Elementary Chronic Absenteeism: A Qualitative Approach to Policy into Practice

Elementary Chronic Absenteeism: A Qualitative Approach to Policy into Practice

by

Kimberly Osborn

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

Lehigh University

April 22, 2025

Approval Page

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Date

Accepted Date

Dr. Craig Hochbein
Dissertation Chair
Associate Professor
Program Director
Educational Leadership Program
Lehigh University

Committee Members:

Dr. Floyd Beachum
Bennett Professor of Urban School Leadership
Educational Leadership Program
Lehigh University

Dr. Julie Fogt
Director of Centennial School and Affiliated Professor
Educational Leadership Program
Lehigh University

Dr. Kate Kieres
Adjunct Professor
Educational Leadership Program
Lehigh University

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my Chair, Dr. Craig Hochbein. You have read every version of this document and helped me grow as a writer and researcher for the better part of a decade. Thank you for the numerous discussions with our shared frustration over absenteeism, and the nuances of the topic. As my professor and chair, you have made me into a better educator, I am more thoughtful, inquisitive and reflective on the human experience.

Thank you to my committee for enduring a challenging topic that will remain so important to me, Dr. Floyd Beachum, Dr. Kate Kieres, and Dr. Julie Fogt. Your patience, support, and encouragement will always be appreciated as I navigated this journey. Your expertise and feedback enhanced this study to best serve our students and families.

To my Mom, this dissertation would not have been possible without you. You taught me your passion for learning, and this dissertation is the evidence of that love. To Andrew, Dad, Kim and Rachel, thank you for continuously asking about my research and progress, and your gentle reminders to continue reading, writing and thinking.

To Jesse, thank you for your love and reassurance. Words cannot truly express how grateful I am for your unwavering belief in me through the final stages of research, writing and editing.

To my colleagues, thank you for your thought-provoking conversations as I navigated this topic. To the participants, thank you for your compassion and commitment to students and their families. To all educators working with students, thank you for your passion, care and enthusiasm.

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ABSTRACT

Chronic absenteeism, missing more than 10% of a school year for unexcused and excused reasons, has compounding negative impacts on the absent student, classmates, and society (Attendance Works, 2021; Pyne et al., 2021). One in six U.S. students were chronically absent during the 2017-2018 school year (Attendance Works, 2021), with only 17% of chronically absent kindergarten and first grade students reading on level in third grade (Aucejo & Romano, 2016), with approximately 11% of kindergarteners and 9% of first grades chronically absent (Romero & Lee, 2007). Thirty-six states under The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 selected chronic absenteeism as a measure of School Quality or Student Success, placing value on student attendance and holding schools accountable for their chronically absent students (Jordan & Miller, 2017; Kostyo et al., 2018). The factors influencing chronic absenteeism are interrelated across environmental, family/student and school categories, with no one specific factor impacting student chronic absenteeism (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). School tracking systems are not equipped to properly measure chronic absenteeism (Lynch et al., 2015) and addressing policy into practice at the school level highlight the need for accurate, meaningful, and consistent measurement of school attendance data.

This study qualitatively analyzed chronic absenteeism within one district's four elementary schools during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. Analysis of school level attendance data, school policy documents, school attendance improvement plans, and personnel interviews, show chronically absent students are overrepresented in minority racial groups and are more likely to qualify for services including the national school lunch program, English Language Learner supports or special education in comparison to their regularly attending peers. Interview data highlighted the reasons for absences consisting of maternal mental health and

wellbeing, homelessness, transience, and medical treatment. Kindergarten and first grade students account for half of chronically absent students, and a third of chronically absent students met that threshold the following year. The conflict between PDE policy and school policy limit tracking and intervention for chronically absent student. Policy recommendations are included.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Chronic absenteeism is a crisis in America's schools, and this crisis often reflects the obstacles and environments that impact a student's ability to attend school (Attendance Works, 2021; Pyne et al., 2021). Approximately 15% of Pennsylvania students were chronically absent during the 2018-2019 school year, missing more than 10% of days for unexcused and excused reasons. Rates are often highest among students in the formative academic years of elementary school (Department of Education, n.d.-a). Chronic absenteeism is a complex issue because of the interconnected patterns and factors influencing attendance, and the challenging maintenance of school level data to identify and intervene when a student is chronically absent (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Federal and state policy utilize chronic absenteeism as a measure of school success and this focus highlights the importance of school attendance to access academics and available resources (Hutt, 2018; Jordan & Miller, 2017). This study addresses the problem of implementation of state chronic absenteeism policy into complex practice with attendance reporting, data maintenance, absence factors, and intervention processes at the elementary school level.

Chronic absenteeism is an optional School Quality or Student Success (SQSS) proxy measure for school climate, parent engagement and student academic success through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 (Jordan & Miller, 2017; Kostyo et al., 2018). Pennsylvania and 36 other states selected the metric to hold schools accountable for chronic absenteeism rates beginning with the 2017-2018 school year (Attendance Works, 2016). The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) recognizes ESSA as an opportunity to distance itself from the narrow policies and measures outlined in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (The

Every Student Succeeds Act, 2019), however the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged that school tracking systems are not designed to measure chronic absenteeism (Lynch et al., 2015).

Schools utilize Student Information Systems (SIS) to maintain demographic information and academic, health and attendance records with available data only as valid as the process for collecting and maintaining it (Jordan et al., 2018). Jordan et al. (2018) found reporting concerns when 246 California schools reported perfect attendance, a school district in Connecticut dropped students on vacation to reduce rates, and a high school in Washington D.C. changed 4,000 attendance records. Attendance data and record maintenance impacts the identification of students who require intervention for absenteeism. Collaborative research is essential to attendance data, as outlined by Lenhoff et al. (2020), the domain lacks "significant research literature demonstrating the effectiveness of particular attendance management strategies" (p. 2).

Attendance management begins at the school level with communication between guardian, teacher, and attendance manager. A reason for the absence is initially reported by guardians, interpreted through local school policy by administrative assistants, and recorded as an excused or unexcused absence (Keppens et al., 2019). The record is dependent on if a guardian reports the absence and what reason information is shared (Pyne et al, 2021). While administrative assistants typically code the guardian reported information within the student information system, policymakers often overlook the role of classroom teachers (Jordan et al., 2018; Keppens & Spuryt, 2017a, 2017b; Keppens et al., 2019). Jordan et al. (2018) found most school systems default to "attending" and the toggle for absent can create a large margin for underreporting absences. When considering the software that is utilized, teachers should be trained on the system with clear expectations, and explicit steps for intervention for attendance

reasons and codes for chronic absenteeism, whereas most training focuses on administrative assistants.

Pennsylvania ESSA policy generalizes school level excused and unexcused absence reasons into binary codes of absent or present (Department of Education, n.d.-b, p.1). Absent examples include illness (with or without a doctor's note), college visits, out of school suspension, family vacation and present examples included field trip or other school sponsored activity, in school suspension, or homebound instruction (Department of Education, n.d.-b, p.1). ESSA policy states "chronically absent students include students who are absent regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused" such as absences that result from out-of-school suspensions or college visits (Department of Education, n.d.-b, p.1). Utilizing the ESSA definition, both school level excused and unexcused absences could be included in the total number of absences towards the chronic absenteeism threshold of 18 school days or 10% of the school year (Dougherty, 2018). A student can exceed 18 absent days in a school year, by missing 1-3 days a month (Henderson, 2014).

Chang and Romero (2008) intended to study excused versus unexcused absences, "but the data were too unreliable, especially for comparison across localities" (p. 6). As an example, a district policy would code a student as excused for "take your daughter to work day," but under PDE ESSA policy it would be considered an absence towards the chronic absenteeism threshold. ESSA does not guide schools on how to maintain or evaluate reasons in their records, how to identify a student as chronically absent or how to intervene. Gottfried (2009) states "disaggregating absences may provide even more benefit, not only to the researcher and practitioner but also to the at-risk student, who can in turn be better identified" (p. 411). Identifying a chronically absent student as per state policy rather than school policy is complex,

in addition to the processes for intervention. North Dakota did not select chronic absenteeism due to the belief that schools cannot control attendance (Jordan & Miller, 2017). The student information system records versus the qualitative absence reasons create barriers to identification and intervention, and the policy must invoke common reporting procedures and processes (Lenhoff et al., 2020). Hutt (2018) believes these are unrealistic expectations for schools and advised schools to be cautious about the assumptions surrounding the reasons for absences and interpreting the recorded data.

Significance

Chronic absenteeism can begin in the earliest years of formal education and persist through high school, leading to negative consequences for students, classmates, and society. Intervention is possible during the elementary years to prevent future chronic absenteeism and negative impacts (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Romero & Lee, 2007). Prior to ESSA in 2015, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) defined chronic absenteeism as missing 15 school days (Gottfried, 2014a), but policymakers and practitioners did not unify over this threshold (Dougherty, 2018). Through ESSA, Pennsylvania set the threshold of 18 days or 10% of the school year (Dougherty, 2018). In June 2016, OCR completed the first full national portrait of chronic absenteeism utilizing the threshold of 15 school days, estimating 13% of students as chronically absent, but researchers believe the number is higher, closer to 30% due to inaccurate first-time district reporting (Jordan & Miller, 2017). Out of 13,300 school districts, 1,747 did not report having any chronically absent students, whereas 10,000 public schools out of 100,000 public schools reported approximately 30% of students as chronically absent (Jordan & Miller, 2017).

One in six U.S. students were chronically absent during the 2017-2018 school year (Attendance Works, 2021). “Over 11% of kindergartners, almost 9% of first graders, 6% of third graders, and 5% of fifth graders were chronic absentees: they missed at least 18 days or more of the school year” (Romero & Lee, 2007, p. 1). The consequences of chronic absenteeism compound, and the pattern of absenteeism continues with 24% to 28% of prior chronically absent students becoming chronically absent again the following year (Bauer et al., 2018). Seventeen percent of chronically absent kindergarten and first grade students were proficient at a third grade reading level, compared to approximately 66% of regularly attending peers (Aucejo & Romano, 2016), and reading ability is directly linked to school engagement, self-esteem, behaviors, disability diagnosis, and high school graduation (Chang & Jordan, 2012).

Future Ready PA Index data includes the state average and goal for each academic indicator in each school’s progress report (Department of Education, 2019), with specific information available for subgroup populations of students. “ESSA requires that each state track data and hold schools and [local education agencies] accountable for the performance of the following student groups: economically disadvantaged students, children with disabilities, English learners, and students form major racial and ethnic groups” (Department of Education, n.d.-a, website). Students who contend with systemic barriers already, including poverty, disabilities, minority status or students facing transience are more likely to be chronically absent (Rafa, 2017). The chronic absenteeism consequences impact our low-income students at alarmingly higher rates (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried, 2009; Romero & Lee, 2007), and most often low-income students are four times more likely to be chronically absent (Ready, 2010). Childs and Lofton (2021) warn “education policy can distract

from the multi-layered causes that impact achievement and opportunity gaps, and how students' life circumstances can affect their school attendance" (p. 213).

Chang et al. (2019) recognized that a negative school environment can contribute to absenteeism, but a positive environment does not guarantee attendance, and schools may have a limited impact on preventing chronic absenteeism due to systemic barriers beyond their control. Researchers are conflicted as to what agencies and systems are responsible for preventing and intervening against chronic absenteeism (Chang et al., 2019; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Lenhoff & Pogodzinski (2018) stated "the factors that contribute to student absenteeism are complex, and many are not directly affected by school decision-making" and broke the factors into environmental, family/individual and school factors in reflection of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework. School-based research lacks real time observation or available proxy measures and often use estimate models (Bartanen, 2020) and the consequences of measurement and analysis are not properly evaluated (Dougherty, 2018). Historically, Average Daily Attendance (ADA) was utilized as a measure of attendance, but omitted individual student absences, and only reported the percentage of students present daily (Kostyo et al., 2018).

Truancy as a measure only includes unexcused or unlawful absences, and ESSA policy emphasizes that excused and unexcused absences remove the student from the learning environment (Gottfried, 2009; Rafa, 2017). Pennsylvania Department of Education describes a student as truant with three or more unexcused absences in a year, or habitually truant with six or more unexcused absences during the year. An absence is unlawful until a note is provided by the parent or guardian. "Pennsylvania law broadly defines absences as excused when a student is prevented from attendance for mental, physical…illness, family emergency, death of a family member, medical or dental appointments, authorized school activities, and educational travel

with prior approval as lawful absences. (Department of Education, 2020, Categorizing Absences: What is a Lawful Absence section). Table 1 outlines the differences between truancy and chronic absenteeism parameters.

Table 1

Comparing Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism Parameters

	Truancy	Chronic absenteeism
Included reasons	Unlawful (no parent/guardian note provided)	Any reason (except for a school sponsored field trip or in school suspension)
# of Days	Three or more Six or more is habitually truant	18 (10%) or more of the school year

The change in discourse and constructs surrounding attendance and chronic absenteeism highlight the persistent national and state barriers of recording, identifying, and responding to chronically absent students in the past (Dougherty, 2018). States define chronic absenteeism at their policy level in six different ways even with the enacting of the Every Student Succeeds Act (Bauer et al., 2018). Guarino et al. (2019) suggest multiple accountability measures so no one metric is overemphasized and create a balance for improvement focusing on implementation at the local level. Jordan and Miller (2017) express concern and hope "done right, holding schools accountable for these absences can encourage educators and community leaders to address the root causes of excused and unexcused absences" (p. 1). However, if schools address chronic absenteeism inappropriately, the focus could change to blaming parents and revert to heavily utilized standardized tests (Jordan & Miller, 2017). The efforts to conceptualize and record student attendance and absenteeism reasons are manifold, in part because of the heterogenous nature of the constructs and because risk factors are multilayered (Kearney et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively review elementary school level chronic absenteeism and analyze the intersection of state and school level policies and school level practices. The school attendance codes are reviewed from the state policy binary variable lens, chronically absent students will be identified and the available reasons for absence and the intervention process will be disaggregated (Gottfried, 2009). The overarching policy of recording chronic absenteeism at the school level with state level oversight represents the importance of intervention and the need for clear and consistent measurement to properly analyze and compare schools and districts for progress and need for intervention. Jacob and Lovett (2019) advised "districts and states need to collect high-quality data to a) better understand the scope of the chronic absenteeism problem and b) to identify chronically absent students and monitor efforts to improve their attendance" (p. 1). This purpose required historical knowledge of policy, constructs, the negative and the cycle of chronic absenteeism.

The elementary focus of this study is valuable as "little is known…about chronic school absenteeism among early elementary school students (Romero and Lee, 2007, p. 1). Gottfried (2009) highlights that much of what is being studied is high school performance and studying elementary students is essential because elementary students and high schools are unalike. Elementary students are more contained in their environment and reliant on family members to support their attendance and elementary attendance reporting is closely monitored for student safety (Gottfried, 2009). Students are not changing classrooms with different teachers, and travel within their own class grouping (Gottfried, 2009).

Romero and Lee (2007) utilized The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Kindergarten cohort from 1998 to create portrait of chronic absenteeism in elementary school. Trends exist

with “over one-half of chronic absentees in kindergarten also were chronic absentees in first grade” (Romero & Lee, 2007, p. 2). ECLS-K limitations include a primarily white and higher income family sample and underrepresents the negative impacts of chronic absenteeism with poverty and residential segregation correlating with high chronic absenteeism in four of ten schools that educate majority students of color (Attendance Works, 2021). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) advise policy at the federal level to prioritize “measuring, monitoring, and responding with evidence-based strategies” to decrease chronic absenteeism (p. 38), but Jordan and Miller (2017) acknowledged pre-K and Kindergarten statistics are not commonly reported in national samples, promoting an overuse of the available ECLS-K data. Research utilizing self-reported absence totals and reasons by families underestimates the total number of days, emphasizing the importance of school level data in the specific context of the study’s purpose (Rogers & Feller, 2018). This study focuses on one district’s absenteeism data at the elementary level over the course of two years, including kindergarten students and the available data collected through the school level SIS including school level attendance codes.

The exercise of designating a reason for absences into two variables, excused and unexcused has consequences not only for the student at the school level, but now at the state level for reporting purposes and progress monitoring for the district and school, to absent and present. The perception that an absence is condoned by the district as excused, but at the state level as absent is complex. Utilizing the large data set, over five years, Gottfried (2009) generalized elementary school level guidelines for what is an excused versus unexcused absence, a student’s music recital would be unexcused in addition to an out of school suspension, whereas an illness with a doctor’s note is excused. There are racial disparities between the excused and unexcused designations (McNeely et al., 2021). The color-blind construction of the two

designations perpetuates racial inequities and refers students to court for unexcused absenteeism due to prior law surrounding truancy, or unexcused absences. American Indian and Black students to be twice as likely to have absences labeled unexcused compared to white students and suggests reviewing the reasons behind unexcused and excused absences to be equitable, including multiple days of mourning as excused for American Indian families, or incarcerated parent visits (McNeely et al., 2021).

Students may fail to be recognized as chronically absent without a coherent and consistent definition (Ginsburg et al. 2014; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Keppens et al., 2019). Researchers state that relying on the excused and unexcused dichotomy prevents intervention, and "key challenges for categorical and dichotomous approaches to school attendance problems include the need to better account for the considerable heterogeneity of this population and to link specific intervention strategies to specific constructs" (Kearney et al., 2019, p. 6). This study highlights the intersection of policy and practice, with identification of chronically absent students, data analysis of excused and unexcused designations, and existing intervention. How the policy is implemented at the school level represents the efficacy and the purpose of the policy goal to support student attendance. Evaluating the policy in practice emphasizes the capacity and ability of school personnel to identify and intervene when a student is chronically absent. The complex process of reporting, recording, and measuring attendance met with the dilution of reasons to binary variables limits efficient and productive intervention to support students at the school and district level.

The purpose of this study was to explicitly analyze state chronic absenteeism policy in practice in the Eagle School District's (pseudonym) four elementary schools, including record maintenance, student identification and the specific intervention processes. This study

contributes to prior research focusing on school level and student specific circumstances to guide and highlight policy into practice. To analyze school level elementary school chronic absenteeism data and state policy, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does ESSA policy, state policy and local elementary school practice intersect?
2. How are students identified for a School Attendance Improvement Plan?
3. What are the characteristics of a chronically absent student in Eagle School District elementary schools?

School attendance records as reported to the state are now integral to other achievement data, state funding, laws, and school evaluations of effectiveness (Hutt, 2018). Hutt (2018) acknowledges that schools provide academic instruction and non-academic resources including food, medical care, social services, and support basic welfare needs. ESSA identifies these equity indicators as broader measures detached from test scores to support reviewing the disparity between student subgroups (Kostyo et al., 2018). This study highlights one district's implementation of policy to understand current school level impacts on chronic absenteeism. Specific policy into practice analysis and recognition of factors influencing chronic absenteeism contributes to future prevention and mitigation of elementary chronic absenteeism and longitudinal school engagement.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search

This literature review includes research related to elementary chronic absenteeism in the United States and the policy discourse, factors, and interventions. Factors influencing student attendance are multilayered through the school, the family/student, and the students' environment (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). The interventions to address these factors range from school-level practices to state-wide initiatives. The primary participants in the included studies are pre-kindergarten or elementary school-aged students due to the predictive patterns of attendance, the value of early intervention and the compounding negative impacts of absenteeism (Romero & Lee, 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Connolly & Olsen, 2012). Chronic absenteeism is the primary research phrase because truancy and average daily attendance (ADA) as defined do not capture all absences. Through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), chronic absenteeism provides a more comprehensive portrait with both unexcused and excused absence reasons included (Attendance Works, 2015). A research limitation includes a lack of explicitly stated chronic absenteeism thresholds in some studies, but the studies will not be omitted due to the assumption that chronic absenteeism is typically defined through the Office of Civil Rights definition of 15 school days or the ESSA policy of 18 school days, and research often reports differences in absence rates rather than meeting the threshold of chronic absenteeism.

Included research is conducted in the United States without limitations for specific states, and no parameter for publication year or the dates of data collection. Eklund et al. (2020) limited literature from 2000 and later, but important attendance factors existed before ESSA. Both quantitative and qualitative data sets will be included in this review as recommended (Gottfried,

2014b; Gottfried & Ansari, 2021a), unfortunately qualitative data is limited due to historically large data sets not specifically recorded for attendance research purposes (Ansari & Gottfried, 2020).

Negative Cycle of Chronic Absenteeism

One year of chronic absenteeism predicts future absenteeism and the negative impacts of absenteeism can compound with prior factors and affect a student's future school attendance (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019a; Simon et al., 2020). This section highlights the negative impacts and the potential cycle of chronic absenteeism to create a holistic view of the cycle and the influencing factors for a historically chronically absent student. Before addressing the environmental, family/student and school influencing factors (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018), it is important to recognize the negative impacts of chronic absenteeism and the prediction of future absenteeism as a factor.

Chronic absenteeism begins in the earliest years of education and understanding the manifestation of this crisis is essential to prevent negative impacts on academics, peers, social development society, and future patterns of absenteeism (Ansari & Pianta; 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Romero & Lee, 2007). Elementary education is not only the foundation for academics, including reading, but non-academic outcomes including social and behavior expectations (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Prekindergarten is a predictor of early elementary school attendance in District of Columbia Public School Head Start Programs, "for children who were chronically absent in prekindergarten, only 34 percent have satisfactory attendance in second grade" (Dubay & Holla, 2016, p.12). The reporting metric may have overestimated due to a change in administrative reporting, and it is unclear if excused or unexcused days were included, but chronic absenteeism was defined as 10% or more school

days. Attendance Works (2015) and Gottfried (2014) recognized absences in kindergarten and early years impact reading skills, retention, and attendance in future school years.

Elementary absences decrease critical social skill practice, including persistence, causing students to struggle in later years with their academics and their social development (Heckman, 2008). Chronic absenteeism disproportionately impacts low-income students of color (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018) and low-income students are shown to miss school more often (Balfanz & Byrnes 2012, 2018; Connolly & Olsen, 2012; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf et al., 2012; Nauer et al., 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007). Dubay and Holla (2016) found when comparing chronically absent students to their regularly attending peers, students who were chronically absent in prekindergarten are 9.1 times more likely to be chronically absent in kindergarten, 5.9 times more likely in first grade, and 4.4 times more so in second grade. Henderson et al. (2014) labeled chronic absenteeism a public health issue due to its entanglement with future progress and what it indicates about a students' circumstances throughout the academic year.

While we understand that prior absenteeism is a predictor of future absenteeism, this understanding does not address the primary factor influencing chronic absenteeism. To address chronic absenteeism, the initial factor must be addressed. The negative impacts of chronic absenteeism compound with prior absenteeism as a predictor (Dubay & Holla, 2016). Addressing the root cause of chronic absenteeism in that initial year is crucial, each year after that first chronically absent year becomes more complex. Chronic absenteeism can decrease a student's academic achievement including their reading ability, impacting their engagement in school, each year a student is chronically absent compounds the factors related to absenteeism. For example, if a kindergarten student is chronically absent, addressing their lack of transportation

may prevent a lower engagement in school due to reading difficulty in a future year, coupled with a potential transportation factor. This emphasizes the importance of identifying chronic absenteeism and factors during the first chronically absent year, to prevent the cycle of chronic absenteeism (Ansari et al., 2020).

Theoretical Organization

The organization of this literature review reflects Lenhoff and Pogodzinski's (2018) conceptualization of absenteeism factors, which mirrors Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1977) with factors interrelating with one another. The literature reviewing the influencing factors associated with elementary chronic absenteeism is organized into environmental factors, student/family factors, and school factors. Each category may also include possible interventions strategies. Table 2 highlights influencing factors under each area of influence, but with all factors interconnecting and transcending beyond just their area.

Table 2

Factors Influencing Chronic Absenteeism: Categorized into Environmental, Student/Family and School Level Factors

Environmental	Student/Family	School
Poverty and Resources	Poverty and Access to Resources	School Meals
Public Transportation	Family Vehicle	School Transportation
Community Health	Physical and Mental Health	School Health and Safety, Chronically Absent Classmates
Education Policy and Programming	Family Structure and Engagement	Preschool Programming, Learning Engagement
Affordable and Safe Housing	Mobility and Transience	Discipline Policy and Disability Status

Table 2 represents the complicated nature of chronic absenteeism factors impacting and transcending beyond just one area of influence and the relationships across each factor. For example, while schools may have a limited influence over a family car, employing school transportation may mitigate a family's lack of transportation (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). There is a "complex range of bio-psycho-socio-cultural determinants of absenteeism" (Tonge & Silverman, 2019, p. 119), and intervening in chronic absenteeism requires analyzing beyond the binary unexcused and excused codes (Gottfried, 2011a). Childs and Lofton (2021) called chronic absenteeism a "wicked problem" as defined by public administration, a complex social problem which is difficult to define, solve, and is constantly evolving, and where "chronic absenteeism is not just a school problem, but a systemic issue that implicates multiple social sectors" (p. 222). Chang et al. (2018) suggested reviewing school discipline data, attendance patterns, chronic health interventions, and school climate, and in the community, transit routes, health data, early childhood programs, and health services.

Utilizing a socioecological framework to review the aggregated data and identify the factors is "a first step, uncovering the root causes of absenteeism gaps will require multiple sources of data to be interlinked with each other: from education to health to housing to social services" (Gee, 2018, p. 4). Organizing influencing factors through environmental, family/student, and school highlights the interrelated and connected nature of factors with the direct and indirect relationships between each (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). The symbiotic relationship each factor has with one another complicates identifying just one element to address and prevent absenteeism, rather developing an understanding of their relationships with one another and the individual student is essential to the intervention process.

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors directly impact the relationship families, students and schools have with resources to support attendance (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). These factors include economic status, neighborhood and housing, educational programming, and health care (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). While student demographics are not a cause of chronic absenteeism, Chang and Romero (2008) acknowledged it is important to recognize the "differences in the prevalence across racial/ethnic groups also reflect whether the current or historical treatment of the members of a particular ethnic group has an impact on the factors contributing to chronic absence" (p. 14). While 9.7% of white elementary school students are chronically absent (15 or more days in this brief), approximately 20% of Native American and Pacific Islander students and 14.6% of African American students are chronically absent (Gee, 2018). On average 19% of non-disabled students are chronically absent, but 25% of disabled students are (Gee, 2018). Researchers warn not to make assumptions with race and ethnicity as a predictor (Chang & Romero, 2008) and Gee (2018) recommend explicitly focusing on closing the gap between subgroups through school systems aggregating their data and specifically targeting intervention efforts. The reported demographic data does not create a relationship but suggests analyzing the factors caused by society and environment.

Data suggests students, regardless of race, in high poverty areas, have an increase in chronic absenteeism, (Chang & Romero, 2008) with students living in poverty two to three times more likely than their advantaged peers to be chronically absent (Chang et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2019). Individual family economic status will be included through family and individual factors, whereas concentrated poverty is addressed with neighborhood and housing opportunities. National portraits of chronic absenteeism may also conservatively estimate chronic absenteeism

among low income and minority students due to large data set limitations (Chang & Romero, 2008). While environmental factors may be out of the control of a school, schools can recognize 10% of kindergarteners miss 18 or more days of school (Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015; Romero & Lee, 2007) and identify interventions and educational programming to provide support to mitigate these factors (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019a; Jordan & Miller, 2017).

Neighborhood and Housing

Students living in impoverished neighborhoods have higher rates of chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Connolly & Olsen, 2012; Ehrlich et al., 2014, Fantuzzo et al., 2012, Nauer et al, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007). Community housing as it relates to safety (Basch, 2011; Rafa, 2017) is developed by state and county programs for affordable housing, but often undermaintained and unsafe home environments can be a detrimental to student health. The home is the primary location of exposure to poor air quality and particulates that contribute to asthma (Basch, 2011). Public housing environments are associated with allergens, where students can be sensitized to cockroach, mold, and fungi pollutants (Basch, 2011). Housing conditions as outlined above impact access to health care and living conditions which exacerbate asthma episodes for low-income students (Basch, 2011). Homelessness affects eight percent of children from low-income families in a year, and this impacts educational outcomes and student attendance (Fantuzzo et al., 2012). School mobility and transience are a common symptom of homelessness and Miller (2011) identifies community and school level supports can intervene to reduce school absenteeism even within the same district.

Neighborhood make up and composition can provide opportunities for resources. Utilizing geocoding, Gottfried (2014a) with neighborhood variables including poverty, family structure, and household size, and measured the percent of the neighborhood block that is

consists of Black households to evaluate if a students' residential block correlates with school absenteeism, including poverty, crime, family structure, homeownership, and race. They did not study the threshold of chronic absenteeism, rather just rates of absence, the students were elementary and middle school students in The School District of Philadelphia (Gottfried, 2014a). Large assumptions were made by Gottfried (2014a) with the understanding that trends exist, and the research leads to broad patterns. Nauer et al. (2008) studied New York City schools and recognized neighborhoods with half or more students living in poverty was a challenge to reducing chronic absenteeism due to the obstacles they face with chronic health concerns, transience, and mental health.

Unexcused absences have a greater effect from neighborhood attributes, than excused absences, although when including both excused and unexcused absences a significant relationship is still reported (Gottfried, 2014a). Gottfried (2014a) found increased neighborhood poverty is correlated with higher rates of chronic absenteeism, but older neighbors negatively correlate with student absences, and the reverse is true for household size. The health-related factors with home environment including food insecurity, unhealthy housing, obesity, violence in the community, all associate with chronic absenteeism and a lack of resources for low-income families (Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015). While a school can utilize this information to intervene, the community resources, urban planning, social capital, and social services need to be involved systemically.

Educational Policy & Programming

Chronic absenteeism is not a behavior that begins in later school grades, but begins in preschool and elementary school, and persists throughout school years (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Connolly & Olsen, 2012; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2015; Mapping the early attendance

gap, 2015). Chang et al. (2018) reported rates of chronic absenteeism are highest in kindergarten (16%), with 14% in first grade, then stable second through fifth grade, but Simon et al. (2020) recognized that this statistic does not highlight individual student behavior trends over elementary school and the outcomes of consecutive years of chronic absenteeism. Connolly and Olsen (2012) emphasized the importance of pre-kindergarten programming and utilizing preschool attendance as a predictor of kindergarten attendance, and further elementary attendance in Baltimore City Schools. The purpose of the report was to measure student academic achievement and readiness through pre-kindergarten Head Start programming and kindergarten. Students who did not attend a prekindergarten program consistently underperformed in comparison to their peers, and students who had positive attendance in Head Start maintained that attendance through at least third grade (Connolly & Olson, 2012).

Head Start is a program for low-income families and it is recognized that low-income families often have higher rates of chronic absenteeism. Head Start as a piece of educational programming and opportunity for families can be viewed as an intervention, and without this programming in place there could be an increase in chronic absenteeism in elementary school years. Students who attend a school environment at the age of three, have greater attendance than those who do not (Gottfried, 2015; Gottfried & Ansari, 2020). Ansari and Purtell (2018) discovered that 12-24% of the variance in kindergarten attendance can be explained by absenteeism at the ages of 3 and 4, and Ansari and Pianta (2019) found kindergarten attendance predicts 10-20% of the variance between first and third grades.

Concerned about the Third Grade Reading Law, The Detroit Education Research Partnership studied the negative impacts chronic absenteeism has on third grade reading scores, and thus the possibility of grade retention (Cook et al., 2021). “Each year being chronically

absent in grades K-3 is associated with a 26% increase in the probability of being eligible for retention under the Third Grade Reading Law" (Cook et al., 2021, p. 4), with grade retention and chronic absenteeism linked to poor academic engagement. The Detroit Education Research Partnership strives to reduce chronic absenteeism, and the number of students retained in third grade (Cook et al., 2021). Chang and Romero (2008), controlling for demographics including race, gender, and socioeconomic status, found chronic absenteeism in kindergarten is associated with lower academic scores in first grade. Addressing chronic absenteeism in kindergarten can prevent chronic absenteeism and the negative impacts later in the student's schooling. Kindergarten students with disabilities attending full day kindergarten had greater absenteeism rates than their peers who attended partial day programs, researchers did not use the chronic absenteeism threshold, and just measured differences, with full day kindergarten students missing 2.73 more days (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2021a). Utilizing the ECLS-K:2011, researchers studied 2,120 kindergarteners with a disability at school, could not determine the mechanisms that caused higher absenteeism, but advise policy makers and practitioners to evaluate how to best to support students with disabilities, school attendance and kindergarten opportunities (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2021a).

Preschool attendance is a strong predictor of kindergarten attendance, and this pattern continues through elementary school, and preschool enables the routine of school to be established within a family (Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gottfried & Ansari, 2020). Ansari & Purtell (2018) and Connolly and Olsen (2012) recommended Head Start and prekindergarten programs as an intervention to mitigate absenteeism prior to elementary school, especially for low-income families, in addition it also supports increase academic success in school. The article suggests two years of Head Start programming, but research showed students with only one year of

experience as less likely to be absent in kindergarten, students had exposure to school routines, expectations of academics and peers, social interactions, which support greater school attendance (Ansari & Purtell, 2018; Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Stargel & Easterbrooks, 2022). Efforts to educate and contact families who are eligible for prekindergarten programs should be increased, to better serve low-income families (Connolly & Olson, 2012; Stargel & Easterbrooks, 2022).

Community Partnerships Intervention

Working with environmental factors should include community-based interventions to promote equity and reduce disparities in access for all subgroups. Environmental factors can be addressed through city-wide campaign efforts and focusing on systemic concerns and providing rewards for attending (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Chang et al., 2019; Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018). Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) and Smythe-Leistico and Page (2018) studied the New York City campaign to reduce chronic absenteeism through Success Mentors, unfortunately researchers acknowledged the multipronged approach and the inability to replicate the successful design due to the layered approach. The researchers were unable to identify one key element of the design that positively impacted low income, and at-risk students the most due to the mentor program as only a piece of a wider intervention effort (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018). Smythe-Leistico and Page (2018) established their intervention, Connect-Text in Pittsburgh schools with the community involvement of Americorps, on the basis that parents may not know the number of absences a student has accrued.

Founding the practice on prior research of effective communication, and the establishment that families and parents have access to cell phones with text capabilities, Americorps involvement created positive family and school communication (Leistico & Page, 2018). The program qualitatively enabled a family to receive a washing machine for one student

who did not have clean clothes. The pilot study cost $200 per student, but Americorps involvement did show 13.3% of kindergarteners chronically absent in comparison to the synthetic comparison of 24.4% (Smythe-Leistico, 2018). The Cleveland, Get 2 School: You can Make it! campaign saw a reduction in chronic absenteeism from 44% to 30% during the 2015-2016 school year (Chang et al., 2019). With support from community partnerships to provide positive attendance rewards, including phone banks, sports team visits, and clothes. A committee met monthly to review attendance, and devise strategies for students, and the school also redesigned the attendance office, with more staff, coordination amongst schools and no punitive measures and court referrals (Chang et al., 2019).

While Chang et al. (2019) acknowledged that "problematic learning environment contributes to higher levels of chronic absence, positive conditions for learning do not guarantee excellent student attendance" (p. 4). Georgia created a system to promote higher educational outcomes including a reading campaign and a school climate rating system, a byproduct of these school initiatives was community support including housing initiatives, Medicaid, school nurse staffing, and supports for students in foster care. In-school initiatives included robust teacher training, student safety education, and restorative discipline practices. While Georgia ranks 8th in the nation for homelessness and between 2010 and 2017 the number of children in foster care rose 80%, the chronic absenteeism rate is the second lowest in the South and 13th in the nation. The holistic school and community partnership can begin to meet the needs of students (Chang et al. 2019). City-wide and district-wide policy to support mobile students can address the student registration process which may occur frequently for students with housing instability and can cause a disruption to attendance and instruction (Keppens et al., 2019; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2002).

Environmental factors directly and indirectly influence the relationships students and families have with resources to support positive school attendance. These factors are the symptom of a greater systemic issue that transcends to individual and family factors influencing chronic absenteeism (Chang and Romero, 2008). Through identification of chronically absent students, subgroups, and trends the initiatives can intervene.

Family/Individual Factors

Family and individual factors are encompassed by environmental factors through the theoretical framework (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Economic status has a direct relationship with factors within the family and individual factors and the access to resources to prevent and intervene when necessary. Family and student health, family structure, routine, and family engagement impact student attendance, with student health as the number one reported reason for absence (Basch, 2011; Bloom et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2019; Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015; Moonie et al., 2006; Taras & Potts-Datema, 2005). Family and individual student factors contributing towards absences are within the control of the family, but possible mitigation efforts by schools are included.

Economic Status

One of the strongest predictors of chronic absenteeism is family income (Ansari et al., 2021), with chronic absenteeism rates twice as high for economically disadvantaged elementary students in comparison to their more advantaged peers (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Areas with high concentrations of poverty, influence access individual families have to resources (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018) Economic status is not the direct cause of chronic absenteeism, but the lack of relationship to resources for students and families in poverty can impede a student's ability to attend school (Anderson et al., 2020; Nauer et al., 2008). Regardless of the attendance

metric utilized, students who qualified for free or reduced lunch had lower attendance (Ansari & Gottfried, 2020; Dougherty, 2018; Ready, 2010; Romero and Lee, 2008). NCES (2006) established all students living in poverty are 25 percent more likely to miss three or more school days per month, across 9 months of school, this can quickly lead to chronic absenteeism (18 days). Approximately 23% of low income fourth graders missed three days a month in comparison to 17% of their higher income peers (Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015) and low-income kindergarteners were four times more likely to be chronically absent (Romero & Lee, 2007). On the opposite end, low-income kindergarten and first grade students who attend regularly develop more literacy skills than their higher income peers during those grades (Ready, 2010), highlighting the value of school attendance.

The connection between families in poverty and school attendance is coupled with family structure, including single parent households with a greater probability for housing mobility, family health, home language, and a limited capacity to make up for lost instructional time (Mailka et al., 2021; Romero and Lee, 2008). Low socioeconomic status is linked to health-related issues (Bauer et al., 2018; Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015), and for elementary school students the largest contributor of absences is illness, "ailments-particularly those related to respiratory disorders-are often exacerbated by parental behaviors, including elevated use of tobacco, and environmental factors associated with poverty…housing and increased exposure to pollutants and lead" (Ready, 2010, p. 273). Students in poverty are 45% more likely to have a chronic disability, 41% more likely to have a serious disease, and 85% more likely to have a hearing or vision problem (Bauer et al., 2018). Chronic absenteeism among low-income students reflects the environmental barriers families face every day including reliable transportation, safe housing, and quality health care.

Morrissey et al. (2013) believed there are other mechanisms apart from attendance influencing academic achievement, including family income and expressed concern for using the National School Lunch Program where some families may be on the bubble and not included. Morrissey et al. (2013) with original research and Sosu et al. (2020) through a research synthesis, found the inconsistency in low-income students' attendance contributes to the achievement gap between students of varying income. While small, Morrissey et al. (2013) found that free lunch to be associated with more absences than reduced-priced lunch, and longer periods of eligibility for the program with each grade associated with a 0.1-0.2% increase in absences (or tardies) (Morrissey et al., 2013).

From an alternative lens, Gottfried (2015) and Gottfried and Gee (2017) found through the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class 2010-11 (ECLS-K:2011) students with higher at home learning opportunities may be chronically absent due to the family affording additional opportunities for learning outside of the traditional academic setting. Socioeconomic status deeply impacts a student's ability to get to school, and the resources and supports available in the community and school can mitigate some of those barriers, but systemically socioeconomics will continue to threaten a students' ability to attend school regularly. A student's socioeconomic status has a direct relationship with neighborhood, housing, healthcare, educational opportunities, and transportation.

Family and Student Health

Student health and patterns of healthy environments in the home directly relate to student attendance, while affordable health care and environmental factors play a role in prevention and intervention, asthma and student health are listed as the number one reason for student absence in elementary school (Basch, 2011; Bloom et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2019; Mapping the early

attendance gap, 2015; Moonie et al., 2006; Taras & Potts-Datema, 2005). Asthma accounts for 12.8 million missed school days alone (Basch, 2011). Twenty percent of students aged five to 11 have an untreated decaying tooth, and 30% of native English speakers reported missing two or more days of school for oral care, whereas 52% of non-native English speakers missed two days (Pourat & Nicholson, 2009), with low-income students twice as likely as their higher income peers to suffer from untreated oral health (Beltran-Aguilar et al., 2005) and low-income Black students are more likely to have high levels of asthma (Basch, 2011). Students with asthma miss nine or more days a year due to asthma, and 15% of elementary aged students are diagnosed with asthma with higher rates among rural students ages 5-8 (Kim et al., 2019), minority and low-income students (Basch, 2011; Johnson et al., 2019; Moonie et al., 2006). Taras and Potts-Datema (2005) reviewed 66 articles relating to childhood asthma and school performance but struggled with a clear definition and symptoms of the illness. With inconsistent data reporting for asthma or other related illness, it is difficult to determine how strong of an impact the condition has on attendance, with asthma side effects including sleep disruption, school air environment triggers, or comorbid diseases including respiratory infections also potentially causing absences (Basch, 2011 & Bloom et al., 2006).

An elementary student living with one or two adults who smoke, correlates to increased absences and smoking-related respiratory impacts including asthma (Gilliland et al., 2003; Levy et al., 2011). Families reported an increase of greater than three ear infections in the past year, and a chest cold in the two weeks prior to the interview. Students with two or more adult smokers were absent 1.54 more school days a year in comparison to their peers (Levy et al., 2011). Researchers estimated 25-33% of student absences (aged 6-11) with one or two smokers in the home were attributed to exposure and half of the population studied had families under the

poverty line who smoked, which also increases the negative impacts of chronic absenteeism (Levy et al., 2011). Fourth grade students in California with asthma and one or two smokers in the home had a 4.5 times greater chance of absences due to respiratory illness (Gilliland et al., 2003).

Parents with mental health concerns, including depressive symptoms correlated with student absence due to an emergency doctor's visit (Guevara, Mandell, Danagoulian, Reyner, & Pati, 2013). This was an adult respondent study but coincides with research regarding parental and maternal physical and mental health. Elementary school students were more likely to be impacted by their parental depressive symptoms and health than older students who could independently attend school (Guevara et al., 2013). Nursing staff can provide support for physical health and a respite for mental health. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events including abuse, neglect and family and home dysfunction, with each event or experience adding to a student's ACE score (Stempel et al., 2017). ACEs relate directly to the student's wellbeing and significantly associate with chronic absenteeism. Stempel et al. (2017) utilized the National Center for Health Statistics and used proxy questions to determine student ACE scores and parents reported days missed, but parents underreport the number of missed student days. Stempel et al. (2017) focused on pediatric involvement with ACE scores and working with schools to address student mental health and support regular school attendance to receive in-school resources.

Sleep plays a critical role in student health and academic engagement, and students with consistent bedtimes miss fewer days of school and were 5% less likely to be chronically absent (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2019b). Gottfried and Kirksey (2021b) utilized the ECLS-KC 2010-11, to measure kindergarteners' bedtimes and chronic absenteeism, the actual bedtime, hours asleep or

school start time was not significant, but having a consistent bedtime was associated with improved attendance. Head Start preschool program enrollment predictively supported improved attendance in comparison to peers who do not participate (Ansari & Purtell, 2018; Dubay & Holla, 2016; Welsh, 2018). Preschool programs elicit routines around getting to school, planning for transportation and bedtimes (Ansari & Purtell, 2018; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2021b).

Nursing staff within a school can support student health overall (Bauer et al., 2018; Ehrlich et al., 2014) as schools will locally excuse an absence for a health-related reason, but ESSA policy would deem that as an absence contributing towards chronic absenteeism (Keppens et al., 2019; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018; Taras & Potts-Datema, 2005). Chronic illness can hospitalize students for periods of time contributing to chronic absenteeism (Harden et al., 2020) but within school health support may be unable to provide the level of care needed (Bauer et al., 2018; Ehrlich et al., 2014).

School Nurse Intervention

Recognizing health as one of the most important factors in chronic absenteeism, Kerr et al. (2011) analyzed nursing staff calling families regarding absences and found that 40% of absences reported as illness were not related to illness, but transportation, behavior, or family problems. While Kerr et al. (2011) could not confirm if the involvement of nurses contacting families positively impacted attendance, the information from the phone calls was important for the district to address some misconceptions and educate families. School nursing staff can support health plans and enable students to seek medical care at school, either to prevent health concerns or refer to available community resources (Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015). School counselors can also address mental health concerns or barriers to attending school

through additional resources, but only half of all US students have access to a nurse or school counselor in their school (Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015).

Health is one of the leading factors in elementary absenteeism, and Kimel (1996) conducted a small study comparing absences due to flu-like systems in two groups of kindergarten and first grade students, comparing those who did and did not receive a handwashing program prior to flu season. Absences were doubled for the group of students who did not participate (Kimel, 1996). In conjunction with handwashing programs, school nurses have shown to play a critical role in Michigan schools with the largest ratio of school nurse to student, 1:6,600. Programs including nutrition, physical activity initiatives, health education, allergy/asthma/seizure action plans, immunizations, and safe walks to school decreased one school's chronic absenteeism by 32% with 66% of the population qualifying for the national school lunch program (Jacobsen, Meeder, & Voskuil, 2016). Wyman (2005) analyzed student early departure from school with and without a full-time school nurse and found 57% fewer students were dismissed early for illness or injury compared to students without contact with a nurse. The school nurse can mitigate sickness and often return students back to class without missing substantial academic time or going home and disrupting the students' day.

Family Structure and Engagement

Low family income, parent involvement, housing, stressful family life all influences chronic absenteeism (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2002; Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015; Ready, 2010; Romero & Lee, 2007, 2008) but socioeconomic status as noted previously is multifaceted due to the impact of income status on home structure, stability, daily routines, community safety and consistent support and transportation (Ansari & Purtell, 2018; Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015). Single parent homes (Ehrlich, 2014) and young mothers

(Romero & Lee, 2008; Stargel & Easterbrooks, 2022) are linked to chronic absenteeism and represent the "challenges that families may need to overcome to ensure their child attends regularly" (Balu & Ehrlich, 2018, p. 3). Families that are involved with child protective services or have incarcerated family members add additional stress, time away from family, and inconsistent routines for students attending school (Rafa, 2017).

Student attendance is more deeply impacted by family structure in the elementary years and reflects family stability or instability (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Ready (2010) and Romero and Lee (2008) utilized the ECLS-K:1998 to assess for chronic absenteeism risk for early school aged children, in conjunction with maternal and family factors. Romero and Lee (2008) and Stargel and Easterbrooks (2022) found children exposed to poverty through teenage mothers, parents without a high school diploma, welfare status, unemployment, poor health or four or more minors in the home with higher rates of chronic absenteeism in comparison to those peers who did not experience those home environments. Of the ECLS-K:1998 participants, 14% experienced three or more risk categories, whereas 53% of children experience no risk. Cumulative risk throughout elementary school also increases the likelihood of becoming chronically absent (Romero & Lee, 2008). The potential instability and consistent change of routine and available resources impacts elementary students dependent on others in the home to attend school

Gottfried (2015) and Gottfried and Gee (2017) utilized the ECLS-K:2011 and the teacher reported absence totals and found students with more siblings had a lower likelihood of becoming chronically absent possibly due to greater accountability for all children to attend school. Siblings who can travel to school together, walk or ride can support each other in attending (Gottfried, 2015; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). The main effects of sibling relationships and

the ages with the most significant impact was not determined, but students without siblings to provide support in attending school or against unstable home environments were discussed (Gottfried, 2015; Gottfried & Gee, 2017).

School-Family Engagement Intervention

Engaging families in their child's schooling is a school level intervention but is addressed in the family and student level factors as a mitigating tool against chronic absenteeism. Utilizing these possible interventions can support families and their children. Parents and families are often unaware of how many days their child has missed school, through the utilization of school distributed targeted post card mailing attendance updates decreased absenteeism by 15% in ten schools, grades K-5 (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2007) and 10% in the School District of Philadelphia (Rogers & Feller, 2018). Atlanta public schools started a texting platform and reduced chances of chronic absenteeism by 7.8% (Musaddiq et al., 2020). Research was based on the notion that parents do not value school attendance in early school as they do in later grades, and those with strong views on regular attendance in early grades have reduced absences (Musaddiq et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2017: Rogers & Feller, 2018). The study incorporated 10,967 households of students first through fifth grade in the bottom 60th percentile of attendance. The mailings had a significantly larger impact on low-income students, reducing absences by 1.02 days for a low-income student, and 0.42 for higher income students (Robinson et al., 2017). There was no difference across grade, or race, gender, language, or prior year attendance.

Unless absences are consecutive days, parents will often underestimate their child's absences by a "factor of two" (Rogers & Feller, 2018, p. 1). Recognizing the expense of most interventions, the most effective intervention cost $6 for each additional day attended by the

student. Families in the School District of Philadelphia opted into the program for the 2014-2015 school year, with 40,326 students participating. For the treatment families, five mailings were mailed during the school year, with each treatment receive varying levels of personalization. Measuring both unexcused and excused absences, Rogers, and Feller (2018) identified the personalized communication with total absences was effective in reducing absences. In comparing hard mailings to electronic, it was not determinable if text or email was most effective, and the parents' who did not receive the text or email due to connectivity may need the communication the most (Musaddiq et al., 2020). These studies also included all form of absences, without studying reason for absent or excused or unexcused (Musaddiq et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2017: Rogers & Feller, 2018). Communication and family involvement regarding absence totals supports student improved attendance.

Family and student factors including student health, family health and structure and home environment influence a student's attendance. School nurses and family communication support student attendance from the school lens. Transportation, discipline and learning engagement are factors relating to school influence, with possible intervention.

School Factors

At the center of the model, are school factors central to the location of chronic absenteeism (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018) and ESSA's purpose of empowering schools to recognize and intervene when a student is chronically absent. How attendance data is maintained and recorded in student intervention systems (SIS) impacts the process of chronically absent student identification (Kearney et al., 2019). School specific factors function to moderate the relationship between student, family and school may impact a student's ability or willingness to go to school (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2002). Facilities, teachers, curriculum, climate, special

education services, English language support, and bullying all play a role in a student's attendance and access to school (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2002). The impact of chronic absenteeism on a student's academics and their classmate's success can perpetuate absenteeism and can be viewed as an influencing factor in the cycle.

Learning Engagement

Understanding the negative academic impacts of chronic absenteeism can guide school level intervention efforts to recognize the influence school level policies and practice have on attendance. When a student is academically underperforming, their engagement and willingness to attend school is diminished and their dislike of school increases. Absences correlate with negative academic outcomes, and the more difficult and challenging academics become students who may dislike school, develop negative relationships with peers and teachers, and experience bullying (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2002). Students with disabilities or learning English as a second language are more challenged in school and can become disengaged if their specific needs are not met (Chang et al, 2019; Kim, 2011). A student's confidence in academics relates to prior chronic absenteeism, as a student with a prior history of absences may achieve at a lower rate than their peers (Keppens et al., 2019). Keppens et al. (2019) and Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2002) found a student's dislike of a teacher, or a lesson can elicit an absence, which may be provoked by prior chronic absenteeism and academic ability.

Chronically absent kindergarteners, absent for possible other factors, are less likely to read at grade level in third grade, have lower academic engagement, drop out of school and graduate from high school or post-secondary plans, entering the cycle of chronic absenteeism (Ginsburg et al., 2014; Lara et al., 2018). Only 17% of chronically absent students in kindergarten and first grade are proficient readers by third grade (Bruner, Discher, & Chang,

2011). Henderson et al. (2014) found 24% of Oregon's kindergarteners are chronically absent (15 school days) and are unable to academically catch up to their peers until 5th grade. Chronic absenteeism, regardless of reason, demographics, grade, or gender is correlated with lower achievement scores in all academic areas (Chang & Romero, 2008; Connolly & Olson, 2012; Ehrlich, Gwynne & Allensworth, 2018). With a focus on math scores, Gershenson et al. (2015) utilized the ECLS-K:1998 to study urban and suburban schools and found unexcused absences to be twice as harmful on math scores. Gershenson et al. (2015) concluded "results indicate that reducing low-income students' absences by ten absences relative to non-poor students would reduce the achievement gap by 5 to 10 percent" (p. 31). Not only is there a correlation between socioeconomic status, and type of absence, but gender comparison also shows academic impacts. Through ECLS-K data, the reason for absence is not included, but Gottfried and Kirskey (2016) recognize this barrier to intervention. The association between chronic absenteeism and the likelihood of retention, stresses the importance of addressing chronic absenteeism early due to the negative impacts that low reading scores and retention have on students, families, school, and society (Cook et al., 2021). While a students' chronic absenteeism directly impacts that student's academic outcomes, the classroom environment is also negatively affected.

Chronically Absent Classmates

Students not only miss instruction and fall behind academically when absent, but their absence impacts their classmates' instruction and can negatively shape their teachers' view of their academics (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gottfried, 2011a; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried & Ansari, 2021). Gottfried (2019) utilized school level data for all third and fourth grade students in the School District of Philadelphia and recognized that this data set is rare with specific information for each student, rather than predetermined ranges or

parent/teacher reports to the researcher. “Students in classrooms with a higher percentage of chronic absentees have lower test scores” (Gottfried, 2019, p. 25). When a student is chronically absent “places extra burden on teachers to ensure that student can catch up” (Balu & Ehrlich, 2018, p. 1). Lara et al. (2018) acknowledged that chronic absenteeism impacts the school system, peers, the teacher, and the climate of the school, and can impact state funding. Students who attend regularly suffer when a peer is chronically absent due to the reteaching of curriculum or attention shifted to the chronically absent student when they are present (Goodman, 2014; Nauer et al., 2008). Math and reading achievement scores and executive functioning rates of chronically absent classmates, who were not chronically absent themselves, were negatively impacted as shown in the large ECLS-K:2011 data set (Gottfried & Ansari, 2021a). The negative secondhand risk of chronic absenteeism is the academic outcomes of peers, and there may be more unmeasured impacts (Gottfried, 2019).

Goodman (2014) established that weather related school closures did not negatively impact academic achievement, whereas unplanned absences of students at different times does. While the effect on classmates is a negative impact of chronic absenteeism, and not an influencing factor of chronic absenteeism, it does provoke a review of whole classroom approaches to addressing chronic absenteeism and how the negative impacts of a peer could in turn influence another student’s perception of school (Gottfried & Ansari, 2021a).

School Engagement Intervention

Gottfried, Kirksey, and Hutt (2020, 2021) assessed novice teacher preparation and working with attendance concerns in the classroom and found varying degrees of preparedness to work with students and families on the importance of attending school. Through NCLB and ESSA, teacher effectiveness is measured on student achievement outcomes on standardized

assessments “and more experienced teachers tend to have larger effects” (Gershenson, 2016, p. 143). We fail to recognize teacher effectiveness unrelated to test scores, and if we prioritized the crucial character development and attendance in classrooms, more attention may be paid to attendance and training. Gershenson (2016) remarks that the random sorting of students to teachers may fail students with chronic absenteeism and the potential pairing of students with more experienced teachers may prevent chronic absenteeism for the following school year.

The positive impact shown by Gershenson (2016) is reflected in the ability of a teacher spend more time with each student through smaller class sizes. von Hippel (2021) intended to study small classes sizes and the impact on elementary absenteeism due to infection spread from 1985-1989 but found that classes reduced in size by one third did not stop the spread of infection but did reduce absenteeism. The smaller classes sizes in the randomized control trial reduced individual student absences by 0.43 days the school year. Small classes with 13-17 children, whereas regular classes included 22 to 26 students in Tennessee. The current research was based on Project STAR data from this time frame (von Hippel, 2021). Smaller class size allows teachers time to focus on attendance and may increase parent communication, this dataset was collected prior to ESSA defining chronic absenteeism but could suggest a possible intervention. Teacher assignment and class sizes are controlled by the school and district administration and “principals can also affect student absences through their control over school policies and programs” (Bartanen, 2020, p. 2), not just through human capital and instructional practices. While Bartanen (2020) did not review if individual student attendance improved, the impact was strong throughout all school years, and largest on urban and high-poverty schools.

School Health and Safety

Using the 2005 Building Condition Survey (BCS) of Upstate New York, Simons et al. (2010) studied elementary schools for ventilation problems, vermin, mold, and moisture and found "moisture and dampness can support mold growth and the proliferation of dust mites, which may produce allergic respiratory symptoms…" (p. 1683) which leads to health concerns and chronic absenteeism. Simons et al. (2010) stated the importance of a sanitary elementary school building due to "vermin-related exposures because they spend more time close to floor level" (p. 1684). Komisarow & Pakhtigian (2020) studied the closure of local power plants in 15 Illinois school districts and found a reduction of 7% in student absences, 372 days total, or 0.71 days a year per student. Researchers discovered the "effects on children's health, and ground-level concentrations of fine particulates" (Komisaro & Pakhtigian, 2020, p. 28). Basch (2011) identified fungi and cat allergen as common pollutants in 60 Texas urban elementary schools, in addition to cockroach and mold spores over the recommend limits. Asthma is attributed to one-third of all absences, and one in five US schools has poor air quality and can trigger asthma attacks (Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015; Romero & Lee, 2007).

School specific reasons for chronic absenteeism are coupled with prior chronic absenteeism, safety, health and dislike for academic learning and peers. Schools do have capacity, with funding, to remove reasons for chronic absenteeism as provoked by the school setting. Basch (2011) advised on educational programs, smoke free communities, responding appropriately to asthma attacks and facilitating health support for those identified students. School nurses as an intervention was discussed in family and student health under the family and student influencing factors, but available health programs in schools assist with mitigating school factors as they relate to health and safety (Kimel 1995; Wyman, 2005).

School Transportation System

Lack of transportation (Gottfried, 2017; Rafa, 2017) is identified as one of the leading causes of chronic absenteeism, second to health. Gottfried (2017) utilized the ECLS-K:2011 to study the impact of school bussing in kindergarten and found students who rode the school bus had fewer absences than kindergarteners who did not. Gottfried (2017) recognized Chicago city-wide bus routes are limited or stopped all together to reduce costs, expanding walking routes or the use of public transportation. Teachers reported absences in groups of three days, 1-4, 5-7, up to 20 or more, and deemed a student chronically absent if missed more than 10 days of kindergarten (not in alignment with PDE ESSA of 10% or 18 school days), the families said whether their child got to school by way of school bus or other means, with 24% of the students utilizing the school bus. Gottfried (2017) established that "regardless of how absenteeism was operationalized, the results link bus-taking to fewer absences" (p. 581). Lower income districts are reportedly cutting bus services, where absenteeism has a greater impact on academic achievement (Gottfried, 2017).

The National Center for Safe Routes to School identified the bus or car ride as the most common transportation to school when surveying parents (2016). Driving to school is most common for younger students, with bussing in rural areas, and driving in urban areas. Health is the most reported reason for absence as reviewed for a 9-week period, the secondary reasons were more related to family logistics and transportation. Half-day kindergarten impacts attendance due to care the other half of the day and transportation to and from (Ehrlich et al., 2014). Black and Latino students were absent twice as often as their peers due to health reasons, and African American students report more logistical issues getting to school in comparison to their Latino or white peers (Ehrlich et al., 2014).

Transportation Intervention

Consistent transportation to school has shown to improve attendance across all grade levels, and Gottfried, Ozuna and Kirksey (2021) studied a large rural school district in Nevada to show the positive attendance outcomes with school buses for kindergarteners in rural fringe areas, especially those with a father who worked full time and with an older sibling in the same school, whereas there was no significance for single parent households. Researchers attribute this to the routines and structure established by busing for kindergarten students, routines can alleviate stress and promote positive attitudes with schooling for families (Ansari & Purtell, 2018; Dubay & Holla, 2016; Gottfried, Ozuna, & Kirksey, 2021; Welsh, 2018). For students with disabilities, both high incidence and low incidence, transportation improves attendance promoting routine, safety, and accessibility (Gottfried Ozuna & Lloydhauser, 2021). Researchers acknowledge potential error for teacher reporting recall for attendance and included both excused and unexcused absences, but Welsh (2018) established the effectiveness of routine transportation regardless of family structure and type of absences.

Discipline Policy and Disability Status

School level discipline policies can lead to exclusionary discipline or out of school suspensions which are counted as absences towards chronic absenteeism (Civil Rights Data Collection Snapshot, 2014). Behaviors that elicit a suspension also require review as well as the assigned discipline as Chang et al. (2019) discovered biases for discipline and suspensions related to attendance procedures. A zero-tolerance policy for some infractions may lead to increased suspension (Childs & Lofton, 2021). “Chronic absence in K was related to suspensions in Grade 3 and cumulative rates of suspension over the three years after K” (Connolly and Olson, 2012, p. 17). Even in preschool, which is a predictor of kindergarten attendance, show that Black

students make up 42% of the suspended population, while only 18% of the preschool enrollment (Civil Rights Data Collection Snapshot, 2014). The school to prison pipeline is represented through exclusionary discipline of specific subgroups of populations, that are also more susceptible to chronic absenteeism due to other systemic barriers (Civil Rights Data Collection Snapshot, 2014).

Using five years of attendance and demographic data, and disciplinary records from the 2012-2013 to the 2016-2017 school year, for students identified with special education services in Michigan for grades K-12, Anderson (2020) found absenteeism varies by disability category and level of inclusion setting for the student. Anderson's (2020) data was driven for grades K-12, and the discipline for disability was statistically significant for K-5 it is important to note the possible connection of discipline and disability identification contributing towards chronic absenteeism per the Pennsylvania ESSA parameters. While chronic absenteeism was not defined, "students with SLD, OHI, and emotional impairment are at a higher risk of exclusionary discipline, and students with emotional impairment are also at a high risk for absenteeism, practitioners and policymakers should attend to the particular needs of these groups…" (Anderson, 2020, p. 22). Gottfried et al. (2021b) established the level of disability incidence may correlate to attendance, with high incidence identifications with lower rates of absenteeism in part due to their IEP and additional faculty support. The elementary population in NYC public schools with disabilities are 65.6% more likely to be chronically absent, and students diagnosed with emotional disturbance (ED) miss the most school, with the gap closing with more inclusive settings (Gottfried et al., 2017). In Pennsylvania, out of school suspensions do contribute towards to total absences. Anderson (2020) outlines the IDEA allows 10 days exclusionary discipline

days for students with an identified disability with the exclusionary discipline practices contributing to over half of the chronic absenteeism threshold (18 days).

Civil Rights Data Collection Snapshot: School Discipline (2014) showed that in the 2011-2012 school year, suspension rates of Black students are five times greater than their white counterparts, students with disabilities are twice as likely to receive an out of school suspension, and one in four Black students with disabilities according to IDEA receive higher rates of out of school suspension, all which accrue into chronic absenteeism and remove the student from the academic setting (Civil Rights Data Collection Snapshot, 2014). Students with an identification through IDEA are twice as likely to receive an out of school suspension than their peers without an identification (Civil Rights Data Collection Snapshot, 2014).

Chang et al. (2018) and Gee (2018) determined students with disabilities are 50% more likely to be chronically absent than their nondisabled peers. Gottfried, Stiefel, Schwartz, and Hopkins (2017) utilized a longitudinal data set from New York City public schools to compare rates of chronic absenteeism between students with and without disabilities and the varying degrees of inclusion and diagnoses. Within NYC the IDEA advocates for students with disabilities to be educated alongside their general education peers, and attention should be paid to this subgroup in terms of absenteeism (as stated by Gottfried et al. (2017)). The more inclusive the school setting the greater the association with better attendance (Anderson, 2020, p. 2).

Discipline Policy Intervention

The Georgia Department of Education established a School Climate Star Rating system and recognized the need for a change in discipline practices (Chang et al., 2019). In 2018, state legislators passed a law to prevent students in third grade or younger from being suspended from school for more than five days without a multi-tiered system of support to identify the student's

needs. Through this climate improvement plan and law, researchers saw a drop in out of school suspensions and a 10% increase in student attendance in grades K-3 (Chang et al., 2019). Chang et al. (2019) discovered higher rates of kindergarten to third grade out of school suspensions significantly correlated with lower rates of reading and math proficiency, this impact carries through high school. Ninth grade shows, kids who were suspended 3 or more times in early elementary school were nearly six times more likely to be suspended than their peers, and students were assigned an OSS due to minor infractions, not safety related issues. Promoting restorative disciplinary practices and providing resources to educators can reduce the amount of OSS infractions. Anderson (2020) expressed the need to be intentional about moving students into inclusive settings, to promote social interaction, not simply for the designation, only does the purposeful inclusion setting promote improve behavior, less exclusionary discipline, and improved attendance.

Georgia has also leveraged medical care for students and passed provisions for tenant concerns with health and safety issues. Housing instability is a huge concern, with 40% of students changing houses during the school year, the state is working to address with incentivization and other services to break down barriers, and educators are also become educated in trauma, due to the high rate of foster care placement (Chang et al., 2019). Anderson et al. (2020) studied discipline within student disability categories and recognized the need for schools to evaluate procedures for specific populations, with Chang et al. (2019) focusing on trauma and care noting exclusionary discipline is ineffective.

Meal Programs

Bartfield et al. (2019) studied the utilization of a school wide free school meal programs and attendance at three elementary schools in Wisconsin during the 2014-2015 school year.

Researchers recognized the limited number of families who apply for the National School Lunch Program for a myriad of reasons, but when a school has 40% or more of the population as low income, the opportunity for free meals for all students becomes available and may have an impact on attendance. Free meals may be viewed as an incentive to come to school, Bartfield et al. (2019) and Kirksey and Gottfried (2021) predicted that meals are a basic need that can be met at school. Thirty-seven Community Eligible Program (CEP) schools provided free meals for all students, and 108 non-eligible schools acted as controls (Bartfield et al., 2019). Three days of attendance were gathered for each student, resulting in 94,570 observations. While three days do not provide the natural arc of attendance throughout the school year including flu and cold season, holidays, and transitioning into school and weather changes that we recognize as impacting attendance, the researchers did include the school year prior, to measure differences in trends. During the second year of data collection, researchers did find a meaningful difference in absenteeism "concentrated among economically disadvantaged students" (Bartfield et al., 2019, p. 6) this may show a long period of exposure to the intervention may be important to show impacts. There may be other interventions in place across schools that may have caused this impact, regardless children should not be hungry (Bartfield et al., 2019). The timing of free meal programs may also represent the need to thoughtfully offer free meals to students, so that students are not embarrassed of the stigma of receiving a meal at school (Kirksey & Gottfried, 2021).

School Meals Intervention

Child hunger and inconsistent meal expectations can disrupt a student's attendance, but Breakfast After-the-Bell (BAB) in Colorado and Nevada provides all students with breakfast after school begins rather than before school (Kirksey & Gottfried, 2021). Kirksey and Gottfried

(2021) recognized the stigma that exists with the National School Lunch Program and receiving breakfast prior to school beginning, and BAB can enable the establishment of routines for families with prior research showing routines, especially in early schooling, reduce chronic absenteeism (Gottfried, 2015, 2017). There is also a link with nutritional programming for students and health's role in student absenteeism. Utilizing a 15-day threshold to label chronic absenteeism, this study found high schools had greater effects of BAB, however elementary schools still realized the benefits, especially for schools with universal meal programs and the suburban areas (Kirksey & Gottfried, 2021). "School breakfast is often viewed as something separate from schooling outcomes, but in fact, the findings show that it is very much intertwined with student success" (Kirksey & Gottfried, 2021, p. 19). School level factors influencing student attendance include learning engagement, absent classmates, school health, transportation discipline and meals. Interventions at the school level are possible when the influencing factors are identified.

School-Level Student Information Systems

Within school related factors, SIS and attendance data maintenance are not listed by Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018), however, to recognize and identify a chronically absent student the school must evaluate the process for data collection and record keeping (Dougherty, 2018; Kearney et al., 2019). Dougherty (2018) analyzed 12 studies of chronic absenteeism and found the lack of clear threshold and definition of absences did not align practitioners and policymakers. Organizational effectiveness in Detroit Public Schools including charter schools were challenged with absence reporting, while consistent across the public school system, the charter schools recorded absences differently, even with the same oversight company (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018).

FutureEd and Attendance Works assisted with determining what absent days to be including in totals, rules for withdrawing, monitoring accuracy, timely reporting, and intervention (Jordan et al., 2018). A student is absent after they miss 50% of the academic day (Jordan et al., 2018), but Washington D.C. reports a student needs to attend for 80% for it to count as attending. Michigan updated their definition to fit the state ESSA policy to missing 50% or more of a day rather than the entire day and has required schools to drastically change their systems of response (Lenhoff et al., 2020). The report advises to have consistent policies on when to count an absence, ESSA defines for Pennsylvania, but this report notes the varied regulations from differing states, Connecticut argued to remove absent days for students who lacked proper immunizations (Jordan et al., 2018). New Jersey and Maryland exempt absences for Take Your Child to Work Day and Kentucky for students attending the state fair (Jordan et al., 2019). Pennsylvania ESSA outlined all reasons for absences regardless of school policy, that a student is out of school for a non-condoned school activity (with out of school suspension as an exception), would count towards the chronic absenteeism threshold (ESSA Report Card, n.d.).

Chang and Romero (2008) warn of inconsistent and inaccurate local attendance data and advise to include both excused and unexcused absences but did not discuss the varied reasons included in either category. The excused and unexcused dichotomy is utilized as a default record keeping mechanism in accordance with district policy for simplicity (Kearney et al., 2019) but is challenging to conceptualize the absent versus present days (Birioukov, 2016). How record keeping systems are arranged, impacts under or overreporting, and a district in Connecticut with a default setting to attending inflated attendance counts (Jordan & Miller, 2017; Jordan et al., 2018). District policy for excused and unexcused absences were and may currently be the method of identification and intervention, but the threshold for chronic absenteeism under ESSA

requires restructuring or reframing absenteeism at the local level (Jordan & Miller, 2017). The attendance data available in the ECLS-K data set included the total number of absent days for the entire school year and finds that excused and unexcused absences are a local "school-level phenomenon" (Gershenson et al., 2015, p. 10). Gottfried (2009) recognized the weakness in prior literature of removing excused absences from the data collection or being unable to define what absences were included in the data. In Philadelphia School District, a doctor's note is an excused absence, with no note it is an unexcused absence, but even with a parent note often it can be listed as an unexcused absence (Gottfried, 2009). Pennsylvania ESSA does create a clear portrait of absenteeism across entities, but states have defined chronic absenteeism differently, and the data entry points for each school and district vary depending on local policy, student information system, and personnel. Measuring only unexcused absences does not fully capture the time a student has missed from academic instruction (Jordan & Miller, 2017). Pyne et al. (2021) would argue that maintaining the district code for unexcused, highlights a higher need for intervention with the academic outcomes for those with higher rates of unexcused absences.

Through a qualitative research design, Lenhoff et al. (2020) interviewed school-level practitioners, district leaders and community partners regarding chronic absenteeism within Detroit Public Schools. Leaders expressed frustration for those who were responsible for record maintenance with high turnover and lack of training (Lenhoff et al., 2020). Specific school personnel should be trained to support attendance data, the New Jersey Department of Education employed specific individuals to support schools and chronic absenteeism tracking and intervention (Bauer et al., 2018), then can reduce gaming the system, support schools to reduce rates and students to attend school. In Madison Metropolitan School District in Madison, WI, teachers indicate if a student is present, absent, or tardy, and for those families that do not call in

a reason for an absence, a attendance manager will call home. If they receive a reason, it is excused, if they do not then the student is marked unexcused (Pyne et al., 2021). This policy differs from other districts, that even when a parent reports a reason, it may be unexcused, and through ESSA policy, almost all absences are unexcused, but Pyne et al. (2021) utilized this district's reporting measure to study the impacts of excused versus unexcused absences on test scores. There is no default mechanism, the teacher must mark an option for all students, and school personnel are reaching out to families (Pyne et al., 2021).

Summary

Chronic absenteeism is influenced by environmental factors, family/student factors and school factors and the relationships all factors share with each other (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Parents are responsible their child's attendance but there are barriers that operate out of the family's control, especially when living in poverty, and "large numbers of chronically absent students could indicate systemic problems that affect the quality of the educational experience and/or the healthy functioning of the entire community" (Chang and Romero, 2008, p. 11). The complex and compounding reasons for chronic absenteeism can transcend beyond a school building, but prevention and intervention are possible, especially at an early age to support regular attendance in later school years. Chang and Romero (2008) engaged an ecological lens to explain "that children's development and educational outcomes take place in the context of multiple, ongoing influences among children themselves" (p. 11). The policy goal is to hold schools accountable for their students' chronic absenteeism to support action.

The influencing factors for chronic absenteeism are interrelated and complex to identify specific intervention efforts, but Eklund et al. (2020) highlighted the critical need for additional research with a current gap in method and intervention fidelity. Through a meta-analysis on

chronic absenteeism, Eklund et al. (2020) discovered large quantitative data sets, without clear reasons and effective explanation of intervention for replication. Chang et al. (2019) stated the first step to action is maintaining clear data. Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018) recommend adding qualitative data collection to evaluate measuring and reporting absences, and "could illuminate some of the institutional dynamics that shape student attendance and the unintended consequences of incorporating chronic absenteeism in high stakes accountability policy" (p. 15). When collected consistently and accurately and with a clear response system, educators and the community can support and intervene when necessary. This study will focus on specifically identified chronically absent students, analyze their reason codes and study the factors influencing absenteeism, and the interventions in place.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Through qualitative methods, this study explores the intersection of federal and state policy, with school level practice with elementary aged students in one school district. The overall design evaluates how one district addresses chronic absenteeism and how policy is implemented and utilized to support students. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does ESSA policy, state policy and local elementary school practice intersect?
2. How are students identified for a School Attendance Improvement Plan?
3. What are the characteristics of a chronically absent student in Eagle School District elementary schools?

To address the three research questions, I collected and analyzed four data sources from four elementary schools across two school years: district policy, school level student information system (SIS) attendance data, school attendance improvement plan (SAIP) documents, and semi-structured interviews of the school personnel involved with intervention and recording efforts to mitigate chronic absenteeism. The students are elementary school students attending Eagle School District schools. This study considers prior assumptions surrounding chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Connolly & Olsen, 2012; Romero & Lee, 2007), the current interventions employed (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Bartanen, 2020; Chang et al., 2019; Gershenson, 2016; Gottfried, 2017; Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018; Rafa, 2017), and the federal, state, and local policies in place for reporting chronic absenteeism (Attendance Works, 2015; Dougherty, 2018; Gottfried, 2014a; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Kostyo et al., 2018). Prior chronic absenteeism literature is rich with large data sets and the impact chronic

absenteeism has directly on the student and longitudinally on society, but it is limited in local school policy, procedure, and practices (Anderson, 2020; Aucejo & Romano, 2014; Attendance Works, 2014; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Gee, 2018; Gershenson et al., 2015; Gottfried, 2011 et al., 2017; Jordan & Chang, 2015; Ready, 2010; Romero & Lee, 2007).

This methodology gives representation to school level practices which directly influence students and their families (Bauer et al., 2018; Chang & Romero, 2009; Conry & Richards, 2018; Dougherty, 2018; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Lee et al., 2020; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Through document analysis of the school level SIS attendance data, and the SAIP documents of almost two full school years, this research provides a design for schools and districts to replicate to address their own student populations and improve practice for addressing chronic absenteeism as defined by PDE ESSA policy.

Setting

The setting is Eagle School District elementary schools and the students during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. Eagle School District is a suburban district located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States serving approximately 4,000 students during the 2018-2019 school year. Within Eagle School District, there is one K-1 Building that serves the district's kindergarten and first grade students, and three elementary schools, second through fifth grade, enrolling about 2,000 students in total. One elementary school is identified as a Title 1 school, and Table 3 shows demographic percentages for the district (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020).

Table 3

Demographic data for the district in 2018-2019 school year reported by PDE

Demographic	% of District Population

Economically Disadvantaged	30.0
English Language Learner	8.6
Special Education	13.6
Hispanic	16.0
Black	6.0
White	69.6
Asian	3.4
Two or more races	4.9

Sample

The research focus on elementary school students reflects the importance of elementary age school attendance as a predictive measure for future school attendance and school dropout, and of social, emotional, and academic needs of students (Attendance Works, 2016; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried, 2009; Gottfried, 2014; Jordan & Chang, 2015). I purposefully focused on the attendance for the 2018-2019 school year, and part of the 2019-2020 school year through March 13, 2020. The 2017-2018 school year was the first year of implementation of chronic absenteeism as an ESSA indicator, and March 13, 2020 was the last day of instruction prior to the state-wide closure of schools due to COVID-19. For the 2019-2020 school year, the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) collected attendance data from July 1, 2019 through March 13, 2020 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). ESSA chronic absenteeism metric did not include attendance data collected by districts after March 13, 2020 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020).

Future Ready PA

In 2016, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) selected chronic absenteeism as one of the two School Quality and Student Success (SQSS) indicators under ESSA.

Pennsylvania, and 36 additional states selected regular attendance to measure school performance and student outcomes. Regular attendance included the students that attend 90% or more enrolled school days per the given year. Regular attendance is reported as a percentage of students, and the remaining percentage indicates the chronically absent students. Schools measure chronic absenteeism to identify and intervene, but PDE only reports the percentage of regular attenders. For the 2018-2019 school year, 85.7% of Pennsylvania public students regularly attended school and PDE set a target of regular attendance at 94.1% at each Pennsylvania school (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). Therefore, 14.3% of Pennsylvania public school students were chronically absent during the 2018-2019 school year. Eagle School District elementary schools had approximately 10% more students regularly attending school across both academic years. Absence recording can impact data when reported to PDE Future Ready PA, however most attendance codes are included as absences towards chronic absenteeism. Attendance is a lagging indicator and is reported on the Future Ready PA dashboard one academic year after the close of the reported school year. The lag is caused by "reporting schedules and validations procedures" (Department of Education, n.d.-b, Requirements). The lack of timeliness of reporting through PDE could cause a delay in district and school action regarding chronic absenteeism.

Table 4 represents the Future Ready PA reported attendance data for the four elementary schools in Eagle School District for the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 (through March 13, 2020) school years. Future Ready PA reports the regular attendance percentage, student enrollment and various other metrics. I subtracted the percent of regular attenders from 100% to find the percent of chronically absent students and calculated the product of that value and the enrollment value to find the number of chronically absent students.

Table 4

Attendance Data for Eagle School District Elementary Schools reported by Future Ready PA

School	Grades	Enrollment	% Regular Attenders	% Chronically Absent	# Chronically Absent
2018-2019 School Year					
K-1 Building	K,1	658	95.4	4.6	30.27
Elementary A	2,3,4,5	312	96.5	3.5	10.92
Elementary B	2,3,4,5	509	97.1	2.9	14.76
Elementary C	2,3,4,5	443	97.7	2.3	10.19
2019-2020 School Year (through March 13, 2020)					
K-1 Building	K,1	577	96.9	3.1	17.89
Elementary A	2,3,4,5	288	96.6	3.4	9.79
Elementary B	2,3,4,5	436	95.3	4.7	20.49
Elementary C	2,3,4,5	498	96.5	3.5	17.43

Across all four elementary schools approximately 66 students were chronically absent for each of the reported school years according to the Future Ready PA Index reporting tool, for a total of 132 for both academic years (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). The student cases within this research setting are bounded by the threshold of chronic absenteeism and omits students from the sample who regularly attend school. In this study, the individual chronically absent students are identified through the analysis of the SIS attendance data from all four elementary school buildings across both years, and the available school attendance improvement plan (SAIP) documents.

Data Collection & Analysis

I maintained data collection information through a data accounting log with a standardized protocol, listing the date of collection, source, file format and location. The data accounting log in the form of a Microsoft Excel document includes the available data and

includes the date of the document or interview, interviewee's role, and title of the document. All data was uploaded into Quirkos to maintain a secure and central location for all data. Quirkos maintained all pieces of data including jottings, memoing, documents and transcribed interviews. Quirkos is a secure, qualitative software program that supports multiple coding cycles and enables the researcher to maintain clear and accessible records. Table 5 shows the data and sources collected for this study.

Table 5

Collected Data and Sources

Data	Source
Policy Documents	District Policy
	Elementary Student Handbook
2018-2019 SIS Attendance Data	K-1 Building
	Elementary A
	Elementary B
	Elementary C
2019-2020 SIS Attendance Data	K-1 Building
	Elementary A
	Elementary B
	Elementary C
SAIPs	12 total
Interviews	Lead Attendance Manager
	K-1 Attendance Manager
	Elementary A Attendance Manager
	Elementary B Attendance Manager
	Elementary C Attendance Manager

Note: Elementary A Attendance Manager was invited to participate, but did not follow through with participation.

This overarching data collection archive confirms consistent document maintenance, data security and organization. With multiple documents and semi-structured interviews, management of data was crucial for rich description in qualitative analysis. As the primary instrument for collection and analysis, I recognized my own role as a practitioner working with chronically absent high school students. My own experiences assisting with the evolution of the research

methodologies, and an awareness of potentially available data. I processed all data collection and analysis, and I explored my own prior assumptions through active memoing during the data collection and analysis process.

Throughout the entire data collection process, I maintained jottings to support theme development and analysis. Analysis and data collection occurred simultaneously of one another. Jottings are a qualitative method of brief notetaking, which capture the researcher's initial reactions and thoughts to a piece of data, an interviewee or interview (Maxwell, 2012; Miles et al., 2020). Memos act as a researcher's purposive reflection about the data. An excerpt from a jotting dating December 5, 2023, reads:

> The 2019-2020 school year is much more challenging to navigate because there are seemingly so many more students that are CA, but this seems to be inflated because of comparing the two years and where the prior you stood with the number of CA students at the same time of the closure due to COVID on March 13, 2020.

This jotting supporting my confusion and possible frustration with my findings surrounding the chronic absenteeism rate from the 2019-2020 school year and my reflections on the cause.
A memo excerpt from December 26, 2023, includes my initial thoughts on the interview experiences with attendance managers:

> The genuine care and thoughtful attitude and outlook to support these students, not only getting to school but with their families and guardians and how to best support them. They act as gatekeepers with the data, but their valued interactions with parents and with students is inspirational. They truly value their roles and their positions to help and support students, not only when they are present in the building, but to support them in attending daily or navigating barriers and issues.

While jottings are brief, momentary thoughts, memos integrate the data into more coherent thoughts to drive continued research (Miles et al., 2020). Rich and thick description and content analysis enhances the validity of the research and promote greater generalizability to other populations, policy, and future research. Varied coding procedures were utilized to cluster topics and themes to further analyze and to draw eventual conclusions dependent on the data format (Miles et al., 2020).

School Policy Documents

Data collection began with the publicly available school board policy documents and student handbook outlining school attendance policy and intervention. I accessed these two documents on the school district website. PDE states that the Local Education Agency (LEA) "should review their locally-developed attendance policies and work with Student Information System (SIS) vendors to ensure compliance with reporting requirements for both federal ESSA accountability and PA regulatory requirements" (Department of Education, n.d.-b, Requirements). The PA regulatory requirements are written in PA Code Title 22, Chapter 11 Student Attendance (Pennsylvania Code, n.d.).

School Policy 204 and the Elementary Student Handbook are crucial documents to support an understanding of the process by which parents are expected to comply to communicate an absence to their school and the expected consequence of absences. The alignment with the PDE ESSA policy to the original state policy for communication and intervention is an important factor relating to local policy and expectations. The policy document outlines the district's policy used to define excused and unexcused absences, and the responsibility of the district, school, and the parent to report an absence, provide documentation and support student attendance. District policy and the elementary school handbook outline the

parent and guardian responsibilities to report the reason for an absence, and how it is coded in the SIS. The reporting procedures are the foundation for developing an understanding of school and district level processes to record, measure, and address absences.

School Policy Analysis

To fully understand the intersection of state policy in adherence with federal policy and local district policy, content analysis of the district attendance policy and the Elementary School Handbook was critical. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend questions to consider when reviewing a document prior to conducting content analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline questions to ask when reviewing documents:

1. What is the history of the document?
2. How did I get it?
3. Has it been tampered with or edited?
4. Is it the complete document, as originally constructed?
5. What guaranteed is there that is what it pretends to be?
6. Who is the author? What is s/he trying to accomplish?
7. What are the sources of the document?
8. What was or is the author's bias?
9. How likely is that the author is telling the truth?

Lincoln and Guba (1985) ask these questions to support the documents' credibility and authenticity and assist in beginning the analysis process. The school policy documents were uploaded into Quirkos to begin the coding sequence utilizing Quirkos features including virtual bubbles and ordering. Protocol coding was the primary coding method for policy documents because the documents outline an established system and procedures. Through protocol coding, a

network model was developed to provide a visual representation of the process and procedures of attendance at the school district level and the relationship to the state and federal policy (Saldaña, 2016). While this study included the specific federal policy and chronic absenteeism reporting, it is vital to consider the other directive given to districts from the state attendance policy perspective. Multiple and often conflicting directives and policies alter the data and reporting measures, and how a district intervenes and mitigates absenteeism. The PA School Code requirements do not align with the PDE ESSA reporting requirements, including the terminology used to document an absence and what can be excused. [Eagle] School District Policy 204 is a direct reflection from the February 2020 Basic Education Circular from the PDE, in reference to the PA School Code (Pennsylvania Code, n.d.). A table of terminology, definition, and alignment of policies from the school, district and state level is included in the results section. The table highlights the differences and similarities from the documents. This lack of consistent vernacular influences conversation and systemic response to chronic absenteeism. The SIS attendance data and intervention practices should reflect the action of one policy in place that aligns, however the lack of overlap in processes highlights a complex intersection and execution.

SIS Attendance Data

Student information system (SIS) attendance data is the unfiltered and unedited attendance records entered by the school attendance manager for all students in each school. The program manager provided the SIS attendance data for both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school year via email for the each of the four elementary schools in the form of Excel spreadsheets. One spreadsheet per year were provided with identifying information for each school for filtering purposes. The dataset includes all enrolled students per year and their attendance codes entered by the attendance manager by absence date. Individual student

demographics included the deidentified student ID, grade, race, special education status, English Language Learner status, and National School Lunch Program eligibility. The attendance managers interpret the reason from the guardian or no communicated reason and enters the district code as seen in Table 6 and Table 7. For example, a parent reported to the attendance manager a student is ill with a cold, the manager would enter E-P for Excused Parent. The first letter is the type code, then a hyphen and the reason code, no reason code is required but can be added to provide more information for those reviewing the entries. The type code is what is reportable to PDE to indicate if a student is absent or present.

Table 6

Eagle School District Attendance Codes Coding Schema with Type Code

Type Code	Short Description	Long Description
A	Unresolved Abs	Unresolved Absence
C	College Visit	College Visit
D	Early Dismissal	Early Dismissal
E	Excused	Excused
F	Field Trip	Field Trip
H	Homebound	Homebound Instruction
L	Late	Late
O	OSS	Out of School Suspension
R	ED - Returned	Early Dismissal - Returned
S	ISS	In-School Suspension
V	Extended Vacay	Extended Vacation
X	Unlawful	Unlawful

Table 7

Eagle School District Attendance Codes Coding Schema with Reason Code

Reason Code	Short Description	Long Description
CO	Court	Court
E	Excused	Excused
M	Medical Note	Medical Note

NU	Nurse Dismissal	Nurse Dismissal
P	Parent Note	Parent Note
Q	Quarantine	Quarantine
WE	Weather Related	Weather Related
X	Unexcused	Unexcused

PDE identifies a student as either absent or present based on the reasons reported by the school, and those absences contribute towards the chronic absenteeism total. However, districts utilize different, more specific codes to maintain their attendance data as seen in Table 6 and Table 7 while PDE aggregates the data into binary variables, absent and present. I captured the school level data for those chronically absent per PDE ESSA guidelines, to represent Eagle School District's chronically absent elementary school students' reasons for absences as defined by the district. The simplified measurement utilized by PDE, does not provide statewide, county or district-wide data as to the actual reasons for student absences.

SIS Attendance Data Analysis

Initially, I had to review if students were included in more than one building in one year. I included transfer students between elementary schools after consideration, and their data per each school. There were no students listed in two schools for the 2018-2019 school year, and six for the 2019-2020 school year. For consistency, I identified which school they attended the most during the year based on the data entries matching their student ID and maintained that entity for their school for the descriptive statistics. I was able to determine if a student was cross listed between two buildings by their student ID.

Prior to beginning to analyze the data for chronically absent students, I had to filter the spreadsheets and remove students who were late to school or had an early dismissal only. For the 2018-2019 school year, there were 21,932 attendance entries across all four schools, and for 2019-2020 there were 11,687 attendance entries across all four schools. With the attendance data

for the 2019-2020 school year ending on March 13, 2020. Elementary attendance is entered for first half of the day, labeled 1 and second half of the day, labeled 2 in the spreadsheets. Typically, when a student is absent for a full day, the code is the same for both parts 1 and 2, however there were errors made during data entry. Consistent assumptions were made to clean the data, where specific codes if listed only for 1 or 2, were assumed intended for whole day absence because no late or early dismissal data was entered, therefore it is assumed the student was absent for the entire day rather than a late arrival or early dismissal.

For 2018-2019, there were 5,354 entries for late arrivals and 4,370 entries for early dismissals. For 2019-2020, there were 1,125 entries for late arrivals, and 1,263 entries for early dismissals. I was advised by the attendance managers which codes were likely data entry errors and how to best move forward with counting the student absent for the full day, rather than an early dismissal or late arrival. There were also circumstances of codes for 1 and 2 not matching, code dependent this student was most likely in school for at least a partial day. The determination for omitting data for late arrival or early dismissal, or incorrect coding was made at the beginning of the data filtering for the purposes of consistency. Including partial day attendance would inflate the chronically absent student total.

After identifying the full school days absences, I created the coding schema in Table 9, in reflection of PDE's absent and present reasons in Table 8. PDE ESSA reporting guidelines state that "a student is considered absent if they are not physically participating in instruction or instruction-related activities on school grounds or at an approved off-grounds location" (Department of Education (n.d.-b). Table 8 is provided by PDE to "be coded as absences for purposes of chronic absenteeism and regular attendance measures. (Department of Education, n.d.-b, Requirements).

Table 8

Examples for Reporting Regular Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism (Department of Education (n.d.-b)

Absent	Present
Absence from school (excused and or unexcused)	Career Education and Work experiences sponsored by the school entity
Out-of-School Suspension	In-school suspension
Extended Illness (not coded homebound)	Homebound instruction
Bereavement	School-sponsored field-trips or college visits
Non-school sponsored approved educational trips	
College visits not part of the curriculum or course expectations	

I coded the SIS attendance data into the PDE ESSA binary codes of absent or present, utilizing the coding schema outlined in Table 9 in accordance with PDE reporting guidelines (Department of Education (n.d.-b). Days that the student was present according to PDE were eliminated, for the 2018-2019 year, 14 entries for ISS were eliminated and three field trip entries for 2019-2020 were eliminated. The remaining entries were full day absences according to PDE and contribute towards the chronic absenteeism threshold. For the 2018-2019 academic year, full day data absences totaled 12,208, with 1,649 absence entries for chronically absent students, and for the 2019-2020 school year, 9,299 full day entries with 1,957 of those entries towards chronically absent students.

Through the coding into PDE's binary absent and present categories, I identified the chronically absent students, thus bounding the case. The boundaries of the sample include only those determined to be chronically absent according to the definition set by PDE, "chronic absenteeism is calculated for all public schools with 20 or more students based on the number of students who have missed more than 10 percent of enrolled school days across the academic year; this represents 18 days in a 180-day school year" (Department of Education, n.d.-b,

Requirements). For the 2018-2019 school year, 18 absent school days equated to chronic absenteeism, and during the partial 2019-2020 school year, 12 school days (10% of 123 days), equated to chronic absenteeism. Spreadsheets were separated by the chronically absent population and the regular attenders. The six students who transferred during the 2019-2020 school year, were not found to be chronically absent. Table 9 provides an abbreviated list of possible codes utilized with chronically absent students.

Table 9

PDE Policy Binary Variables and ESD Attendance Codes Coding Schema Policy

PDE ESSA Code	ESD Code	ESD Code Description	ESD Policy
Absent	A	Unresolved Absence	Unexcused
Absent	E-M	Excused Medical (confirmed by doctor's note)	Excused
Absent	E-P	Excused Parent	Excused
Absent	E-CO	Excused Court	Excused
Absent	E-WE	Excused Weather	Excused
Absent	O	OSS – Out of school suspension	Excused
Absent	V	Extended Vacation	Excused
Absent	X	Unlawful	Unexcused
Present	F	Field Trip	Excused
Present	N	School Function	Excused
Present	S	ISS- In school suspension	Excused

I compared the number of chronically absent students from the analyzed SIS data to the figures reported by PDE Future Ready PA Dashboard represented in Table 10. Future Ready PA reported approximately 66 chronically absent students for the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years, whereas the analyzed SIS data found 72 students for the 2018-2019 school year, and 129 students for the 2019-2020 school year. The threshold for chronically absent students during the 2019-2020 school year was lowered to 12 school days as opposed to 18 due to the truncated school year, this may impact this reporting.

Table 10

Attendance Data for Eagle School District Elementary Schools reported by Future Ready PA and analyzed SIS data

School	Grades	# Chronically Absent as per Future Ready PA	# Chronically Absent as per analyzed SIS Data
2018-2019 School Year			
K-1 Building	K,1	30.27	37
Elementary A	2,3,4,5	10.92	13
Elementary B	2,3,4,5	14.76	9
Elementary C	2,3,4,5	10.19	13
2019-2020 School Year (through March 13, 2020)			
K-1 Building	K,1	17.89	48
Elementary A	2,3,4,5	9.79	19
Elementary B	2,3,4,5	20.49	27
Elementary C	2,3,4,5	17.43	35

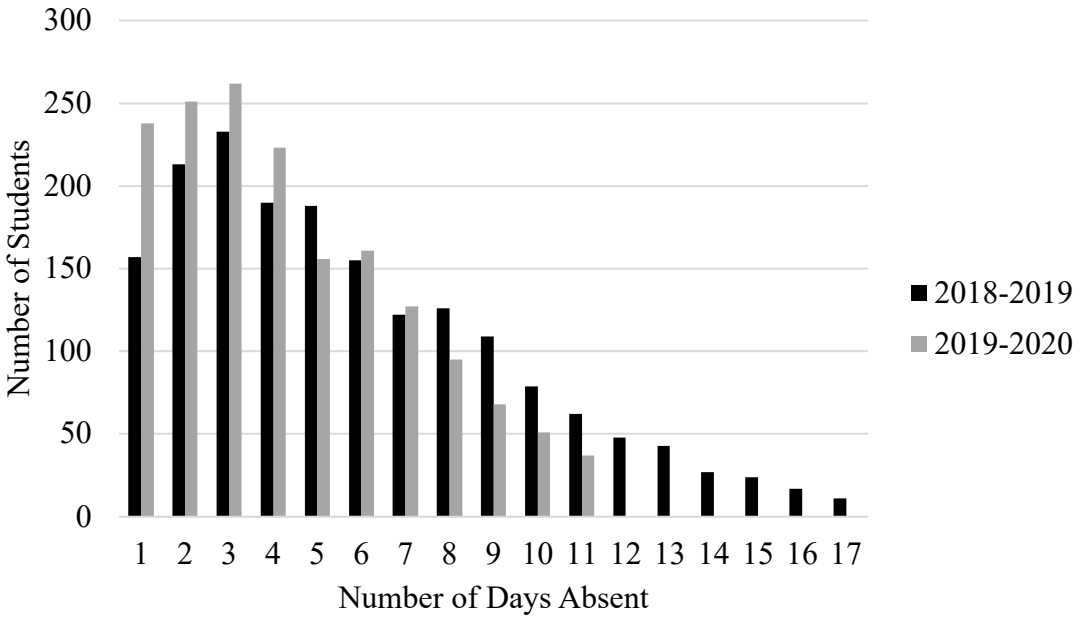
Descriptive statistics for disaggregated school level codes for chronically absent students can be found in the results. The code is tied to a reason for absence, illness, court, etc. The identified student and the reason codes supported specific interview questions for the lead attendance manager. This process aided in highlighting the reasons students are chronically absent as reported by school codes in response to research question three, although simplified due to the process of coding for attendance data entry. The descriptive statistics for chronically absent students are disaggregated by school to support school level intervention.

For those students that do not meet the threshold of 18 absent days per year, the descriptive statistics citing how many students fell short of the threshold for each year is reported in Figure 1. A rich portrait for all students and their days absent highlights the stratification of absent days, and the bubble between 17 and 18 days, and 11 and 12 days. An understanding of

the school setting and total absences, provides a rich description of the sample and setting. The sample population is bounded by the chronic absenteeism threshold, the portrait of regular attenders is only included as a comparison.

Figure 1

Number of students with total days absent as per PDE policy for non-chronically absent students.



Note: This figure depicts the number of non-chronically absent students with their absence totals. The 2018-2019 threshold for chronically absent was 18 or greater, and the 2019-2020 threshold was 12 or greater, totals for chronically absent students are not included in this figure.

School Attendance Improvement Plans

The lead attendance manager provided 12 SAIP documents for the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school year via email for the each of the four elementary schools. Seven SAIP documents were available for the 2018-2019 year, and five for the 2019-2020 school year. A copy of a sixth SAIP for the 2019-2020 school year was not available to me due to a transition in personnel and

no access to the document. The lead attendance manager shared two students who did not have formal SAIPs by another lead attendance manager, but attendance concerns were being addressed through Children, Youth and Families during the 2018-2019 school year. Table 9 shows school codes in accordance with ESD policy for excused and unexcused absences. When a student accrues three unexcused absences, a School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP) should be written response as per as directed by ESD School Policy 204 and PA State Code Title 22, Chapter 11 with the intention to mitigate and provide support for the student and family and prevent further unexcused absences. A student may have excused absences as outlined by the school policy, but be chronically absent as per the PDE definition, and this may be one reason for a lack of intervention, this is explored in the results section.

The SAIP document in Appendix A is available on PDE's website, and schools must use the document "or a similar form to document the SAIP" (Department of Education (n.d.-c). The plan is written by the school lead attendance manager, during a School Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC). A conference should be held in response to a student's repeat unexcused or unlawful absences from school, as outlined in Table 9 per ESD policy. A SAIP is written by the lead attendance manager with input during the conference with the parent, and additional school personnel involved with the student, including the counselor, teacher, and administrator. The individuals involved in the conference discuss and record solutions and supports to remove attendance barriers.

SAIP documents were analyzed as their own document including the contents recorded during the meeting. Document analysis guided interview questions for the lead attendance manager. The process of identifying a chronically absent student, truant student, the decision to hold a meeting and the process of scheduling a meeting is an important piece of data

incorporated through the interview. Attendance data should be maintained with readily available access to identify student attendance concerns, but when and how the school intervenes varies, and the trigger prompting intervention is valuable. The information recorded on the SAIP document through the lens of the recorder prescribes meaning to the mitigation of chronic absenteeism, as does the lack of SAIP and current policy.

School Attendance Improvement Plans Analysis

Two analyses occurred in parallel with SAIP documents, one addressed the lack of a document and the second analyzed the content of existing documents. A SAIP document could exist for each truant student and more than one should be written if multiple meetings are necessary to continue to address the absenteeism. All seven SAIP documents written during the 2018-2019 school year were held prior to the student becoming chronically absent, and one of the five written during the 2019-2020 school year (with the reduced threshold of 12 days). However, over the course of the year, all students with SAIP documents met the chronically absenteeism threshold, while not chronically absent before the meeting, they did become chronically absent regardless of intervention. Research question 2 is addressed through SAIP document or lack of document analysis, addressing the differences between the population of chronically absent students identified and not identified for a SAIP, as well as the absences recorded before and after the SAIP was held.

While content analysis can only take place if there is content to review, the absence of a documented meeting is also important to the data collection process. The absence of a SAIP document holds valuable information of trends or codes that are not recognized as contributing towards the chronic absence totals. Coding the lack of document may be a systemic concern of organization or procedures if the document did not exist in the first place. Future Ready PA

reports 66 chronically absent students for the 2018-2019 school year, but there are only 7 SAIP documents. The intersection between the chronically absent student metric and SAIP documents is addressed through reviewing the SIS data for those chronically absent students without a SAIP document on file. This is completed by school and by year separately first. This gap in SAIP documents, and the students who were identified for requiring intervention provides data to support intervention to address chronically absent students. In addition, the SAIPs for students who are not chronically absent are included. Information as to their absence reasons is valuable but will be recognized as not meeting the chronically absent threshold, but all students with a recorded SAIP were eventually chronically absent during the school year regardless of year.

For available SAIP documents, analysis data is displayed using a table outlining themes from reports and a composite sequence analysis assists in sharing the narratives for each student with a SAIP to show commonalities (Miles et al., 2020). The analysis of the SAIP documents provided data to explore research question two and provided additional data for question three. PDE designed the SAIP document as part of a The Pennsylvania School Attendance and Improvement and Truancy Reduction Toolkit (Department of Education (n.d.-c). The document supports the recorder with prompts to answer during the meeting, but all documents are subjective to what the individual deems important to include even while the form is pre-formulated by the state (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Analyzing the document prior to its use is essential to understand what the PDE believes to be important. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations for considering a document will be utilized. The completed documents will be analyzed for the response to the predesigned questions. The documents are coded in two cycles: descriptive coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). The document is a predesigned form, therefore descriptive codes best support first round coding for a report-style document. Pattern

coding reviewed consistent and repetitive themes and topics that arise across multiple SAIP documents (Saldaña, 2016). Table 11 represents the SAIP document prompt and my considerations when reviewing the content.

Table 11

ESD SAIP Prompts with Considerations for Analysis

SAIP Prompt	Considerations
Special Needs	If there is an IEP?
Grade Level	Are there prior attendance concerns?
Medical or Health Concerns	Are there concerns? Does this vary? Specific to student?
Date of SAIP Meeting	How many prior absences per ESSA? What are the reason codes? Written excuse provided? Reason for absence on document? School action?
Goals	Specific to student?
Strengths	Specific to student?
Needs	Are they impacting attendance?
Actions	Who is responsible for these actions?
Benefits for compliance?	Are these students specific for both short term benefits and long term benefits?
Consequences for non-compliance?	Are there specific thresholds for consequences?
Signature Space	Is there a student signature and parent/guardian signature?
Date for Follow-Up Meeting	Is there a date listed?
Are there additional SAIP documents for this student?	If not, should there be, based on the raw attendance data and the date of the meeting?

Interviews

Following the first round of analysis for both the raw SIS attendance data and SAIP documents, I contacted the attendance managers and the elementary school lead attendance manager to arrange interviews. Semi-structured interviews of the elementary lead attendance manager and three attendance managers followed the interview protocol set forth by the researcher including predetermined questions. One attendance manager did not participate in the interview due to lack of message reply. Interview data collection took place in the Fall of 2023

and each interview took place for 45 to 90 minutes. The qualifications for attendance managers included secretarial or clerical experience, and the lead attendance manager had a graduate degree for her role within the district. Interviews validated and extended data collection through personal interaction and follow up questions with a focus on the data entry, record maintenance and SAIP process. For example, if a family identified a factor contributing to absenteeism as "ride to school" during the SAIP meeting and is listed on the SAIP, the interview data expanded to find out more about why the transportation caused inconsistent attendance and how the district supported removing that barrier.

Interviews allowed a thorough review of the experiences by the school personnel responsible for intervention in chronic absenteeism. As outlined in the literature review, qualitative methods exploring chronic absenteeism are limited, and even more so are studies incorporating the perspectives reported by school personnel surrounding the SAIP process and the factors causing chronic absenteeism. Providing individuals with an outlet to give reflective feedback on their experiences elicited rich description that illuminated policy to practice and their own roles to mitigate barriers to attendance. Interviews assisted with reducing assumptions surrounding the chronic absenteeism perpetuated in prior literature and highlighted how invaluable the relationships school personnel have with families and the ability to support school attendance. I communicated with all interviewees my role as a student conducting research, and not assessing completion of their job responsibilities, but my goal to address my research questions.

Interviews provided an account for the processes of recording and coding absences, identifying students requiring intervention, but student specific questions expanded and triangulated data in accordance with administrative attendance codes and SAIP records.

Interview questions for both protocols were derived from prior studies (Reid, 2008; Sahin et al., 2016) and personal experience, and aligned with one another to address assumptions. The protocol for the elementary lead attendance manager provided the space for the interviewee to broadly explain the process by which a student is identified for intervention, and her own work with the policy implementation. The second set of questions for the lead attendance manager was tailored for each student's SAIP document. The interview then expanded to a purposeful sampling of chronically absent students as determined by state standards, but without a SAIP were also reviewed on a case-by-case basis for more information and explanation. I selected students who met the chronic absenteeism threshold that mirrored the demographics of the chronically absent population of that year. Eight students were identified for further questions for the 2018-2019 school year, and ten for the 2019-2020 school year. The sample approximately reflected the number per each school, and demographics included grade, race, special education status, ELL status, free or reduced lunch status, and the month when they reached the year's chronic absenteeism threshold. The total number of days absent also varied from just crossing the threshold to the largest number of absences, ranging from 16-41 days absent as well as the reason codes for their absences and the code majorities. This slice into the chronically absent students without SAIPs provided space for the attendance manager to share the differences between those with and without SAIPs, and share specific details about those student and family situations. This sample highlights the differences in identification for those who require SAIP meetings and intervention, and those who do not.

This narrative also emphasizes record keeping, student withdraw timelines and the immense role that school personnel have and their note and record keeping. During interviews, recall bias did arise, but previous effective notetaking by the interviewees reduced the bias.

Mitigation for recall bias included open-ended questions and avoiding leading questions. In addition, a comfortable and approachable space was provided with the option of either an in person or virtual arrangement at their choosing. During the interview the interviewees referred to policy documents, SAIP documents and were provided triggers including absence codes and the deidentified student ID. The interviews highlighted policies' transcendence to school level practices and the intersection between the policies.

The interview protocol for the lead attendance manager included the following questions:

1. Describe the process of identifying a student with attendance concerns.
2. Who is involved with conducting a SAIP for a student?
3. The ESSA chronic absenteeism policy and the PDE State Code vary, how do you work with the intersection?

Student specific questions:

1. What are the factors as to why *student ID* was absent?
2. What factors were mitigated throughout the year, and did new factors arise?
3. What are the key issues which need to be addressed to improve student attendance?
4. How did the SAIP process unfold for *student ID*?
5. Did attendance improve following the meeting?
6. Were individuals who attended the meeting collaborative to end the absenteeism?
7. Were there next steps that needed to be addressed to prevent future absenteeism?

The interview protocol for the attendance managers addressed the process by which a reason from a parent or teacher is recorded into a ESD attendance code. As the attendance data is diluted from parent to absent or present by ESSA standards, much of the crucial information is removed, and the attendance manager is the first individual who can intervene to support

attendance with a family. The attendance manager acts as a gatekeeper or filter throughout attendance recording and their role in the process is critical to developing an understanding for the process by which data is recorded to school codes. Their perception and experiences surrounding student and school level attendance is shown to be very valuable.

The interview protocol for the attendance managers included the following questions:

1. What is your role in the school?
2. How long have you worked in this role here? In another school?
3. Describe the training process for your role (technology, policies).
4. What are the policies and procedures for documenting attendance?
5. Do teachers mark attendance in the system first?
6. How do parents and guardians notify the school of an absence?
7. How is the absence coded?
8. Who do you make aware if a student is missing school? How much school is the threshold?
9. Are you responsible for arranging a meeting or notifying families?
10. What are your thoughts on the current policies and procedures?

Throughout both interviews, the interviewee had the freedom to add their own feedback and experiences with attendance. I audio recorded each interview with the consent of the participants and was personally transcribed in Word and uploaded to Quirkos.

Interview Analysis

Utilizing Microsoft Word, I transcribed each interview by hand with a recorder and uploaded the Word documents to Quirkos. I maintained rich descriptions of the interview environment, physical appearance and body language of the interviewee, and jottings of initial

reactions to the data collection. I listened to the interview prior to transcribing and identified preliminary themes and jottings of the interview. The interview was put through two coding cycles: in vivo coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding specifically utilized the words and phrases from the participant's transcribed interview data. This coding practice maintained the participants' voices throughout the study, and this unique research focus on a small sample's perspective, rather than a large data set. The second round of coding was pattern coding. Maintaining the voice and giving meaning to the experiences of the individual was essential for each of the three research questions (Miles et al., 2020). Pattern coding continued to condense prior coding into larger themes when codes repeated themselves throughout and across multiple interviews. A codebook was maintained throughout interviewing coding processes, revisions took place throughout data collection and data analysis, and themes were developed looking for alignment with document analysis. The interview data and absence reason coding patterns are highlighted to show the process by which students are identified for intervention (Miles et al., 2020). To display data for research question three and SAIP specific questions, a case-by-case description table is located in the results facilitate an understanding of student specific characteristics, but also allowed for the uniqueness of individuals to be maintained. Following transcription and interpretation, the participants had the opportunity to review and confirm their quotes, "participants add credibility to the qualitative study by having a chance to react to both the data and the final narrative" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127).

Intersection and Analysis

There are two domains of analysis: policy and practice, and influencing factors for chronic absenteeism. The two domains were analyzed for major theme development and overlapping themes and relationships across the two are included. Due to the complicated nature

of chronic absenteeism and the processes associated with recording and intervening, is it important to use these two domain lenses to ensure the narrative is maintained and addressed separately.

The first domain, policy and practice, includes policy analysis, and policy and procedure interview questions. There is a disparity between the PDE chronically absent student identification total, and the school district's list of chronically absent students. This occurs due to lack of policy alignment with the PDE ESSA definition of absent or present. This difference is acknowledged and highlighted as a piece of data during document collection and analysis. Upon reviewing the students with SAIP documents, I reviewed the list of chronically absent students as identified by the PDE binary variables against those who had plans and analyzed the intersection of these two points. The commonalities and differences between those with SAIP meetings and those without are included in the results, as there are many who did not have SAIP meetings, but the PDE policy would identify as chronically absent. Interview questions for the elementary lead attendance manager include a review of 18 individual sample students who did not have meetings, but also just a general description for how students are identified for a meeting which provides an explanation for why students are omitted from SAIP intervention. Thematic array is used to represent the intersection between policies and practice, this display supports the complicated narrative with multiple paths and definitions.

The second domain, student factors and barriers, is organized through the three domains of influencing factors, environmental, family/individual, school as outlined in the literature review (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Student information systems data, including district absence codes, and SAIP documents highlight student absence reasons. The purpose of addressing student factors and barriers separately, is to focus on the chronically absent student

and family and how they can be best supported. Analyzing the themes across the chronically absent students specifically could create greater policy development to address barriers these specific students may be facing and more broadly to other students as prevention. Ultimately, this qualitative study's purpose is to support students, families, and their schools to address needs and remove possible barriers.

Recognizing and identifying possible overlapping themes between the two domains of policy and practice, and influencing factors enables category development (Saldaña, 2016). The common themes and categories across both groupings, and the experiences of those working with students, to support both groups. It is understood that chronic absenteeism does not have a policy to address within schools, and personnel are working with a policy that is not aligned to chronic absenteeism. Identifying possible common themes tells the narrative of these individuals most deeply impacted (Saldaña, 2016).

Trustworthiness and Limitations

The research design meets four areas of trustworthiness and mitigate foreseen limitations. Trustworthiness was met through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility for this study was met through data source triangulation. Data source triangulation includes multiple points of data, including document analysis, student information data, and interview participants. Creswell and Miller (2000) support data source triangulation because "The narrative account is valid because researchers go through this process and rely on multiple forms of evidence" (p.127). Multiple data sources supported triangulation to lead to a more credible conclusion (Tracy, 2010).

Dependability

The ability to replicate this study in another school district is valuable to promote shared knowledge and addressing student needs. An audit trail was maintained throughout data collection and analysis, with details to promote replicability. A clear and explicit record of data collection and analysis supports dependability (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and analysis and theme development. The audit trail includes title, data source, date of retrieval, document format, and location, as well as notes to replicate SIS data clean up and analysis.

Transferability

This study includes thick and rich description to share individual narrative. Writing with thick descriptions enables maintenance of authentic voice to embody how an individual feels through their experiences (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The reader should "feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation" (Tracy, 2010, p. 845) through interpreting policy or working with students.

Confirmability

As a researcher in a qualitative study, it is imperative and valuable to address my own assumptions, beliefs and biases throughout data collection and analysis through researcher reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Dodgson, 2019). My own positionality and context as an educator working with adolescents was a valuable lens where pre-existing beliefs will exist. Throughout data collection and analysis, I maintained jottings and memos reflecting on my role, personal experiences, and how my own lens shaped interpretation (Dodgson, 2019).

Limitations

This qualitative research is concerned with selection and recall bias but has mitigation measures in place to combat both biases and includes rich description. Selection bias is

concerned with the interviewees self-selecting to participate in the study, potentially skewing the data in this process. One individual did not participate in the interview due to lack of follow up. I attempted to work through selection bias through my relationships with the individuals and my role as a student. I explained that I am from Lehigh University, and although chronic absenteeism is often punitive topic, and that I am attempting to find supportive ways to address chronic absenteeism. The study was explained to the sample as confidential, and that the role of researcher is to improve circumstances that could drive systemic improvement.

An additional bias was recall bias when interviewing and asking to discuss reasons for absences, or how many days absent for example, the interviewee may not have recalled data accurately due to time lapse or frequency of absences. This perception can be utilized as a piece of data, but the interviewees were able to review their own notes recorded in the SIS as well as the attendance codes of that referenced school year. The interviewees' ability to recall mentally, but also refer to prior notes, dates, and codes greatly mitigated this bias. Some students inquired about are still attending and familiar to the interviewee which assisted with recall bias. Attendance managers were able to refer to notes within their own systems and it mitigated recall bias immensely. The managers ability to review notes stored in the SIS, but recorded on a SAIP or in the raw data files was imperative to understand the student circumstances more thoroughly. Referring directly back to the SAIP document as written by the interviewee also assisted with furthering explanation for reasons, interventions, and family situation details.

The initial attendance code entry into the school database was completed by individuals and can involve human error. This is a threat to validity, as I worked with a small number of cases. There are consistent school codes that the managers utilize to enter the data, and with parents also viewing attendance data on their students' academic portal, this data was frequently

reviewed. Consistent assumptions were made to address incorrect code entry or differences between morning and afternoon reporting, each circumstance was reviewed for consistent omission. ESD attendance recording is defaulted to student present, and the teacher must enter the absence, and the attendance manager enters the appropriate code as reported by the parent. Human error could consist of not entering a student absent, a lack of code communicated by parent, or an incorrect code. There is copious data entry required by attendance managers with busy roles and incorrect coding could occur. Assumptions and consistent data clean up addressed these concerns, and could overestimate the number of chronically absent students, rather than underestimate.

An inaccurate record may also exist if a student did seek medical attention from a provider, but the note was not provided to the school. Unfortunately, I am unaware of how often this occurs in the absence of data, however regardless of reason if a student is not in school ESSA does consider this a contributing absence for chronic absenteeism. This parent note versus medical note would be a concern for truancy. An additional concern linked with record maintenance, is the lack of a recorded absence. For example, a student may be suspended for a day in school, but the student is able to complete their work and communicate with the teacher and the attendance is not recorded to show their absences. Often if a student is still within the school, ESSA does not consider this an absence.

The absence of a SAIP document was possible, even if a SAIP document was created during a conference. The elementary lead attendance manager is diligent about record maintenance, but a misplaced document or one that is not provided for research purposes is possible. The lack of document for analysis reduces the interaction between chronic absenteeism and school level practice, but I was only able to analyze what was provided with additional data

collected for a sample of chronically absent students without SAIP documents. The lead attendance manager was also able to identify two students who were involved with the secondary lead attendance manager, while she could not provide a SAIP, she was able to communicate that they had interventions for their absences.

Utilizing both document analysis and interview data enables triangulation of data. In this research, the misalignment is evidence to address research question one, as a systemic concern when addressing chronic absenteeism. An audit trail was developed to address the number of occurrences of a code to support drawing conclusions and draw out disconfirming evidence. Disconfirming evidence is recognized and included in the analysis and conclusions. With multiple students in the sample, this multiple-case study adds confidence to themes, and understanding how these processes take place for students and school stakeholders.

Qualitative research often limits its ability to generalize across samples and populations. Student and school level data, while specific to Eagle School District, can be viewed as shared experiences across other suburban areas. The specific experiences of these individuals can drive further research and consideration for Eagle School District specifically and other districts with a similar population or absenteeism concern. While this sample is limited to elementary school students who are very different than their older peers, the sample was selected by the researcher due to the predictive nature of absenteeism and high school dropout. This research may not be generalizable to older populations, but may have qualities applicable to other elementary schools, outside of the public-school sector. Derived themes are applicable to future research and guiding practices of federal and state policy to prevent and mitigate on going absenteeism, as well as school level practices. Future research may include qualitative data collection of older populations, other impacted individuals, or varying types of school environments to compare the

experiences across multiple settings. All future research should be driven to support students' regular attendance to school, and address policy from the student, family, and school perspectives and supports those individuals who are working to support families and their students attending school.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This study includes four interrelated data sources expanding on prior quantitative research (Ansari & Gottfried, 2020; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried, 2015; Gottfried & Ansari, 2021a; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Together, these four sources add a human and relational component from qualitative reflection on the human experience working with absent students and their families. The goal of this study is to create a portrait of chronically absent students through understanding the current policy, identification and intervention practices. This study will support school personnel with identifying chronically absent students, and aid in understanding the barriers to regular attendance.

This study's methodology proposed two domains of intersection across the four data sources. Those two domains are 'policy and practice', and 'student factors and barriers,' with theme development occurring within and across each domain. This section includes analysis of each source, and how the sources triangulate with each other in theme and domain development. This research develops a portrait of one district's elementary chronic absenteeism across two years to answer the following research questions:

1. How does ESSA policy, state policy, and local elementary school practice intersect?
2. How are students identified for a School Attendance Improvement Plan?
3. What are the characteristics of a chronically absent student in Eagle School District Elementary Schools?

Ideally with these four data sources, I would tell a linear narrative of defining absences, identifying absence reasons, attendance barriers, and mitigating interventions, but the data is complex and non-linear. This continues to fit into the complicated construct of chronic

absenteeism and the federal and state policy expectation that schools have the capability to prevent and intervene. The lack of aligning definitions of an absence, recording absence reasons, and reporting is a challenging foundation to begin a narrative. Comparing the policies identified the conflict and contradictions between the constructs and the policies' definitions of an unexcused absence.

Policy Documents

Within ESSA policy, PDE's selection of chronic absenteeism as a measure of student success highlights the department's value on students regularly attending school regardless of absence reason (Jordan & Miller, 2017). School districts report the number of students who miss more than 10% of the school year, or 18 school days to PDE. Operating in tandem is the PA Public School Code, the official publication written by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Code, n.d) based on Commonwealth Law in place since 1949. Eagle School District Policy 204 and the Student Handbook are written in reflection of the PA Public School Code. District Policy 204 cites specific components of the PA Public School Code as it pertains to attendance and reasons for absences, and Eagle School District Elementary Handbook references District Policy 204. This study will utilize 'school policy' to communicate the PA Public School Code, District Policy 204 and the handbook overlap.

Figure 2

PA Public School Code and the influence on Eagle School District Policy and Elementary Handbook

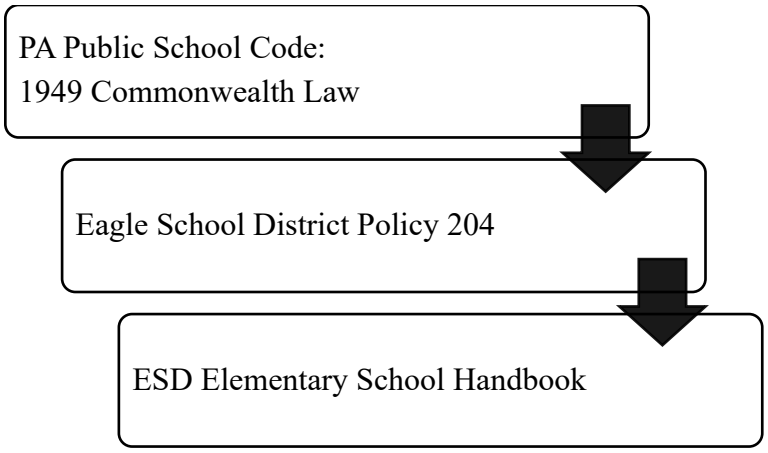


Figure 2 illustrates the hierarchy of school policy from PA Public School Code, Eagle School District Policy 204 adopted from the PA Public School Code and reflected in the school handbook to guide parent responsibility and attendance personnel on absence recording and the pursuant actions by personnel. The PDE ESSA chronic absenteeism measure and the PA Public School Code simultaneously guide school districts regarding attendance policies and procedures. PDE policy and PA Public School Code conflict between absence reason recording which results in different interpretation and intervention outcomes.

School Policy

While PA Public School Code does not include chronic absenteeism as a construct, it does direct schools how to record absence reasons and the expected actions by the school. District Policy 204 states:

> Absences shall be treated as unexcused until the District receives a written excuse explaining the absence, to be submitted within three (3) days of absence. A maximum of ten days of cumulative lawful absences verified by parental notification shall be permitted during a school year. All absences beyond ten cumulative days shall required an excuse from a licensed practitioner of the healing arts.

The directive above outlines that a parent or guardian is responsible for notifying the school of the absence reason. If a guardian does not provide a reason for the absence, the absence is automatically coded as unexcused. The absence reason shared by the student's guardian is interpreted by the attendance manager and the absence will be marked in the student information system (SIS) as excused or unexcused with a reason code associated as per the policy. PA Public School Code reads that "a student shall be excused during school hours for the purpose of obtaining professional health care or therapy service" (n.d., Section 1329d). District policy sets thresholds where a student may have ten parent provided notes for illness without the student seeing a doctor, as per the district policy this is excused, following those ten parent notes, a doctor's note is required for the absence to be excused.

Doctor's notes and up to ten parent notes are recorded as excused absences as per school policy, in addition, a student can be excused for non-school sponsored educational tours and trips. PA Public School Code states, "A school district may excuse a student from school attendance to participate in a non-school district sponsored educational tour or trip" (n.d., Section 1329a.1). The school district limits the number and duration of excused absences for this purpose, District Policy 204 and the handbook read, "Absences due to a family trip/vacation (consecutive or cumulative) in excess of five (5) days are unexcused absences." A child can be excused from school for a maximum of five school days for vacation, after which the absences would be recorded as unexcused.

Religious observances are excused absences, as they constitute reasonable cause for absence, District Policy 204 includes "Observance of a religious holiday observed by a bona fide religious group, upon prior written request from the person in parental relation." The PA Public School Code states a district can "excuse a student to observe or participate in a religious activity

or function… There shall be no penalty attached for any such absences pursuant to this subsection." (n.d., Section 1329f). Specific discipline infractions will elicit a student to be assigned exclusionary discipline or an out-of-school suspension, not permitting the student to attend classes on campus. School policy records these absences as excused, "An out-of-school suspension may not be considered an unexcused absence" (District Policy 204; PA School Code, n.d., Section 1326;). The differentiation between school policy recording and interpreting an absence as excused or unexcused impacts the action taken by school personnel as directed by school policy.

School policy identifies "'Truant' shall mean having incurred three (3) or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year by a child subject to compulsory school attendance under this article." (District Policy 204; PA School Code, n.d., Section 1326). School policy defines habitually truant as six or more unexcused school days and provide guidelines for a School Attendance Improvement Conference, specifically the handbook states:

> If three unlawful absences are recorded in a school year, a Final Notice of Unlawful Absence will be mailed to the parent/guardian. If additional unlawful absences are recorded following the receipt of that notice, a Student Attendance Improvement Plan meeting with be scheduled with the parent/guardian. (p. 14)

PA Public School Code explains the conference, '"School attendance improvement conference" shall mean a conference where the child's absences and reasons for the absences are examined to improve attendance, with or without additional services." (n.d., Section 1326). School attendance improvement conferences are intended to identify the unreported reasons for unexcused absences and intervene for truant students.

PDE Policy

PA Public School Code does not include chronic absenteeism as a construct, whereas the PDE policy values tracking and reporting the number of chronically absent to the department. PDE policy states, "Chronically absent students include students who are absent regardless of whether absences are excused or unexcused; whatever the reason for the absence, instructional hours are lost" (n.d.-b, p. 1). PDE provides an example of common absences that count towards the chronic absenteeism threshold, "For example, out of school suspensions and excused absences for approved family-sponsored educational trips would be coded as absences for purposes of chronic absenteeism and regular attendance measures" (n.d.-b, p.2). These trips are unexcused by PDE and contribute towards the chronic absenteeism threshold for a student and would be reported to PDE in the metric. The only excused absence reasons that would not contribute towards the PDE chronic absenteeism reporting are field trips, in school suspension, homebound and school sponsored career education (n.d., p. 1).

The PDE policy includes two constructs: truancy and chronic absenteeism, "Truancy rates only include unexcused absences, while Chronic Absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused absences…The inclusion of a Chronic Absenteeism indicator for ESSA accountability has no effect on existing truancy regulations." (Department of Education, n.d.-b, Guidelines, p. 5). PDE policy places value on accounting for students who are chronically absent, and this value is reported to PDE at the conclusion of each school year.

Conflict Summary

A conflict exists between the reported chronic absenteeism metric for PDE policy and the PA Public School law governing schools and action for truancy. Whether an absence is recorded as excused or unexcused as per school policy, prompts action for truancy, but PDE policy

identifies these excused and unexcused records as all contributing towards the chronic absenteeism threshold. The PDE policy chronic absenteeism metric does not align with school policy in terms of recording absences as excused or unexcused. Students can be either truant, chronically absent or both. Table 12 summarizes the common terms and definitions from each policy and their conflict or alignment. School policy utilized unlawful and unexcused terms interchangeably.

Table 12

Table of policy definitions.

Term	School Policy	PDE Policy
Habitually Truant	6 or more unexcused absences	6 or more unexcused absences
Truant	3 or more school days of unexcused absences	3 or more school days of unexcused absences
Unexcused/Unlawful	No reason provided or too many guardian/vacation days	Any absence that is not an in-school suspension or school sponsored trip
Excused	Written parent note (up to 10), Vacation reason (up to 5), unlimited medical notes	In school suspension, school sponsored trip
Chronically Absent	Not included	10% of unexcused school days (as per PDE/ESSA definitions

The conflict between recording an absence excused, unexcused, and the thresholds for reasons prompt different action by the district with school policy and reporting chronic absenteeism metric to PDE. Attendance managers utilize school policy to record the absence code, as outlined in Table 13. Within the student information system (SIS) absence reasons are coded and entered in accordance with school policy. The SIS supports identification and intervention for truant students, triggering a SAIP meeting to support removing barriers to attending school regularly as per the school policy unexcused absences.

PDE policy identifies almost all absence reasons as unexcused contributing towards a student's threshold towards 10% of total days. The number of chronically absent students per year is reported as a metric to PDE, but school policy does not prompt action by the district. Table 13 shows the outcomes of the differing policies, with school policy recording the absence as excused or unexcused within the SIS.

Table 13

Absence reasons and school policy recording in the SIS and PDE policy labeling for chronic absenteeism

Absence Reason	School Policy	PDE Policy
No reason provided	Unexcused	Unexcused
Guardian note (days 1-10)	Excused	Unexcused
Guardian note (day 11 or more)	Unexcused	Unexcused
Doctors note provided	Excused	Unexcused
Vacation (days 1-5)	Excused	Unexcused
Vacation (day 6 or more)	Unexcused	Unexcused
Religious observance	Excused	Unexcused
In-School Suspension	Excused	Excused
Out of School Suspension	Excused	Unexcused

While five days of a non-school sponsored activity are excused via the school policy, these school excused days would add into the chronic absenteeism 10% threshold. School policy has maximum vacation absences and parent excusal absences per school year. School policy excuses ten parent reasons and five vacation days, but these fifteen days contribute towards chronic absenteeism. Table 13 is the expectation for personnel to record an absence, SIS data will show that this is not always followed. While the school policy procedure for recording an absence reason supports families and personnel on recording measures, the chronic absenteeism reporting metric for PDE exists and the conflict between absence reasons is maintained. Table

14 illustrates three examples of student attendance profiles and their identification for truancy, chronic absenteeism or both.

Table 14

Three student attendance profiles and their identification for truancy and/or chronic absenteeism

Student	Policy Identification	Absences	School Policy Absence Codes	PDE Policy Absence Codes	Following Year
Student A Grade 2 Black NSLP	Truant	5 Absences without guardian reporting	5 Unexcused Absences	5 Unexcused Absences	Not Chronically Absent
Student B Grade 4 White	Chronically Absent	11 Parent Notes 9 Doctor's Notes 5 Vacation Days	25 Excused absences	25 Unexcused Absences	Chronically Absent
Student C Kindergarten Hispanic NSLP	Truant and Chronically Absent	6 Parent Notes 2 Vacation Days 6 Doctor's Notes 10 Without guardian reporting	14 Excused absences 10 Unexcused absences	24 Unexcused Absences	Not Chronically Absent

Table 14 shows three real student examples from the 2018-2019 school year, with varied reasons submitted to the attendance manager, thus triggering differing intervention. Student A is not chronically absent per PDE policy but is truant through school policy and should result in a SAIP meeting to identify barriers to attending school. Student B will not trigger truancy intervention within school policy, but the student is chronically absent by the PDE metric. Student B has exhausted parent notes and vacation days but also has nine doctor's notes. Student C has ten unexcused absences and 14 excused absences as per school policy, therefore is both truant and chronically absent. Student C should have a SAIP meeting to identify barriers to attending school

as per school policy and will be reported to PDE as chronically absent. Only Student B was chronically absent during the following school year, 2019-2020.

Due to the unexcused absences for Students A and B, these families would receive additional communication from the attendance managers to resolve these absences and enter an absence code as per the guardian reported reason. Student B would receive minimal communication due to the parent reporting in reasons, potentially they would have been notified of meeting the threshold for parent excused and vacation days, but no additional contact would be required. While Student B obtained the most absent days, this student has all excused absences, and the policy gives the notion that there are no concerns around absences from school. The excused absence policy reinforces absences for excused reasons within the thresholds, without identify concerns for chronic absenteeism. This study includes the school policy truancy construct because it triggers intervention through a SAIP meeting, and these SAIP documents will provide data for this student regarding barriers to attendance.

Student Information Systems (SIS) Data

Student information systems (SIS) data include absence reason codes by date recorded by school personnel as per school policy, as well as key demographic information. There is a discrepancy between the number of chronically absent students reported by Future Ready PA, and what I found through my analysis possibly due to the COVID closure. Through analysis of those chronically absent students, reason codes, dates, and demographic data, there were several trends in the data.

The number of chronically absent students increases towards the end of the academic year, with most students reaching the threshold in March, April and May, with over 50% meeting the threshold in the last quarter of the school year. Generally, chronic absenteeism decreases

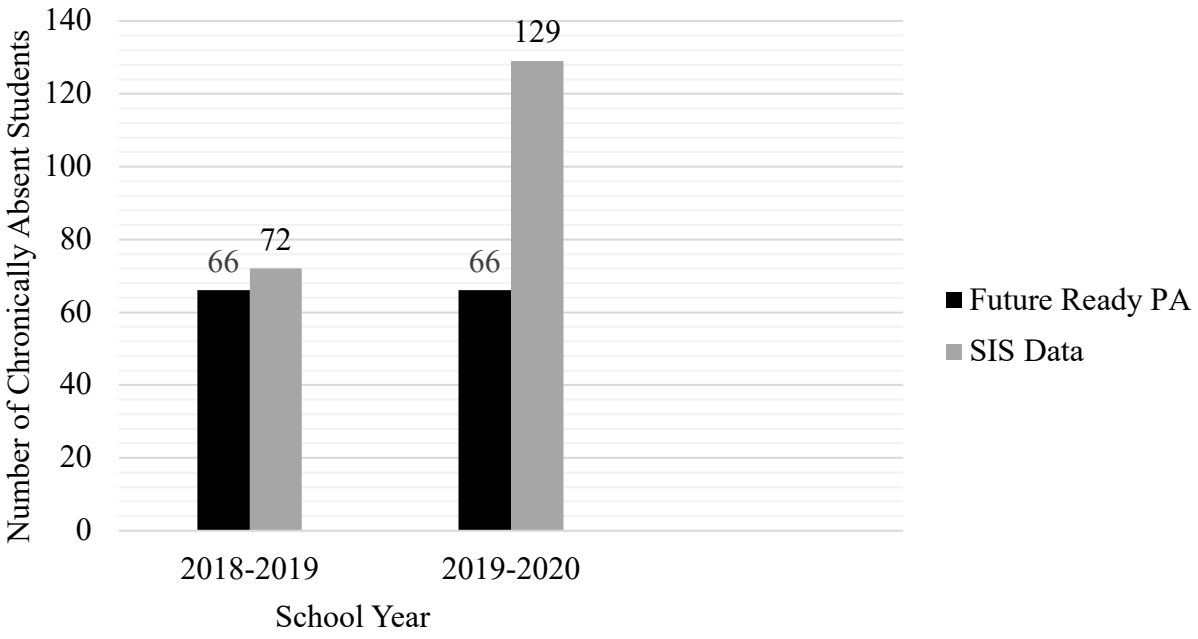
across grade level and was similar across all elementary school buildings. The absence code of medical notes and vacations are a large contributor towards chronically absent students. Chronically absent students are overrepresented in key demographic areas including special education services, English Language Learner supports, Free or Reduced Lunch, and minority racial groups including Asian, Hispanic, and Multi-racial students.

Chronically Absent Student Totals

For the 2018-2019 school year, there were 1,922 students across all four buildings with 12,208 absences recorded, and for the 2019-2020 school year there were 1,799 students with 9,299 absences. The chronic absenteeism threshold for the 2018-2019 school year was 18 or more days, 10% of the school year, but for the 2019-2020 school year, due to the COVID closure, the threshold was 12 school days or more. To identify the subgroup of chronically absent students, I removed the field trip and in school suspension absences for students as per PDE policy and found the students who met the threshold for 18 or more (or 12 or more) absent days. Across both academic years, 201 chronically absent students had a total of 3,606 absences recorded. Figure 3 represents my SIS data analysis to calculate the number of chronically absent students versus PDE policy reporting the number of chronically absent student totals on the Future Ready PA website. There is a discrepancy for the 2019-2020 school year.

Figure 3

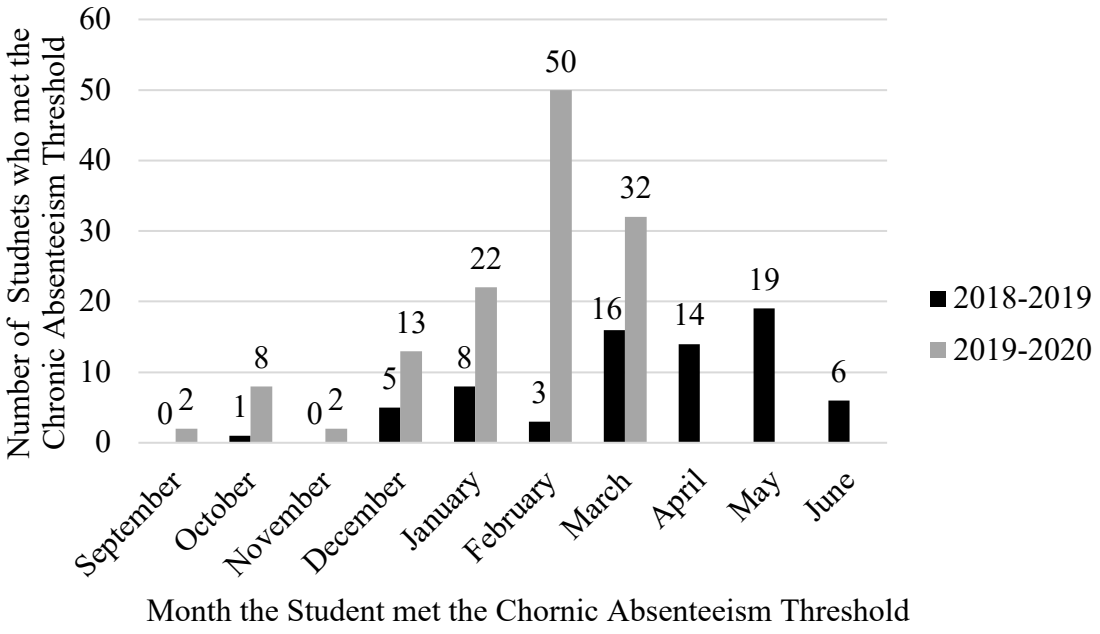
Number of chronically absent students per year as reported by Future Ready PA and SIS data analysis.



The 2019-2020 school year reporting period ended March 13, but when comparing both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years, each year had 24 and 20 chronically absent students respectively by March 13 utilizing the 18-day threshold. Both school years were trending towards a similar number of chronically absent students in total if there was no change in reporting threshold due to COVID. The pandemic may have also influenced absences for the remainder of the year as well, but we do not have data on this due to reporting metrics. Figure 4 includes the number of students each month that reached the chronic absenteeism threshold. The two years are very different from one another, presumably due to the threshold difference and the record maintenance from the 2019-2020 school year closing in March. The 2018-2019, a traditional year by comparison, shows that most students reach 10% or 18 or more days in March, April, May or June. The number of chronically absent students increases towards the end of the academic year, with the majority reaching the threshold in March, April and May. During the 2018-2019 year, approximately 54% of chronically absent students met the threshold of 18 days during the last quarter of school.

Figure 4

The number of students per month who met the chronic absenteeism threshold (2018-2019 threshold: 18 days, 2019-2020 threshold: 12 days, ending in March)



Chronically Absent Student Reason Codes

Table 15 shows all codes utilized for chronically absent students, with 1,649 total absence entries for the 2018-2019 school year and 1,957 entries for the 2019-2020 school year. Both school years show that Excused-Parent, Excused-Medical, X-Unlawful (unexcused) and Vacation were the most recorded absence reasons for chronically absent students. With approximately 98% of all absence entries falling within one of these four codes. Vacation accounted for 11% of absence reasons for chronically absent students, with an additional 62% excused with either medical documentation or parent note. A quarter of reasons were not provided by parents and therefore were unexcused and would contribute towards both the truancy threshold and the chronic absenteeism threshold.

Table 15

SIS absence codes and descriptions for chronically absent students per year with totals and comparisons

Absence Code	Long Description	2018-2019	2019-2020	Total	Percentage
E-P	Excused-Parent	545	623	1,168	32%
E-M	Excused-Medical	437	651	1,088	30%
X-	Unexcused/Unlawful	482	437	919	25%
V-	Vacation	169	216	385	11%
E-NU	Excused-Nurse	6	0	6	<1%
E-CO	Excused-Court	4	4	8	<1%
V-X	Vacation-Unexcused	0	22	22	<1%
O-	Out of School Suspension	5	4	9	<1%
C-E	College Visit-Excused	1	0	1	<1%
Total		1,649	1,957	3,606	

Through policy we understand that families are responsible for communicating a reason for absence, then attendance managers enter absences reason codes which prompts varied action or labeling by school policy and PDE policy. Per school policy, students are permitted five vacation absences a year, this code does not contribute towards the truancy threshold but does add to the chronic absenteeism threshold with 11% of absence reasons as vacation codes.

Chronically Absent Student Demographics

Figures 5 and 6 show the distribution of chronically absent students across each school building and across grade levels by school year. The building with the youngest students, kindergarten and first grade, had 43% of all chronically absent students across all four buildings. Whereas the elementary schools with grades two through five had generally fewer chronically absent students. Buildings A, B and C had similar numbers of chronically absent students across both school years.

Figure 5

Number of chronically absent students per building by year

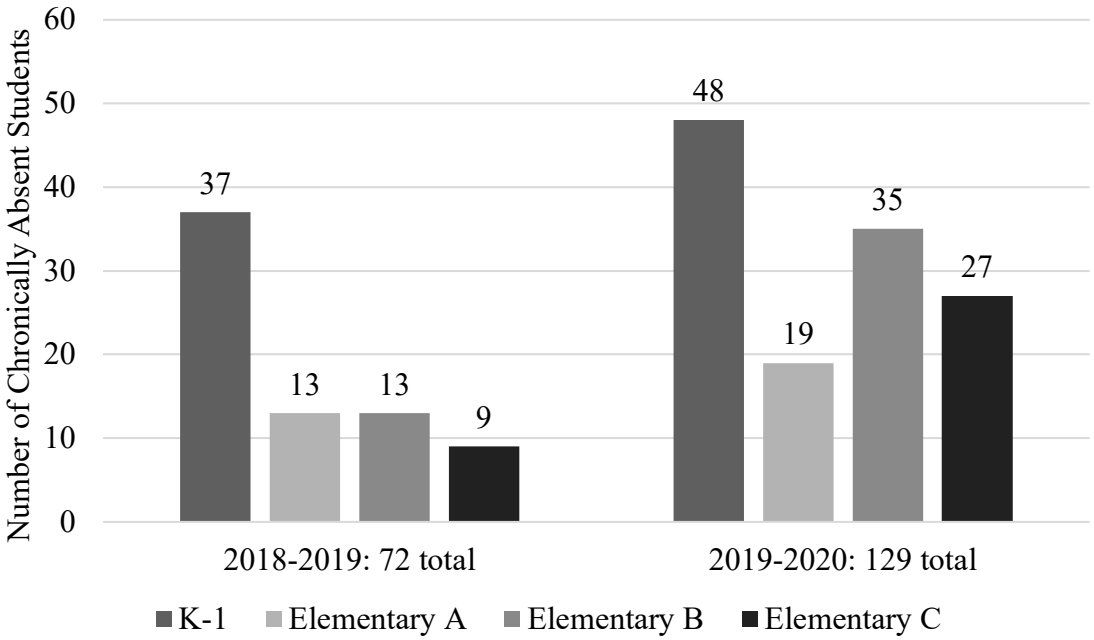
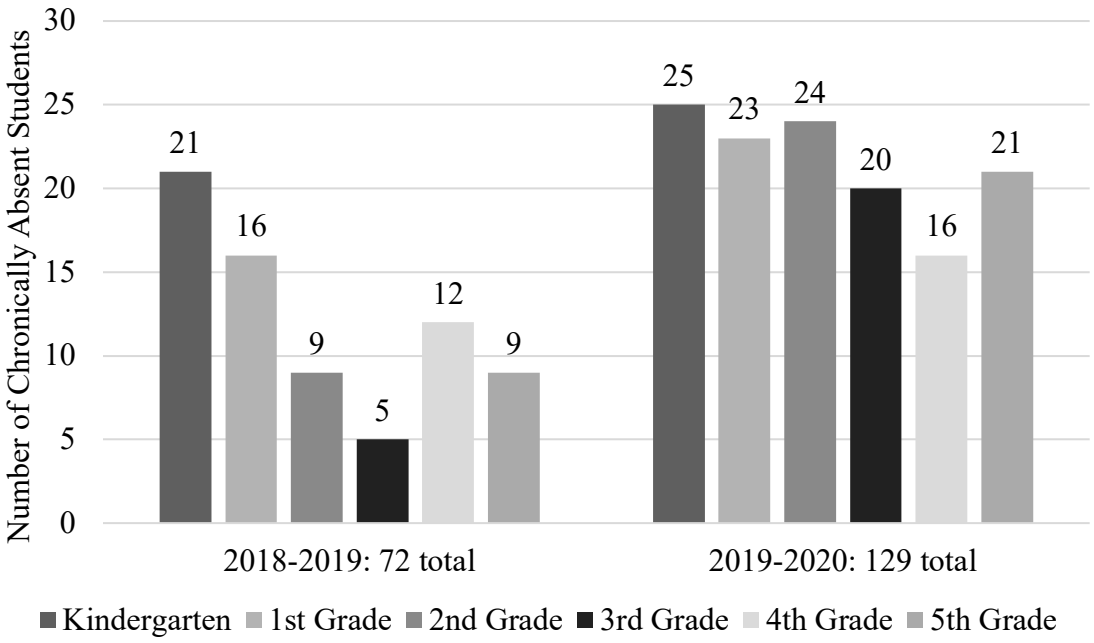


Figure 6 illustrates the number of chronically absent students per grade level, with kindergarten having the greatest number of chronically absent students across both years. With roughly 23% of all chronically absent students, the kindergarten and first grade building had the highest number of chronically absent students as shown in Figure 5. Figure 6 shows that generally chronic absenteeism decreases across grade level and is similar across all elementary school buildings by year.

Figure 6

Number of chronically absent students per grade by year



While the overall number of chronically absent students is higher during the 2019-2020 school year, there are similar trends with higher rates of kindergarten students, and a decrease in absenteeism rates as students get older in Figure 6. Table 16 compares district demographic data against the demographic data for chronically absent students. Chronically absent students tend to not be representative of district demographics and are overrepresented in certain subpopulations.

Table 16

Percentage of chronically absent students by race, special education services, ELL services or the National School Lunch Program compared to district population percentages

		Chronically Absent Student Population	
	District Population	2018-2019	2019-2020
Free or Reduced Lunch	30.0	63	59
ELL	8.6	13	14
Special Education	14.6	19	20
Asian	3.4	11	9
Multi-Racial	4.9	11	9
White	69.6	51	54
Hispanic	16.0	22	21
Black	6.0	4	7

American Indian	0.0	0	1

Table 16 shows that chronically absent students are more likely to quality for the National School Lunch Program, have English Language Learning supports, or be identified for special education services in comparison to the district average. Specifically, the most remarkable component is the roughly 60% of chronically absent students qualify for the National School Lunch Program, whereas the district average is half of that at 30%. While most chronically absent students are white, the population of chronically absent student is disproportionately Hispanic, Asian and multi-racial in comparison to the district population. As opposed to the population of white students who are underrepresented in the chronically absent population compared to the district population.

Table 17 highlights the 23 students who were chronically absent in both the 2018-2019 school year and the 2019-2020 school year, with most students experiencing a decrease in total days absent, however the truncated school year this may play a role. Approximately 32% of eligible chronically absent students during the 2018-2019 school year were also chronically absent during the 2019-2020 school year, an eligible student is a student that was in grades kindergarten through fourth grade during the 2018-2029 school year. The greatest population of students transitioned from kindergarten to first grade, and approximately half of students qualified for the National School Lunch Program. There is an overrepresentation of Hispanic students, and an underrepresentation of White students. All except one student experienced a decrease in absence totals from year to year.

Table 17

Chronically absent students across both the 2018-2019 and 2019-20 school years with demographic data and absence totals

	2018-2019		2019-2020				
	Grade	Absences	Grade	Absences	Race	Services	Building
1	4	18	5	14	White	None	B
2	4	25	5	22	White	ELL Exit	C
3	4	18	5	12	Multi-Racial	None	C
4	4	38 (SAIP)	5	16	Hispanic	NSLP	B
5	3	18	4	12	Hispanic	NSLP, SPED, ELL	A
6	4	18	5	14	White	NSLP	A
7	2	18	3	12	Asian	None	B
8	2	22	3	17	White	NSLP, SPED	B
9	2	23	3	15	Asian	None	B
10	1	21	2	27	White	None	K-1, B
11	1	26	2	13	Hispanic	NSLP	K-1, A
12	1	22	2	12	Multi-Racial	NSLP	K-1, B
13	1	29	2	20	White	NSLP, SPED	K-1, B
14	3	28 (SAIP)	4	19	White	SPED	C
15	1	34 (SAIP)	2	13	Hispanic	NSLP	K-1, B
16	K	27	1	15	White	SPED	K-1
17	K	20	1	12	Hispanic	NSLP, ELL	K-1
18	K	19	1	16	Hispanic	NSLP, ELL	K-1
19	K	20	1	13	White	SPED	K-1
20	K	18	1	12	White	None	K-1
21	K	28	1	17	Asian	None	K-1
22	K	19 (SAIP)	1	21	White	NSLP	K-1
23	K	28	1	24	White	NSLP	K-1

From the data I was unable to determine sibling or household trends between students. SIS data provides school policy absence codes to determine the basic reason students are absent from schools and their total absences to trigger support and intervention through a SAIP.

School Attendance Improvement Plans

As per school policy, when a student is truant, accumulating three or more unexcused absences, a meeting is held to develop a School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP). School policy outlines the purpose of the meeting "is to examine the student's absences and reasons for the absences in an effort to improve attendance with or without additional services." The purpose of the SAIP meeting is to identify the student and family's needs and the barriers to attending school regular to prevent additional unexcused absences. SAIPs are intended to respond to

truancy not chronic absenteeism, however these plans are included in this study to develop a deeper understanding regarding absence reasons and interventions instead of the school policy recorded absence codes. A SAIP (Appendix A) form is utilized to guide the meeting discussion to remove barriers and support families getting their children to school.

All 12 students were truant, with three or more unexcused absences prior to the meeting, but no student was chronically absent, utilizing the standard threshold of 18 school days. However, all twelve students were chronically absent at the conclusion of the school year, utilizing the altered threshold of 18 and 12 days. The common needs written into a SAIP include housing, morning routines, family dynamics, asthma and medical concerns, mental health and academic dislike. Strengths surrounded students' enjoyment of school and peers, ability to learn, problem solve, and capable in school. Solutions included community resources for housing, mental health, medical insurance, and activities. Most SAIPs offered a call to school personnel to support in the morning with transportation but also discussion of timeliness for bus transportation and truancy prevention programs.

SAIP Documents

The lead attendance manager identified 15 total students with School Attendance Improvement Plans (SAIPs) during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. I was provided deidentified copies of 12 of those SAIPs, copies of three SAIPs were not accessible. The 12 available SAIPs were analyzed through descriptive coding followed by pattern coding, to develop themes and trends for students with a SAIP. Interview data extends these documents in the next section for a robust portrait of these specific students with SAIPs. On every SAIP, the parent acknowledges the intention of the document and the roles of those responsible:

> This SAIP was created collaboratively to assist the student in improving attendance, to enlist the support of parent/guardian and to document the school's attempts to provide resources to promote student success. As the parent(s)/guardian(s), I/we understand that while the school has demonstrated its support and assistance to this student thought this process, by law, it is my/our responsibility to ensure that the student attends school. (SAIP, Department of Education (n.d.-c))

Nine out of the 12 documented SAIP meetings had a parent present, with the mother of the student attending eight of those nine parent attended meetings. The school counselor, lead attendance manager, administrator, as well as outside agencies involved with the family and student attended each meeting. Table 18 shows the available SAIP document information with SIS data, absence codes prior to and following their SAIP meeting, as well as needs, solutions and intervention data written in the SAIP.

Table 18

Twelve SAIP documents organized by building with demographics, qualifying services, absence codes prior to the meeting, and a summary of needs, strengths, and solutions

	Race	Grade	Services	Codes Prior	Needs	Strengths/Solutions
K-1 Building						
1	White	K	NSLP	3 unexcused 5 doctors 8 parent	New housing, morning routine	Likes school, stabilizing housing with HAT program
2	Hispanic	1	NSLP	5 unexcused 3 vacation 9 parent	Living situation, unpredictable routines	Likes school, good listener, on time for bus, explore community resources, truancy prevention program referral, counselor check in

3	White	1	NSLP	6 unexcused 8 parent 2 doctors	Asthma not well controlled, intensive reading intervention	Loves school, on grade level math, asthma medication as prescribed, on bus daily, call personnel for transportation
4	Black	K	NSLP	16 unexcused 1 parent 6 doctors	Literacy skills and frustrated by academic demands	Enjoys tablets, lunch, recess with friends, on bus daily
Building A						
1	White	2	SPED NSLP	3 unexcused 9 parent	Coping skills, getting started, dislikes school	Friendly, good at addition, likes adult attention, IEP meeting, counseling group, scheduled breaks, teacher monitor
2	White	5	NSLP	5 unexcused 3 parent	Difficulty with math, refused to attend school	Art and theater, bright, routine for bus, after school activities, truancy prevention program, community resources, call personnel for transportation
Building B						
1	White	4	None	5 unexcused 5 parent 5 vacation	Challenging, defiant, slow in morning	Likes to read and white, good at drawing, leave for school at specific time, special lunch reward on time for three weeks
2	Black	2	NSLP	11 unexcused 2 parent 2 vacation	Medical insurance	Enjoys school, friendly, happy, YMCA care options, applying for medical assistance

3	White	3	NSLP	3 unexcused 2 doctors	Mental health, peer relationships, directions from Mom	Art, science and sports, call school personnel for morning support, classroom rewards, community resources, peer lunch bunch
Building C						
1	White	3	SPED NSLP	6 unexcused 3 doctors 1 vacation 1 parent	Work completion, emotional change in family	Capable, medical management with outpatient mental health, counseling group, additional mental health, call personnel for morning support
2	White	3	SPED	8 unexcused 4 parent 2 vacation 1 doctor	Low self-esteem, defensive, struggles independently with Mom in morning	Determined, bright, social, empathetic, morning routine chart, call school personnel for morning support
3	White	5	SPED	8 unexcused 2 vacation 2 parent	Rigid, hyper-focused	Ready on time, bright, cooperative, call school personnel for morning support
Total						
	9 White 1 Hispanic 2 Black	2-K 2-1st 2-2nd 3-3rd 1-4th 2-5th	4 SPED 9 NSLP	>3 unexcused	School dislike, academic challenges, family dynamics and relationships, mental health, housing, morning routine, asthma/medical	Enjoy school, academic strengths, bright; call school for personnel morning support, mental health, community resources, housing resources, morning routine, in school rewards lunch, counseling groups, medical insurance

Students with SAIPs are not representative of the overall district demographic population, with more Black students, students qualifying for the National School Lunch Program and special education services. No student qualified for ELL supports, but 75% qualified for the National School Lunch Program and 25% qualified for special education services. All students had at least three unexcused absences prior to the meeting.

Identification

Prior to their SAIP meetings, three students accumulated at least five unexcused absences, and nine accumulated at least 11 unexcused absences. Through SIS analysis, I identified the most common code for student with a SAIP were unexcused codes, with all students meeting the threshold for truancy prior to the meeting. SAIPs did not include the students' absences with parent or medical notes, the document only listed absence dates without a lawful excuse. According to the SIS data, the students did have parent excusals, medical excusals and vacation excusals, but the SAIP meeting focus was on the unlawful excusals. Example of absence reasons included, "Changes, Mom's medical needs" as well as "student refused" "refused/morning resistance" with most commonly "written excuse provided? No." Also listed on the document is the date of the unlawful absence, without space for dates of lawful absences. The trend of unexcused absences prior to a meeting, and students not meeting the chronic absenteeism threshold signifies the school policy intention of writing a SAIP in response to truancy, and unexcused absences.

During the 2018-2019 school year, SAIP meetings were held October through April, and during the 2019-2020 school year, meetings were held October through December. All 12 students with SAIPs were chronically absent at the conclusion of the school year the SAIP was written. For example, a fifth grader during the 2018-2019 school year had five unexcused

absences and three parent notes prior to the SAIP meeting and had 17 unexcused absences and five medical notes following the meeting, totaling 30 absences total for the year. This student was truant but not chronically absent prior to the meeting but was chronically absent by the end of the school year.

Needs

The common needs written in the SAIPs included morning routine, getting to the bus on time, disliking school or academic challenges, housing, family dynamics, and mental health. The focus was on the student and their specific feelings towards school developing into school avoidance or a need in the home with a change in family dynamic. Morning routines proved to be a common concern when students struggle "with doing things independently for mom at home in the morning" or "slow going in the morning" and "struggling with following mom's direction at home." For students with morning needs, the solutions included school personnel support.

A first grader with five unexcused absences and seventeen total absences prior to the meeting was working through "family changes in living situation have resulted in unpredictable schedules and routines as well as missed school time." Where a third grader "struggled emotionally with a recent change in the family." Family changes cause students to struggle emotionally and require support for a third grader, "the family is working on locating new housing." Elementary school students require family support to get to school, changes in family dynamics and housing impact the population significantly.

Academic demands and expectations can weigh on an elementary school student, including a fifth grader challenged by math who "has refused to attend school on a [couple] occasions this school year." Academic challenges can cause school refusal for a student who "struggles with work completion" and "does not like going to school." Students "receiving an

intensive reading intervention" continue to require attention to support school engagement and positive interactions.

Medical and health concerns arise when a first grader's "asthma has not been well controlled lately" and a second grader needs "medical insurance for when she is ill." A fifth grader was already working with community based mental health to "benefit from building more peer relationships." While not expressly stated in the documents, nine of the twelve students qualified for the National School Lunch Program and could have financial barriers accessing resources, including housing, medical support, and mental health services. Asthma, family changes, housing instability, medical care, morning routine and school refusal were all outlined as needs for students to attend school. With knowledge of these needs, the attendance managers and other school staff can support the family to identify solutions.

Strengths and Solutions

Strengths outlined in the SAIP document focused on the academic environment, including the enjoyment of school with peers, intelligence, and specific capabilities within certain subjects. The SAIP solutions section most included outside supports with community resources with housing, mental health, medical insurance, and activities. However, most SAIPs also included the option to call the attendance manager to support with mornings that were specifically challenging, as well as bus timelines and morning routine ideas.

A focus on morning routine and accessing the school bus was noted throughout several SAIPs, and a call to the lead attendance manager was offered as a morning support "if [student] is refusing to come to school to request in-home support" or the parent will call the lead attendance manager "should an unforeseen circumstance prevent [student] from getting on the bus and request transportation assistance." Many solutions reflected the role of the parent or

guardian and their direct impact to support their child's attendance. The disrupted morning routine or family home environment was readily the most common reason students were not attending school, and the focus on establishing routine, and communication with the principal, counselor, and lead attendance manager to support in mitigating that barrier. A morning solution included the student "will leave for school no later than 8:35 am" and will receive a reward of a "special lunch with friends when he is on time daily for three consecutive weeks."

Student strengths were highlighted throughout the SAIPs as well as their needs to support school attendance. A first grader "feels positively about school and seems to enjoy it" and one solution was a "morning check in with [him] for the remainder of the year" by the lead attendance manager. The documents focused on solutions and actions and all actions included the role of the guardian and the role of school personnel. Typically, communication was involved for families to seek support from the lead attendance manager and school counselor, but most families also received referrals to community agencies for mental health support and housing stability services. A second grader who "enjoys developing relationships" was provided "participation in psychoeducational group with school counselor will be offered again." In school efforts to engage students in school and meet mental health concerns was a focus including being invited "to a future changing families group" and "a lunch bunch…pizza reward." There was focus on rewards for students and support for families depending on needs.

The IEP team for one student met to address concerns and "will further discuss recommendations for individual therapy with psychiatrist" as a strength the student is already working with a provider and "generally wants to please." A fifth grader "is an art and theater enthusiast" and the lead attendance manager agreed to "investigate after school activities that are

close to…home that she may be able to participate in" to engage the student in school and arrange a routine to get on the bus and accomplish homework.

Written into the SAIP documents are the benefits with complying to the plan and attending school regularly. The document includes "When present and on time daily, [student] will have the greatest access to instructional material" and when the family is compliant with the SAIP no further escalated intervention is required. Non-compliance in the plan includes varying levels of intervention, including "on additional unlawful absence occurs, a referral to Holcomb Truancy Prevention" with two additional unlawful days, a citation with the district magistrate, along with missing academic material. The primary purpose of a SAIP document is to reduce truancy, and referrals to the magistrate for truancy court and potential citations and fines. The mandatory truancy action by school districts function to reduce unexcused absences from school, not excused absences that contribute towards chronic absenteeism. All plans reported an attendance goal of improvement prior to the end of the school year, and did not list a follow up SAIP meeting date.

Chronically Absent Students without SAIPs

As predicted, there was a substantial number of chronically absent students without SAIP documents. It is a challenging comparison when there are so few SAIPs, but there was a clear difference in absence reasons between those with and without SAIPs. SAIP documents are written for students with unlawful absences, and it is valuable to review trends for chronically absent students without SAIP documents. For students with SAIPs their greatest absence code was unlawful, for non-SAIP chronically absent students, the greatest codes were medically excused, and parent excused. While the lack of SAIP for chronically absent student should be

due to the lack of truancy identification, through analysis I found 32 chronically absent students were also truant, but without SAIPs.

The interviews explore a sample of 18 chronically absent students, and nine of those students also fit the profile of truancy. I selected students who met the chronic absenteeism threshold that mirrored the demographics of the chronically absent population of that year. The sample approximately reflected the number per each school, and demographics including grade, race, special education status, ELL status, free or reduced lunch status, and the month when they reached the year's chronic absenteeism threshold. The total number of days absent also varied from just crossing the chronic absenteeism threshold to the largest number of absences, ranging from 16-41 days absent as well as the reason codes for their absences and the code majorities.

This sample of chronically absent students without SAIPs provided space for the attendance manager to share the differences between those with and without SAIPs and share specific details about those students and their needs. This sample highlights the differences in identification for those with SAIP meetings and those who do not. This narrative also highlights record keeping, student withdraw timelines and the immense role that school personnel have and their note and record keeping.

Interviews

Four semi-structured interviews took place with three general attendance managers and one lead attendance manager. All four individuals were women who worked in an attendance role in the district ranging from three to thirteen years. The general attendance manager questions were developed to focus on their role in entering data, policy, and to support additional responsibilities.-The first round of coding was in vivo coding to maintain participant voice, followed by pattern coding to give meaning to their experiences, across multiple interviews and

develop overarching themes (Saldana, 2016). The value in each of their own experiences working with families and students emphasized the importance of this small study.

The attendance manager's role is not solely focused on attendance, they are highly valued individuals within the epicenter of the school building ready to aid at a moment's notice. Through this epicenter the managers develop trust, relationships and positive communication with families and the school. Attendance managers rely collaboration with their school team and fellow managers to make determinations on attendance codes and procedures without official training. Each attendance manager established organization and tracking systems that functioned for their building and processes including the order and process for entering absence codes and maintaining lists of student concerns. Reconciling an absence without a reason is one of their greatest and most influential tasks and each manager goes above and beyond to communicate with families. Their dedication and passion for the role is evident and their strong record keeping skills support families and students.

A challenge during interviews was the time elapsed since the 2019-2020 school year, and the significant changes that took place in attendance with COVID tracking, reporting, thresholds, medical notes. All participants acknowledged that the 2024-2025 school year is the first with more traditional practices in place. Another topic not relevant to the academic years in this study, is a new reporting app for families to report absences. In addition to attendance, pick up processes are also a significant part of the role of attendance managers. This new app has removed barriers to reporting attendance with its ability to translate into many languages to create ease with parent communication as well. Laura, an attendance manager, expressed concern about the language barrier, "A part of all of this, not everyone got coded as excused, because I feel that a part of attendance was a huge language barrier." All four managers

expressed their appreciation for this great improvement with communication, but it challenged them to reflect on a time prior to COVID and the new app.

Attendance Manager Role

The duties of an attendance manager vary from building to building, but all managers discussed their role in the school as being able to step in at a moment's notice and not always related to attendance. Their roles include many other tasks and their physical location in their buildings highlight their value and importance in helping the operation of the school day. Managers work at the epicenter of the front office of an elementary school and will answer the door, greet visitors, support students getting lunch, locate students and support families. Attendance manager Laura noted, "It's a lot more than people think, just checking kids in and checking kids out. So much more involved." Anne noted that her role is student-focused, with clubs, discipline recording, student of the month, cycle calendars, "just kind of a variety of stuff. But it's a very busy window, we could have anywhere from six early dismissals to 15, its constant interruptions all day long, but I love it." Through their multiple roles within their building, each manager got to know families and develop rapport and relationships. Mary spoke about her relationships and knowledge about families she worked with frequently:

> I would say the frequent flyers typically have extenuating circumstances outside of school that you're like they've got bigger problems to worry about, than whether, you know like, not that it's not important that kids in school but they're looking to figure out where they are going to get their next meal, or they're trying to find out housing, and you just have to have grace.

Through her role, Mary can connect the family with resources through additional school personnel. Their consistent communication with family can build trust with the school. Laura, a manager, shares about getting to know a family:

> Yes, there is a trend and you get to know the names and the families, but it is interesting because I had one family and the more you communicate with them the more likely they are to get on and do the process. So you have to keep at it and keep at it and keep at it, and help them. The more the see you help their child the more they will tell you. And the more they will adhere to policies. And that is kind of what happened with that one parent. She saw I genuinely had her child's interest at heart and cared and that's when she started to open up and trust me, they don't until they see that, once they see that they start to, it is because, oh you're helping my child, that's like the biggest thing you can do for a parent.

Working in the epicenter of the building with answering the doorbell, phones, lunch orders, supporting other personnel, and working directly with families at the forefront of their roles, the attendance managers develop relationships and trust between the family and the school.

Training

All three general attendance managers noted they had no formal training before beginning in their role, and Laura said "not a formal training process where we had to attend training. So it was basically, what I would call 'baptism by fire' you come in, you start and the attendance manager who was there, you know helped to prepare, train me." Managers referred to learning the role and best practice through collaboration with colleagues within their building and the other district attendance managers for consistency with entering codes and tracking students.

Attendance managers spoke of collaborating with one another regarding consistent coding practices and involving counselors and principals when there was a student concern. Not only with unexcused absences, but with other student concerns as well. Attendance manager, Anne, said "Yeah, it's hard being an attendance clerk. You kind of just have to use your judgement, and what you've been taught." When discussing the collaboration and consistency across schools Mary said she would speak with another manager and say, "Like would you code this way, or would you code this way, and 99 percent of the time we were on the same page." Collaboration was the main avenue for training for the attendance managers, with professional development when a change with coding or report occurred. Laura spoke on the role when working with policy adherence:

> Oh yeah, we had to. They really adhere to state policy. The district follows state policy, basically. So it is stated in all the handbooks, actually the other component, you had said, when someone was constantly late, third unlawful, I would actually copy the handbook and send the policy, or if we required a doctor's note.

When speaking to each of the managers, they referred to the handbook and adherence to the procedures to report their child absent from school and in turn understand how to best record that absence in the system.

Recording an Absence

The three attendance managers operated in different sequences to enter data into the SIS, reconcile absences, and track absence code totals. The timeline for entering absence reasons varies from building to building. At the start of each day, each teacher enters an "A" for absent into the SIS for each student absent from their class. The attendance managers override the "A" with absence reason codes interpreted from the guardian email and phone messages. The

managers determine what school policy absence code to enter the SIS based on the guardian reported reason. The managers review prior absence codes to see if a student is reaching a threshold for parent excusals or vacation days as well. All managers expressed the need for no interruptions for roughly the hour in the morning after teachers input to reviewing the reported absences through email and phone calls. One attendance manager tries to get ahead and will enter absence reasons prior to teachers, but most frequently teachers are entering the absences first, followed by attendance managers adjusting the code following that teacher's record. Anne noted the timeline of the morning for the process of managers entering the absence codes from guardians, "So get it done by 10, 10:30 the robocall goes out to parents, of anyone that is not, you know, not accounted for. So if it an A for absent, if it is excused, parent excused, it will be an E-P, excused parent." Without documentation or reporting an absence reason, the unresolved absences automatically become an unlawful or unexcused absence.

Automatic robocalls are sent each morning to families of students with an unresolved absence for that day because the family did not call or email with a reason for absence. The attendance managers also reach out directly to the families to reconcile the absence if the parent has not provided a reason. Each manager had their own process for keeping track and identified this piece as going above their responsibilities, but the value they placed on this task was evident. Mary spoke of the robocall information they can access and the communication with families:

> Yeah, it's very helpful. I very rarely have a parent push back like "What do you mean?" Very rarely, um, and it's your frequent fliers, the ones that are answering the phones or getting those phone calls, are typically your frequent fliers, that just don't reconcile.

While robocalls are provided to remind parents to report an absence reason, the managers also reach out specifically to families to address the absence. Laura discussed collaboration with

colleagues to develop support for students who have unexcused absences or are absent for an extended period:

> To try and at least try and find why this child was absent, and get it resolved, that was our goal. Your goal was to get them resolved, to get them excused, and figure out what's going on. If there is a situation, and I see someone's been out an extended period, I contact my home and school person, I make people aware.

Mary noted that in the focus of her role, "Yeah, well, I look at that, for me, I take that seriously, because that's my job is to figure out where these kids are" and she added:

> Sure, but if that's your job as an attendance clerk, it's really very wrote, it's very, you know, again its always, extenuating, you always have those outside couple of cases, but if my job is to make sure the kid is accounted for then that's what I spend my day doing, is finding out where they are because it's not shame on you you're not in school, are you okay? We just, we haven't heard from you in three days, oh yeah, he's sick. Oh, I am so sorry to hear that, oh by the way get a doctor's note.

The SIS runs automated absence lists twice a week listing the students and the number of unexcused absences a student has accrued. A letter is mailed home after a student accrues one unexcused absence. Each attendance manager maintains a list of their building's students who receive a letter. After the third unlawful absence, the letter is sent from the superintendent's office and the lead attendance manager becomes involved. Rachel, the lead attendance manager, highlighted "They get a letter at their first unlawful, their second unlawful and their third. But only the third is legally mandated from the state, the first two come from the building principal and the third comes from the superintendent."

Communication between the district and family a key factor in understanding a student's attendance. Communication does not only occur through letters mailed home, but also through the automated robocalls, dispersion of handbook materials and policies via email from the attendance managers as well. All attendance managers highlighted their efforts to inform parents regarding their child's attendance and reconcile those unexcused absences. Mary said:

> I try to get them reconciled before those letters go out because they're state mandated letters, which I mean the kids, the parents doesn't want on the kids record technically, sometimes if the letter has gone out, I will get a phone call or an email, that says hey, I got this letter, but not often. If the letters go out, I mean I've reached out to them by that point, ten or eleven or twelve times to try to get it reconciled.

Rachel, lead attendance manager, discusses the process after three unlawful absences are recorded:

> So the process is that I get an automated report twice a week from our SIS, our student information system, sends an automated report every Tuesday and Thursday, of students who are coded as having three or more unlawful absences, so twice a week those come in, I review those, I then pull up each individual student's attendance to see what it looks like, to see when their letter went out, their final notice, um, if their final notice has just recently gone out, and they haven't been absent since, then that would just be a situation where we continue to monitor, if their letter went out weeks ago, and they have multiple absences since, um at that point we would initiate a meeting to write a formal SAIP, essentially twice every week, we are looking at where students are in that continuum.

When arranging a SAIP meeting, Rachel involves the family, the counselor and the building principal or assistant principal, and if relevant, the special education teacher. Following the SAIP

meeting, the team continues to support the student and the family with in-school supports for the student, and community referrals for the family depending on the need.

The SAIP process focuses on unlawful absences, but the recorded excused absences contribute towards the chronically absent threshold. While there are thresholds for specific absence reasons, including parent excusals and vacation notes, those lines can become blurred and figuring out the coding process can be complicated. Anne talks of a specific circumstance with a family:

> They know, yesterday I had a late day phone call from a parent, my daughters were out the three days before break and two days after break. We were away and I ended up in the hospital, oh okay, so how do I excuse them? And I said really, if you were traveling, it would be, it's really, we would appreciate a travel form, in advance, before your trip. So it, because, you know it would be a vacation time. And she said well we were away, and I got sick and it extended it two more days, and I said okay that's fine, and she said will it be excused, and I said yeah, it will be a parental excuse.

The challenge that managers face are these nuanced circumstances where it can be difficult to uphold the threshold. The relationships and rapport building with families was clear from each of the attendance managers, their passion for supporting families is invaluable to support students, each spoke of this unprompted. Laura noted:

> Truancy, the constant lateness, constant absences, what is going on, what can we do to help? That is basically what it is, 'what can we do to help you get your child get to school?' And I find that home and school, and guidance counselor, they do a lot to address the situation and really try to make sure, you know, we're helping this family.

The vital component of the managers is their experience, their genuine passion for the role and their desire to support students yet uphold the policy in tandem. There is formal and informal process to recording absences, the wrote component of data entry and the building of relationships with families to promote trust, support and communication, both processes are valuable.

Students with SAIPs

During her interview, the lead attendance manager, Rachel, communicated details about student circumstances that are not written in the SAIP. A SAIP is a snapshot in time with immense follow up with the family and school personnel. Rachel said:

> Most of it is phone calls, home visits, if we end up in a court hearing, it's a court hearing, we wouldn't have a full meeting. We may have another meeting if a student has an IEP, we may meet as a team. If there is some other issue where we may want to have a team meeting, we have occasionally had a team meeting. Last year we had a meeting with just the school staff about a student to think of other things we could do for him in the building, some creative solutions. And I would call Mom and propose those to add.

During her interview, when she asked to review specific student SAIPs, Rachel would say "Oh okay, gosh. I remember this one too." Of the 12 SAIP students I asked about, all included needs that dealt with family dynamics, change or conflict. One student specifically included academic challenges, and one other spoke of poor relationships with the school personnel. Rachel regarding family dynamic noted that "Mom's psychiatric needs were as great a factor, if not, greater than his. And a lot of his acting out, I think was in a response, like a trauma response to his interacting with his Mom." She was able to recall the specific students and provide more information than the SAIP document held. Rachel on a student with a SAIP and the barrier to

attending said the absences, “They were very late in the year, so she actually had an improvement between November and the end of March, but then it sort of derailed. And again very closely tied to Mother’s own wellbeing.” Another student without a SAIP, but chronically absent with 24 unlawful absences, Rachel knew well:

> And then yes, this student had a slew of unlawful absences, but I do know there was children and youth involvement given what was happening in the home. Um, it looks like she was with, she was enrolled in a new school in January of 2020 due to being removed from her house.

Most attendance barriers included parenting, more specifically, the mother’s own mental health concerns including substance abuse, family conflict and housing instability. Of the 12 students, only three are still living in and attending the district schools which speaks to the factors related to transient families and their stability. Parent work schedules were included and trouble accessing transportation with single car households. With transportation concerns, Rachel spoke of providing transportation herself when a guardian would call due to a transportation barrier or a difficult morning. This rapport and relationship were represented throughout the exploration of the available SAIPs. While SAIPs are interventions for truant students, all students with a SAIP met the chronic absenteeism threshold during the academic year their SAIP was intact. The barriers to school, while many reasons may have been unlawful, highlight the need for supports surrounding family, housing and reliable transportation.

Chronically Absent Student Sample

Interviewing the lead attendance manager about 18 chronically absent students without SAIPs through purposeful sampling, highlighted her role in reviewing attendance that includes students who are not truant, but chronically absent. While these students did not have a SAIP on

file, her wealth of knowledge and care for these students was clear in other ways. The documentation maintained in the SIS and in her own memory was evident. Out of the 18 students, she quickly remembered 12 of them upon looking up their information on the SIS. When asked about a student with 41 absences during the 2018-2019 year, with 30 medical excuses and 11 parental excusals, Rachel said:

> But I want to add though, in this particular case, had the same service essentially as every other kid we just discussed who didn't have a citation, like the same type of work I was doing with all of them, if that makes sense.

While this student did not have any unlawful absences, the student missed about 23% of school due to chronic medical conditions and homelessness. A known barrier to student attendance is housing instability, not only for the recording of absences while a student moves, but the negative impacts making transitions can have on a student. When asked Rachel, lead attendance manager said:

> Well, it's almost like, it's hard to say. It's like a chicken and egg situation. Transient students, like I think, poor attendance and having to move a lot go back to the same point A, there are two different symptoms of the same root problem.

When asked about another chronically absent student with 12 medical excusals, 12 parent notes, and five vacation days, Rachel said "Yeah. So no unlawfuls whatsoever, she was not on my radar, but I would think something was also happening medically because she just had a lot a lot of dismissals." Four of the 18 students had significant medical concerns, including a bone marrow transplant and psychiatric hospitalizations. Medical excusals do not contribute towards truancy as per school policy, but do contribute towards the chronic absenteeism threshold.

During our interview, I asked about nine chronically absent students who met the truancy criteria for a SAIP and Rachel was able to explain four of the students had their attendance profile because they were moving and had yet to be withdrawn, they were still enrolled in the district while their transfer registration was pending. For another student, she made the phone call to schedule the SAIP at the end of February prior to the COVID closure, and that student has had a SAIP every year since 2020. One student had five vacation days, then Rachel explained "And then 6 additional unlawfuls that were directly after the vacation. It still says family vacation, what really should have happened here Kim is the student should have been withdrawn, and that's why he's looking chronically absent when really they were out of the country it looks like." Another student was removed from the home by Children and Youth and during the transition accumulated unlawful absences, while another student Rachel said "She was homeless. They were homeless, that's what happened. There was an eviction January of 2019… I believe the absences were caused by it taking some time to get transportation set up."

Rachel, when asked about two different chronically absent student without SAIPs, one she reported should have been withdrawn due to being away for more than ten days but was left on the record and accumulated absences, another student she said "a lot of vacation days in a school year. Like, 8, that's like over our policy really in a year." While not a traditional barrier to attendance, vacation was one of the largest codes for chronically absent students. Anne said:

> We do have a lot of vacationers, and we have a lot of long, like away trips, like Europe, yeah like pretty nice, we have a couple coming up. Bahamas, Trinidad, one might be going to South America, we have Disney. Yeah, we have a lot of travelers.

It is evident that with no SAIP meeting, Rachel still has a wealth of knowledge regarding students who are identified to be truant, chronically absent, or both. The attendance managers are

working with students and their families to understand barriers and support attending school regularly.

Domain Intersection

Practice and Policy

PDE policy and school policy conflict between absence reason recording, resulting in different interpretation and intervention outcomes for students and families. PDE chronic absenteeism policy and school policy for truancy simultaneously guide districts regarding attendance priorities and procedures. There is misalignment between PDE chronic absenteeism policy and school policy. PA Public School Code does not include chronic absenteeism as a construct, the policy only includes truancy and directs schools to respond to unexcused absences only with expected actions.

Through SAIP and SIS demographic and absence code data, we can determine the most common attendance code for a chronically absent student with a SAIP is unexcused, whereas chronically absent students without a SAIP had medically excused or parent excused as their most common absence code. The trend of at least three unexcused absences prior to a meeting, and students not meeting the chronic absenteeism threshold represents the school policy into practice as directed, writing a SAIP in response to truancy, not chronic absenteeism.

School policy directs schools to respond to three or more unexcused absences with a SAIP meeting, the trends between SIS data and SAIP documents showed 12 SAIPs for 32 truant students. When interviewed, the lead attendance manager was able to speak to this a piece of this intersection. Interview data identified an error in recording absences for students registering in a different district and the lag between registration and withdraw, these students identify as chronically absent during this transition. Interviewing the attendance managers highlighted the

focus on school policy practice and implementation through recording absence codes and maintaining records for students meeting thresholds. Attendance managers practice reconciling unexcused absences to record an excused reason code to prevent truancy, while this does not impact chronic absenteeism, it does support communication between the school and the family. The policies do not include the relationship and rapport building between families and attendance managers, but as evident in the data this is an invaluable component towards reporting and managing attendance.

Student And Family Factors

This study focused on factors contributing to chronic absenteeism and identified the student and family factors. Specifically with elementary-aged students, family is essential in supporting students attending school. The themes for student and family factors include family, housing and transience, and vacation. Relationships and trust are overarching with the managers at the forefront of creating a trust between the family and the school. Without information as to what the family is facing, the school is unable to provide support.

The SIS data highlighted 11% of chronic absenteeism absences are due to vacations, with 30% of absences with a medical note provided. The data also showed that roughly 60% of chronically absent students qualify for the National School Lunch Program with a financial threshold that highlights a possible increase in need for additional resources. SAIP documents while written for truant students, were an intervention while all 12 students with SAIPs also became chronically absent during the academic year. SAIP identified needs to include transportation, morning routines, housing, family dynamics, medical needs and insurance, mental health, and academic challenges. Family dynamic including mental health and housing instability directly impact students attending school, especially elementary school students who rely on

adults in the home to support their attendance. In these circumstances, available transportation and morning routines are even more vital.

Interview trends highlighted the ability for attendance managers to intervene when there is a need in the family and offer support through community resources, morning support and counseling groups. Students with significant medical challenges were identified through interview data, which were not clear through SIS absence medical codes. A student with a bone marrow transplant and those with psychiatric treatment were a part of the chronically absent students. The attendance managers involved genuinely care, develop trust, and support these students, and identifying truancy and chronic absenteeism can help these students not only with school access, but with needs that require additional resources and support.

Research Questions

1. How does ESSA policy, state policy and local elementary school practice intersect?

PDE ESSA chronic absenteeism policy and state and local policy do not align, however PA School Code, district policies and the student handbook use the same language verbatim. The school policies conflict with the PDE chronic absenteeism as a reporting metric, with the school policies utilizing absence reason codes and responding to three or more unexcused absences. PA Public School Code does not include chronic absenteeism as a construct, whereas the PDE chronic absenteeism policy values the tracking and requires reporting the number of chronically absent students to the department. The ESD school district utilizes the truancy measure through school policy to record student absences, identify truant students and intervene to support students and families. An absence is recorded as unexcused or excused, this delineation prompts action for truancy, however PDE policy identifies both codes as contributing the chronic absenteeism threshold. Students can either be truant, chronically absent, or both.

Local elementary school practice is dependent on attendance managers knowledge and understanding of school policy and dedicated record maintenance. The practice of deeply committed attendance managers as well as their ability to build trust and relationships with families extends beyond policies, but rather the relational and human component of working with children and their families. The intersection between policies is minimal with conflicts between constructs and recording absences, but the intention of policy is to value student attendance and accessing their education, the managers involved in supporting students' attendance highlights their value and vital role in getting students to school and connecting families with resources.

2. How are students identified for a School Attendance Improvement Plan?

SAIP development is reflective of the policy set forth by the school district in reflection of PA School Code. SAIPs are not developed for students who are chronically absent, but for truant students. School policy outlines that SAIPs are the primary focus to intervene when a student is truant, with three or more unexcused absences. While all students identified for a SAIP were not chronically absent at the date of the meeting were found to be chronically absent by the end of the school year. All 12 students with SAIPs had three or more unexcused absences prior to their SAIP meeting. A student can be truant, chronically absent, or both, but a student is truant prior to a SAIP, and not necessarily chronically absent.

The most common SIS absence code for a chronically absent student with a SAIP was unexcused, whereas for students without a SAIP the most common was either medical or parent excused. The trend of at least three unexcused absences prior to a meeting, and students not meeting the chronic absenteeism threshold represents the school policy into practice as directed, writing a SAIP in response to truancy, not chronic absenteeism.

3. What are the characteristics of a chronically absent student in Eagle School District elementary schools?

The simple representation of a chronically absent student would be to utilize SIS data, and this is what prior research studies have done. This study analyzed the varied subset of students through interview data and SAIPs written prior to meeting the chronic absenteeism threshold. Chronically absent students are overrepresented in specific demographic areas including special education services, English Language Learner supports, the National School Lunch Program, and minority racial groups including Asian, Hispanic and multi-racial students. A chronically absent student is more likely to qualify for services including the national school lunch program, English Language Learner supports or special education in comparison to their regularly attending peers. Chronically absent students are marked absent with parent notes, medical reasons, without a reported reason and for vacation. A quarter of reasons were not provided by guardians for chronically absent students, whereas 11% were vacation days, and a third were a parent note and a third for a medical reason. Nearly half of the chronically absent population was from kindergarten or first grade with the number of students decreasing throughout the grades, for grades two through five, each building was similar in number of students. Chronically absent students are typically coming from a Building A, B or C more likely, but the K-1 building had the most with the younger student population. Approximately 32% of chronically absent students during the 2018-2019 school year, grades K through 4th were chronically absent during the following year.

Through SAIP documents and interview data, trends developed for factors contributing to chronic absenteeism regarding student and family needs to support regular attendance. Factors include challenging morning routines, transportation, following direction from parents, student

and mother mental health, asthma, medical insurance, housing and transience, family dynamic changes, and academic challenges. Interview data reflected chronically absent students with factors including maternal mental health and wellbeing influencing student attendance and family dynamics changing around housing and household members to support attendance. Children and Youth involvement changing the living situation for a student, and transportation concerns with a change in housing. Homelessness impacts the ability to obtain transportation and a period where transportation through the district is not arranged. Some chronically absent students through SIS data show a significant medical code rate, may have increase medical needs including treatment for physical or mental health needs. There is no set profile of a chronically absent student, however we can look at trends in demographics, reason codes and factors that contribute towards chronic absenteeism to try to prevent or mitigate concerns before students reach that threshold.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Approximately 15% of Pennsylvania students were chronically absent during the 2018-2019 school year, missing more than 10% of school days, with the elementary aged student population most often chronically absent (Department of Education, n.d.-a). This study found roughly 4-7% of Eagle School District's elementary population was chronically absent during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. Prior research focuses on older student populations, and this study addressed a gap in literature regarding elementary school students (Romero & Lee, 2007). Elementary school students are dependent on family and guardians to support attending school regularly in comparison to their older peers (Gottfried, 2009). The students who face systemic barriers daily, including a disability, poverty, minority status or transience are more likely to be chronically absent (Rafa, 2017) with low-income students four times more likely to be chronically absent (Ready, 2010). Students with multiple barriers suffer far greater consequences for missing school (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried, 2009; Romero & Lee, 2007).

The PDE policy utilizes chronic absenteeism as a reporting metric to measure School Quality or Student Success emphasizing the value of students regularly attending school. However, prior research highlights the complex overlapping and interconnected patterns and factors influencing attendance and the maintenance of school level data to identify and intervene when a student is chronically absent (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Previous studies identified challenges with recording, identifying and intervening with chronically absent students (Dougherty, 2018). The focus of this study was to analyze the current policy into practice, review

the chronically absent student population, and identify the factors contributing to chronic absenteeism.

Summary of Findings

PDE policy and school policy fail to intersect to support students due to the conflict between absence reason recording and the threshold for intervention. PDE policy utilizes chronic absenteeism as a reporting metric defining almost all absences as contributing towards that threshold of 10% of the school year, whereas PA School Code and school policy align with truancy and focus on unexcused absences. Students can either be truant, chronically absent, or both. SAIP, SIS and interview data identified unexcused as the most common attendance code for a chronically absent student with a SAIP. However, for chronically absent students without a SAIP, medically excused or parent excused were the most frequent attendance codes. School policy responds to three or more unexcused absences and interview data highlighted attendance managers' practice reconciling unexcused absences to record an excused reason code to prevent truancy.

The identification of an attendance concern is dependent on attendance managers' knowledge and implementation of school policy and their dedicated record maintenance. The practice of deeply committed attendance managers as well as their ability to build trust and relationships with families extends beyond policies, but rather the relational and human component of working with children and their families. The intersection between policies is minimal with conflicts between constructs and recording absences, but the intention of policy is to value student attendance and students accessing their education. The managers caring and dedicated recording of attendance reasons and reconciliation of an unexcused absence is essential to communicate with families and provide the first line of support.

Students are identified for a SAIP to intervene when students accrue three or more unexcused absences and are deemed truant as per school policy. While a student can be truant, chronically absent, or both, a student is truant prior to a SAIP, and not necessarily chronically absent. The population of students with a SAIP document were truant prior to their meeting but were also labeled chronically absent by the conclusion of that same school year. While SAIP documents are written in response to unexcused absences, it is valuable to understand that chronically absent students have excused absences with parent notes, medical reasons and vacation. For the chronically absent student population, 25% of absences were unexcused and 11% of absences were vacation days, a third of absences were parent notes and a third were medical notes.

Although this study did not find one set of characteristics for a chronically absent Eagle School District elementary school student, there are trends and commonalities amongst the population of chronically absent students. Prior research utilized large data sets (Ansari & Gottfried, 2020; Gottfried, 2009; Romero and Lee, 2007) but this study expounded on the SIS data with interview data and SAIPs written prior to meeting the chronic absenteeism threshold. Chronically absent students are overrepresented in minority racial groups including Asian, Hispanic and multi-Racial, and are more likely to qualify for services including the national school lunch program, English Language Learner supports or special education in comparison to their regularly attending peers. Prior research found chronic absenteeism disproportionately impacts low-income students of color (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018).

Approximately half of the chronic absenteeism population in this study were kindergarten or first grade students, and as students get older the number of chronically absent students decreases. While the number of chronically absent students decreases as students age through

elementary school, approximately 32% of chronically absent students during the 2018-2019 school year were also chronically absent the following academic year. Prior research highlighted the cycle of chronic absenteeism at the compounding factors, with the pattern of absenteeism research with 24 to 28% of chronically absent students becoming chronically absent the following school year as found in this study (Bauer et al., 2018).

Interview data identified chronically absent students with barriers including maternal mental health and wellbeing influencing student attendance and family dynamics changing around housing and household members to support attendance. Homelessness, transience and mobility impacts the ability to obtain transportation and can create an absence period where transportation is not arranged. In addition, some chronically absent students had significant medical absences due to treatment for physical or mental health needs. Prior research found these factors fall within the environmental, family and school related factors with symbiotic relationships influencing student attendance (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018).

Limitations of the Study

The greatest limitation and challenge of this study is the utilization of 2019-2020 school year data. While the research only included the academic days and attendance data through March 13, 2020, due to the COVID closure, the truncation of the school year and decreased chronic absenteeism threshold was a challenging comparison between the two school years. Attendance managers were unaware of this change until the closure of the school year, and through comparison it is evident 2019-2020 school year was trending to have a similar number of chronically absent students as the 2018-2019 school year without the change due to the pandemic.

A limitation that is acknowledged throughout prior research is the maintenance and tracking of student attendance (Jacob and Lovett, 2019). Utilizing SIS data highlighted this concern of the overwhelming amount of data entry and tracking required from attendance managers. Assumptions and consistent data clean up addressed concerns, but an incorrect attendance code would be unknown, and there could be an overestimation the number of chronically absent students. I was only able to utilize the available SAIP documents, therefore a missing or lack of document is possible. The lead attendance manager is diligent about record maintenance, however this highlights the complex process of identification, recording of the SAIP and maintaining the document.

A common threat to validity in qualitative studies, includes the narrative shared from interview participants. Sharing a narrative that is not in their best interest would not typically occur, therefore there is a possibility of underestimation regarding the concern with training, data entry, and processes for working with students. While there was variability between buildings across their processes, their dedication and compassion for students and families was evident. This commitment to students and families can help support students accessing resources but also may impact their reporting of negative attendance or blurring the thresholds for reporting absences reasons. Selection bias occurred within this study, because one attendance manager did not participate in the interview due to lack of follow through. I attempted to work through selection bias through my relationships with the individuals and my role as a student. I did manage to speak with three attendance managers, and one lead attendance manager who shared common themes and trends within their roles. The SIS and SAIP data focused on the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years, and the interviews occurred in the Fall of 2023.

Recall bias was a concern when interviewing and asking managers to recall information from those school years. The interviewees' ability to recall mentally, but also refer to prior notes, dates, and codes greatly mitigated this bias. Referring directly back to the SAIP document as written by the interviewee also assisted with furthering explanation for reasons, interventions, and family situation details. The lead attendance managers extensive note taking within the SIS allowed her to readily remember details relating to the student and family, her ability to remember thoughtfully, highlighted the value of her role and the attention and care to detail with each family. Data triangulation was possible through referencing SIS data, SAIP documents and interview questions, each data source integrated through themes and trends. The complex narrative continued to be a significant component evident through this research.

Implications for State Policy

Prior research and this study stress the systemic barriers, trends and environmental factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism. We understand there is a "complex range of bio-psycho-socio-cultural determinates of absenteeism" (Tonge & Silverman, 2019, p. 119) and supporting students is challenging for districts. State policy as it relates to education is valued, but policy as it relates to community resources and programming for housing, medical and mental health services, and basic human needs should be considered to support students and their guardians. Childs and Lofton (2021) identified that chronic absenteeism is not only a school issue, but social and policy issue that transcends the academic environment. Increased neighborhood poverty (Gottfried, 2014b) and food insecurity, unhealthy housing, violence, all associate with chronic absenteeism with a lack of resources for low-income families (Mapping the early attendance gap, 2015). Approximately 60% of chronically absent students in this study, were eligible for the National School Lunch Program, this highlights the need to support students

in poverty accessing basic needs to support their school attendance. Through SAIP documents and interview data we understand housing and transience are a great factor in prohibiting students from coming to school and accumulating unexcused absences. Addressing housing disparities and affordability within school districts, with funding programs and resources, could reduce the level of transience and school absences. Homeless students receive services through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance (MVA) Act, and guarantee transportation, but students who move frequently and do not qualify for MVA (National Center for Homeless Assistance Act, n.d.). Transportation arrangement delays can also impact a students' attendance school and through his study a common theme was reliable school provided transportation. Pennsylvania Law does not require districts to transport students, this is determined by the local school board of directors. Instituting state level policy to support student transportation to school could reduce absenteeism by removing a common barrier to attendance.

Medical needs, including mental health, are a great factor leading to chronic absenteeism. The absences that accrue while a student is hospitalized all contribute towards the threshold. State policy could include a differentiation for students who are continuing to receive academic instruction while a student is away from campus, including homebound instruction, virtual instruction or a third-party educational provider through a hospital program. While the student is not in the traditional campus setting, their academics are not significantly interrupted while receiving the medical support they require, for example, one student with a bone marrow transplant may not have been able to attend school due to the possibility of infection but could receive at home instruction. This student was chronically absent with medical excusals.

There is no requirement for attendance managers or lead attendance managers, and this responsibility can often fall on counselors or administrators depending on the resources of a

district. Resources and funding towards staff to focus on student attendance could be vital in supporting students and their families. While identifying and intervening with truant students is mandated in Pennsylvania, those who are responsible for this crucial process vary. While it is unknown if attendance managers reduce chronic absenteeism, they do focus on reconciling absence to reduce truancy, their ability to build relationships and rapport with families supports in removing barriers to attending school. The assumption remains that the school personnel that families communicate with increases school engagement and willingness to seek support.

This research continued to emphasize the overrepresentation of specific subpopulations, and their chronically absent status compared to their peers. The intention of chronic absenteeism as a state reporting metric is to understand School Quality and Student Success, but prior research cautions this as a metric due to the complex and integrated nature of chronic absenteeism (Hutt, 2019). This small study emphasizes the value of understanding the impact policy and practice have on individual students and their families, prior large datasets did not include the individual and human component of the barriers students and families are facing. The boots on the ground perspective of this study reminds researchers and practitioners that these are children accessing their academic day, for all areas of development. This study reflects prior research and removes many prior assumptions, with identification for potential areas of change to best support our students and families. Recognizing and working with families to remove barriers and meet needs is crucial for student success, but federal, state and local policy must intersect to benefit families and meet basic needs through multiple avenues, not just school.

Implications for School Policy and Practice

Most attendance barriers identified included influencing factors that schools and educators are unable to control, schools can focus on what they have the capabilities to influence

to encourage student attendance. While school policy, by law, must reflect PA School Code and follow PDE policy, the value in designing and writing school policy to best educate and communicate to families on attendance is evident. Policy to include both truancy and chronic absenteeism by simply informing families is an intervention. Following the return to school after the COVID closure an app has been introduced to remove the barrier to reporting a student absent from school and to facilitating providing a reason and communicating with the attendance manager in addition, greater communication to families regarding total absences is in place. A school policy to include a process for chronically absent students, in addition to truancy, including all absence reasons may prove to intervene for students, but this should also take place prior to students reaching the threshold of 10% of the school year. An effort the district is making is to notify families of attendance concerns, not at 18 days, but at 10% of the school year so far, this provides students with the opportunity to increase attendance and potentially avoid becoming chronically absent.

Intervention efforts prior to students reaching 10% or 18 days of the school year proves to be useful, with families typically underreporting their student's absence totals (Jordan et al., 2018), sharing attendance totals with guardians has reduced absences in districts utilizing campaigns sharing absence totals and focusing on the value of daily attendance (Chang et al., 2019). The Eagle School District has begun communicating daily absences via emails to families to share more readily regardless of absence reason. Reconciliation is a significant component of the role of the attendance manager to identify the reason for student absence, this is an effort of communication and the first step of intervention.

The current school policy permits families to have 10 parent notes and 5 vacation days, this without pause, adds up to 15 absent days from school. Approximately, 11% of absences for

chronically absent students were vacation days and reviewing the threshold for vacation days may reduce the number of absences contributing to chronically absent students. There are situations where students are medically excused for significant time due to treatment, and this is a challenging policy to set forth for families to support students. There are circumstances where the medical needs of a students are so great, missing school is unavoidable, but reviewing the medical notes for reasons could prove to be supportive of the student who is missing instruction.

The attendance managers are at the forefront of responsibility for tracking, maintaining data and building rapport and relationships with families. Three attendance managers shared they did not receive formal training as a collective group, rather they were trained by their predecessor and through collaboration and communication with their colleagues. The decision making and data entry component of the role is a great undertaking, with great responsibility, providing the managers with specific training and support to empower them would be beneficial. The qualifications of the attendance managers varied, but their commitment was evident, identifying the ideal individual for the role is invaluable to support students and families. Including the communication component, data management, and resourcefulness is vital. Each manager collaborates with their colleagues, but providing consistent training and instruction would show their vital role in their buildings and to support student attendance. The SIS has great technological capabilities, enabling the system to support managers with threshold totals rather than managers manually counting, could reduce the human error component that comes with the significant amount of data review and entry within the role and support their tracking and reporting efforts. The focus of school policy and practice is to support those who are at the forefront of working with children and their families, and this could be done through policy and

training. Enhancing policy to address all absences, identifying threshold maximums, communicating with families and training those more valuable to student attendance is vital.

Recommendations for Future Research

Attendance is complex in constructs, record maintenance, barriers, and intervention responsibility. Ideally, developing a generalizable intervention structure could prevent chronic absenteeism, but through this study we continue to find the integrated narrative preventing student attendance and variance from student to student. This study utilized four data sources with diverse formatting to expand on data from each source, a case study of a specific subgroup of students could identify more specific reasons and possible interventions. This case study could support interviewing the family and student to better understand the locus of control for intervening with attendance. Focusing on the parent and guardian role in supporting their child getting to school can highlight the lived experiences of these families. Elementary school students rely heavily on family support to access their education and providing an open and safe space for families to reflect on their experience may be impactful for policy and practice development. Inquiring with families about their home routines, student behaviors, reporting an absence, their view of absence policies and the barriers to attendance would identify how best a district and community can support the family.

Reviewing the actual notes and communications provided by families, rather than the simplified SIS attendance codes, could provide a deeper look into the reasons. The analysis of notes could highlight the medical excusals from doctor's offices. This research focused on full day absences only, studying partial absences, chronic late to school, also limits a student's access to instruction. Transportation is an area of need for students to attend school regularly and on time. With a guardian transporting or walking to school, the possibility of being late to school

increases. An analysis of partially missed days, and the barriers to get to school on time could also impact the students who do not attend at all due to a morning concern. A partial absence and a full day absence could underscore different or similar barriers to attending. As students get older and reach middle and high school, attendance recording can change to marking attendance to each individual period of the day. A study aligned with this could identify by period the amount of time a student may miss from first period due to lateness, or due to entire day absences. The attendance maintenance continues to become more complicated, but the onus to attend school increasingly moves to the student rather than the family.

Future research could include a longitudinal study with a continuation of data collection throughout the formative elementary school years with diverse student populations across districts and geographical regions (Gottfried, 2009; Romero & Lee, 2007). This study included two academic years of data, but a longitudinal study looking at student attendance through a cohort model could highlight trends and the effectiveness of interventions more thoroughly. Including the educational programming prior to kindergarten could highlight the impacts educational enrollment have throughout elementary school. Transience is a common barrier to attendance as shown through SAIP and interview data, utilizing state level reporting data to track student movement and attendance trends may prove to highlight state level policy impacts and the process of school withdraw and enrollment to limit educational gaps and absences.

Developing an understanding of other state and district policies as well as data entry and record tracking could support shaping effective intervention of students and the roles of attendance managers within surrounding districts. The formative years also including Pre-Kindergarten programming and the impacts of programming on kindergarten attendance could prove to support additional policy and programming for students prior to their elementary school

experience (Jordan & Miller, 2017). A focus on elementary school grades is valuable because intervention during the elementary years can prevent future chronic absenteeism and negative impacts (Ansari & Pianta, 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Romero & Lee, 2007), due to the cyclical nature of chronic absenteeism focusing on kindergarten years, with the highest rate of absenteeism is vital (Ansari et al., 2020). Continuing to employ interventions and studying the effectiveness is required to understand and develop ways to support attendance, not only from schools but also systemically in the community for elementary aged students. Prior intervention studies on communication systems are continuing to show success but studying programs that can be built into existing SIS programs without district purchasing additional programs, would be beneficial.

This research emphasized the value and importance of dedicated and caring attendance managers. Future research could consider focusing on the specific role of the attendance manager, with an immersive approach to understand their essential role in the building, and the nuances of the job. Interviewing multiple attendance managers across different districts would highlight the variance in response to state policy and their local school policy in effect. Comparing school policy within a single state would show the variance in interpretation of the state policy in effect. While Eagle School District follows PA School Code, allowed absences may be unique across varied districts, understanding how each district supports and intervenes when students are absent could support further intervention. All future research should be driven to support students' regular attendance to school, and address policy from the student, family, and school perspectives and support those individuals who are working to support families and their students attending school.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation of state chronic absenteeism policy into complex practice with attendance reporting, data maintenance, absence factors, and intervention processes at the elementary school level. This study emphasized the need for continued support, understanding, collaboration and community resources to support students. Chronically absent students are often overrepresented in marginalized populations, suffering the most consequences from missing school. Attendance data is complex not only in the maintenance of data, but in the terms, constructs, expected responses, barriers, and interventions. Prior research, utilizing large quantitative data sets, highlighted the need for a district specific analysis of chronic absenteeism and the policy, practice and barriers students and their families face (Gottfried, 2009; Romero and Lee, 2007). This study utilized a district's elementary schools, with kindergarten included in the population with qualitative analysis and available data and personnel. The narrative provided further emphasized the value and importance of relationships and rapport within schools to support students attending school and removing barriers to regular attendance and meeting family needs.

The analysis and synthetization of district elementary level data sources support prior research and extends the knowledge surrounding chronic absenteeism at the elementary level, and specifically for one district's practice. The four data sources in this study are integrated and support the narrative of complicated, but valuable data for students, families, and schools. The challenges and complexities are evident when reviewing the four data sources, with the barriers to attendance identifying the need to support students and families using school and community resources. The data is complex, but themes and domains arose to support future research, policy direction, and supporting students, families and the school personnel that work most closely with

all students, regardless of attendance. Hutt (2018) acknowledges that schools provide academic instruction and non-academic resources including food, medical care, social services, and support basic welfare needs, but meeting these needs might set unrealistic expectations. This study emphasizes one district's implementation of policy to develop and understand current school level impacts on chronic absenteeism, and the required focus on school and community collaboration to support students and their families

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: *School Attendance Improvement Plan (SAIP)*

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SAIP)

Basic Student Information:

Name of Student: _____ Home Address: _____ Special Needs/IEP: ○ Yes ○ No

Grade Level: _____

Name of Parent/ Guardian: _____ Home Address: _____ Home Phone: _____

Work Phone: _____

Email Address: _____ Work Address: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Name of Parent/ Guardian: _____ Home Address: _____ Home Phone: _____

Work Phone: _____

Email Address: _____ Work Address: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Goal: _____ Projected Date of Attendance Improvement _____

(Insert Student's Name) *(Insert Date)*

List of those who attended the SAIP and Role/Relationship to student: Date of SAIP meeting: _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Attach the Attendance Summary to the End of this Document for Reference

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Strengths of Student/Family:

	Description	Relevance to the Plan
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

General Information Regarding Family Habits/Routines

Does the student have siblings, step, or half-siblings, or are other children or young adults living in the household? ○ Yes ○ No

If yes, who _____

With whom does the student live during the week. _____

What time does the student wake up on a school day? _____

What type of transportation does the student use to get to school? _____

Additional Information / Comments

Assessment / Areas of Need:

	Primary	Secondary
1.		
2.		

Additional Information / Comments

Solutions:

	Description	Responsible Party(ies)	Projected Completion Date
1.			
2.			
3.			

Specific Potential Benefits to Student for Improved Attendance with Plan:

	Short Term Benefit :	Long Term Benefit :
1.		
2.		

Specific Potential Consequences for Non-improvement / Decline of Attendance :

	Short Term Consequence :	Long Term Consequence :
1.		
2.		

This SAIP was created collaboratively to

- Assist the student in improving attendance;
- Enlist my/your support as the parent(s)/guardian(s); and
- Document the school's attempts to provide resources to promote the educational success of the student.

We agree with this Plan, including all requirements and consequences set forth herein, and we agree to comply with the terms set forth in the Plan. Parties in agreement with this plan will sign below:

Student :	Date :
Parent or Guardian :	Date :
Parent or Guardian :	Date :

If those persons listed above disagree and refuse the terms set forth in the plan, please sign below:

Student

Parent / Guardian

Parent / Guardian

Should we the Parent / Guardian have difficulty in implementing the plan or are not clear on the roles of each party, we can contact the following school personnel with questions or concerns prior to the scheduled progress meeting.

Date for Follow-up Meeting *(if applicable)* :

If no date is listed above, please disregard.

The student, parents, and school should be provided a copy of this form regardless of attendance.

Curriculum Vita: Kimberly Osborn

EDUCATION

May 2025 **Ed.D. Educational Leadership,** Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
Elementary Chronic Absenteeism: A Qualitative Approach to Policy into Practice

May 2013 **M.Ed. Secondary School Counseling,** Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

May 2011 **B.A. Sociology/Social Psychology - B.A. Science Writing/Journalism**
Minor in Health, Medicine and Society, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

School Counselor, Phoenixville Area High School, Phoenixville, PA, Grades 9-12 July 2013-Present
Public, serves 1,250 students, with 30% on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program

- Coordinating Advanced Placement Exam Administration 2012-Present, with over 400 test takers and 800 exams each administration
- Student Assistant Program Team Member meeting weekly to review referrals, teacher feedback collection with communication and support to parents/guardians of referred students
- Section 504 Agreement Coordinator, overseeing over 35 agreements per year including implementation, dissemination and meetings in accordance with Section 504 bylaws and requirements.
- Educating students on Naviance and College and Career Information through small group instruction
- Scheduling for all students to include core courses and elective options, prerequisite and graduation requirement review, and Individualized Educational Program (IEP) adherence
- Providing social/emotional, career, and academic advising to a caseload of approximately 320 students yearly

School Counseling Intern, Easton Area High School, Easton, PA, Grades 9-12
August 2012-May 2013
Public, served 2,700 students, with 38% on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program

- Delivered individual, responsive counseling services to 15 high school students, one hour a week per student
- Interviewed over 50 seniors on career/college goals to promote work on resumes, applications, college search and career interest inventories, discussion included College Board and Career Cruising
- Set goals individually with 18 retained 9th grade students to raise grades, improve study habits, use community resources, and advance to 10th grade
- Performed 22 classroom observations to evaluate students' academic needs for special education evaluations and 504 modifications

School Counseling Practicum, Broughal Middle School, Bethlehem, PA, Grades 6-8
January 2012-May 2012
Public, served 570 students, with 88% of students on the Free and Reduced Lunch Program

- Observed 100 hours of individual, responsive and crisis school counseling procedures
- Contributed to peer mediations to resolve bullying, gossip, physical fighting and friendship issues

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Lehigh Athletics, *Graduate Assistant* August 2011-May 2013

- Assessed the needs of 28 coaches and staff members to hire and manage 100 college work study students

- Collaborated with students and faculty on the Community Outreach by Athletes who Care about Helping (COACH) Board in once-weekly meetings to create and design campus wide initiatives to engage students in the community and in Lehigh Athletics events
- Assisted in programming 20 annual Southside Bethlehem Community outreach opportunities for student-athletes: Adopt-A-Family, City Clean-Up, Education Day, Play for Kay, Reading Rocks

Double H Ranch, Summer Camp for Children with Life Threatening Illnesses, Lake George, New York
July 2012

- Volunteered as a cabin counselor for 22 children diagnosed with AIDS, Leukemia, TBI, Cerebral Palsy, Guillain-Barre Disease, and various other life-threatening illnesses

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS, MEMBERSHIPS & AWARDS

Secondary School Counselor, Instructional II – Pennsylvania Certification
Elizabeth Major Nevis Award (2011)
Student Assistance Program (2012-Present)
Certified Positive Discipline Parenting Educator, Positive Discipline Association (2012-Present)
Human Trafficking Awareness & Prevention Trainer, Valley Against Sex Trafficking (2013)
American School Counselor Association (2012-Present)
Pennsylvania School Counselor Association (2013-Present)
Crisis Prevention Institute Trained & Maintenance Training (2013-Present)