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Using PBIS Frameworks in Elementary Schools to Decrease Chronic Absenteeism

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USING PBIS FRAMEWORKS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS TO DECREASE
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

by

Earl Joe Nelson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
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 Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This basic qualitative study examined the beliefs and attitudes of selected faculty in three southern region schools that had been identified by several government agencies as having severe chronic attendance problems. Twelve educators who work closely with the daily Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program were individually interviewed and re-interviewed until reaching a significant point where no new knowledge could be derived. The goal of the study was to explore the essence of the teachers' experiences when using the PBIS practices in order to increase school attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism. The purpose of the study was to fully understand which PBIS practices were effective in changing undesired attendance behavior of school learners. The primary research question addressed in this study was how do PBIS programs influence student behavior as related to improved school attendance.

Extensive information was gathered, analyzed, and interpreted in order to add significant contributions to the scholarly literature regarding PBIS implementation. Based on the findings and results of this study, it was concluded that PBIS programs are beneficial and effective in reducing chronic attendance patterns if the PBIS faculty works in a school culture that provides comprehensive professional development, a creative student incentive program, and an existing culture comprised of individuals who are committed to collaborating among their colleagues-faculty, administration, and support staff.

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DEDICATION

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I can do all things through Christ, which strengthens me. –Philippians 4:13

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The National School Climate Center (2015) reported that consistent school attendance must be established in order for student learning to improve and develop as the child proceeds through the schooling process. Research (Gottfried, 2010; Roby, 2014; Robins and Antrim, 2013) supports the premise that when students are absent, they miss pertinent instruction and interaction that is needed at specific periods of time within the curriculum plan. Additionally, the demand for educational reform has been prevalent in the United States since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Rhodes, 2014). Improving school attendance is one of the major tenets outlined in the historic document.

Although recent research studies continue to document the importance of reduced absenteeism, scholarly literature continues to report the prevalence of chronic absenteeism in the United States and Europe. Ginburg, Jordan, and Chang (2014) indicated in their research that missing a period of only three days of class or school can have a damaging effect on academic performance and academic achievement test results. In that same study (2014), kindergarten students with poor attendance did not score or perform as well as kindergarten students who had good attendance. Prior to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test, it was revealed that fourth grade students were more likely to earn less than proficient reading assessment scores when missing as few as three or more days of school (Maggin, Zurheide, Pickett, & Bailliee, 2015).

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) defined regular school attendance as five or fewer absences per year. Based upon the results of a study by Farmer, Reinke, & Brooks

(2014), findings suggested that schools should recognize student absenteeism as a precursor to reduced academic performance and inappropriate behavior problems. Research has also discovered that chronic student absenteeism is linked to more complex problems later in adulthood. Substance abuse, the likelihood of dropping out of high school, and increased criminal activity are negative adolescent outcomes that may be predicted by poor attendance (Pas & Bradshaw, 2011).

Chronic absenteeism from school continues to be a prominent topic of discussion at the state level and during many government assemblies. For example, California's Attorney General defined chronic absenteeism as a priority issue (Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012). According to Weeks (2012), the estimates state that as many as 11% of American adolescents have skipped class or did not attend school within the past 30 days. Despite that extended research initiatives have been published concerning pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students' failure to attend school or class on a regular basis, extended school non-attendance is still identified as a major reason for poor academic outcomes and poor achievement in adulthood. Many variables can impact school absenteeism and extended non-attendance including school climate/culture, school transportation, health and wellness within the family unit, and specific attitudes toward the value of education and schooling (Faul, Stepensky, & Simonsen, 2012).

Research by Robins and Antrim (2013) suggested that increased academic performance, especially among lower socio-economic learners, is connected to consistent daily school attendance. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders continue to locate, analyze, and apply current service delivery models in an attempt to reduce student non-attendance. Scholarly literature continues to identify chronic absenteeism as the specific

precursor of undesirable student outcomes such as academic failure, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency. Since 2011, researchers have used absenteeism-like terms interchangeably, although the various terms have different meanings. Most of these terms usually include types of school absenteeism, but are not limited to “lesson absence, post-registration absence, parentally condoned absence, psychological absence, school refusal, and school phobia” (Reid, 2005, p. 59). Although terminology to describe school absenteeism remains inconsistent, Kearney and Graczyk (2013) attempted to establish a common definition and understanding for school non-attendance behaviors. The use of a common definition may assist researchers and school leaders to arrive at more efficient programs that may establish a consensus in reducing school absenteeism. For this basic qualitative study, the terms student attendance and chronic absenteeism were used to describe the attendance issues.

Chronic Absenteeism in Mississippi

In 2014, the high school graduation rate in Mississippi was 74% as compared to the United States average of 82% (Mississippi Kids Count, 2015), and 9000 Mississippi teenagers ages 16 -19 years old had dropped out of high school (Mississippi Kids Count, 2015). During the same year, 18.1% of Mississippi residents, 25 years and older, did not have a high school diploma (Mississippi Kids Count, 2015). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014) reported 18,000 teenagers, ages 16-19, were not attending school or holding employment. Sixteen percent of the nation’s school-enrolled population attendance patterns were identified as chronic, meaning absent from school fifteen or more class periods or full days of school in one year (U. S. Department of Education, 2019).

Absenteeism at the Local Level

Hancock, Harrison and Jackson are three coastal counties containing three county school districts in the southern area of Mississippi. In 2014, the three school districts were identified as possessing the highest range of student absenteeism within the entire state. Hancock County had 20.3% absenteeism while Harrison and Jackson Counties fell within the second highest range of 9.2% - 13% of chronic absenteeism (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). According to the Mississippi Chronic Absenteeism Report (2018) data from 2016-2017, there was no identification of significant improvement in these counties (Mississippi Department of Education, 2018). In addition, three school districts outside of coastal counties reported the following chronic absenteeism percentages consecutively: Forrest School District, 26.43 %; Lumberton School District, 24.80 %; McComb School District, 24.16%. Based on the report, chronic absenteeism appears to be an issue throughout several Mississippi counties.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)

Several national programs and resources have been initiated to identify and improve student academic difficulties, such as chronic absenteeism (Horner et al., 2014). Soon after the passing of the historic law of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2002 (NCLB, 2002), and the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1997 (IDEA, 1997), the Center on Positive Behavior Intervention and Support was established. As a result, individual schools across the nation were provided with support for students with behavioral disorders.

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) and School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) are operational frameworks used to

improve students' academic and behavior outcomes and are observable and measurable (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). Specific approaches within the framework can be selected and implemented according to the students or learner groups' needs. Anecdotal records, observation notes, performance scores, and specific grades support the selection and implementation of certain frameworks (Horner et al., 2010). Ultimately, PBIS implementation strives to achieve the best evidence-based practices for improving vital academic and behavior outcomes for each student (Dee & Jacob, 2010).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS/SWPBIS) embraces several approaches and frameworks that are research based and have proven to reduce certain academic barriers such as chronic absenteeism (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). Many early theorists, like B.F. Skinner, presented the first evidence that demonstrated how behaviorism aligns with school attendance patterns. Skinner (1953) studied human behavior and how it can be manipulated and controlled when a desired behavior is rewarded with a positive consequence. Edward Thorndike was one of the first theorists to propose the law of effect theory (McLeod, 2018). This theory defines that any behavior that is followed by pleasant consequences is likely to be repeated (McLeod, 2018). Many years later, the term "reinforcement" was coined by Skinner. Skinner was attempting to gain acceptance for the function of change in overt behavior throughout the schooling process. Skinner recognized the importance of changing behavior as balancing instruction and behavior became the paramount task for educating children enrolled in public schools (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2012).

Several universities, in conjunction with the University of Oregon, established The National Technical Assistance Center for PBIS. The PBIS model has been widely

disseminated throughout the United States utilized in an estimated 22,000 schools that are currently implementing the Tier 1 supports (Banks, 2014). PBIS continues to provide and support the authentic development of specialized programs based upon the needs of individual school districts.

PBIS, when implemented correctly, may assist students in the development and acquisition of the intrinsic value of regular school attendance. Gottfried (2011) and Sheldon and Epstein (2004), who were some of the first to thoroughly examine PBIS, agree that regular school attendance is important and necessary in order to achieve academic success. Choi and Chang (2011) published their study that verified how compounding ramifications from chronic absenteeism increased the likelihood of non-promotion to the next grade. Husband and Hunt (2015) found that students who reside in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods may feel disconnected from the type of environment their school supports when compared to their home and neighborhood environments. As shown, multiple researchers have conducted studies that have verified the significant impact of positive reinforcement and established justification for the use of positive reinforcement in children's lives as a means of fostering increased learning.

Problem Statement

Several studies have contributed information about how PBIS frameworks have emphasized the important of reduced absenteeism; scholarly literature continues to report that chronic absenteeism is still prevalent in the United States (Ginburg, Jordan, & Change, 2014). Yet, only minimal research can be found describing the progress and status of school attendance for Mississippi school districts that use PBIS frameworks. Therefore, the research problem for this study was to explore the implementation of PBIS

frameworks and practices and how it influenced the goals of increasing daily attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism.

Need for the Study

In 2011, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) revised the Education Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Building Level Standards. The first ELCC standard was revised to emphasize the principal's sole responsibility to lead a productive school culture that fosters continual academic improvement and performance (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011). The standards examined and commented on southern state school districts that used the PBIS model to reduce chronic absenteeism in order to provide a resource for school principals. The standards present the need for additional research studies evaluating the impact of PBIS to existing literature to support and act as a model when school principals are faced with the challenge of sustaining a positive school culture and instructional program (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011).

This study was grounded in the theory that PBIS practices utilizing behavior modification theory will positively influence student attendance and therefore, chronic absenteeism will be reduced. The study examined the use of practices specifically aimed at ameliorating absenteeism rates that are implemented in school districts where the chronic absenteeism score reached its lowest level of 7.23% in 2017 (Mississippi Department of Education, 2018). In hopes of identifying practices that may be suitable for application in three counties where chronic absenteeism exists, this study presented an examination of the faculty experiences derived from using PBIS/SWPBIS to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Researchers have explored student attendance and chronic absenteeism in many different ways. However, limited studies have attempted to examine the attitudes, beliefs, and efficacy status of teachers, administrators, and school stakeholders as related to the impact of PBIS/SWPBIS on reducing chronic absenteeism. A study by Havik, Bru, and Ertesvag (2015) attempted to justify and verify improved attendance averages after a designated period of time while Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, and Salovey (2012) looked at individual student\grade groupings. Although these studies used quantitative approaches in order to obtain results by assessing selected student behaviors that can prevent students from regularly attending school, few studies located in the state of Mississippi, where chronic absenteeism had been prevalent for years, revealed specific positive factors that may have produced improved student attendance percentages (Mississippi Department of Education, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty beliefs and attitudes within the specific school cultures that have used PBIS frameworks and also managed student behaviors are related to increased student attendance. The findings of this study can be used to further inform school principals how PBIS service delivery protocol can be used to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following primary research question: How do Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) programs influence student behavior as related to improved school attendance? The sub-questions are:

1. Which specific PBIS practices are used to decrease chronic absenteeism?

2. What are the PBIS professional development strategies that are used by teachers to support families when attempting to reduce chronic absenteeism among certain students?
3. How does staff collaboration work when using the PBIS framework tiers to reduce chronic absenteeism?

Justification

The findings of this study can be used to further inform school principals on how the PBIS service delivery protocol can be used to increase attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism. This study will address some gaps in existing literature regarding the contributions that PBIS can make to a positive school culture that produces increased regular attendance when implemented correctly. This study contributed to increasing the knowledge available to the school community through the lens of educators who have positively experienced a reduction in chronic absenteeism when using the PBIS frameworks within the school classrooms.

Based upon the information presented in the 2011 report by the CAEP regarding the revised the ELCC Building Level Standards, school principals are tasked with responsibility of applying specific knowledge that promotes the success of every student by collaboratively facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a shared school vision of learning (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011). Universally, school principals are first instructional leaders. Therefore, it is important not only for principals to become informed of new knowledge, but it should be required that principals have research-based data models that can assist them in evaluating and assessing individual progress in producing increased academic

performance among learners (Lundenberg, 2006). It is the intent that this study will accomplish the aforementioned goal.

Finally, this study provides a better understanding of current faculty perception as to which components are significant in reducing chronic absenteeism. This study can potentially become a useful tool for every school principal; especially school principals who are using the PBIS approach in their individual schools.

Certain roles such as assistant principals, instructional coaches, department heads, and professional development personnel, have the responsibility to provide transformational leadership support to specific groups of staff. School leaders in other states can benefit from this new knowledge in their attempt to adopt, inform, and assess organizational effectiveness when using PBIS frameworks.

Assumptions

It was assumed that all of the interview participants responded by answering truthfully to the interview questions. It was also assumed that each participant held the belief that chronic absenteeism is detrimental to improved academic performance and achievement.

Definition of Terms

1. *Chronic absenteeism*- The United States Department of Education (USDOE) has implemented new standards for calculating chronic absenteeism (USDOE, 2019).

Their indicators define federal calculations:

- Students who miss 50% or more of a school day will be counted as absent
- Students absent 10% or more of the time he or she is enrolled will be included in the calculations of the Federal Chronic Absenteeism Report

- Students enrolled in more than one school will be counted in the Federal Chronic Absenteeism Report (USDOE, 2019)
2. *Classroom teacher*- The primary teacher who helps others to acquire knowledge, competences or values (Ducharme & Shecter, 2011).
 3. *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)* - A proactive approach and
 4. framework used to establish behavioral supports and social culture for all students on school campuses (PBIS.org, 2017).
 5. *Regular school attendance* - The act of attending school without being absent 10 days during the school year (Mississippi Department of Education, 2018).
 6. *School Culture* - The beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of educators who have used PBIS framework practices and who have experienced positive results when attempting to reduce student absenteeism. To add context to this study, this chapter provides an extensive review of literature that pertains to the phenomenon of PBIS that is being studied (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

London, Sanchez, and Castrechini (2016) supported the premise that when students attend school on a regular basis, learner performance improves. By examining the beliefs and attitudes held by faculty in association with certain behaviors that may improve student attendance, school administrators, especially in the state of Mississippi, may become more informed and knowledgeable in their decision-making when developing PBIS professional development programs, participating in PBIS collaborative inquiry sessions, and preparing specific PBIS attendance strategy plans. This chapter presents a critical review of existing literature obtained from peer-reviewed articles, reports, and studies published within the last 7-10 years.

The literature search was filtered by year, type, and relevancy. Some of the main search terms that were used included: chronic absenteeism, student non-attendance, PBIS, and attendance interventions. Using those basic terms, the researcher conducted searches by starting with databases such as EBSCO including ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Academic Research Premier. The Education Resources Information Center (eric.ed.gov website) offered reliable literature that was used as part of this study as well as the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) library website. Thereafter, the

researcher searched ProQuest to review dissertations and Google Scholar to ensure that the research is exhaustive.

Theoretical Framework

Research conducted by Quin, Deris, Bischoff and Johnson (2015) presented a premise explaining how individual theories can work together to support and inform specific studies. Although Quin et al. (2015) suggested that educators should attempt to use a singular theory to support the framing of the study, their study presents three basic theories that contain attributes that were utilized to inform this study. The authors describe a belief that certain principles are embedded in educational theories representing a designated theoretical framework used as a guide for educational outcomes (Quin et al., 2015). By linking three basic theoretical frameworks of behaviorism (Skinner, 2012), transformational leadership theory (Leithwood & Sun, 2012), and PBIS (McIntosh, 2014), philosophical trends, occurrences, behaviors, and experiences in the field of leadership and educational administration are drawn from the literature to help frame the answers to the included research questions.

Many years ago, seminal literature supported that positive behavior support interventions (behaviorism) stem from applied behavioral approach strategies, and in terms of rectifying outcomes of problem behaviors (chronic absenteeism) and important social events (schooling) in the environment (Baer, Wolf & Risley, 1968). Behaviorism, a basic theory developed by B.F Skinner (1953), an American psychologist, introduced a definition that encompasses a type of behavior known as operant behavior that links rewards or consequences to negative and positive behaviors. Fisher, Piazza, and Roane (2014) examined operant behavior that includes three steps: antecedent-behavior-

consequence. Skinner's theory focuses on the way operant behavior functioned according to certain environmental factors. Skinner also believed that the variables that influence behavior can be placed into two different categories. The first category contains phylogenetic variables that are basically genetic traits that are inherited. According to Darwin's theory of "natural selection," traits that are necessary for survival are more likely to be inherited by offspring (Fisher et al., 2014). The second category contains the variable of ontogenetic which is similar to the first, but it proposes that changes can occur within a person's lifetime. This would mean that ontogeny is a process of natural selection of behaviors brought on by consequences within a person's lifetime (Fisher et al., 2014). The aforementioned explanation provides a foundation to support how the researcher can collect specific data that describes how educators develop certain beliefs and attitudes when using an educational program (PBIS) to reduce chronic absenteeism.

The basic concept of PBIS is based on behavioral-based systems that function to strengthen schools, homes, and communities (McIntosh, 2014). This concept is committed to creating and sustaining safe and productive learning environments for all students. PBIS frameworks are constructed to provide a similar step sequence as operant behavior. McIntosh (2014) provided an example describing PBIS as a process whereby if a student is reinforced randomly for being in class on time, the behavior of being on time is being reinforced. In return, the student starts coming to school every day in hopes of receiving reinforcement for being present and punctual for class. As a result, the student's school attendance improves; therefore, the increase in student attendance represents a by-product of the on-time-to-class behavior that is being directly reinforced. The aforementioned example explains how this study can draw out significant experiences

and demonstrates how PBIS frameworks may provide an opportunity to reduce chronic absenteeism

B.F. Skinner's behaviorism theory cannot support this study alone.

Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) is the second basic theory used in this study. School principals (leaders) are faced with a multitude of challenges that requires them to use their knowledge and experience to effectively lead a school. When leaders (principals) use the experiences of their faculty to collect ideas and perspectives, McGuinn (2015) concluded that the principals demonstrate their ability to determine what programs to implement for achieving the specified outcomes for learners. Therefore, TLT can support the context of a qualitative investigation that examines how educators must demonstrate certain leadership ability to determine what programs (i.e. PBIS) to implement to achieve the academic and cultural outcomes for the learners.

The third basic theory that guided this study was the PBIS framework itself. Although the experiences from using this specific schooling framework form the approved topic, the PBIS framework structure also acts as a guiding principle influencing the context of the study. The PBIS framework provides educators with an exact procedure to guide their instruction, curriculum, and daily operation. The PBIS program includes a common set of protocols that are used throughout the entire campus of the school.

Therefore, by collecting teacher perspectives (interviews), analyzing educators' beliefs (data), and synthesizing individual attitudes regarding the reduction of student chronic absenteeism (results), the PBIS framework structure will contribute to the context of this study.

Chronic Absenteeism and Student Achievement

The link between chronic absenteeism and improved student achievement was the focus of the study by London et al. (2016) exploring the dynamics of chronic absence and student achievement. These researchers substantiated the fact that chronic absenteeism was becoming a major barrier to improved academic performance throughout the nation. Although the state of Mississippi had historically ranked in the bottom half of the nation (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014), more studies revealed this student problem was spreading nationwide. London et al. (2016) verified that the term, chronic absenteeism is aligned with the same definition of school truancy. Therefore, the researcher gained more freedom to locate pertinent studies that used both terms. This fact is important because it was discovered that the term truancy is used more frequently in well-defined government policies and procedures. The concept of truancy is defined as a term that addresses school unexcused absences (Pas & Bradshaw, 2012). The same researchers recognized that an established system for tracking unexcused absences had not existed until 2012. Supporting the premise that regular school attendance is key to not only academic improvement, but also key to positive personal, emotional, and social outcomes was outlined in Henry and Huizinga's (2007) study. Although the geographical areas did not include each state in the Union, a number of large school districts were surveyed. Havik et al. (2015) conducted a study that also used the term truancy and chronic absenteeism interchangeably. Therefore, it can be assumed this study also verified the seriousness of this national school problem.

The study by London et al. (2016) focused on collected data from two school districts within California's San Francisco Bay area. This longitudinal study used two

school years, 2008-2009 and 2010-2011. Students in kindergarten through 12th grades were the participants in the London et al. study (2016). There were three guiding research questions London et al. (2016) aspired to address. First, the study (2016) sought to determine the number and percent of learners demonstrating chronic absenteeism over the course of one or more years. Second, the study (2016) sought to determine the demographic attributes of the learners that were considered chronically absent and whether the demographics differed from learners that were not chronically absent. Third, the study (2016) sought to determine the relationship, if any, present between chronic absenteeism and academic achievement (London et al., 2016). The demographics were described as follows: Latino 69%, white 23%, other 8%. Additionally, 55% of the participants were enrolled in the Federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) program (London et al., 2016, p.8). The largest age group with verified chronic absenteeism was the kindergarten grade level. In 9th through 12th grades, the high school students reported the second largest chronic absenteeism of the study participants.

Multiple factors were used as indicators for chronic absenteeism. In this study (London et al., 2016), the students accumulating the most tardies were many of the same students in the chronic absenteeism group. The largest indicator of chronic absenteeism existed in area of academic achievement. The students who were identified with chronic absenteeism also tended to have lower achievement scores on the various state tests. Additionally, the education level of the parents played a role in chronic absenteeism with students whose parents were educated beyond a high school diploma demonstrating a lower propensity to experience chronic absenteeism. London et al. (2016) suggested that interventions should focus on familial factors, the presence of health issues, or

miscellaneous factors such as motivation (London et al., 2016). Based upon this literature, there is an indication that new programs should be developed that focus on establishing positive communication with parents that emphasizes the importance of attending school. These measures should replace current punitive measures that have been implemented to deter truancy (London et al., 2016).

Roby (2004) focused on finding a link between school attendance and student achievement. Roby's research utilized data obtained from the Ohio Department of Education's website to determine if student achievement on the state proficiency tests was influenced by student attendance in tested grade levels. Roby noted that there are numerous factors that can affect student achievement in addition to attendance. The Ohio Department of Education has mandated that there be a minimum of 93% annual attendance average rate for every school in Ohio (Ohio Department of Education, 2018). According to their website, 83.4% of the public school students had met this standard during the 2016-2017 school year (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). Attendance is one of the factors that the state department uses to evaluate public school performance in the state of Ohio (Ohio Department of Education, 2017).

Roby (2004) makes note of previous research that points to attendance being an important component of student achievement. Roby states, "Good weather, vacations, and peer group pressure excuses affect daily attendance averages and student achievement to a greater degree than illnesses and family deaths" (Roby, 2004, p. 5). Roby focused on four main research questions in his study (2004) composed to verify the significant correlation between attendance status and achievement scores. Data was collected from 3,171 schools that published attendance and state test averages. Roby

(2004) presented his findings in a data table that showed the amount of instructional time lost in relation to absenteeism and hours of attendance. Roby's study (2004) revealed that for each 1% decrease in annual attendance, there is a 3,600-hour reduction of overall instructional hours. Out of the schools that were included in this study (2004), personnel in 91 schools reported attendance rates below the 85% standard, indicating a cumulative yearly loss of student learning time in excess of 54,000 instructional hours per building. Roby (2004) concluded an indication that student attendance has a statistically significant impact on student achievement. His study (2004) also suggested that school districts in the future may want to provide students with incentives for coming to school and that districts with low student attendance may want to contact and visit with high attendance schools to see what they are doing to increase student attendance. Acknowledging the fact that further research involving teacher and parent attitudes/opinions towards attendance may yield significant results substantiated the justification for this dissertation study.

In 2010, Gottfried examined the relationship between school attendance and achievement. Gottfried noted that most of the prior studies were conducted at the aggregate level of analysis only. In his study (2010), Gottfried conducted a new analysis at the student-level. Gottfried's study took place in the Philadelphia School District from 1994 to 2001 and included elementary and middle school students. He used value index observation notes to analyze the importance of regular attendance as related to improved academic performance. He concluded that academic ability may be related to attendance and may cause estimates to be biased when it comes to the influence of attendance on achievement. Gottfried used a value-added model of student achievement with a

longitudinal data set consisting of multiple observations to eliminate this issue (Gottfried, 2010).

Gottfried (2010) found that the baseline models he used supported the premise that there is a correlation between attending school and having a higher GPA. This result was also consistent with the full study sample. Not only was there evidence to support, but the study (2010) found “that the relationship between attendance and achievement is positive and highly significant” and “there is a slight increase for students in middle school” (Gottfried, 2010, p. 434).

Gottfried’s study (2010) supported previous studies where a link has been shown between school attendance and academic achievement. Gottfried (2010) gave two suggestions on improving the attendance-achievement relationship in schools. First, schools may limit the number of student absences and promote student attendance by implementing policies that deter absences such as a zero-tolerance approach towards truancy. The second suggestion involves implementing proactive methods designed to increase student attendance through curricular as well as extracurricular activities that are attractive to students (Gottfried, 2010). Gottfried’s study (2010) further supports the importance of students attending school in order to obtain greater academic achievement. There is evidence to show that it is important for schools to put policies in place to increase student attendance during the early years of school, especially in urban areas. Missing school has contributed to decreased performance on standardized tests and academic problems increase as students move up in grade levels. Gottfried (2010) also includes a list of additional issues that older students face based on literature including higher dropout rates, antisocial behaviors, and the unemployment rates of their parents or

guardians (Gottfried, 2010). This paramount task of synthesizing Gottfried's conclusion also added context as to why it is relevant to collect qualitative data as perceived by in-house faculty.

The majority of research on the impact that non-attendance has on student achievement focuses on students in grade K-12. Absenteeism has far-reaching effects that can impact a student's life beyond their grade-school years. In 2017, Kassarnig, Bjerre-Nielson, Mones, Lehmann, and Lassen reviewed the existing literature addressing the correlation between attending class and academic performance. Their research revealed that school attendance is related to improved academic performance in higher education and in future employment (Kassarnig et al, 2017). In their study, Kassarnig et al. (2017) used data that was collected in the Copenhagen Networks Study (CNS) which included information gathered from the smartphones of almost 1,000 undergraduate students at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU) throughout a two-year time period. The data included the students' locations through the use of GPS services, the students' proximity to other students as determined by the use of Bluetooth scans, and student communication utilizing mobile phones (Kassarnig et al, 2017). The time period focused on the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years and the participants were approximately 78% male and 22% female. At DTU, there is not a mandatory attendance policy for classes, and the professors do not keep track of attendance. Kassarnig et al. (2017) noted that there are a variety of educational models used at this university including lectures, flipped classroom teaching, problem-based group work, etc. The number of participants did not remain constant throughout the study because there was a possibility of them exiting during the experiment.

Some of the previous research that Kassarnig et al. (2017) reviewed noted significant themes that verified how the grade point averages (GPA) among students with few absence days were higher. Lower performing students were found to be more likely to arrive late to class (Gottfried, 2014). Most of the literature reviewed supported the premise identifying regular attendance as a positive indicator of course grades (Kassarnig et al, 2017). Less research has been conducted to determine if there is a correlation between peer behavior and attendance where individual behavior is related to group behavior patterns of absenteeism. Previous research also had limitations and was prone to biases as well as errors based on the methods used for data collection. Such methods included surveys, sign-in-sheets, and self-reports.

The results of the study conducted by Kassarnig et al. (2017) supported previous research on temporal effects. Lower achieving students showed a greater than average decrease in class attendance starting within the first week of class as opposed to students who achieved at a higher rate. This decrease in class attendance gradually expanded over time resulting in more absenteeism and was further coupled with a decrease in academic achievement (Kassarnig et al., 2017). Furthermore, previous findings regarding peer behavior were supported by this study (2017) as well. The students who displayed lower academic performance had a tendency to spend more time with peers who also displayed lower academic performance. In contrast, students exhibiting higher academic achievement tended to spend more time with peers who also demonstrated higher academic achievement. In regards to overall academic achievement, the findings showed that students with low attendance earned a wide range of grades indicating that many other factors contribute to performance other than attendance alone (Kassarnig, 2017).

On average, students with consistently high attendance did show a higher probability for achieving higher than average grades. The study (2017) concluded that attendance is more apt to be a reliable indicator as to whether or not a student will fail a class rather than the actual grade that the student will earn.

Some of the limitations of the Kassarnig et al study (2017) included that the location of the classes was based on GPS and Bluetooth signals that can be affected by interference. Also, demographic characteristics of the students were not examined in the study (2017) but could have been confounding factors. Additionally, measurements were made from a subset of students who were enrolled in classes resulting in a potential limiting factor (Kassarnig et al., 2017). Overall, it is believed that the results are accurate in relation to the context of this study (2017). Further research is needed to fully understand the relationship between attendance and academic performance, but attendance does appear to have a direct impact on student performance even in adulthood at the university level (Kassarnig et al, 2017). This last set of studies introduced several factors that should be considered when conducting a study to substantiate certain attitudes and beliefs that may be developed when using PBIS frameworks.

Factors for Chronic Absenteeism

Most of the literature involving chronic absenteeism indicates that there are multiple factors that impact school attendance. Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) conducted a study to determine what some of the potential factors. Their study (2015) focused on the family indicators among high school students. Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) surveyed a total of 581 ninth to twelfth-grade students. Of the 581

students that they surveyed, 44% were male and 56% were female, and all of the students were all selected using a cluster sampling method.

There were five sections of the survey administered that included personal information, school commitment, quality of school environment, and parental control. This study (2015) provided established information regarding factors that had been previously studied. Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) contributed to this body of literature related to the support of student achievement, the influence achievement has on school attendance, and how lower attendance may be a strong indicator of lower academic success. The basic conclusion verified the increase in high school chronic absenteeism. Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) also concluded that chronic absenteeism reaches beyond the impact on the individual student. Chronic absenteeism has both direct and indirect influences on various aspects of society. The negative effects on the student can carry over into students' futures and result in problems related to employment and mental health. The same study (2015) revealed commonalities amongst individual students who displayed chronic absenteeism such as not feeling safe, feeling academically and socially inadequate, being bored in class, and having less positive experiences at school than their peers with consistent attendance.

Demir and Karabeyoglu (2015) examined factors related to the family and socio-economic components that may influence chronic absenteeism. The family factors that were most prevalent in their research included socio-economic levels, the level of parental involvement, the presence of alcohol/drug problems, and homelessness. Demir and Karabeyoglu (2015) suggested that lower socioeconomic levels by the students' families often resulted in the need for students to seek employment to assist with family

expenses. The study (2015) addressed the lack of parenting skills that were found to be more prevalent in parents in lower socioeconomic households including higher incidents of neglect, substance abuse problems, inconsistent environments, lack of family structure, minimal interest in the daily lives of the students, minimal participation or interests in the children's education, and a lack of a quality home environment conducive for homework (Demir and Karabeyoglu, 2015). Among the school factors noted in the study (2015), the school's attitude and rules concerning absenteeism demonstrated a common theme of inconsistency that potentially led to higher rates of chronic absenteeism. One of the key factors noted by Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015) for chronically absent students not attending school was a dislike of school.

Limited studies in Turkey resulted in the identification of factors similar to those in the United States. This particular study (2015) took place in the province of Burdur which is located in Turkey and the students were randomly selected from ten high schools. The results showed three factors that impacted the rate of student absenteeism most significantly. These three factors were the level of commitment of students to their school, the level of control of the family, and the quality of the school environment (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015). The result of this study demonstrated that the more committed to the school that the student was, the fewer absences the student possessed. Commitment to school was broken down into three different categories including the commitment to school, commitment to friends, and commitment to teachers. Commitment to the teacher was the most significant out of all three types which translates into teacher-student relationships being the foundation for students' commitment to their school (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015).

Managing variables within a school alone are not effective in reducing absenteeism. According to Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu (2015), the best method for increasing students' commitment to the school is by making them feel like a valued member of the school, feel respected, and have a sense of belonging. These factors may lead to a reduction in number of student absences throughout the course of the school year (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2015). Key factors that affect students' commitment to school include the establishment of teacher-student relationships, communication between students and other students, the ability of the school to manage day-to-day operations including classroom management, and student participation in activities at the school (Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015). As a result of their study (2015), Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu recommended that schools seeking to reduce the number of chronically absent students should focus on methods for increasing the students' level of commitment to the school. Once the students' level of commitment is established, the attendance levels will increase and undesirable behaviors should decrease (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2015).

According to Havik et al. (2015), there is a need for better understanding of the various factors that contribute to absences. Unexcused school non-attendance, such as school refusal (SR) and truancy, is relatively common, and approximately 20% of all school non-attendance is considered to be problematic. The study by Havik et al. (2015) focused on identifying school factors associated with SR and truancy-related reasons for school non-attendance. Their study (2015) focused on the investigation of how students' perceptions regarding their relationships with their peers and their teachers' ability to manage their classrooms contributed to SR and non-attendance due to truancy.

Recent studies have a common theme of combining school refusal with truancy and calling it school refusal behavior. The scholars have determined the need to distinguish between the terms because of their differing characteristics (Havik et al, 2015). Havik et al. (2015) separated the two terms in their study by defining school refusal (SR) as “non-attendance due to the expectation of experiencing strong negative emotions while at school” (p. 222) and truancy as being “related to anti-school sentiments and antisocial characteristics such as finding school boring and seeking more rewarding activities outside school” (p. 222).

Factors such as bullying, boredom in school, and poor academic and social support have been attributed to student non-attendance, but according to Havik, et al. (2015) there is very little empirical evidence of this especially in relation to school refusal. Havik et al. (2015) also noted that students with low attendance appear to have increased difficulty making and maintaining friendships and appear to be more socially isolated. Based upon their research findings on qualitative studies, Havik et al. (2015) suggests that the presence of good social relationships that may provide support are a deterrent for school refusal.

Havik et al. (2015) cited previous research that indicated the impact of classroom management on the promotion of positive, supportive peer relationships among students. The effectively managed classroom may provide a positive learning environment but is also instrumental in reducing the amount of bullying experienced by students at school (Havik et al., 2015). Classroom management involves the teacher structuring the social interactions in the classroom that has been argued to be a critical factor in student engagement and well-being. Prior to the study by Havik et al. (2015), there was a lack of

research to link the level of classroom organization, including the classroom structure, the amount of order in the classroom, and ability of the teacher to manage interactions, with the prevalence of school refusal and truancy (Havik et al., 2015).

Classrooms where teachers incorporate structured activities may create a sense of predictability or control in the classroom. When students are enrolled in a class that has a high level of predictability, research has shown that they are more likely to experience reduced levels of stress (Havik et al., 2015). Additionally, students in highly predictable classrooms have an increased awareness of the rules and expectations that are established concerning the attendance policies established at their schools as determined by Havik et al. (2015) during their qualitative interview of parents participating in their study.

Teacher-student relationships may also have a direct impact on student truancy and SR. Havik et al. (2015) wrote that when relationships between teachers and students are supportive, students had a lower incidence of risk factors such as stress and other related negative emotions that could result in school refusal. People who are emotionally unstable may be particularly vulnerable and react emotionally to stress as well as feel threatened in situations that others may perceive as normal. Students who have emotional instability are at a greater risk for SR which may cause them to have a negative view of their learning environment and lead to in genuine relationships (Havik et al., 2015).

Parental involvement and parents' attitude towards school can also be contributing factors when it comes to student SR and truancy. The attitude parents have toward school is considered an influential factor when determining the perception students have regarding the school environment and may contribute to the relationship between student perceptions and the presence of SR and truancy (Havik et al., 2015).

Additionally, parental monitoring and awareness of school attendance policies also serves as an instrumental factor in students that are susceptible to SR and truancy (Havik et al., 2015). The focus of the study by Havik et al. (2015) was to examine how the students' perceptions of their relationships with their peers in the school environment and the teacher's ability to manage the classroom are associated with SR-related and truancy-related non-attendance. Havik et al. (2015) built in controls for variables such as emotional stability, parental interest in schoolwork, and parental monitoring of reasons for absence. Additionally, Havik et al. (2015) wanted to see if there was a difference with these associations between the primary and secondary school levels.

Students who participated in this study (2015) were selected from 45 schools across seven municipalities in Norway. Norway is made up of a large city as well as several towns and rural districts which included 5,465 students from grades 6th through 10th. Questionnaires were administered to the students with a response rate of 84% (Havik et al., 2015). Within this sample of students, 32% were eliminated near the inception of the study (2015) due to no absences reported within the three months prior to the start of the study. The remaining 3,629 students were comprised of 38.4% primary students and 61.6% secondary students. The ratio of males and females was approximately 50/50. Data was collected in the form of self-report questionnaires that the students completed during class at the end of the 2012 fall term. The results of this study showed that factors related to school such as the presence of strong relationships with peers and the ability of the teacher to maintain strong classroom management would likely play a crucial role in determining the prevalence of school refusal despite the presence of individual risks or parental risks (Havik et al., 2015). Fostering good teacher-

student relationships, peer relationships, and making sure that students feel safe from being bullied are important factors that play a role in student attendance. There is a need for further research that involves longitudinal designs to help confirm the results of this study.

Intervention

Throughout history, there have been numerous attempts to solve student non-attendance in school. Results of various studies show that there is an increase in academic achievement when there is an increase in student attendance. Some interventions that have been utilized to deter student absenteeism include check-in/check-out programs, changing school culture, and School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS). These interventions are explained below.

Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) Programs

Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) programs have been used to reduce specific, undesirable behaviors. This type of intervention has been used in isolation or as part of an increasing trend where three-tiered models of intervention are used. The three-tier models typically consist of a first-level tier that utilizes primary interventions. Generally, all students receive the same interventions without concern for individualization. The second level tier is more focused on giving students a moderate level of support in the event they did not respond to the first level of interventions. The second tier provides consistent interventions that are based upon standard procedures and are available for students on an ongoing basis (Maggin, Zurheide, Pickett, & Baillie, 2015). The third and final tier focuses on more intensive support coupled with individualized behavior plans.

The check-in/check-out program represents a tier two type of support. In 2015, Maggin et al. conducted a systematic evidence review to determine if the check-in/check-out program is an effective behavior intervention. Check-in/check-out procedures are practices that teachers often use when students do not respond to the universal methods implemented in tier one. The five components of CICO include that students check in with a specified teacher upon arrival at school, complete point cards aimed at recording daily behavior, enlist teacher feedback using structured approaches, require an afternoon check-out with a specified teacher where the daily point card is reviewed for progress, and parental collaboration where the point card is reviewed again and signed by a guardian at home (Maggin et al., 2015) For the program to experience success, the faculty must be informed of the importance of implementing practices that are aligned with federal initiatives and are evidenced-based by empirical support (Maggin et al., 2015).

The study conducted by Maggin et al. (2015) was designed to “evaluate the research underlying the CICO program to determine its strengths, limitations, and generality” (p. 198). There were a total of 22 studies that Maggin et al. (2015) identified as meeting their criteria for use in their review consisting of both single-case and group-based studies. The single-case research included 17 single-case studies with a total of 79 students, and the group-based research included only two studies that met the criteria for the review. In the review by Maggin et al. (2015), the research studies had mixed results. There were multiple single-case studies that demonstrated evidence that had moderate visual support, and the findings were published with reservations. Furthermore, the group-based studies lacked the provision of evidence due to the absence of rigor and of

results (Maggin et al., 2015). Basically, the single-based research showed “sufficient empirical support for the CICO programs, while the group-based research did not” (Maggin et al., 2015, p. 205). The research showed evidence that when problem behaviors were attention maintained, the students exhibited a higher propensity to respond to CICO protocol in comparison to behaviors that were escape maintained (Maggin, et al., 2015). With that noted, the results of this review of research studies were positive and showed a decrease in behaviors that were considered disruptive in nature as well as an increase in the work that the students completed regardless of which type of study was used. Until further research is conducted, Maggin et al. (2015) recommend continuing to implement all the core components while using a CICO program. There were several limitations to their review, but overall, the results were indicative of the effective ability of the CICO program to be utilized as a supplementary intervention to address the behavioral function of students directly (Maggin et al., 2015). More research needs to be conducted, but the current findings are positive indicating that CICO programs are an effective intervention in regards to changing certain attention-maintained and escape-maintained behaviors.

Changing School Culture

Changing school culture is an intervention strategy that has been used to indirectly to increase student attendance and academic achievement. Fransa Weeks (2012) conducted a study in South Africa to determine how a culture of learning impacts student behavior. Embedded in this study was literature supporting the decline in school culture that impacted the learning environment (Weeks, 2012). In particular, the study (2012) mentioned that the majority of schools in South Africa responsible for educating

the black population are experiencing failure due to a lack of discipline creating a less than desirable learning environment, a low morale that is characterized by an attitude that is anti-school, and high rate of failing students (Weeks, 2012). Without changing the school culture, this cycle of failure will continue to perpetuate impacting future generations of learners.

Weeks (2012) provides one definition in an effort to define what the concept of a culture of learning looks like. This culture is defined and described as employing the circumstances and controls aligned with compulsory schooling to impress upon faculty and learners the significance of consistent presence, punctuality and recognition of authority (Weeks, 2012). Additionally, other essential elements of a culture of learning were supported by the literature and include several components (Weeks, 2012). First, the presence of a multilevel learning environment is a key feature. Also, the presence of a learning community that may engender a shared responsibility and purposeful behavior among the members. Next, the mindset of teachers should include caring attitudes, recognition of the importance of preparation, and a determination to perform their duties. Furthermore, there should exist networks of collaboration amongst all stakeholders, and students attending school should be punctual, accept authority, and feel safe. The school environment should have an availability of physical resources and the clarity of mission and values supported by all. Principals should be trustworthy leaders capable of earning and providing mutual respect. Finally, the staff should develop a partnership with parents to provide and develop a support system for the learners (Weeks, 2012). Weeks' study (2012) was a qualitative analysis that utilized a narrative approach and was conducted using an inquiry research design in a rural setting at a secondary school in South Africa;

the school was deemed to be economically disadvantaged. Despite its challenges, this particular school had established a culture of learning and was serving as a model for other schools. The school had adopted a proactive stance on behavior issues by dealing with them on a preventative level using open communication with stakeholders to come up with strategies used to deal with issues allowing for all stakeholders to be involved and for families to take ownership as partners in their children's education (Weeks, 2012).

During Weeks' study (2012), students, teachers, and the principal were asked questions during interviews. The results of the study (2012) supported the literature and demonstrated the benefits of creating a culture of learning. According to Weeks (2012), students that increase their connection to the school community experience decreases in undesirable school behaviors including absenteeism and fighting. Weeks (2012) cited scientific evidence that by increasing the student connection, schools promoted increased levels of motivation, engagement, attendance, academic achievement and rates of graduation.

Additional proactive intervention strategies focus on manipulating the learning environment to create a positive and supportive climate within the classroom (Banks, 2014). Such intervention strategies are both appropriate and beneficial for all students, not just students who have behavior issues, emotional issues, or are determined to have disabilities. The physical arrangement of the classroom environment, having a classroom schedule, classroom rules with clearly defined expectations and consequences, and building positive teacher-student relationships as well as providing peer models are interventions that have demonstrated success when used within the classroom. By

predicting potential behavior issues and implementing antecedent strategies, the teacher may create a learning environment that is conducive to a positive learner experience and the one of the key components of effective classroom management (Banks, 2014).

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS)

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a three-tiered model used to address problems such as absenteeism and academic issues. In 2013, Kearney and Graczyk conducted a “systematic search of empirical literature related to school attendance, chronic absenteeism, and the utilization of an RtI framework to address the needs of school-aged children and youth” (p. 1). In their study, Kearney and Graczyk (2013) noted that there is a direct correlation between students attending school on a regular basis and higher scores on standardized tests and subject-area grades. Kearney and Graczyk (2013) defined regular attendance as a student being absent no more than five days per school year. They also went on to note that issues with absenteeism may be described as students missing a minimum of 25% of school days over a two-week period, students experiencing difficulties in attending classes due to significant interference in the student’s routine, or students that have been absent for ten or more school days over 15 weeks during the course of normal school operations (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013)

Kearney and Graczyk (2013) set out to show that the RtI model can be used by professionals to support assessment alignment, provide pre-emptive attempts to curb undesired behaviors, and address specific interventions to improve attendance. These interventions should be developed through the use of organized and tiered decision process that utilizes strategies specific to student needs and frequent student monitoring (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Response to Intervention uses a three-tiered approach where

tier 1 uses universal interventions that are aimed toward the entire student population utilizing fundamental strategies while conducting frequent identification screenings for students not responding to those fundamental strategies (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). The second tier uses targeted interventions that are focused on specific at-risk learners requiring supplemental support services beyond the strategies presented in tier 1. Tier 2 requires additional student progress monitoring on a more frequent basis than tier 1 (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Tier 3 consists of intense interventions for learners experiencing considerable or multifaceted issues requiring an individualized, concentrated method with more intensive progress monitoring (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Tier 1 should be effective with 80-90% of students; only 5-10% of students should need the additional support from tier 2, and 1-5% of students typically need the more intense/individualized support in tier 3 (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013).

Kearney and Graczyk (2013) noted five key points that Response to Intervention (RtI) addresses. The first included the purposeful integration of the RtI model to focus on identifying and treating students early rather than waiting until they fail before the intervention process is started. The second key point is that the RtI model includes a functional behavioral assessment component that is helpful in the identification of the specific variables attributing to problem behaviors and how to develop individualized interventions that are capable of addressing those specific variables (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). The third key point included the development of interventions designed to address absenteeism from an instructional standpoint in accordance with research that provides amplified levels of empirical support (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). The fourth point addressed the compatibility of RtI as it is integrated with various multi-tiered approaches

including mental health programs and the PBIS framework while emphasizing prevention in lieu of correction (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Finally, the fifth and final point that was addressed was the team approach including the benefits of collaboration.

In their study, Kearney and Graczyk (2013) discussed strategies that may be used as interventions at each of the tier levels. Included in their discussion, Kearney and Graczyk (2013) mention the utilization of whole-school interventions such as PBIS to improve school climate. The justification for whole-school interventions was based upon previous findings that linked PBIS to increases in students' academic achievement as well as improved perceptions of overall school safety. As a result of the changes, schools experienced decreases in the number of disciplinary referrals and incidences resulting in school suspensions decreased (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Other first tier strategies include safety-oriented strategies, health-based strategies, mental health and social-emotional learning, and parental involvement.

Tier 2 strategies for interventions include psychological interventions for absenteeism, student engagement, peer relationships, and mentoring. The intensive interventions suggested for those students experiencing chronic absenteeism include expanded tier 2 interventions, alternative educational programs, and accessing legal strategies (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). In the conclusion of their study, Kearney & Graczyk (2013) noted that consistent attendance in school broadens student opportunities promoting the development of their skills related to academic language, work-related attributes, and overall social well being. They went on to state that the RtI model is capable of accommodating students who are experiencing varying degrees of absenteeism

from school and providing explicit directions in preparation for associated assessment and designed interventions (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013, p. 17).

In addition to classroom-level positive behavior interventions, the literature supports the effectiveness of school-wide positive behavior interventions. The School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (SWPBIS) system involves intervention strategies that schools have used to decrease chronic absenteeism and increase academic achievement. Horner et al. (2010) defined SWPBIS as “a set of intervention practices and organizational systems for establishing the social culture and intensive individual behavior supports needed to achieve academic and social success for all students” (p. 198). Horner et al. (2010) compiled large amounts of literature as part of their research, including the history as well as the steps in the process of implementation.

SWPBIS focuses on using a multi-tier system of interventions with progressive levels of intensity. The first tier is referred to as primary prevention with a focus on providing all students with support prior to behavior issues occurring. Based upon research by Horner et al. (2010), the study developed the following findings:

- (a) defining and teaching three to five school-wide behavioral expectations; (b) rewarding appropriate behavior on a regular schedule; (c) minimizing the natural rewards available for inappropriate behavior; (d) establishing a continuum of formal and predictable consequences for problem behavior; (e) collecting and using data about student behavior to guide ongoing decision making. (p. 198)

The second tier of SWPBIS focuses on those students that are not responding successfully to the first tier of interventions. These second tier interventions are designed to be address targeted areas among this specific group of learners (Horner et al., 2010).

Finally, the third tier of intervention addresses the individual learners that have not experienced favorable outcomes during the first two tiers of SWPBIS. These interventions are provided on an individual basis and developed based upon academic weaknesses, social issues, medical issues, or functional behavior that may impede student progress (Horner et al., 2010). The basic foundations of SWPBIS are not new and have been developed after years of systematic research involving the application of innovative ideas in the schools, with mental health practices, and intensive behavior analyses (Horner et al., 2010). It typically takes schools as well as school districts approximately two to three years to establish their systems and practices in order to effectively implement a SWPBIS system.

Over the past five years, there has been an increase in the number of organizations utilizing SWPBIS. Horner et al. (2010) listed the following contributions as reasons why SWPBIS has increased in implementation:

(a) focusing on the whole school as the unit of analysis; (b) emphasizing multiple tiers of support in which a student's needs are assessed regularly, support levels are tied to need, and supports are delivered as early as possible; (c) tying educational practices to the organizational systems needed to deliver these practices with fidelity and sustainability; (d) using data for active and cyclical decision making. (p. 198)

During the early 1990s, the development of the framework, also referred to as the blueprint, began including steps for implementing SWPBIS (Horner et al., 2010). Oregon was the first state to formally begin using SWPBIS during 1994. Utilizing all of the information obtained from the initial implementation process and adding subsequent

findings, the initial sketch of the SWPBIS Implementation Blueprint became available for review in 2002 (Horner et al., 2010). A revision of the blueprint was posted in March 2010. Between 1997 and 1999, other states began following Oregon's lead in the implementation of SWPBIS including Illinois, Missouri, and Maryland. Next, SWPBIS broadened into new areas including the states of Florida, North Carolina, and Colorado in 2002 (Horner et al., 2010).

By the time Horner et al. conducted their study (2010), there had been over 18,000 schools in the United States who had started implementing SWPBIS. The results of experimental research study by Horner et al. (2010) support that the schools using SWPBIS have established the following:

- (a) reduction in office discipline referrals; (b) improved school organizational health; (c) reduction in suspensions; (d) increased academic performance; (e) increased perception of school safety; (f) reduction in bullying behaviors; (g) improved perception of teacher efficacy; (h) improved social-emotional competence of students. (p. 198)

The initial step for schools to undertake in order to adopt SWPBIS is to perform a self-assessment in order to see if they have any of the components in place and use those areas to serve as a basic foundation to build the program. Generally, SWPBIS schools will send support team members for three to six days of training during the first and second year of the program. Additionally, the schools are assigned a support coach to assist in the implementation process. Collecting data is an important part of the initial stages as well as during the ongoing implementation (Horner et al., 2010) The PBIS.org website has created a blueprint to facilitate the implementation process that is available to

all states to use for training of leadership teams responsible for establishing PBIS in the schools.

Within the PBIS blueprint, there are four levels of local capacity deemed to be important in regards to implementation and sustainability including 1) Funding for the initiative, 2) Visibility, 3) Political Support, and 4) Policy. Horner et al. (2010) stressed the importance of building capacity during SWPBIS training in order to facilitate successful implementation. The study (2010) identified four areas of capacity include training, coaching, evaluation, and behavioral expertise.

In the Horner et al. (2010) study, they referred to a 2005 study in which the authors (Fixsen Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005) stressed the importance of establishing a foundation through the identification of need and areas of support from policy as well as establishing the appropriate infrastructure to serve as the footing for a successful implementation of SWPBIS. The study (2005) continued to support this claim by developing the equation, “Effective Interventions X Effective Implementation = Effective Educational Outcomes” (Horner, Sugai, and Anderson, 2010, p 200). In 2005, Fixsen et al. suggested the six stages of implementation including exploration, installation, initial implementation, full implementation, innovation and sustainability.

In the Horner et al. (2010) study, three themes were recognized from amongst the schools participating in the study. The schools were located within seven states, and all were implementing SWPBIS. First, the schools did not follow the same schedule for adoption. Second, the schools chose not to follow the stages in a linear sequence even though the stages were aligned in a manner that was considered helpful during implementation. Instead, the schools followed a cyclical or iterative sequence. Third, the

timetable for the induction and preliminary employment of developmental stages varied from school to school. Regardless of the implementation procedures, the cost of maintaining the program was reduced as the implementation progressed (Horner et al., 2010).

To conclude their study, Horner et al. (2010) determined that those states that were capable of successfully implementing SWPBIS on a large scale usually started by piloting the program. During the piloting phase, capacity was built which allowed for adopting and sustaining SWPBIS. Piloting of the program established an approach that eased the transition of moving from a local capacity to a large-scale application. States with large-scale implementation had the found and hired people with the capacity to adapt to change based upon the needs of the school and the learners. Another finding was that funding, political support, implementation capacity, and infrastructure from demonstration development to large-scale implementation was not feasible until a state had 100-200 SWPBIS schools (Horner et al., 2010). This study (2010) showed that large-scale implementation of SWPBIS is possible with a well-planned approach.

The implementation of PBIS has expanded beyond the borders of the United States. By 2014, there were reportedly over 20,000 schools using SWPBIS. SWPBIS is often identified by many countries as the “U.S. approach” (McIntosh, 2014). The countries using SWPBIS include Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and beyond. Canada first started implementing SWPBIS around 1996 in British Columbia. Several school districts in Canada have experienced positive outcomes from the implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports-Soutien au comportement positif (PBIS-SCP). McIntosh (2014) cited a study conducted by Kelm, McIntosh, and Cooley (2014)

that showed when PBIS-SCP was implemented in Canada, the outcomes were similar to those resulting from implementation of SWPBIS in the United States including “reduced problem behavior, reduced suspensions, reduced bullying, increased instructional time, increased school safety, and increased academic achievement” (McIntosh, 2014, p. 158). Additionally, PBIS-SCP is being used as a means of increasing prosocial behavior, improving long-term life outcomes, and decreasing challenging behavior (McIntosh, 2014). A major goal of Canada’s PBIS-SCP is to achieve long-term results, not just provide a short-term solution to attendance and behavior problems (McIntosh, 2014).

SWPBIS is not limited to the educational setting. The implementation of PBIS-SCP has been expanded across multiple locations including mental health services and correctional institutions (McIntosh, 2014).

In conclusion to reviewing pertinent literature, there is a tremendous need for additional research of components that may amplify or facilitate the acceptance and implementation of behavior programs that may usher in improved, more efficient practices. As a result, more desirable outcomes may be achieved throughout the school setting through the utilization of evidence-based practices and programs (Pas & Bradshaw, 2012).

A Type II translation research model was used, and the data were analyzed from a statewide scale-up effort of SWPBIS in Maryland public schools. With this effort, data was collected from over 870 public schools in Maryland. Additionally, at least 44 other states in America have implemented strategies to scale-up SWPBIS. When Pas & Bradshaw (2012) conducted their study, there was a limited amount of empirical research that had focused on the prevalence and availability of prevention programs and the

efficiency of their implementation efforts. Additionally, the research examined the quality of the study and how the factors impacted student outcomes (Pas & Bradshaw, 2012).

The PBIS Maryland Consortium collected the data used in the study in the spring of 2009 regarding implementation and the spring of 2010 regarding student outcomes. The schools involved were elementary schools and middle schools with grades ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. There were three measures used to determine the level of implementation including “the Implementation Phases Inventory (IPI), the School-wide Evaluation Tool (SET), and the Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ)” (Pas & Bradshaw, 2012, p. 420). Results of Pas & Bradshaw’s study showed that schools that had been using SW-PBIS in addition to a higher percentage of standard certified teachers demonstrated more efficient implementation. It was also determined that more advanced implementation, based upon information on the IPI, has been shown to result in increased achievement scores in the subjects of math and reading and has been associated with lower rates of truancy (Pas & Bradshaw, 2012). The SET proved to be most reliable when utilized at the elementary level and is the most widely used measure. Whereas the IPI and BoQ are more recently developed measures, there is a need to conduct further research to ensure their predictive validity in addition to their psychometric properties (Pas & Bradshaw, 2012). Further research is needed to determine if implementation and outcomes vary at different points throughout the process of scaling up and if the findings from the McIntosh study generalize across states located outside of the research area.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

Historically, qualitative researchers have attempted to discover how people interpret their experiences (Yin, 2014). Yin explains that the purpose of a qualitative research study is to also achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives or work. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) stated that qualitative research is based on the belief that practitioners cannot construct knowledge until they are able to engage in their work to a point where they can “make significant meaning” of their work (p. 23).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how the faculty beliefs and attitudes within the specific school cultures that have used PBIS frameworks and also managed student behaviors are related to increased student attendance. The findings of this study can be used to further inform school principals how PBIS service delivery protocol can be used to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following primary research question: How do Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) programs influence student behavior as related to improved school attendance? The sub-questions are:

1. Which specific PBIS practices are used to decrease chronic absenteeism?
2. What are the PBIS professional development sessions that are used by teachers to support families when attempting to reduce chronic absenteeism among certain students?
3. How does staff collaboration work when using the PBIS framework tiers to reduce chronic absenteeism?

Research Design

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised that applied research strives to improve the quality of practice of a certain discipline. Braun and Clarke (2013) went further by describing qualitative research as an effort to understand how people make sense out of their experiences when using certain phenomenon. Although a number of design types are listed in literature, this study used the Basic Qualitative Design (BQD) (Merriam, 2014). The intent of this study is to examine how the beliefs and attitudes that educators have formed while implementing PBIS strategies in the classroom in their effort to manage student behavior and reduce chronic absenteeism.

Target Population and Sample

The state of Mississippi was identified by several government agencies as having a severe chronic attendance problem. Within three different counties in the southern region of Mississippi are three specific public schools that enroll the largest range of students who are identified as maintaining chronic absenteeism records (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). This specific region is one of the few in that state of Mississippi that has managed to decreased the chronic absenteeism rate since 2014 (MDE, 2018).

The sample for this study was comprised of the faculty who worked at three specific PBIS schools within three different counties. The sample group for this study was twelve educators from the three schools located in each of the three counties that were identified as serving the largest number of students who demonstrate chronic absenteeism. Each group consisted of three classroom teachers who use the PBIS

framework daily. In order to collect information regarding school leadership, each of the three groups included one assistant or lead principal.

In qualitative research, the sample size is usually smaller than in quantitative research because the investigation is attempting to obtain a deeper, more thorough understanding of the phenomenon. In order to reach that goal in this study, purposeful sampling was used to select the unit of analysis. Patton (2015) suggests that in order to gather rich information that is central to the purpose of the study, it is best to use purposeful sampling.

Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect data: an audiotape recording device, observation journal, and an interview guide with probing question list (Appendix A). The researcher was the main data collection and analysis instrument (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher is a school principal who has served in the current community for 20 years.

Data Collection Procedures

Before the data could be collected, the researcher received permission to conduct the study from the school district superintendent (Appendix B), three school principals, and the university Institutional Review Board (Appendix C). The researcher then began the recruitment process (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) by emailing a recruitment letter (Appendix D) to 20 classroom teachers and three assistant principals in the three schools. The recruitment letter (Appendix D) contained the following information:

- Overview of the study
- Recruitment criteria and rationale
- Copy of the Informed Consent form

The researcher screened each applicant by reviewing the completed forms that were returned. A screening telephone interview was conducted to each applicant.

After selecting fifteen participants, (three additional participants in the event a participant failed to complete the study) from each school, the researcher distributed by email a sign-up sheet with three time slots for scheduling interviews at the local library near each of the school locations. After the interview schedule was developed, a confirmation letter was distributed to each selected participant.

On the day of the initial interview session, all procedures were explained regarding anonymity, confidentiality, consent, and IRB requirements (Punch, 2013). A hard copy of the consent form was signed before the interview began. All interviews were conducted in a private conference room of a library located in the neighborhood of each school. Pseudonyms were created to protect the identity of the participants.

Information and data were collected from the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A) that included recorded verbal responses, observation notes made by the interviewer during the interview, probe responses, and non-verbal communication comments. The first set of four interviews were conducted at a neighborhood library located near School #1. Although the interview questions had been approved by the Institutional Review Board, the responses were vague and brief. The analysis process was uneventful, and the researcher did not collect rich information about the various experiences when using PBIS frameworks and practices.

Probes (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) are follow-up questions, follow-up responses, and comments used to gather more details when the participants are not responding with clarity from the original interview questions. For the next set of interviews for School #2, the interviewer used the probe/follow-up question method. This additional method, along with attempting to reach a point of saturation, proved successful in extracting more pertinent information from the responses (Creswell, 2015). A full view of the educators' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions regarding how the implementation of PBIS frameworks reduced chronic student absenteeism was achieved.

After the third set of successful interviews at School #3, the researcher scheduled a second set of interviews with the first group where the responses had not yielded the needed information. This time a significant point of saturation was achieved as described in Creswell (2015).

The Role of the Researcher

As a principal who leads a school that has implemented the PBIS framework for several years and a school leader who attempts to strengthen the goal of reducing chronic absenteeism and providing new arenas to increase school attendance and academic performance, the researcher became motivated to capture any ideas, progress, or success that other schools in the same southern state had experienced while implementing PBIS frameworks. As a doctoral learner, who was required to survey scholarly literature, minimal information could be found regarding the specific southern state where the doctoral learner served as principal. Therefore, the research plan came to fruition as a part of a future doctoral capstone.

While serving as a school principal, the researcher has had many opportunities to communicate with other school principals who have implemented PBIS frameworks within the school culture. Although the researcher collaborated with interested educators participating in the PBIS training, minimal contact with PBIS classroom teachers or PBIS leads occurred. This gap of experience motivated the researcher to select a sample where faculty was involved daily with enrolled students as they used PBIS practices in the classroom. Therefore, the sample became classroom teachers and assistant school principals.

Data Analysis

The researcher completed the interview sessions and then transcribed all of the recordings. Axial coding (Charmaz, 2014), a process of assigning descriptions to each bit of the data, began after the reading and re-reading of the first set of interview transcripts. Merriam (2002) explains this process as beginning with a unit of data, comparing it to other units of data, finding recurring themes within or between these units and creating a system or code to refine the process. A list of codes was eventually developed which assisted in the development of categories of similarities and contrasting perspectives. Each category contained a group of raw data related to each theme. After each set of interviews, the researcher followed the aforementioned procedure.

Throughout the entire process the researcher continuously referred back to the research questions in order to remain aligned and integrate the correct information. Special attention was given to the probe/follow-up questions. This process was completed for each set of interviews. The resulting categories became the topics for the data analysis.

According to Yin, (2014) in order to analyze the phenomena (chronic absenteeism), descriptive and interpretive methods must be employed. Using both methods allowed the researcher to objectively cope with personal bias or preconceptions that may have existed within the researcher who is also a school principal. During the data analysis, the researcher continually determined which source of data would lead to each finding. According to research by Yin (2014), utilizing triangulation strengthened the validity of the study. After completing a comprehensive analysis, the display and report were written in a dissertation template.

Summary

Chapter three presented the complete methodology procedure used during the study. The general research question and the sub-questions guided the study. The rationale for selecting the research approach, the research design, and the sampling method were described and explained. A chronological protocol that listed the recruitment process, the type of participants, the university Institutional Review Board process, the data collection method, and the inquiry protocol were identified and described. Finally, a discussion was presented that supported and explained the data analysis that would be used.

CHAPTER IV – PRESENTATION OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter includes the findings from the collection of data and the analysis process used during the study. The data is presented from an examination of interview data collected from twelve participants who as faculty, work in three schools that implemented the PBIS framework in order to increase school attendance and reduce the three schools' significantly high chronic absenteeism rate (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2016). These participants work closely with the students and have first-hand knowledge of the PBIS framework implementation.

Chapter four also presents the applied methodology that guided the analyzed data, the results of the analyzed data, the in-depth analysis derived from the interviews, and a summary of the data collection. The discussion in this chapter is significant to demonstrate the relationship of the participants' responses as they related to the answers to the research questions that were intended to clarify the attitudes and beliefs the faculty have derived through their experiences when working in a school that implements PBIS best practices.

The data from the interviews were thoroughly analyzed and triangulated with information learned from previous research studies in other states where PBIS frameworks are implemented, the notes written in the reflective journal, and the follow-up interviews with each of the three schools assistant principals. The presented data was derived in response to the primary research question: How do Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) programs influence student behavior as related to improved school attendance?

Description of Participants

Semi-structured Interviews were completed with twelve participants who served in the role of classroom teachers, school counselors, or assistant principals.

The twelve participants worked in one of the three school districts on a school campus where the schools had been designated as high-risk schools with chronic absenteeism issues. Each one of the schools, identified as School 1, School 2, and School 3, have used PBIS frameworks for five years as support for the school mission to increase academic performance and classroom behavior. Three additional participants were recruited for a total of fifteen altogether because of the risk of someone deciding to discontinue the study. Each of the fifteen participants served as either a permanent classroom teacher, assistant principal, or grade level counselor. The information for the original twelve participants is presented in Table 1 while the information for the additional three participants is presented in Table 2. The fifteen participants were certified to teach, lead, or counsel students in their respective southern state where this study was conducted. Each of the participants was involved in the school districts' PBIS professional development program held at each of the campuses. Of the original twelve participants selected, seven were female and five were male. During the screening process, the researcher attempted to select participants who worked with PBIS students on a daily basis. Each of the participants had been trained in PBIS best practices for increasing student attendance and increasing positive classroom behavior.

Table 1 *Participant Sample*

Participant name	Gender	Role/Position	Years of service
Participant A	F	Teacher	4
Participant B	F	Counselor	6
Participant C	F	Asst. Principal	5
Participant D	M	Teacher	10
Participant E	F	Asst. Principal	8
Participant F	M	Teacher	10
Participant G	M	Teacher	11
Participant H	M	Teacher	6
Participant I	F	Asst. Principal	9
Participant J	F	Teacher	14
Participant K	F	Teacher	5
Participant L	M	Teacher	1

Data Collection

The study used a basic qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to capture the experiences of the 12 participants while serving as a part of the daily classroom experience. The participants' experiences were investigated through ten semi-structured interview questions. Before each set of the interviews, the protection of privacy was discussed with each participant. The opportunity of the participants to stop the interview at any time was reviewed. The researcher did not proceed until the participant was ready to initiate the interview.

Triangulation of the research was used to strengthen the reliability and validity of the study. Additionally, for the one-on-one, face-to-face interviews, the researcher

created a research journal to record reflections throughout the data collection process. A plethora of notes were written in the on-going journal to document behavior regarding the interview process and the anxiety of the process as experienced by a novice researcher. After each interview, reflections that assessed the effectiveness of the interview session were documented. This journal represented a tool for managing bias during the collection process, therefore bracketing pre-conceived notions. The researcher recorded the observations that occurred before and after each interview. Along with the journal and the interview sessions, the researcher held a follow-up interview with School 1 administrators after the raw data was organized into themes and categories in order to gather more in-depth information. The journal and follow-up interview increased the depth of the study by providing another perspective to yield new and emerging information.

Qualitative research methodology seeks to understand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the goal of each interview session was to clarify, explain, and highlight the participants' attitudes and beliefs they had derived from their experiences while working in schools that had implemented PBIS best practices designed to support increased school attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism.

The basic research design selected requires producing a detailed and rich narrative in which themes and theories can be gathered and analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Asking good questions is an integral part of basic qualitative research methodology. During the first set of interviews at School 1, the interview responses were noted as being very brief and sometimes vague. After completing the first set of interviews, the researcher listened to the recording and realized he could not capture any significant

attitudes or specific beliefs, nor was he able to make any significant observations from the interview session.

At the second set of interviews the researcher decided to use the follow-up questions and probes (Yin, 2014) that had been listed in the interview guide. Using those additional questions motivated the participants to respond with more details, opinions, similarities, and comments. The participants provided expanded dialogue that expressed their diverse perceptions based on their teaching, training, and data-driven experiences while using PBIS practices in the classroom and on the campus. After recognizing the increase of information and the increased responsiveness of participants when using the set of follow-up/probing questions, the researcher revisited School 1 and conducted a second interview session.

The researcher began to notice data saturation after the second set of interviews. The researcher wanted to insure the interview process had reached complete saturation; therefore, he interviewed the three participants who were not part of the original twelve participants in order to detect any new emergent patterns (Yin, 2014). These participants are included in Table 2 as M, N, & O and their data is not included in the analysis. No new patterns or new data emerged. Complete saturation had been accomplished.

Table 2 *Additional interviews*

Participant M	F	Teacher	14
Participant N	M	Teacher	3
Participant O	M	Teacher	5

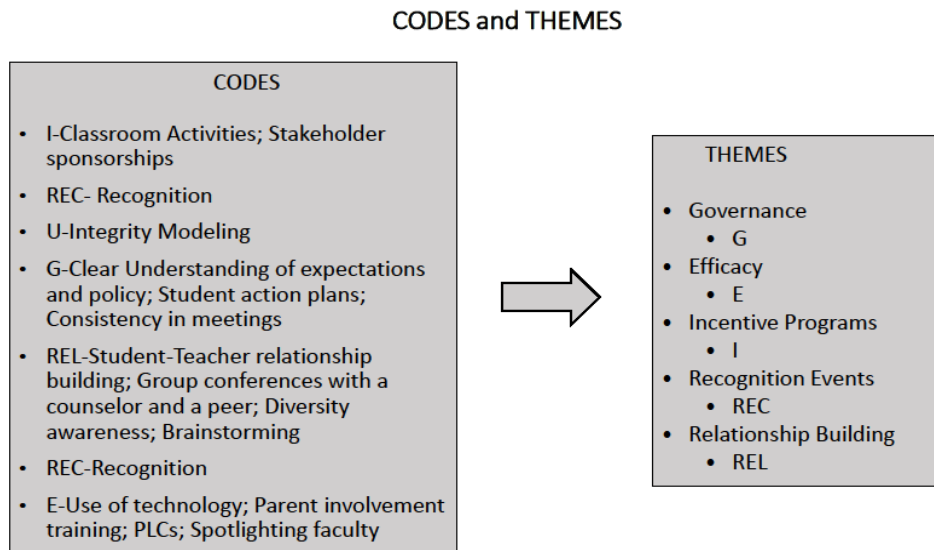
Data Analysis

An inductive content analysis method was used to establish themes and categories. A step-by-step process was used to reduce the raw data into emerging patterns and then draw interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After the second reading of the interview transcripts, open coding began. This included required note taking and making reflective comments in the margins of the transcripts. The researcher continued this process until the actual interview sessions were completed.

After assigning a code to each of the ‘bits of data,’ a spreadsheet listing all of the codes derived from the responses to each of the ten interview questions was developed. Further reduction occurred using an inductive approach to construct the different code patterns that were related to each of the ten interview questions.

After creating several sets of code and category patterns, further reduction occurred by constructing the pattern sheets into established emerging themes. Figure 1 presents the themes emerging from the data analysis as identifiable educational patterns that provided a link to the interpretive results of the sub-questions: 1) Collaboration among faculty- a system where the entire school culture works together to achieve positive and improved results for the entire student body. 2) Incentives- the main component for the PBIS interventions. 3) Professional Development- an on-going training and learning system created to improve the educator’s professionalism and skills.

Figure 1. Codes and Themes Derived from the Data



The researcher continued to use the inductive approach for qualitative research by conducting a follow-up semi-structured interview with the assistant principals of the three schools. After completing the assistant principal interviews, the researcher was able to further interpret, synthesize, and make conclusions from the raw data, category information, and the emerging theme patterns.

Research Question 1: How do PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) programs influence student behavior as related to improved school attendance?

PBIS focuses on using a multi-tier system of interventions with certain practices combined with varying levels of intensity. The first tier is referred to as primary prevention with a focus on providing all students with support prior to remediating the undesired behavior. All twelve participants stated that PBIS incentive programs supported the practices within the teaching and learning environment. They also believed that the incentive program emphasizes rewarding appropriate behavior on a regular

schedule. Five participants stated that incentives are key to increased school and class attendance in their classroom. Each participant discussed how the incentive program influenced the parents “buy in” for improving his or her child’s attendance. Participant L stated, “I have one parent who emails me each month to find out if her son is going to win a prize for attending school all of the days in the month.”

All participants believed the incentive program has become an integral intervention of the PBIS practice. The classroom teachers identified the program as the best motivator of any PBIS practice that is used in the daily classroom. Participants believed that the incentives program has also stimulated the campus culture and integrity of the entire student body. Mixed attitudes were presented regarding the commercial PBIS incentives programs. Some participants did not like the commercial videos that were used to introduce a new incentive program. Some viewed the videos as out of date, not diverse enough, and a waste of instructional time. However, the commercial incentive practice that was mentioned positively by seven of the participants is the Dojo point system. This system tracks daily attendance and gives the student a Dojo point for each day of attendance. At the end of the month, the teachers give out prizes and certificates.

During state testing, school attendance is paramount for successful results. In their efforts to encourage school attendance, two teachers discussed another incentive program that works well in their school. This program is based upon an incentive program where if a student attends school for an entire month, the student’s name goes in a drawing for an opportunity to win a gift card worth twenty-five dollars or more. Several other teachers mentioned other incentive programs like free admission to amusement parks, movie theatres, and restaurants. “Play money” is also the final incentive program the

teachers discussed. This “play money” may be named tiger bucks, attendance dollars, or school bucks. The dollars are awarded monthly, and the student is then able to use them in the school store where many types of small and safe items are stored for purchase.

Another integral PBIS intervention is recognition practices. Recognizing students for accomplishing goals and outcomes is a type of positive reinforcement that stimulates children to minimize several types of undesired behaviors. In recent years, social media has taken the place of written letters to the home and postings on bulletin boards. Five participants discussed how their school posted all of the improved attendance data on the school web site. Participant B shared as follows:

Once the students read the school web site and see their name and recognized actions, they also post the information on their personal web site. Attending school each day has become a ‘favorite past time’ in my class. My students still enjoy being recognized.

Each of the twelve participants agreed that recognition actions on social media had helped to build relationships.

All of the recognition announcements were made by the principal’s office in all of the three schools. This created an increased effort among the recognized students to stop by the principals’ office to thank him or her. The participants noticed that several times during the beginning of the month, the students would return to class with an entrance pass from the principal. These impromptu visits to the principal’s office had become 10-20 minute conferences with the recognized student and the principal. Participant F emphasized the importance of strengthening relationships as follows:

Our school is very large. Before the PBIS recognition activities, some students did not know the head principal. Now every student who has been recognized for improving class and school attendance has had a positive conversation with the head principal.

Each of the three middle school teachers discussed the importance of modeling good attendance. Each of them used the same PBIS unit of study although they are at three different schools. When the unit of study uses a biographical unit, the PBIS practices require that the classroom teacher design a classroom activity whereas the students are able to reflect and experience “Integrity Modeling” in which the students learn how hero-like individuals coped with issues such as school attendance. Participant G shared this teaching experience as follows:

When we study the life of a hero like Martin Luther King, I have the students to research important information about the person: grade point average in college, any information about his daily life as a student, and something about his parents. I then have the student to write a reflective paper imagining what Martin Luther King’s attendance record demonstrated. When the class reviews the assignment, I attempt to transcend the discussion into personal aspects of healthy living, as attending school regularly.

When sharing the best practices that teachers have used to foster changing behaviors like increasing school attendance behaviors, two participants stated that implementing a schedule of repeating the attendance and tardy rules on a regular basis was a meaningful practice. Additionally, the teachers included discussion on the expectations that students need to follow along with the requirements for attending school on a regular basis. All

twelve participants described and clarified their choices of certain PBIS practices that had been instrumental in reinforcing the behavior to attend school regularly and reduce chronic absenteeism. Research Question 1 was answered by summarizing the analyzed findings as they relate to several categories of analyzed data: Incentives, Interventions, and Collaboration.

Research Question 2: What are the PBIS professional development sessions that are used by teachers to support families when attempting to reduce chronic absenteeism among certain students?

Professional development is necessary for educators who must implement the PBIS framework to increase effectiveness that may improve attendance behaviors with the student and the student's family. All three of the schools implemented PBIS because the district leaders noticed a decline in the attendance rates and an increase in chronic absenteeism numbers during the fourth quarter of the school years. However, all of the educators experienced professional development through use of the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs have become a widely used model for professional development (DuFour, 2009). Participant B described her professional development as a flexible group whereas the training session always centered on the exact need at that moment. Participant D shared as follows:

At each PLC session, a brainstorming component would occur at the beginning in order to decide the most current need in the school as related to increasing school attendance. The need could emerge from any area: weekly or daily reports, an incident that might include attendance or truancy issues, a problem that an individual teacher is having, or a family or stakeholder issue. Many times, we

would meet if a sponsor of incentive awards had stopped their sponsorship. It was always refreshing to know a problem could be solved by your own PLCs.

Participant A shared her experience with a commercial PLC program as follows:

We participate in PBIS trainings by using the *Leader in Me* training program. The sessions focus on concentrating on instructional leadership whereas the classroom teacher uses specific leadership skills to work with parents and families whose children do not want to attend school. A series of exercises that provide strategies to use with children to help them discover how they themselves can redirect their present behavior presented.

Although comments related to professional development for working with families was minimal at best, Participant F stated as follows:

We really do have many professional development sessions about working with parents, however my principal always sends out helpful tips to parents about encouraging their children to go to bed on time and arrive at the bus stop in plenty [of] time when the weather is bad.

When the researcher conducted a follow-up interview with the school assistant principals only, additional information was collected. Participant I gave a list of three activities that had been used in PLC sessions to motivate teachers to communicate more with parents when they had students who were absent from school many times during the week. Participant I listed the following: using telephone calls in lieu of emails, making an effort to determine the reason why the student was absent while the guardian is on the telephone, and selecting and implementing strategies from the PBIS parent-student Action plan packets for the parents to implement to help remediate the unwanted

behavior. Participant E, also an assistant principal, believed that the PLC sessions were concerned more with issues regarding the correct use of the PBIS tier system than there was little time to learn more about handling and changing adult parents' behaviors. By the tenth interview when there was very little additional data that allowed the researcher to learn more about using professional development to further family involvement, the researcher abandoned the discussion and asked the participants to give suggestions as to how to increase family support when a child is identified with chronic absenteeism. Participant K believed that funding should be allotted for transporting parents to the schools on parent conference nights. She believed that parents should have small-group sessions among themselves to develop some parent strategies to help their children develop a "buy in" in an effort to change student behavior and encourage a return to attending school on a regular basis. Participant L was asked the same question, and he believed it was not his responsibility to learn new strategies to work with parents of children who were experiencing poor attendance.

Most participants expressed that PBIS training needed to include more sessions that discussed and presented strategies to work with parents and families. However, Participant K shared that the plans were being made to ask one of the commercial companies to prepare more professional development that centers on families and parent involvement in the PBIS process.

Research Question 3: How does staff collaboration work when using the PBIS framework tiers to reduce chronic absenteeism?

Collaboration efforts are necessary components in every school reform program. PBIS has been acknowledged (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012) for providing opportunities for

faculty and staff to work together in order to increase student performance and achieve staff success. Participant D discussed how students who experience chronic absenteeism are pulled from extracurricular activities and sports. However, a PBIS practice of student-faculty collaboration is placed in that same time slot. Students meet with a selected faculty member during the original practice/rehearsal time. Student critical thinking exercises designed to promote honest conversations, are convened. Participant D stated as follows:

These honest conversations allow the student to look at the undesired behavior through another lens. This provides an opportunity for the student to create some new goals that are conducive to remediating the undesired behavior such as chronic absenteeism.

Throughout the duration of the interviews, an extensive amount of data was noted that exemplified the large presence of collaborative efforts within the implementation of the PBIS program. Responses discussing collaboration efforts within the PLC activities were noted quite frequently. Participant H, C, and L elaborated on how a shared responsibility existed in the leadership of each PLC meeting. Participant H shared how the monthly book club was led by a different colleague for each book selection. Participant H believes that collaborative effort has increased relationship building efforts, especially in situations when colleagues have to make sound decisions for students who may be experiencing academic difficulty and behavior difficulty.

Ten of the twelve participants described the collaboration that transpires between the administrators and faculty, especially teachers. They believed that the administrators did an excellent job of boosting morale, recognizing teacher accomplishments, and

communicating to the stakeholders the achievements of the faculty. Participants explained how the administrators made a special effort to present sessions to the faculty that illustrated how decisions were made when introducing a new PBIS tier, hiring PBIS specialists, and how Board of Education reports were developed to present to the public.

When asked about collaboration with department leaders as a follow-up question, there was major concern about the attitude of the department heads' unwillingness to share ideas as the school administrators do, even though the expectation is for them to support their colleagues in their department. Participant C stated as follows:

Sometimes I have to go to the assistant principal to find out something about the attendance reports. I believe I should not have to ask about the individual reports.

I believe these reports should be distributed in a timely fashion.

Additional Findings

The following discussion presents some of the findings that do not necessarily fit under the research questions two and three. In the year that the school district attendance rates were published, three schools in three different counties were identified with the highest chronic absenteeism rates in the southern state. After receiving a mandate to implement the PBIS framework, the chronic absenteeism rates experienced a decrease. In order to fully understand how the faculty perceived this experience, a few questions were asked to expand on what the teachers believed had specifically worked when using the PBIS framework. Below are some specific interview questions that revealed specific attitudinal information:

Since you experienced working with the PBIS framework, if you were the principal, how would you redesign the current Professional Development Program?

One participant stated that she would include the support staff of teacher's aides into the PBIS professional development sessions. She believed the book club was a really successful tool in helping the teachers understand how to successfully implement Tier 1 of the PBIS framework. She believed that if the teacher's aides could also learn this information, then the classroom process would be more beneficial. The teacher's aides would understand the rationale as to why the classroom teacher was using certain strategies with students who were experiencing difficulty, like not coming to school.

Another participant believed that the "buy in" or commitment was not as complete as it should be. He stated that if he were principal, he would redesign the professional development sessions to include some sessions on teacher efficacy and building relationships. One participant stated as follows:

I would continue what we are doing and provide more research to teachers on how attendance affects student performance. I would also have some sort of incentive for the parents in order to support their desire to be more involved with their child's attempt to eradicate the undesired type of behavior.

At the end of each interview, the researcher attempted to reach saturation by asking each participant to choose three words or phrases that characterize the PBIS framework culture at their respective school. Of the 36 words or phrases, the repetition of several words may be significant in drawing conclusions.

Table 3 *Efficacy Data*

One of Three Words to Describe PBIS culture # of Occurrences

Data- Driven	7
Collaborative	8
Ever-growing	1
Mandatory	1
Unexciting	1
Beneficial	5
Supportive	4
Necessary	4
Respectful	5

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the data analysis that was executed after the semi-structured interviews. The primary research question, along with three of the sub-questions, guided the research. The research revealed that the participants in this study felt that PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) programs have a positive influence on student behavior and help improve student attendance. All of the participants believed that the incentive programs supported the practices within the teaching and learning environment. They shared their thoughts that the incentive programs helped to reward appropriate behavior on a regular schedule and that incentives are key to increased school and class attendance in their classrooms. Each of the

participants also indicated that the incentive programs influenced the parents' "buy in" increasing the level of support for improving the attendance of their children.

All of the educators in this study were provided professional development through use of the Professional Learning Community (PLC). Some activities that were utilized during PLC sessions were designed to motivate teachers and help them understand the need for appropriate communication with parents when students who had multiple absences from school. The activities focused on the use of telephone contacts in lieu of emails. The telephone calls should seek the reason why the student is not at school and follow the information outlined in the PBIS plan for working with parents and students. The purpose of the telephone contact is to conference with the family to help them understand the significance of school absences and help them remediate the undesired behavior. Most of the participants in this study expressed that PBIS training needed to include more sessions that discussed and presented strategies that taught them how to work with parents and families to work toward a common goal.

This study revealed that collaboration was a large part of the PBIS process, and the use of PLCs as a method of collaboration was frequently noted. The participants felt the administrators did an excellent job of boosting morale, recognizing teachers, and communicating to the stakeholders regarding the achievements of the faculty.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This study was grounded in the theory that the PBIS practices utilizing the behavior modification theory have a positive influence on student attendance resulting in a reduction in chronic absenteeism. The study examined the use of practices specifically aimed at minimizing absenteeism rates in school districts where the chronic absenteeism score dropped to a lower level of 7.23% in 2017 (MDE, 2018). This study presented an examination of the faculty experiences derived from using PBIS/SWPBIS as a method to reduce chronic absenteeism.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain understanding in the implementation of PBIS from the perspectives of teachers and assistant principals who work closely with children and who are involved with the PBIS practices as associated with increasing attendance and reducing any evidence of chronic absenteeism. This study was prompted by the need to obtain a better understanding of teacher and assistant principals' beliefs and attitudes regarding their experiences when working in a school culture that has implemented the PBIS framework to increase student attendance and reduce the number of chronic absenteeism cases. This study may inform school principals who may need more knowledge and information regarding appropriate PBIS practices that may be implemented to foster successful outcomes within the school culture.

Chapter five presents a summary of the findings, discussion of the findings as related to the literature, the limitations, the implications of the findings for practice, and recommendations for future research. This chapter will also present a reflective discussion by contributing additional suggestions for best practices and future research.

Summary of the Findings

The primary focus of this study was to fully understand, utilizing the perspectives of school faculty who work closely with the students, how PBIS practices are working. The interview questions were developed to center around the primary research question and three sub-questions:

The study was guided by the following primary research question: How do PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) programs influence student behavior as related to improved school attendance? The sub-questions are:

1. Which specific PBIS practices are used to decrease chronic absenteeism?
2. What are the PBIS professional development sessions that are used by teachers to support families when attempting to reduce chronic absenteeism among certain students?
3. How does staff collaboration work when using the PBIS framework tiers to reduce chronic absenteeism?

Primary Research Question

The research question asks, how does the PBIS program influence student behavior as related to improving school attendance? Because the PBIS framework was designed under the auspices of positive behavior, the daily school culture is immersed in a positive atmosphere rather than a former mandatory restricted atmosphere. According to the findings, the students are rewarded several times of the week by receiving rewards, recognition, and commendation for daily attendance, quarterly attendance, and participation in class discussions about the importance of daily attendance.

Sub-question 1 asked which specific PBIS practices were used to decrease chronic absenteeism. The majority of the participants believe that the main practice that supports decreasing chronic absenteeism is professional development. According to the participants, professional development sessions utilizing interactive activities teach the faculty how to examine individual student data and design an action plan based on students' individual needs. One participant reflected that he had learned the importance designing individual attendance action plans for each unique set of circumstances stating,

A child who only attends school once a week because his mother died last year, must have a different action plan from a student who attends twice a week but is addicted to video games and her mother leaves before the student boards the school bus.

Describing one of the data patterns that was constructed early during the analysis phase summarizes the next PBIS practice best. Incentives are a widely used group of activities whereas the student receives a tangible reward for successfully attending school for an entire period (week, month, quarter, semesters, etc.) of time. Each one of the twelve participants had a positive experience to share regarding the use of incentives to increase individual attendance behavior without distinctions made between the grade levels. Although the tangible rewards have different names, such as tiger bucks, attendance points, or boutique dollars, the student receives some type of currency or gift cards that can be cashed in for prizes, games, food, and/or entrance passes. During each of the interviews all of the participants expressed the level of success that the incentives activities supported.

Sub-question 2 asked what PBIS professional development sessions are used by teachers to support families when attempting to reduce chronic absenteeism among certain students. Although the participants acknowledged the presence of ample PBIS program content to be trained in through professional development sessions, there was almost no evidence of any specific programs that were used to strengthen the parental involvement action when a student exhibits poor attendance or chronic absenteeism. No participant could recall any available commercial or local designed professional development units of study designed specifically to support parental involvement practices. It was apparent that an implication for future research and future practice had appeared. The associated discussion is presented in the following sections.

Although no information on PBIS parental involvement practices could be gathered, the participants discussed certain influential practices that were in existence before the PBIS implementation. Most of the procedures centered on communicating with parents by sending attendance progress reports weekly, convening parent conferences via FaceTime, and sponsoring parent visitation days. These practices list a few that were that were initiated before PBIS was implemented.

Sub-question 3 asked how staff collaboration works when using the PBIS framework tiers to reduce chronic absenteeism. Collaboration among faculty was the next largest data pattern constructed early in the analysis phase. All twelve of the participants had many experiences to share regarding using collaboration to strengthen the school culture, to increase attending school regularly, and decrease any evidence of chronic absenteeism cases.

Throughout the entire interview process, examples of collaboration among faculty emerged. This discussion substantiated and demonstrated that the analysis of the data had been accurate. Participant K gave a testimony statement to demonstrate the belief that sharing best practices was a concrete component of the school's culture when the faculty was in the beginning stages of implementing the PBIS program. She discussed several examples of the level of trust that was conveyed among the faculty. Participant K stated, "Every faculty member felt comfortable sharing their individual techniques and methods that they were using to introduce the new PBIS framework and practices."

Shared decision-making was also revealed as an example of collaboration among faculty. Participant K stated the following:

Although the school principal is the official leader of the PBIS program, he was always ready to relinquish his leadership to a teacher who would emerge as more of an expert regarding the topic of the session. The facilitator role became a roving position that exemplified the school principal's transformational leadership qualities.

Participant B discussed how collaboration among the faculty worked in her school.

Participant B stated the following:

The make-up and structure of the data teams created an opportunity for collaboration. This collaboration was very beneficial to the teachers who were novices in working with student data that would support the goal to improve, in not only attendance, but academic performance.

All of the participants discussed the positive results of the PBIS Book Club component of the PBIS professional development program. Again, the emergence of

collaboration among faculty occurred. Every participant believed that they learned many new teaching tools when reading and discussing the books' contents. One participant revealed that he never found the time to read the book. However, he would always attend the book discussions because the members were willing to share their information that they had gleaned from reading the book. The participant believed this was a great example to support that the collaboration among the faculty was strong, transparent, and beneficial.

Discussion of the Findings as Related to the Literature

Several theoretical frameworks found in the research of scholarly literature supported this basic qualitative study. Behaviorism (Skinner, 2012) verifies that if learners can be rewarded for comprehending and following the school expectations, as in the PBIS framework, then undesired behaviors like chronic absenteeism can be redirected to successful outcomes. The participants of the study were able to share their experiences and attitudes on how incentives are beneficial for students who need to be motivated to redirect and change their undesired behaviors.

Previous studies revealed that there are multiple factors that impact school attendance. In Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu's study (2015), they focused on family indicators and examined factors related to the family including socioeconomic level, parental involvement, alcohol/drug problems, and homelessness. Data collected in this study supported Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu's findings (2015) that family factors impact school attendance. Each of the twelve participants in this study discussed how the incentives built into the PBIS program influenced the parents' "buy-in" for improving his or her child's attendance.

The results of this study supported the literature that indicates new programs are needed that focus on positive communication with parents about the importance of attending school instead of the current punitive measures that are taken to address truancy (London et al., 2016). Most participants expressed that PBIS training needed to include more sessions that discussed and presented strategies to work with parents and families.

The role of the teacher in the classroom is one of leadership. McGuinn (2015) concluded that the principal demonstrates his/her ability to determine what programs to implement for achieving the specified outcomes for learners. By allowing teachers to demonstrate leadership within their classroom, principals are able to use the experiences of their faculty to collect a revolution of ideas and perspectives. According to the transformational leadership theory, the teacher's leadership must exhibit strategies that influence the learners to achieve academic and social success (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). The participants in this study who used the PBIS framework believe that part of the social success like good attendance directly effects academic success.

The previous research rests on the basic PBIS theoretical framework (McIntosh, 2014), in which four components must be established in order for the school culture to strengthen and produce viable citizens who understand the importance of good attendance along with the relationship between attendance and increased academic performance. This framework includes shared decision-making, collaborative inquiry, incentive efforts, and reinforcement of positive student behavior. All of the participants felt confident that the PBIS framework and the possible constructive outcomes associated with the programs could create a positive impact. The PBIS framework provides

educators with an exact procedure to guide their instruction, curriculum, and daily operation.

Roby (2004) concluded that student attendance has a statistically significant impact on student achievement. He also suggested that school districts in the future may want to provide students with incentives for coming to school (Roby, 2004). This study supports the existing literature on the importance of providing students with incentives. All participants believed the incentive program has become an integral intervention of the PBIS practice. The classroom teachers identified the program as the best motivator of any PBIS practice that is used in the daily classroom.

Gottfried (2010) gave two suggestions on improving the attendance-achievement relationship in schools. One of the suggestions was to limit the number of student absences and promote student attendance by implementing policies that deter absences. All of the schools that were part of this study have clear policies on how they address student absences. Two participants in this study stated that implementing a schedule of repeating the attendance and tardy rules on a regular basis was a meaningful practice that they have used to foster changing behaviors like increasing school attendance behaviors. All twelve participants described and clarified their choices of certain PBIS practices that had been instrumental in reinforcing the behavior to attend school regularly and reduce chronic absenteeism.

According to Demir and Akman Karabeyoglu's study (2015), the more committed to the school that the students were was directly proportional to a fewer number of student absences. In their study (2015), they suggested that increasing a student's commitment to the school by making them feel like a valued member of the school. This

feeling of value included feeling respected and having a sense of belonging that may lead to a reduction in absenteeism. Findings in this study supported the importance of making students feel valued. Recognition practices are an integral PBIS intervention. Ways of recognizing student achievement has evolved over the years from sending written letters home, posting recognition on bulletin boards, and posting recognition on social media. Each of the twelve participants in this study agreed that recognition actions on social media had a positive impact on building the relationships that are so crucial in the reduction of absenteeism and the increase in achievement.

In addition to increasing student commitment, earlier research noted that changing school culture is an intervention strategy that has been used to indirectly increase student attendance and improve academic achievement. In Fransa Weeks' study (2012) conducted in South Africa, the research was used to determine how a culture of learning impacts student behavior. In this study, some of the essential elements of a culture of learning were present including shared responsibility, network of collaboration amongst all stakeholders, clarity of mission and values supported by all, mutual respect and understanding, and parent partnership with teachers. This study supports the collaboration theme of Weeks' study (2012). Collaboration must take place amongst all stakeholders which means that it not only takes place inside the school, it also must take place outside of the school to include parents and community.

This study demonstrated that an extensive amount of data exemplified the large presence of collaboration efforts within the PBIS program. In Kearney and Graczyk's study (2013), the fifth key point made was that it takes a team approach. Ten of the twelve participants described the collaboration that goes on with the administrators and

faculty and especially among the teachers. They believed that the administrators did an excellent job boosting morale, recognizing teachers, and communicating with stakeholders the achievements of the faculty.

Throughout the interviews, it was frequently discussed that Professional Learning Community (PLC) activities were a form of collaboration. PLC meetings were also utilized as a means of professional development. PBIS has been acknowledged (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012) for providing opportunities for faculty and staff to work cohesively in order to increase student performance and achieve staff success. All of the educators in this study participated in professional development through use of the PLCs. Most participants expressed that PBIS training needed to include more sessions that discussed and presented strategies on how to work collaboratively with parents and families.

Limitations

Limitations are factors in a study that are often beyond the researcher's control. Although the information derived from this study will add to the overall body of literature that informs school educators and especially school principals on how the positive outcomes that may be achieved through the use of PBIS strategies and how they can impact and reduce chronic absenteeism in schools, the selection of participants was limited to a specific region within the southern region of the United States coastal counties making it impossible to generalize the research findings to the remaining population. This region was chosen specifically because it had been identified by several government agencies as having a severe, chronic attendance problem. The specific region is one of the few in that state that has decreased the chronic absenteeism rate since 2014 (MDE, 2018).

The Implications of the Findings for Practice

Part of the purpose of this study was to use the findings to further inform school principals how the PBIS service delivery can be used to reduce chronic absenteeism. The results of the study did firmly indicate that several sound practices developed as the outcomes of the PBIS implementation resulting in a reduction in chronic absenteeism by the three participating schools. The results also indicated that when the appropriate professional development, tangible incentive rewards, collaboration of faculty and staff, and transformative leadership are bound together, as required in PBIS programs, a successful outcome can come to fruition that is filled with regular school attenders and no evidence of chronic absenteeism.

This study can be used as a glimpse into the attitudes, beliefs, and efficacy status of teachers, administrators, and school stakeholders as related to the PBIS/SWPBIS impact on reducing chronic absenteeism. Schools have made great strides in the right direction in regards to reducing absenteeism and increasing academic achievement. There will always be a need for policies and procedures that include punitive actions and holding parents accountable for their student's education which includes attending school on a regular basis. However, there is a development of a trend that includes Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions that motivate students and provide incentives while moving toward development of the intrinsic rewards associated with regular school attendance. Clearly, there is area for much improvement in increasing parental education and involvement.

Recommendations for Future Research

A basic qualitative research design is optimal to examine human experiences and perspectives. However, when attempting to improve practice, it is sometimes beneficial to examine or develop studies that also measure and verify progress and behavior levels. This study recommends expanded research by conducting a quantitative study that will analyze the PBIS practices by conducting a comparative analysis between PBIS and non-PBIS school programs.

Parent involvement activities, professional development focused on parental issues, and parental involvement strategies were non-existent in the interview sessions. Therefore, no data relating to parents and their role in increasing their children's attendance behavior was collected. This study only revealed that the incentives for the students helped with parent "buy-in". It is also recommended that additional studies continue to survey, research, and analyze any PBIS practices that provide the support for parents whose children need to address and change undesired attendance behavior.

To conclude, a final recommendation is presented that discusses the various commercial PBIS programs that exist for school district purchase. One of the participants expressed concern that the commercial videos that present staff training are out-of-date and are not conducive for professional development. In a time in which a myriad of technology products are available to educators, out of date videos should not be used for professional development sessions. Therefore, it is recommended that scholarly program evaluation study should be initiated to assess, judge, evaluate, and justify the professional products that are used in the PBIS programs.

APPENDIX A – PBIS Interview Questions

PBIS Interview Questions

What school/school district are you employed with?

Please indicate (x) your position and your years of employment at your school/school district.

Position:

_____ assistant principal _____ general education teacher

_____ other (counselor, interventionist, etc.)

Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Years of employment with your school/school district:

_____ 1-3 _____ 4-6 _____ 7-10 _____ More than 10

1. How do PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support) programs influence student behavior as related to improved school attendance?
2. What are the PBIS professional development sessions that are used by teachers to support families when attempting to reduce chronic absenteeism among certain students?
3. How does staff collaboration work when using the PBIS framework tiers to reduce chronic absenteeism?

APPENDIX B – Superintendent Letter

Dear Superintendent:

I am Earl Joe Nelson, Jr., doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am currently working on my dissertation which will examine using PBIS frameworks in elementary schools to reduce chronic Absenteeism. I am observing schools in Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson counties which leads me to you, as I would like your permission to speak with / and or survey assistant principals and 10-12 teachers in your district.

The data collected for this study will be gathered using interview questions from an audio recording and field notes in a record-keeping form. I would like your permission to contact assistant principals of the elementary schools and teachers of that school with experience in PBIS to participate in this study. The process will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

I assure you that I will not be collecting any personal information during the interview process and all responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. All data will be analyzed at an aggregate level and no individual responses will be identified. There will be no public disclosure of the results of the study. However, I would be more than happy to share the information that I gain from the study with you about your district.

I can be contacted at jnelsonpcms@gmail.com. I eagerly await your response and greatly appreciate your help.

Sincerely,

Earl Joe Nelson, Jr.

APPENDIX C – IRB Approval

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-18-210

PROJECT TITLE: Using PBIS Frameworks in Elementary Schools to Decrease Chronic Absenteeism

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

RESEARCHER(S): Earl Nelson, Lilian Hill

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: February 18, 2019 to February 18, 2020

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald Sacco".

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX D – Recruitment Letter

Dear Educator:

I am Earl Joe Nelson, Jr., doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am currently working on my dissertation which will examine using PBIS frameworks in elementary schools to reduce chronic absenteeism. I would like to invite you to participate in an interview that will take no more than 30 minutes to complete. This invitation is being extended to all general and special education teachers, assistant principals, and anyone else who deals with PBIS in your school. Every effort will be made to protect your anonymity and confidentiality. All data will be analyzed at an aggregate level and no individual responses will be identified.

The study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Southern Mississippi which ensures that research involving human subjects follows federal regulations. Any questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5116, Hattiesburg MS 39406-001, 601-266-5997, irb@usm.edu.

I really appreciate your help. If you have any questions or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at jnelson@pc.k12.ms.us or 228-697-5962.

Sincerely,

Earl Joe Nelson

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