improvement involved teachers enhancing their craft through review of research, taking part in educational training opportunities, and helping colleagues to improve their own teaching practices. Collaboration with stake holders allowed teachers to develop relationships with members of the school and community (Kilinc, 2014; Pickeral, et al., 2009).

Research conducted by Degol and Wang (2015) identified supportive teachers and quality instruction to be highly correlated to positive student outcomes. Bowen, Roderick, Powers, and Glennie (2008) stated that teacher support had a significant influence on relationships with students and their families. Ruby Payne (2013) claimed that the ability to build relationships is critical to a student's success. In an educational setting, teachers and administrators can build relationships by demonstrating that they care about students, model expectations, promote positive outcomes, and facilitate collaboration through a network of relationships. Payne (2013) stated, "For students and adults from poverty, the primary motivation for success will be in their relationships." (p. 105).

School-Community Partnerships

According to Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2014), community schools were defined as schools that addressed student health needs and social needs in addition to the state and district curriculum. The purpose of the community school is to move beyond the traditional educational mission in order to improve student outcomes. Research conducted on community schools indicated that the mission and vision of the school aimed to address the needs of the whole child through community-based partnerships (Bryan & Henry, 2008). According to Valli et al. (2018), "School-community partnerships are defined as intentional efforts to create long-standing relationships among schools or school districts and organizations in the local community."

According to Chang and Romero (2008) schools that developed partnerships with community agencies that had implemented a comprehensive outreach system ensured that all students had the opportunity to attend school daily. Early childhood education programs and early intervention programs were identified to provide a smoother

transition into kindergarten. Children who stayed at home with family members prior to kindergarten had lowered attendance rates as compared to peers who were enrolled in an early childhood program. The routine provided by early child programs allowed children and their families to develop daily procedures that contributed to consistent school attendance.

Blank (2015) suggested that school leaders must first have a strong infrastructure that can support school-community models. Community leadership teams, school site leadership teams, and an intermediary team should be established in order to ensure the model will meet the needs of the school and the community. Researchers argued that an effective leadership model should be utilized in order to develop community-based partnerships (Blank, 2015; Valli et al., 2014).

Sheldon (2007) claimed that most schools do not have coordinated outreach programs resulting in educators lacking the training to develop partnerships within the community. In order to address the needs of families within the school, partnership activities should be developed in order to strengthen various types of parental involvement. The literature suggested that the school should create activities to help parents establish supportive home environments, strategies for enhancing communication regarding school programs and student progress, ways that families can volunteer at school, and learning at home activities. The literature stated that there should also be programs that educate parents on informed decision making so that they can take part in leadership activities within the school. Action teams should be created that consist of parents, teachers, administrators, and community members in order to locate and integrate resources from the community (Sheldon, 2007).

Valli et al. (2014) developed four school community models that were based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). The framework was developed to implement and improve community partnerships in order to aid with educational, emotional, and social needs within the school and the community. The most simplistic model was the Family and Interagency Collaboration Model. The sole purpose of the model was to organize and coordinate health, education, and social services for families living in the community. The Full-Service model offered services within the school site. The next model was the Full-Service Community Model. The literature stated that the Full-Service Community Model expanded beyond the Full-Service Community model. With the model community members and school members were viewed as equal partners; therefore, obtaining input from family and community members was a critical component of the model. The fourth model that Valli et al. (2014) suggested was the Community Development Model. The purpose of the model was to not only provide services within the school, but to address the needs of the neighborhood.

Epstein (2005) claimed that the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model was used to improve elementary schools who received Title I funds. The CSR model was developed from the National Network of Partnerships Schools at John Hopkins University. The model aimed to improve family involvement and develop meaningful partnerships with the community. The literature stated that an action team must first be implemented in order to identify needs of the school and the community. The action team must develop a plan to develop partnerships, improve learning, and increase parental involvement. Programs must be evaluated yearly to ensure that the plan is meeting the goals established by the team. Studies indicated that the CSR model increased family

involvement and allowed stronger partnerships to be developed (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sanders, 1999; Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders and Simon, 2002, Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2002; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004).

Researchers claimed that social justice must be at the priority of any school partnership. All personnel should be provided professional development and training in order to address the needs of students who come from disadvantaged households.

School-Based Interventions

Weismuller, Grasska, Alexander, White, and Kramer (2007) stated that student attendance is vital to the learning process, and the school nurse can be used as an intervention to increase attendance and promote healthier outcomes. Cooper (2005) argued that student attendance increased when funds were targeted toward health services. District funding was also positively impacted as the daily attendance rates increased. Although the literature indicated that the school nurse program had positive effects on school attendance, there was a lack of research conducted on the types of interventions used by school nurses (Weismuller et al., 2007).

Chang and Romero (2008) suggested that schools who experienced high rates of absenteeism should review attendance policies in place, and closely monitor student attendance rates. In order to increase attendance, the literature stated that policies must be clearly conveyed to parents. Teachers and administrators should communicate expectations and follow up on individual students who missed school regularly. Gandy and Schultz (2007) claimed that schools should collaborate with community members in order to integrate resources in order to improve attendance rates. The literature indicated school-based interventions that were shown to increase attendance rates were as

followed: family workshops, tiered intervention support, relationship-based interventions, school-wide interventions, and mentoring programs.

The literature stated that schools that consistently encouraged family involvement and implemented school-based practices, children attended school more regularly (Chang & Romero, 2008; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gandy & Schultz, 2007). In a study conducted by Epstein and Sheldon (2002), the following predictors were indicated to be associated with student attendance: home visits, family events, consistent communication, and rewarding students for attendance. Freeman et al., (2016) claimed that student attendance could be increased by implementing School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a framework to address student needs and increase student attendance.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The study will use a mixed methods research design to collect open-ended and Closed-ended data to better understand the identified problem of practice, namely student attendance at Lizana Elementary School (Creswell, 2014). According to Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007), “Mixed methods research is the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data in response to research questions.”

Participants

In order to select the participants for the research study, a convenience sample was used. According to Creswell (2014, p. 158), a convenience sample is a nonprobability sample that is chosen by convenience. The purpose of the convenience sampling was to allow the researcher the opportunity to gain teacher perspectives on attendance policies and factors that contributed to student attendance., To be included in the sample teachers had to work with students and administrators at Lizana Elementary.

The current study consisted of 30 teachers who have been employed at Lizana Elementary School in the 2017-2018 or 2018-2019 school year. Out of those 30 teachers, 90% are female and 10% are male. In order to be selected for the study, educators had to meet the following criteria requirements: Participants must hold a valid educator license in the state of Mississippi. Participants must be a member of the Harrison County School District, and the teacher must have been assigned to Lizana Elementary. All participants had to hold a teaching position at Lizana Elementary during one of the fore mentioned years.

Student demographic data from the 2016-2017 and the 2017-2018 school year was obtained in order to determine if there was a correlation between the number of

students who qualify for free and reduced lunch and the number of absences.

Demographic data was obtained from the Mississippi Department of Education. During the 2016-2017 school year, 559 students were enrolled at Lizana Elementary. Out of those students, 52.25% were female and 47.75% were male. During the 2017-2018 school year, there were 481 students enrolled with 51.77% of the population female and 48.23% male.

Procedures

Prior to beginning the research study, site permission was obtained from the superintendent of the Harrison County School District and the principal of Lizana Elementary School. Once district approval was granted, an application was submitted to the University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human Subjects in order to gain consent to conduct the proposed research project.

Student attendance rates were obtained from the school report card from the Mississippi Department of Education. The researcher identified the total number of students enrolled in Lizana Elementary and the attendance rates during the 2016-2017 school year and the 2017-2018 school year. Percentages of male and female students were identified as well as the percentage of students who received free and reduced lunch.

A cross-sectional survey design was used so that the researcher could collect data regarding teacher perspectives on attendance policies and incentives to increase attendance (Cresswell, 2014). A questionnaire that contained Likert-type questions was created using Qualtrics™. Before distributing the questionnaire, informed consent was obtained. Teachers were notified that their consent is voluntary, and it may be revoked at

any time. A link was sent to teachers using the Harrison County List Serv. Teachers were instructed to complete the questionnaire during a one-week window. The questionnaire took approximately ten minutes to complete.

Measures

Socio-economic status. School attendance rates and percentages of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. The rationale for collecting this data is to determine if socioeconomic status is a factor that impacts student attendance. An independent T-Test was used to compare attendance rates of the percentage of students who receive free and reduce lunch and the attendance rates of those who did not qualify for free and reduced lunch during the 2016-2017 school year and the 2017-2018 school year.

Teacher perspectives on attendance policies. Ten questions on the questionnaire will be used to gain information on teacher perspectives on the current attendance polices. This section of the questionnaire will obtain teacher knowledge on school attendance policies and practices used to enforce attendance policies.

Teacher perspectives on incentives used to increase student attendance. An open-ended question on the questionnaire will be designed to gain teacher perspectives on incentives used to increase student attendance rates. The purpose of this section of the questionnaire is to gain information that could lead to strategies and incentives to increase student attendance.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine factors that were associated with student absenteeism. It further explored teacher perspectives on attendance practices and policies in order to develop strategies to increase student attendance rates. The sample consisted of 57% of general education and special education teachers who taught Kindergarten through Sixth Grade. Teaching experience of the sample ranged from zero to three years (11.76%), four to nine years (29.41%), and ten years or greater (58.82%).

Data Collection & Analysis

Attendance related data was obtained from the Chronic Absenteeism Report of the Mississippi Department of Education. According to the Chronic Absenteeism Report (2016), Lizana had a total number of 559 students enrolled with 121 students who were reported to be chronically absent. There was a chronic absentee rate of 27.7% as compared to the Mississippi state average of 14.2%. During the 2017-2018 school year, it was reported that Lizana had a total number of 552 students with 107 students who were determined to be chronically absent; Lizana Elementary had a chronic absenteeism rate of 19.4% as compared to the state average of 16.9% (Chronic Absenteeism Report, 2017). Data regarding subgroups such as those who qualified for free and reduced lunch and those who did not qualify for free and reduced lunch during the 2016-2017 school year and the 2017-2018 school year could not be obtained due to reformatting of the Mississippi Department of Education's website. Although the information was available when the researcher planned the study, it was no longer accessible at its completion.

After conducting a review of the literature, factors that were indicated to impact student attendance included school climate, parental involvement, and socio-economic status. The findings of the study (Appendix A), indicated that 52.9% of participants believed that school climate impacted attendance rates, 52.9% believed that students missed school more frequently when there was a negative school climate, and 58.8% believed that parents were more actively involved if there was a positive school climate. The majority of participants (82.3%) also believed that attendance rates were higher when parents were actively involved in the learning process. When teachers were asked if socio-economic status impacted attendance, 82% of the sample either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the notion that socio-economic status has an impact on attendance rates.

Survey results (Appendix B) showed the majority of participants (57%) believed that school-based interventions could be used to decrease student absenteeism. An open-ended question was used to obtain teacher input on incentives that could be used to increase student attendance rates. Findings indicated that participants believed that parents must first be notified of incentives that will be used, and frequent parent communication should be used to minimize the number of times a student was absent. One response indicated that students in upper grades should make up seat time in order to gain instructional minutes to improve academic performance.

Participant recommendations included tangible rewards for perfect attendance; rewards and incentives should be given on a monthly, quarterly, and yearly basis. One participant responded that the school could have a monthly drawing; student names

would be submitted for the drawing if they attended school every day for an entire month. Incentives such as free time, outside or gym time, and certificates could be used to decrease absenteeism. Participants also believed that students who miss frequently should be given positive reinforcement when they attend school regularly.

Conclusions

Throughout the research process the study has evolved due to changes in administration at Lizana Elementary. After identifying factors associated with attendance, the researcher was going to create an action team that would develop community-based partnerships to address needs associated with low income families. Policies and procedures became more transparent with the shift in administration. The new administrators began to improve existing partnerships within the community, and they increased parent participation in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and other school-related events. Additionally, the researcher considered implementing interventions to address student absenteeism; however, the new administration implemented components of Jostens Renaissance. Jostens Renaissance is a school wide program developed to target school climate. It focuses on celebrations of achievement for students, faculty, and staff. The new administrators also implemented components of the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports System (PBIS) with fidelity. The researcher was no longer able to implement those interventions due to existing supports that were implemented by the new administrators.

This study had limitations that included a small sample size. The study may have benefited from gaining perspectives from a wider range of participants such as other administrators from neighboring school districts and other schools within the district.

Although it was important to gain teacher perspectives, other administrators may have provided perspectives on interventions that have been successfully implemented in their school.

APPENDIX A – TABLE 1

Teacher Perspectives on Factors Associated with Student Absenteeism

#	Field	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
1	School climate impacts student attendance rates.	5.88% 1	17.65% 3	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	52.94% 9	17
2	Students miss school more frequently when there is a negative school climate.	0.00% 0	5.88% 1	11.76% 2	29.41% 5	52.94% 9	17
3	Parents are more actively involved when there is a positive school climate.	0.00% 0	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	17.65% 3	58.82% 10	17
4	Socioeconomic status has an impact on parental involvement.	5.88% 1	5.88% 1	5.88% 1	41.18% 7	41.18% 7	17
5	When parents are actively involved in the learning process, student attendance rates are higher.	0.00% 0	5.88% 1	11.76% 2	0.00% 0	82.35% 14	17

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5

APPENDIX B – TABLE 2

Teacher Perspectives on Attendance Policies and Practices

#	Field	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
1	Student absenteeism is a problem at my school.	0.00% 0	29.41% 5	23.53% 4	23.53% 4	23.53% 4	17
2	I am able to clearly communicate my school's attendance policy to parents.	5.88% 1	0.00% 0	5.88% 1	41.18% 7	47.06% 8	17
3	My school's attendance policy effectively addresses absenteeism.	0.00% 0	11.76% 2	5.88% 1	35.29% 6	47.06% 8	17
4	School based interventions would increase student attendance at my school.	5.88% 1	17.65% 3	29.41% 5	23.53% 4	23.53% 4	17
5	When students miss school frequently, calling parents can help decrease absenteeism.	11.76% 2	29.41% 5	11.76% 2	41.18% 7	5.88% 1	17
6	My school administrators contact parents when students miss school frequently.	11.76% 2	11.76% 2	5.88% 1	41.18% 7	29.41% 5	17
7	Truancy officers contact parents when students exceed the amount of unexcused absences allowed by the district.	11.76% 2	23.53% 4	29.41% 5	5.88% 1	29.41% 5	17

Showing rows 1 - 7 of 7

APPENDIX C– IRB Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-19-269

PROJECT TITLE: Revised Capstone Research Project

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Education, Educational Research and Admin

RESEARCHER(S): Jennifer Roberts, Lilian Hill

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt

CATEGORY: Exempt

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

APPROVED STARTING: August 6, 2019

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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