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Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Attendance Interventions for Schools

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Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Attendance Interventions for Schools

Bailey Biggerstaff

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

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Fall 2020

Winona State University

College of Education

Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

_____

CAPSTONE PROJECT

_____

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Attendance Interventions for Schools

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Bailey Biggerstaff

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

Capstone Project Supervisor: ____Mary Fawcett, Ph.D._____
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____   _____
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Approval Date: ___12.7.2020_____

Abstract

School attendance is a serious problem all schools face. Students who miss even just a few days of school each month are less likely to read proficiently, fail classes, or drop out of high school (Attendance Works, 2018b). Luckily, educators and other educational stakeholders can help to reduce the rates of absenteeism. It is essential to first identify the source of the problem, or why a child is missing school. Stakeholders should then implement interventions for absenteeism using a multi-tier system of support (MTSS). This literature review defines truancy and chronic absenteeism, identifies barriers which cause students to miss school, and finally offers suggestions for interventions using a multi-tiered systems approach.

Contents

Introduction

Education is often referred to as the great equalizer, meaning it allows individuals from all diversities and background an equal opportunity (ED, 2016). With that being said, many students face various barriers that reduce their school attendance rates leading to lack of equal education for all. The purpose of this research is to identify barriers that schools, families, and students face in regard to school attendance rates. This research then takes a deeper look at attendance barriers and identifies ways to appropriately address the needs of schools, families, and students using multi-tiered interventions. By raising attendance rates in schools, students are more likely to reach their fullest potential (ED, 2016).

Review of Literature

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), also known as Education Department or ED, students are considered chronically absent if they have missed fifteen or more school days per school year. During the 2015-2016 school year, more than seven million students in America missed fifteen or more school days (ED, 2016). To put this into perspective, students who have only missed about two school days a month during a nine-month school year add up to fifteen absent school days. How can educators help students get to school and why is missing school impactful?

Definition of Truancy and Chronic Absenteeism

Truancy and chronic absenteeism are both a matter of not being present in school, although the two terms have different definitions. Truancy is known as multiple unexcused absences, whereas chronic absenteeism is the accumulation of excused and unexcused absences (Attendance Works, 2016). When truancy occurs, the law is typically involved. When chronic absences occur, the school is typically the only system who intervenes (Attendance Works, 2016). To create simplicity, this literature review will use the terms truancy and chronic absenteeism when speaking in exact terms and will use the term absent or absenteeism interchangeably when speaking about lack of attendance in a universal manner.

Prevalence

It is widespread knowledge that students lose educational opportunities when they are absent from school. According to the Education Department (ED), students who are chronically absent during high school years are likely to drop out of school (2016). Additionally, students who drop out of high school due to lack of attendance are more likely to live in poverty, have

health issues, and be involved in the criminal justice system (ED, 2016). As educators, our goal

is to create a foundation for students to live happy, healthy, and successful lives. Data shows us

that this is only possible if students attend school.

Attendance Barriers

What are the barriers students face that limit them from attending school every day?

Students face many challenges in their life such as stress from school climate, family limitations,

health concerns, and social and emotional stress. There are many barriers limiting students from

getting to school every single day. It is important for schools to track attendance and determine

what causes students to miss school. A research study conducted by Brundage et al. asked

students their reasoning for missing school. They found that the leading causes for absenteeism

were academic disinterest, how much students value education, transportation, health and stress

(Brundage et al., 2017).

School Specific Barriers

More often than not, schools are quick to assume that the school climate or school staff is

not the problem creating a lack of attendance. Rather, it is assumed that there is an issue with the

individual student or their family. Schools often fail to accept that they are the barrier causing

students to miss school. Research shows that school itself is sometimes the reason students don't

come to school. According to Brundage et al., many students skip school because they feel

unsafe due to bullying and conflict with other students (2017). Students also skip school because

of the school climate (Brungade et al., 2017). School climate refers to the rules put in place,

discipline, and the overall environment in a school such as the cleanliness and supplies offered to

students. Additionally, students report skipping school because they feel stressed about

schoolwork and teachers (Brungade et al., 2017.

Family Specific Barriers

Attendance barriers also come from the issues of that families face. Many families who

are underprivileged may not have access to transportation. According to the results of a study on

absenteeism, Brundage et at. found that about 13% of students surveyed noted that access to

transportation effected their attendance (2017). When transportation becomes an issue, students

are less likely to come to school. This same study also found that seventeen percent of students

surveyed indicated that they were absent from school because they were doing adult

responsibilities such as working, taking care of younger siblings, or helping a family member

(Brundage et al., 2017). Additionally, Attendance Works (2018b) notes that, "barriers including

lack of a nearby school bus, a safe route to school or food insecurity make it difficult to go to

school every day" (p. 3). The information provided in research shows that family's struggles are

a large reason for lack of attendance.

Student Specific Barriers

Not only do students face attendance barriers created by the school or by their families,

they also have personal barriers limiting them from attending school. Many students who are

struggling with social and emotional health are less likely to come to school. According to

Brundage et at., about forty two percent of students surveyed indicated that personal stress,

depression, mental health, or school drama caused them to be absent from school (2017).

Students in this same study also indicated that general health was another reason hindering them

from attending schools (Brundage et al., 2017). For example, having a common cold, allergies,

medical appointments, or feeling overall ill are all considered under the category of general

health related reasons for missing school. Finally, many students admit to skipping school

because they don't find value in attending school or they prefer to spend their time doing

something else besides attending school (Brundage et al., 2017).

Attendance Interventions

Before attendance issues become a chronic problem, schools must take a proactive

approach. It is likely that a student who misses two or more school days the first month of school

will become chronically absent. School should monitor absenteeism on a daily basis and should

use a multi-tier systems approach to address attendance issues. By implementing interventions

for every student in the school, schools take a proactive stance against absenteeism. This is

considered a Tier 1, or universal approach (Attendance Works, 2018a). If schools are noticing

that students are missing more than two school days a month, it is appropriate to intervene with a

Tier 2 approach (Attendance Works, 2018a). Tier 2 approaches are typically implemented when

Tier 1 approaches were not effective, or if students are on track for becoming chronically absent.

If schools have students who have missed twenty percent of the school year, or about four school

days a month, schools must intervene with an intensive Tier 3 individualized approach

(Attendance Works, 2018a). Tier 3 interventions are the most intensive interventions for the

most in need students. Again, it is critical to intervene early utilizing a universal approach for all

students.

School Specific Interventions

Schools are more than likely to be involved in all attendance interventions, whether it be

involving the family or student specifically. Despite schools' constant involvement with

attendance interventions, there are specific interventions that can take place during the school

day or within the school system itself. This section of the literature review addresses

interventions that can take place within a school.

Tier 1 Interventions

Schools should implement school wide interventions to encourage one hundred percent

of students to attend school every day. According to Attendance Works (2018a), some examples

of Tier 1, or universal interventions, that can take place within a school include creating a

positive school climate and recognizing good or improved attendance. This could involve a clean

environment, equal and fair discipline when students do not obey rules, and bullying prevention.

Other interventions include creating curriculum that is engaging and applicable to students

interests and offering before or after school activities (Attendance Works, 2015). Another study

conducted by Marvul (2012) found that by offering extracurricular activities after school,

attendance is likely to increase.

Tier 2 Interventions

Tier 2 interventions should be implemented for students who have missed ten percent of

school days (Attendance Works, 2018a). Examples of Tier 2 approaches specific to schools may

include connecting chronically absent students with a mentor (Attendance Works, 2018a),

exposing students to their attendance records, connecting students with extracurricular activities,

and creating a time to check in with students to identify why they are missing school (Attendance

Works, 2015). Appendix A offers an example of a teacher survey. The purpose of this survey is

to uncover the root cause of why teachers believe a student is missing school. It is important to

remember that the intervention must fit the issue. By using teacher survey data, school

counselors and administrators can properly target the barrier leading to student's absenteeism. It is essential that attendance data is closely monitored while implementing Tier 2 interventions so improvements or declines in attendance can be noted.

Tier 3 Interventions

If a student's attendance does not show improvement after implementing Tier 1 and 2 approaches, schools must intervene with Tier 3 approaches. Most all Tier 3 interventions include involving the family, or an outside agency. See sections titled Student Specific Interventions and Family Specific Interventions for more details about Tier 3 interventions.

Family Specific Interventions

There are many difficulties that families face that hinder students school attendance. Because many families endure several challenges, it is appropriate to consider family interventions for students who are chronically absent. According to Eck, S.R. Johnson, Bettencourt, and S.L. Johnson, "Homelessness, housing instability, family obligations such as caring for younger siblings or elderly family members, and lack of a safe path to school are poverty-related barriers that prevent students from consistently attending schools" (2016, p. 90). This information tells us that family supports, and interventions are an essential step in getting students to school.

Tier 1 Interventions

As previously stated, Tier 1 interventions are school wide, universal interventions that all students benefit from. Tier 1 family inventions may include an orientation night before school starts where teachers and school staff have the ability to connect and build a relationship with

parents (Attendance Works, 2018a). Another Tier 1 family intervention is educating parents and

caretakers about the importance of attendance, what it means to be chronically absent, and the

lifelong effects of absenteeism (Attendance Works, 2018a). Lastly, schools should use

attendance data to make calls home every time a student is absent. Not only does this provide

reassurance that students are safe, but it also creates an opportunity to have a conversation with

parents or caretakers about why the child is absent (Attendance Works, 2015).

Tier 2 Interventions

Tier 2 family specific interventions should be put in place when a student misses two or

more school days a month, or if they have missed ten percent of the total days of school had

(Attendance Works, 2018a). Tier 2 interventions include addressing barriers with families and

provide families with what they need. For example, a family may need access to the local food

shelf, clothes, winter jackets, or gas money in order to get their child to school (Attendance

Works, 2018a). Another reason many students miss school is because they do not have adequate

means of transportation (Attendance Works, 2016). Schools can work with students and families

to help them identify means of transportation within their support system. In addition, school

counselors should sign an attendance agreement form or attendance contract with the family and

students (Attendance Works, 2015). An example of a Student Attendance Success Plan form can

be found in Appendix B. Another Tier 2 intervention comes from the School District of

Philadelphia. This school district sent postcards home to families of students who had missed

school, and some post cards sent to parents gave specific information about the students

attendance data (Rodgers et al., 2017). More about this intervention can be found in Appendix C.

Tier 3 Interventions

Tier 3 interventions should be implemented when progress is not made after the implementation of Tier 2 interventions, or when a student has missed twenty percent of school days (Attendance Works, 2018a). This is an appropriate time for school counselors to work directly with families and recommend them to an outside agency (Attendance Works, 2018a). This may also be a time when home visits become necessary (Railsback, J., 2014). The final option for Tier 3 family specific interventions would be involving authorities (Attendance Works, 2015). This option should only be implemented if all other interventions fail as it may cause the family to break their trust with the school.

Student Specific Interventions

In addition to school and family related barriers, students also have personal reasons as to why they may be missing school. As noted above, many students admit to missing school because of mental health and physical health. Students also admit to missing school because they do not find value in attending school every day (Brundage et al., 2017). This section of the literature review discusses ways in which schools and counselors can address student specific barriers that effect school attendance.

Tier 1 Interventions

Schools should take a universal approach to school attendance, also known as a Tier 1 intervention, to ensure that all students attend school every day. Some examples of Tier 1 student specific approaches include educating students about why coming to school is important. It is essential that students understand attendance expectations and are informed about why attendance is important (Attendance Works, 2015). In addition to educating students about the

importance of attendance, schools should also provide health interventions such as flu shots, health checkups, and dental services if at all possible (Attendance Works, 2015). For example, a local dentist office may offer to bring their services to the school which would allow students to have their teeth cleaned during the school day. The simplest, and possibly most effective way to raise school attendance is by building relationships with students (Attendance Works, 2015). This can be as simple as greeting students at the door each morning. School counselors should work to provide all students with college and career counseling services, as well. By helping students set goals for the future, school may hold a higher value in the life of a student which in turn will encourage them to be present at school everyday (Railsback, 2004).

Tier 2 Interventions

Tier 2 student specific interventions include closely monitoring attendance, as well as targeting student-teacher relationships. Often times, students who miss school two to three times a month are not aware of how quickly these missed days of school can add up. By targeting students who are at risk for chronic absenteeism, school faculty can work with students to track their attendance data. Making students aware of their attendance rates will likely improve their chances of attending school regularly (Attendance Works, 2015). Additionally, many schools have noted that a check-in intervention is highly effective when working to reduce absenteeism (Edwards, n.d.). Check-in interventions, sometimes referred to as Check & Connect, is something school counselors can deliver. Often times, school counselors may notice trends when checking in with students. Trends in barriers or student needs may lead to the development of a small group led by the school counselor (Edwards, n.d.).

Tier 3 Interventions

The final, least desired option for addressing chronic absenteeism typically involves referring students to an outside agency or law enforcement (Attendance Works, 2015). As previously stated, involving law enforcement should be a last resort option as it may affect the trust between the school and student. Tier 3 interventions should be implemented when Tier 2 interventions were ineffective.

Conclusion

By determining school, family, and student specific attendance barriers, school faculty and school counselors are able to create targeted interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools. This literature review gives examples of attendance related barriers and offers suggestions for ways in which schools can support students and families. By developing and implementing proper interventions for all, also known as Tier 1 supports, schools are likely to avoid chronic absenteeism. Within any suggested intervention, limitations exist. Some specific limitations to the interventions listed above are student to teacher ratios, school resources, and community resources. It is important to note that the barriers listen above is not an exhaustive list. Student face many other barriers, some of which may be unknown to educators and researchers at this time.

Discussion

It should be noted that the barriers and interventions listed in the literature review are not an exhaustive list. The barriers mentioned are the most common barriers listed amongst many research articles and do not necessarily include considerations of location, race, religion, or socioeconomic status. School stakeholders must consider the backgrounds of students when providing interventions to ensure that the intervention in appropriate. Not all interventions are appropriate for all populations.

It should be noted that students of color and those who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds have many more barriers in relation to school attendance than do white, middle-class or upper-class students (Ford & Triplett, 2019). According to Ford and Triplett, "Black students were 38% more likely, multiracial students were 34% more likely, Hispanics were 21% more likely, and American Indian students were 142% more likely than white students to be chronically absent" (2019). This data proves that race is another barrier that exists when considering chronic absenteeism in schools. As previously noted, school counselors, teachers, and administrators must consider the background of students they are serving to ensure they are meeting their needs while being culturally and racially sensitive. Some additional intervention's proven specifically for students of color include school's creating a partnership with other systems. According to Race Matters Institute (RMI), "Baltimore identifies 100-180 children a month whose families receive direct services and case management from Family Preservation works, providing interventions that can prevent chronic absenteeism" (RMI, 2013). This may serve as a Tier 2 intervention for families of students who are on track to becoming chronically absent. Additionally, Pittsburgh's Office of Child Development found that the implementation of home visits and programs that allow parents to learn more about supporting their child's need

were highly effective for students and families of color (RMI, 2013). Appendix D offers a graph

showing the risk students of color have in regard to school attendance.

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Appendix A: Teacher Survey

Worksheet: Understanding the root causes for student absenteeism

Use these questions to help identify the likely causes of absenteeism for a student who is chronically absent in your class. Understanding the root causes for missing too much school can help determine the best course of action. Is this something that you can help your student and his/her family overcome? Or is there an underlying issue that requires additional support, perhaps from the school social worker or guidance counselor?

Academic Conditions	
Is the student struggling academically? Consider what skills and content the student has missed as a result of his or her absences as well as other instructional needs.	Y / N
Does the student need accommodations to benefit from classroom instructions? (e.g. peer support, access to computer, breaks, material presented in different ways)	Y / N
Does the student have language or communication challenges?	Y / N
Does the student struggle with organizational tasks?	Y / N
Are there barriers to homework completion?	Y / N
Do you suspect that the student has an unidentified disability?	Y / N
Safety Concerns	
Have there been any reports of bullying?	Y / N
Is the student exposed to race, disability, cultural or LGBTQ biases?	Y / N
Social Dynamics	
Does the student get to avoid difficult social or academic situations by staying away from school?	Y / N
Are transitions difficult for the student? (e.g. entering the school building, moving from class to class)	Y / N
Home Situation	
Do the parents/guardians recognize the importance of and support regular school attendance?	Y / N
Are there problems in the home that contribute to frequent absences? (e.g., parental illness, homelessness, joblessness, child care, needed health or mental health services for parent/caregiver)	Y / N
Health Status	
Are there conditions in the classroom, cafeteria or other school areas that affect the student's health or safety? (e.g. mold or other asthma triggers, animal dander, food allergens)	Y / N
Does the student exhibit anxiety due to separation from parent / caregiver?	Y / N
Does the student require health or mental health-related treatment that interferes with attendance?	Y / N
School Culture	
Are there any clubs, programs or resources during the school day and after school that might help engage the student?	Y / N
Is there a caring adult at the school that could mentor the student?	Y / N
Student Voice	
Has the student identified the reasons for missing school?	Y / N
Parent Voice	
Have you met with the parent/caregiver to discuss attendance concerns?	Y / N
Has the parent/caregiver identified specific barriers to attendance?	Y / N
Are there cultural, language, or other types of barriers that require extra effort on the part of the school to work with the parent/caregiver?	Y / N
Attendance Barriers for Students with Identified Disabilities	
Has the IEP/504 team met recently to review and revise the student's educational plan?	Y / N
Are the instructional and behavioral supports the rights ones?	Y / N

Attendance Works

rev. 10/16/19
www.attendanceworks.org

(Attendance Works, 2019b).

Appendix B: Student Attendance Success Plan

MY ATTENDANCE SUCCESS PLAN

- I have been present_____days.
- I have been absent_____days.
- My goal is to improve my attendance. I will ensure that I miss no more than ____ days for the rest of the year. (*9 or fewer absences = satisfactory attendance*)

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES TO REACH MY ATTENDANCE GOALS

- I will make attending school every day a priority.
- I will keep track of my attendance and absences.
- I will set my alarm clock for _____a.m.
- I will attend school every day unless I'm truly sick with a temperature of 100 degrees or more.
- I will find a relative, friend or neighbor who can take me to school if I miss my bus.
- If I am absent, I will contact my teachers to find out what I missed.
- I will set up medical and dental appointments for weekdays after school. If I must make a medical appointment during the school day, I will try to attend school for the majority of the day.
- When I am struggling with a challenge that is keeping me from school I will confide in an adult at school and seek help.

To improve my attendance, I commit to the following:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

We will review progress to meet this goal in one month.

Student Signature:_____Date:_____

School Staff Signature:_____Date:_____

(Attendance Works, 2019a)

Appendix C: Post Cards

Exterior of all postcards

The School District of Philadephia
Office of Research and Evaluation
440 N. Broad St.
2nd Floor, Portal A
Philadelphia, PA 19130

To the Parent/Guardian of:
[Student First Name] [Student Last Name]
[Address]
[City], [State] [Zip]
[Unique Code]

Important School Attendance Information

Interior of encouragement mailer

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Dear Parent/Guardian of [Student Full Name]:

Attendance matters and we need your help this year. A few absences every month can add up to weeks of lost learning over the year. Missing school, whether for excused or unexcused reasons, disrupts a student's education.

You can play a big role in improving [Student First Name]'s attendance. If you have questions, please call (267)-570-3819 or email SDPattendanceproject.1@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Dr. William Hite
Superintendent
The School District of Philadelphia

ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Interior of encouragement + self mailer

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

Dear Parent/Guardian of [Student Full Name]:

Attendance matters and we need your help this year. [Student First Name] missed [Student Absences] day(s) of school last year [Multiplier Text]. A few absences every month can add up to weeks of lost learning over the year. Missing school, whether for excused or unexcused reasons, disrupts a student's education.

You can play a big role in improving [Student First Name]'s attendance. If you have questions, please call (267)-282-1155 or email SDPattendanceproject.2@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Dr. William Hite
Superintendent
The School District of Philadelphia

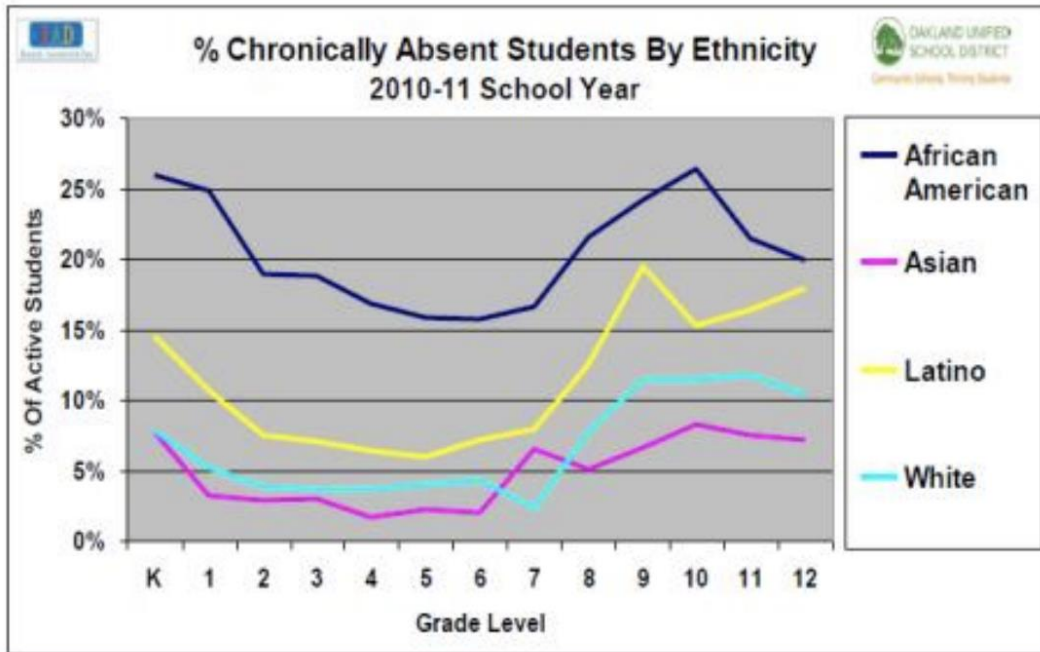## [STUDENT FIRST NAME]'S ABSENCE RECORD

[Student Absences] day(s)

[Student First Name] missed [Student Absences] day(s) [Multiplier].

[Student Full Name]
TOTAL ABSENCES LAST SCHOOL YEAR

(Rogers et al., 2017)

Appendix D: Chronic Absenteeism by Race in Oakland Unified School District

African American and
Latino Students Most Affected

% Chronically Absent Students By Ethnicity
2010-11 School Year

(RMI, 2013)