2015

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAM FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Jan R. Parrish
Virginia Commonwealth University

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAM FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Janice R. Parrish
B.S., Norfolk State University, 1982
M.S.W., Virginia Commonwealth University, 1989

Director: Jonathan Becker, J.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership
School of Education

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
April, 2015

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my relatives, colleagues and friends who stood in the gap for me throughout my doctoral studies. First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Jonathan Becker, without whom this long and arduous journey would not have been possible. I thank you for your patience, for having faith in me and for encouraging me to continue the path even when I sometimes lost my way. It has been a pleasure working with you. Secondly, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Barbara Driver, Dr. William Muth, and Dr. Melissa Abell for taking the time and effort in reading and critiquing my dissertation. I am so grateful for your time and support. Thirdly, I would like to thank my sister Kathy, who supported, encouraged, and cheered me on. Your words of encouragement throughout this journey were invaluable. Last but not least, I would like to thank my friend Ty, for always being a beacon of hope. Thank you for believing in me.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated, in loving memory, to my father, Henry Thomas Parrish, Sr. For all that you sacrificed in order to provide me this opportunity.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAM FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By Janice R. Parrish, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015

Major Director: Jonathan Becker, J.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership
School of Education

This study utilized a mixed methods design. The study was carried out in two phases. In the first phase of the study, a secondary data analysis of data were collected from a sample (n = 390) of middle and high school students who participated in a truancy pilot program launched during the 2012-2013 school year with follow-up services provided through June 2014. The sample was divided into two groups (treatment and control). The treatment group was diverted from court referral and participated in an intervention consisting of in-home counseling and case management services. The control group was referred to court and went through the traditional court process and received no treatment services. The effectiveness of the intervention was measured through the collection of pre and post intervention data consisting of the number of unexcused absences, disciplinary referrals, beginning and final grades in English, math, science, and social studies. As a final variable, retention and promotion rates were examined. The

effectiveness of the truancy reduction intervention was measured by the amount of reduction in these variables following the implementation of the treatment. Data in the first phase of the study were collected by the Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) in partnership with the school district and other agencies.

Further analysis was performed in Phase II of the study utilizing a single school case study design. Qualitative case study is an approach to research that allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. For this phase of the study, data were collected through a survey and a focus group using a sample of students from the treatment and control group of the truancy pilot program. The focus group was designed to gain insight from the voices of the students regarding their perceptions of the factors that influence truancy and the effectiveness of truancy intervention.

The statistical procedures used to examine the quantitative data included Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and Chi Square. Analysis of data collected in Phase I of the study revealed that there was no difference in the effect of treatment for students who were diverted from court to treatment services and those who went through the traditional court process and received no treatment. This finding was supported by results of the analysis of data from the survey and focus group. Results indicated that students did not perceive either invention as being more effective than the other in reducing their truancy. Further, results of the survey and focus group indicated that school factors, not family factors, had the greatest impact on the students' nonattendance. School factors such as safety, teacher and student relationships, and teacher expectations were identified as primary themes. The findings suggest that the truancy pilot intervention's focus on family factors as a means of reducing chronic truancy may have been focused in the wrong direction. .

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Truancy is not a new problem in the field of education. In fact, truancy has been a persistent problem since compulsory education laws were put into effect in the 19th century (Clay, 2004). Despite the long history of concern over truancy, the issue continues to raise serious concern due to its correlation to a number of negative student outcomes such as academic failure, school dropout, and delinquent behavior (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Mueller, Giacomazzi, & Stoddard, 2006). Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the rate of truancy cases throughout the United States (Heilbrunn, 2004). Due to this marked increase in truancy rates, the issue has been identified as a national concern. In a speech before the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, President Obama recognized truancy, as a predictor of school dropout, as a national problem and noted that dropping out of school is "a problem we can't afford to accept or ignore. The stakes are too high for our children, for our economy, for our country. . ." (Obama, 2010, para. 17).

Scope of the Problem: Truancy

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Juvenile Justice Bulletin on Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School (2001) on any given day, hundreds of thousands of students are absent from school. Many of these students are absent without an acceptable excuse and are considered truant. Anecdotal data suggest that truancy has reached epidemic proportions. However, due to the lack of a universal definition of

truancy and inconsistencies in tracking and reporting practices at the school, local and state levels, national data on the prevalence of truancy is limited (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazan, 2005). As a result, current national estimates of truancy are based on self-reported data.

Many large cities within the United States report staggering rates of truancy (OJJDP, 2001). In some cities, reports of daily truancy rates have reached as high as 30% (Garry, 1996). For example, Dekalb (1999) reported that in New York City, the nation's largest public school system, out of a population of one million students, approximately 150,000 were absent on any given day. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, 62,000 students are truant each day, which equates to about 10% of the total student enrollment (Garry, 1996). In Philadelphia, 20,000 students are reported to be truant daily (Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 2002). During the 2006-2007 school year, it was reported that 9% of students in Baltimore Public Schools were chronically truant (Sundius & Farneth, 2008). Although rates are higher in urban areas, truancy is also an issue for less populated states. For example, in Wisconsin, during the 2005-2006 school year, 45% of students were identified to have met the definition of truant (Richards, 2006). In Rhode Island during the school year of 2005-2006, 22% of students residing in Rhode Island's core cities were absent more than 20 days, and as a whole, 14% of the state was absent.

In addition to self-reported data from cities across the United States, the prevalence of truancy is also measured by the number of petitioned truancy cases filed; however, since most truancy cases never reach a petition status this data can only suggest the extent of the problem. From the period of 1995 to 2007 alone, the number of court-petitioned truancy cases processed by juvenile courts increased 67% (from 34,100 cases in 1995 to 57,000 cases in 2007 (Puzzanchera, Adams, & Sickmund, 2010). While truancy cases increased during this time

period for all age groups, the largest increase was seen for 16 and 17-year olds. According to Henry (2007), 11% of eight graders and 16% of 10th graders reported recent truancy.

Like most large cities across the United States, the problem of truancy is a serious concern in Virginia due to its correlation to the student dropout rate and its impact on on-time graduation rates across the state. Although the dropout rate in the commonwealth is lower than in many states, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) (n.d.) reports that in 2006-2007, of the 567,547 children enrolled in Virginia's public schools on September 30, 2006, 10,540 dropped out of school (1.86%) by the end of 2007.

Truancy Defined

Truancy, commonly defined as a student's unlawful absence from school without parental knowledge or consent, is often referred to as a symptom of a much larger problem. Often we find, when we dig deeper, that beneath truancy lies a wide variety of issues, ranging from children caring for younger siblings during school hours, performing various duties to provide for family needs, exposure to violence in the home, abuse and neglect (victimization), bullying and/or peer pressure at school, acting out behaviors and incorrigibility (Bell, Rosen, & Dyblacht, 1994; Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Reid, 1999).

One of the conceptual difficulties faced by schools, researchers, and others involved in the prevention of school truancy is that there is no universal definition of truancy (Reid, 2005). The definition of truancy not only varies from state to state but also from school division to school division (Lindstadt, 2005). The lack of a uniform definition across states and school districts prevents the ability to calculate national truancy prevalence rates which seriously limits what we know about the true extent of truancy (Chang & Romero, 2008). Another difficulty exists at the level of school district practice and policy. Among school divisions, differences

exist both in the definition of the behaviors that result in labeling a student a truant as well as in what definition of truancy is used in reporting truancy rates.

According to Lindstadt (2005), there are as many different criteria used to define what truancy is as there are ways to calculate the rate of truancy. For example, some schools accept a note or letter from a parent to excuse an absence, whereas other schools require a note from a medical professional. Many schools and school districts record absences as excused unless proven otherwise. In contrast, in some school districts all absences are considered unexcused unless proven otherwise. While some school districts only accept illness as an acceptable excuse for an absence, other school districts accept only family obligations or religious holidays as acceptable reasons for an absence. To further complicate matters, what constitutes an excused or unexcused absence may vary from school to school within the same school district (Lindstadt, 2005). Variation in how truancy is defined can lead to over and under-reporting of truancy, especially as it relates to tardiness and period absences. For example, schools may calculate the total number of times that a child is tardy to school or to a class period and count a specific number of occurrences as an unexcused absence; for example, three tardies may equal one unexcused absence (VDOE, 2005).

In Virginia, truancy is defined simply as "an unexcused absence from school" (VDOE, 2005, p. 3). Due to the location of this study and a state definition already in existence, the definition adopted for use in this study is that offered by the VDOE. According to the VDOE (2005, p. 3), since there is no single definition of truancy or chronic truancy, most people think of truant students as those who miss several days.

Truancy: Status Offense

Truancy is considered a status offense, defined as an act that is a crime due to the young age of the offender, but would not be illegal when committed by an adult (National Center for School Engagement [NCSE], 2006). The most common status offenses are running away from home, alcohol use, curfew violations, and ungovernability (NCES, 2006). In a study of status offenses and petitioned cases filed between 1995 and 2004 (OJJDP, 2008), it was reported that the number of petitioned status offense cases referred to juvenile courts increased 39%. Among these cases, the number of truancy cases increased 69%, curfew violation cases increased 38%, ungovernability cases increased 38%, and liquor law violation cases increased 17%, while the number of runaway cases remained relatively stable. In 2004, truancy cases made up the largest proportion of the petitioned status offense caseloads for juveniles of all races with the exception of American Indian/Alaska Native juveniles for whom liquor law violation cases constituted the greatest proportion of petitioned cases (OJJDP, 2008). In 2004, the source of referral varied according to the nature of the offense: schools referred 72% of truancy cases; law enforcement agencies referred 50% of all petitioned status offense cases involving runaways, curfew offenses, and alcohol law violations; and parents and/or guardians referred 42% of ungovernability cases. In 2004, truancy cases were the largest share of the adjudicated status offense caseload that resulted in out-of-home placement. Probation was the most restrictive disposition used in 52% of the petitioned status offense cases in 2004. Courts ordered probation in 61% of cases involving truancy (OJJDP, 2008). Between 1995 and 2004, the petitioned status offense caseload for girls increased 42% compared with a 37% increase in caseload for boys. In 2004, boys accounted for 56% of the total petitioned status offense caseload and 54% of truancy cases. In 2004, 60% of petitioned status offense cases involved a juvenile younger than age 16 at the

time of referral. Juveniles younger than age 16 accounted for 71% of truancy cases, 62% of runaway cases, 53% of curfew violation cases, and 31% of the alcohol law violation caseload.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (Boutilier & Cohen, 2009) asserts that the nation's current approach to addressing juvenile justice is not only costly, but is also, "discriminatory, dangerous, and ineffective" (p. 2). The foundation's *2008 Kids Count Essay and Data Brief* points out the negative consequences of exposing status offender youth, who have committed no crime, to the court system and possible confinement. It is reported that these youth "will achieve less educationally, work less, earn lower wages, fail more frequently to form enduring families, experience more chronic health problems (including addiction), and suffer more imprisonment" (p 2). Additionally, research supports that confinement is more likely to reinforce delinquent behavior in youth who are already at risk, and may also result in more delinquent skills than if the youth were treated individually in the community (Justice Policy Institute, 2009).

Truancy Diversion

Diversion is "an attempt to divert, or channel out, youth offenders from the juvenile justice system" (Boutilier & Cohen, 2009, p. 3). The concept of diversion is based on the theory that processing certain youth through the juvenile justice system may do more harm than good by inadvertently stigmatizing and ostracizing them for having committed relatively minor acts that might be more appropriately handled outside the formal juvenile justice system (Lundman, 1993). The primary objective of a diversion program is to divert youth from traditional forms of secure detention and confinement into the most appropriate alternative program or mode of supervision for their individual treatment needs (Austin, Johnson, & Weitzer, 2005).

An alternative view regards status offending as simply a precursor to more serious offending, thus requiring active intervention and control similar to that for delinquent offenders. Although ample evidence supports the notion that less serious forms of delinquency often

precede more serious delinquent acts (Elliott, 1994; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1995), the "precursor to delinquency" (Kelley, Rolf, Keanan & Delamarte, 1997, p. 36) view of status offending does not take into account the normal experimentation of childhood and adolescence or the diverse developmental pathways that can lead to serious delinquency.

In summary, research suggests that diverting certain populations of youth, most notably very young and first-time offenders, status offenders, youth who commit relatively petty crimes, and youth with mental health disorders, from formal court proceedings into alternative treatments may produce better outcomes than referring them to traditional forms of secure confinement and detention. Evaluations of diversion programs have produced varied results. Although some studies have shown diversion programs are successful in reducing subsequent deviance (Davidson, Redman, Admur, & Mitchell, 1990; Krisberg & Austin, 1993; Shelden, 1999), others have shown no impact and some programs have even been shown to have a negative impact. Early studies (Elliott & Blanchard, 1975; Klein, 1976) found little or no difference in recidivism between diverted and nondiverted youth. Some research suggests diversion actually increased recidivism (Lincoln, 1976). Others have found that interventions, regardless of the setting, increased perceived labeling and self-reported delinquency among youth (Elliott, Dunford, & Knowles, 1978; Lincoln, 1976; Lipsey, Cordray, & Berger, 1981).

Diversion practices generally incorporate the use of behaviorism, social learning, or cognitive behavioral models designed to reinforce social behavior skills. Treatment modalities may include any of the following: individual therapy, anger management, problem solving, behavior modification, group therapy, multimodal treatments, multisystemic therapy, and individualized case planning.

Several family and community-based treatment strategies have been evaluated and found to yield positive outcomes when used to divert status offenders into effective treatment to address their individual mental health and behavioral needs. Multisystemic therapy (MST) is an in-home model in which therapists work with families to empower parents and improve their effectiveness by identifying strengths and developing natural support systems and removing barriers. Emphasis is placed on promoting behavior change in the child's own environment. Services are more intensive than traditional family therapies and include several hours of treatment per week rather than the traditional 50 minutes. The focus is on developing an indigenous support network for the family in which the family is empowered to handle difficulties with the child; and the child is empowered to cope with family, peer, school, and neighborhood problems. MST was found to be one of the most effective treatments for status offenders (Kamradt, 2000). Evaluations of the program have yielded significant short and long-term improvements in school, home, and family functioning and recidivism for delinquent youth (Kamradt, 2000; Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division, 2003).

Truancy Pilot Model

Research suggests that the issue of truancy needs to be approached in a holistic manner that acknowledges the student within the context of their family (Catalano, Loeber, & McKinney, 1999; Reimer & Dimock, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). In order to address attendance issues fully, any family-based needs that are contributing to the issue must be identified. Typically, family-based interventions are used to address family dynamics or to connect families with community services. The issues surrounding family dynamics can range from a simple lack of parenting skills to dealing with more serious issues of child neglect or violence in the home. Due to the strong influence of the family on a child's education and

overall well-being, comprehensive truancy interventions must attend to issues pertaining to family dynamics (Kumpfer, Alvarado, & Whiteside, 2003).

Multisystemic therapy (MST), which targets all environmental systems impacting the problem behavior, can be effective at addressing juvenile issues in the home, school, and community (Thompson, Bender, Windsor, & Flynn, 2009; Timmons-Mitchell, Bender, Kishna, & Mitchell, 2006). There is some evidence that family skill training programs and brief family therapies are effective at increasing parental supervision and monitoring, facilitating effective communication of expectations and family values, and improving positive family time together (Lochman, 2000). While some prevention programs offer parent education, family education, family support or in-home family preservation (programs implemented to help parents who are in crisis, and in danger of having their children removed from the home), research does not support these interventions as being effective when utilized with high-risk teens (Kumpfer et al., 2003). Regardless of the specific therapeutic approaches used, research suggests that home-based therapy is more effective at addressing family issues than therapy conducted in an individual or multifamily/peer group setting (Lay, Blanz, & Schmidt, 2001; Thompson et al., 2009).

The school division in partnership with the local family assessment and planning team (FAPT) comprised of representative agencies including the departments of social services, mental health and court services agreed to participate in a truancy pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness of a truancy intervention in reducing unexcused absences among middle and high school students. The truancy pilot was launched during the 2012-2013 school year beginning September 2012 and ending October 2013, with follow up case management services provided through June 2014 for both treatment and control group participants. Figure 1 is an illustration

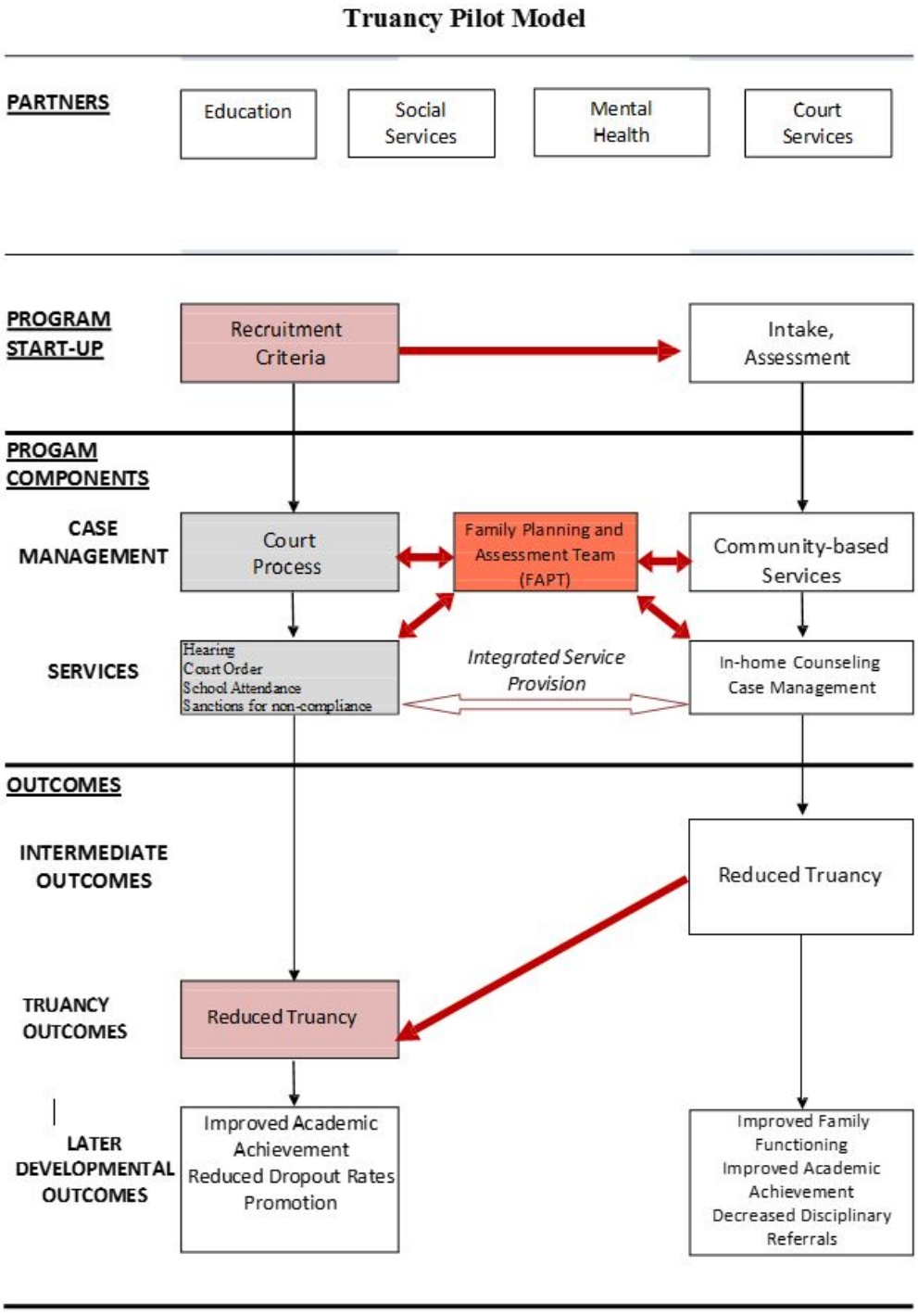

Figure 1. Truancy pilot model.

of the truancy pilot model. It should be acknowledge that this model was adapted from (Liberman,Cahill & Cramer,2007) Interim Evaluation of the Pilot Program of the Truancy Case Management Intervention in the District of Columbia. The collaboration between the school division and the community agencies in developing this truancy pilot was based on an understanding that interagency partnership and collaboration is a key component to successfully addressing truancy. That is, schools cannot address truancy problems alone, and the coordination between schools and community agencies may also help to address other family needs.

The underlying assumption of the truancy pilot is that truancy is not merely a symptom of the individual student's behavior, but is often rooted in the family and that family needs in many areas (e.g., child care, mental health, substance use, unemployment, and poverty) create barriers that cause children to be truant. Failure to address these barriers can often lead to a progression toward worse outcomes which, for the child, can lead to school disengagement, truancy, academic failure, school drop-out, and formal involvement in the juvenile court system.

The expectation of the FAPT in developing the truancy pilot, therefore, was that providing services to address family needs and to improve family functioning could be an effective way to reduce truancy. Improvement in family functioning was considered an interim outcome for the truancy pilot, which in turn, was expected to reduce truancy. At the same time, it was thought that the program might also prevent the need for formal referrals to the juvenile court system and ultimately to social services that could lead to the removal of the child from the home. For the school division, the truancy pilot was an intervention to stop existing truant behaviors; improved academic performance was expected to coincide with improved daily attendance.

The truancy pilot represents the school division and FAPT's efforts to begin looking at an alternative approach to addressing chronic truancy. For this truancy pilot study, the school division and the community partners that make up the FAPT took a family-centered approach to addressing chronic truancy among middle and high school students.

Identification of Students for the Truancy Pilot

For an absence to be considered excused, the parent or guardian must provide either written documentation or call the school and provide a verbal explanation for the absence within 24 hours of the absence. All absences which are not followed up by written documentation or verbal explanation from the parent are considered unexcused. Excusable absences are allowed for illness, court appearances, religious holidays, and attendance at a funeral of a relative.

The criteria for identifying a child as truant is established by state regulation and is defined in the Code of Virginia under section 22.1-254, which states that a child who is subject to compulsory attendance who is absent without excuse seven times in a school year may be referred to the juvenile court (Virginia General Assembly, 2012). Truant students who met the criteria to have a child in need of supervision (CHINS) petition filed against them were referred to the court services department of the local juvenile court. For the students referred during the truancy pilot, the intake worker and FAPT also reviewed the referred student's past year school attendance to determine if a pattern of chronic truancy existed.

When a truancy case is referred to juvenile court, it is reviewed by the court services intake worker. The intake worker determines how the case will proceed. Status offense cases, such as truancy, may be diverted from a court hearing if specific criteria are met. The decision to divert a case is at the discretion of the intake worker. Criteria for diversion is established through the department of juvenile justice and intake personnel make determinations regarding

diversion eligibility based on the established criteria. A truancy case was not deemed to be eligible for diversion if the child had a prior truancy case diverted, if the child had criminal charges pending, or if the child had a history of adjudicated charges.

For the truancy pilot, it was necessary to establish a procedure for routing truancy cases to FAPT to be screened and consented for participation in the truancy pilot. During the period of the truancy pilot, all truancy cases referred to the court services department were received by the intake worker and were screened for eligibility for diversion. If the case met the criteria for diversion, the parent and child were contacted by the intake worker and were offered the opportunity to have the case diverted from a court hearing. If the parent and child agreed to having the case diverted, participation in the truancy pilot was offered as one of several diversion alternatives to going to court. If the parent agreed to consider participation in the truancy pilot, the case was deemed as eligible for diversion and was forwarded to FAPT. Upon receipt of the truancy case, the FAPT coordinator then set up a meeting between the parent and child and FAPT committee. At the FAPT meeting, information regarding the truancy pilot was discussed with the parent and child including services to be provided. During this meeting truancy cases sent to FAPT were screened for eligibility to participate in the truancy pilot using criteria established by FAPT.

Students who met the criteria to have their cases diverted from court intervention and who consented to participate in the treatment services which included in-home counseling and case management services served as the treatment group for the study. The criteria for participating in truancy pilot services as part of the treatment group included:

- The truancy case had to meet the criteria established by the intake department to be eligible for diversion.

- The parent and child could not be receiving similar services offered by FAPT through another public or private service provider.
- The parent and child were asked to provide written consent to participate in the truancy pilot, which included an agreement to cooperate with the funded services of intensive in-home counseling, case management, referral to other services if needed and to attend scheduled FAPT meetings.
- The parent and child were asked to consent to the collection of specific demographic data and academic measures regarding the child during the course of the truancy pilot and follow-up period, and to the use and release of the data collected for the purpose of research as specified in the consent and assent.
- The parent and child were asked to consent to the administration of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS) a requirement for all families receiving services through the FAPT process. The CANS was used to match a family's needs with appropriate services.
- The parent and child had to speak English as no service providers were available that spoke other languages.

If the parent and child agreed to participate in the treatment group for the truancy pilot, they were given the option of either signing consent to participate at the conclusion of the meeting or taking the consent home and returning it within 1 week of the date of the meeting. Those children who met the criteria, and FAPT received parent consent and child assent to participate in the treatment group for the truancy pilot, went through intake, assessment, service referrals, and case management much as with other community referral cases served by FAPT. In many ways, the truancy cases operated as simply an alternate source of referrals for FAPT. Truancy pilot

participation involved completion of standard intake assessments. Service providers were contracted to provide a specified number of hours of services to families each month. Service providers completed a family assessment form to identify service needs, and developed a family service plan (FSP) that outlined the family's goals and the requirements of the truancy pilot within 15 days of receiving a truancy case referral. Service providers referred students and families to county internal programs and/or external programs to address service needs that fell outside of the services provided through FAPT (i.e., housing, substance abuse, physical health-care services, and domestic and dating violence support programs). Family service plans were reviewed by FAPT every 30 days to update goals and evaluate progress.

At the end of each month, following FAPT review and approval, additional service hours were allotted and funded. For the truancy pilot, these regularly scheduled meetings also served as the key forum for identifying problems with the truancy pilot and making any necessary modifications. Case management services were considered to be a key service provision of FAPT services. Case management services involved a significant amount of monitoring of the child's attendance, ensuring that the child arrived for school, providing transportation when the child missed the bus and had no alternative means of transportation to get to school, checking on the child during the school day to ensure that the child remained at school, meeting with teachers and administrators to discuss the child's grades, assignments and behavior and making referrals to other community services based on the needs of the family. In addition to case management services, parents and children participating in the treatment group for the truancy pilot received intensive in-home counseling through the service provider with the goal of improving parenting skills, parent and child communication and incentives for school attendance and overall family functioning.

If the child was not eligible for participation in the treatment group for the truancy pilot because criteria had either not been met or the parent or child indicated that they did not wish to participate, the case was referred back to the intake worker to provide another diversion alternative or to link the parent and child to other needed services.

Truancy cases received by the intake worker that did not meet criteria for diversion were noted as ineligible for diversion, a CHINS petition was filed and the case was referred to FAPT. The intake worker then contacted the parent and child to make them aware that a CHINS petition had been filed and that the case had been referred to FAPT. Upon receipt of the case, the FAPT coordinator then scheduled a meeting between the parent, child, and FAPT.

During the FAPT meeting, the truancy pilot was discussed with the parent and child along with the criteria for participation in the control group for students going through the regular court process. Parent and child consent for the collection of demographic data (name, age, gender, ethnicity, grade-level) and academic measures (number of unexcused absences, grades, disciplinary referrals, and retention and promotion status pre and postcourt referral) regarding the child was discussed. The parent and child were also screened for any current involvement in treatment services such as outpatient counseling and/or in-home counseling similar to services provided to the treatment group for the truancy pilot. The parent and child were also asked to complete a CANS assessment, which matched the identified family and child needs between the participants in both the treatment and control groups. If the parent and child agreed to participate in the control group for the truancy pilot and for the collection and use of the data, the parent and child were given the option of either signing consent to participate at the conclusion of the meeting or taking the consent home and returning it within 1 week of the date of the meeting.

Criteria for participating in the control group of the truancy pilot included:

- The truancy case had been deemed ineligible for diversion from court by the intake worker.
- The parent and child were not participating in similar services offered by FAPT through another public or private service provider.
- Parent and child were asked to consent to the administration of the CANS.
- The parent and child were asked to provide written consent to participate in the control group for the truancy pilot, which included consent for the collection of specific demographic data regarding the child during the course of the truancy pilot and follow-up period and to the use and release of the data collected for the purpose of research as specified in the consent form.

Students who met the criteria and FAPT received parent consent and child assent to participate in the truancy pilot were administered the CANS. The administration of the CANS is a requirement for all families receiving services through the FAPT process, but for this group the CANS was used to compare the family and child service needs between the treatment and control group. This group of students followed the traditional court referral process which required the student and parents to appear for a hearing before the judge. The students were subject to all disposition or probationary options applied to delinquent youth, including mandated services, community service, and incarceration for any violation of the order of the court mandating that the student attend school with no unexcused absences.

The control group's attendance and compliance with the court's order to attend school was monitored by the school social worker that initiated the CHINS petition. If the student failed to comply with the court's order, and continued to be absent unexcused from school, the

school social worker filed a Motion for Show Cause with the court and the student and the parents were summoned to appear before the court. Students found guilty of violating the court's order received sanctions from the court, which included, completion of community service hours, placement in detention, and participation in mandated services such as substance abuse treatment, mental health assessment and treatment if recommended and participation in and successful completion of court sponsored support groups. If the court mandated participants in the control group to treatment/counseling services similar to those offered to the treatment group participants through FAPT, the school social worker notified FAPT and the student and any data collected regarding the student was removed from the control group. In some cases, parents were ordered to complete a mental health assessment and treatment if indicated, as well as parenting classes and other services deemed appropriate by the court.

School social workers provided follow-up services for treatment and control group students when the truancy pilot ended as part of transition services. School social workers held weekly group meetings with these students from October 2013 through June 2014. Table 1 describes the services provided.

Statement of Problem

The mental and physical health problems and family dysfunction experienced by truant children are often expressed in negative school behaviors such as bullying, class disruption, physical aggression, social withdrawal or isolation, substance abuse, and academic failure. Due to the seriousness of some of the issues faced by chronic truants, many need significant support to get them back on track. Unfortunately, efforts to address truant behavior are often sanction and procedure-oriented with truant children being treated as disciplinary problems. However, Heilbrunn (2004) points out, interventions that do not target the root causes of such behavior fail

Table 1

Services Provided

Treatment group	Control group
Diverted from court hearing	Hearing before judge
In-home counseling	Court-ordered school attendance
Case management (daily attendance monitoring, transportation to/from school, homework completion assistance	School attendance monitoring
Thirty-day progress review	Court sanctions (curfew, community service, detention, probation, referral for mental health assessment, substance abuse asssessment/treatment, if recommended
	Follow-up services
	Sixty-day case review

to address the problems that can put many chronically truant children on the path to the juvenile justice system. To address this problem, a number of community-based, family-centered treatment models are being utilized as a means of diverting youth, particularly status offers, away from the juvenile justice system with positive results (Butler, Baruch, Hickey, & Fonagy, 2011; Gordon, Graves, & Arbuthnot, 1995; Henggeler, Melton, & Smith, 1992; Sexton, & Turner, 2010; Winokur Early, Hand, Blankenship, & Chapman 2012). Among these, functional family therapy (FFT), parenting with love and limits (PLL), multisystemic therapy (MST), and other programs seek not only to provide an alternative to exposing youth to the juvenile justice system, and possible confinement, but also have as a goal to strengthen the family system. Research suggests that there is strong empirical evidence of the effectiveness of many of these programs.

As a result, programs such as MST have been designated as evidence-based or model programs through the OJJDP.

There is also evidence that supports the effectiveness of in-home family counseling services in reducing juvenile recidivism (Lipsey et al., 2010). In a recent meta-analysis, Lipsey and colleagues (2010) found that family counseling programs showed positive effects on recidivism in general—and although model programs produced varying degrees of positive results, "some no-name programs produced effects even larger than those found for the model programs" (p. 26). Yet, not all family counseling programs have achieved positive results. Most, however, have not been fully evaluated. In their meta-analysis of systematic reviews on correctional rehabilitation, Lipsey and Cullen (2007) found that although there have been studies of such evidence-based programs, few separated out the effects of community-based treatment such as in-home counseling and MST versus court referral. In addition, few outcome evaluations specifically examined the impact of family-focused interventions (Lipsey & Cullen, 2007). This study sought to remedy this gap in the literature.

Rationale for Study of Problem

This study was designed to contribute to the truancy intervention literature in a number of ways. First, this study tested the underlying theory of a multimodal truancy intervention approach to addressing chronic truancy. This theory postulates that a community-based, family-focused intervention approach, which involves collaboration among the school district, human services, court services, mental health and law enforcement could offer an appropriate alternative to putting truant youth who are considered status offenders on a path to the juvenile justice system and possible incarceration and out of home placement. The use of these sanctions is almost never appropriate for certain populations, including status offenders, young and vulnerable offenders, first-time offenders, youth who commit nonserious offenses, and offenders with involved

parents or strong community-based support systems (Austin et al., 2005). Second, this study involved a population of truants in a large school division. The availability of information regarding the students referred for truancy intervention permitted careful examination of the factors that influence truant behavior and lead these young people to the court system. Third, collaboration among multiple agencies through FAPT made it possible to document service delivery. Fourth, using appropriate statistical techniques, intervention effectiveness was evaluated using a mixed methods design that permitted more in-depth analysis. Finally, results of this study will be used to inform policy, practice, and funding decisions within the school division and will extend the research regarding effective diversion programs to serve truant youth.

Statement of Purpose

The general lack of methodologically sound, empirical studies conducted to determine truancy program effectiveness continues to impede our understanding of how to best serve the growing numbers of truant youth. Studies that evaluate the effectiveness of truancy interventions are needed to determine whether truancy intervention programs successfully serve their intended populations and meet projected goals by improving attendance and academic outcomes for truant youth. In these times of diminished financial resources, government agencies and private funders are limiting their investments to those programs and practices that have clearly demonstrated some success. By studying those evidenced-based programs that have been proven to reduce or prevent truancy, practitioners and policymakers will avoid recreating the wheel and will have more time to spend on improving services and engaging in cost/benefit analysis. In addition, the criteria used to identify whether program models and practice approaches are proven or promising rests largely on the rigor of their evaluation design. It is imperative in this

environment to collect and evaluate data using empirical methodology to allow for generalization of results.

Literature/Research Background

Truancy has been identified as one of the top five major problems in U.S. public schools (Garry, 1996). School systems throughout the United States report thousands of unexcused absences each day with some reporting truancy rates as high as 30% (Garry, 1996). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2006a), 19% of students in fourth grade and 20% of students in eighth grade reported missing 3 or more days of school in the preceding month. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2006a) reports that patterns of absenteeism remained relatively stable between 1994 and 2005. At the same time, statistics available from the U.S. Department of Justice report that the number of truancy cases petitioned and handled in juvenile courts increased 69% between 1995 and 2004, and accounted for the largest proportion (35%) of status offense petitions handled by the juvenile courts (Stahl, 2008). Truancy is a precursor to juvenile delinquency and dropping out of school. Research shows that students who are truant are more likely to engage in criminal activity including burglaries, auto theft, vandalism, and substance abuse (OJJDP, 2008). Once truants enter adulthood, they are less likely to attend college, or be employed, and are more likely to receive public assistance or be incarcerated, which in turn, affects society as a whole (Dryfoos, 1990; Gary, 1996). Given the social and financial costs as well as the ramifications for the individual students, programs to prevent and reduce chronic truancy must be carefully investigated to ensure their efficacy. There is no doubt about the value of research that focuses on school and district initiatives and interventions, as this is where truancy is first identified.

Research Questions

The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study.

1. Are there differences in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment?

H_{01}: There is no statistically significant difference in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treat.

H_{A1}: There is a statistically significant difference in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment.

2. What other effects did the treatment have?

a. Are there differences in academic outcomes for English, math, science and social studies between the two groups?

H_{02}: There is no statistically significant difference in academic outcomes for English, math, science and social studies between the two groups.

H_{A2}: There is a statistically significant difference in academic outcomes for English, math, science and social studies between the two groups.

b. Are there differences in discipline referrals between the two groups?

H_{03}: There is no statistically significant difference in disciplinary referrals between the two groups.

H_{A3}: There is a statistically significant difference in disciplinary referrals between the two groups group.

c. Are there differences in retention and promotion rates between the two groups?

H_{04}: There is no statistically significant difference in retention rates between the two groups.

H_{A4}: There is a statistically significant difference in retention rates between the two groups.

3. What are the student's perceptions of the truancy reduction interventions?

Summary

This mixed methods study was designed to examine the effectiveness of a treatment intervention on attendance and academic measures (grades, discipline referrals, and promotion/retention outcome) of middle and high school students. Specifically of interest was whether or not diverting students from court referral to treatment services involving in-home counseling and case management would decrease student's unexcused absences and improve academic outcomes. Data for this study were collected in two phases of a truancy pilot study implemented by the school division in partnership with local community agencies. Quantitative data were collected during the first phase of the truancy pilot implementation and a secondary analysis of this data was performed. To expand upon the quantitative data and to answer the related research questions, in phase II of the study, a focused, single-school, mixed methods case study with data collected through a survey and focus group was conducted.

Definition of Terms

Attendance. The actual school attendance of a pupil during the school day as defined by the laws and regulations of the state board of education (Virginia State Code, 22.1-254).

Attendance conference. A face-to-face meeting, at a minimum, after the sixth unexcused absence among school staff, parents, and student (if appropriate). The conference may include, if necessary, community representatives to discuss the current attendance plan and make modifications to support regular school attendance.

Attendance plan. Action steps developed by a school representative, parent, and student (if appropriate) to engage the student in regular school attendance. The plan shall identify academic, social, emotional, and familial barriers that impede daily attendance along with positive strategies to support regular attendance. This plan may include school-based activities or suggested referrals to community supports, or both.

Average daily attendance (ADA). Total number of student attendance days divided by the total number of days in the school year. ADA determines the school district's revenue income.

Chronic truancy. Virginia Code §22.1-254 states that a student is considered to be chronically truant when he accumulates six unexcused absences.

Excused absence. According to the Virginia Department of Education (2005), a student's absence from school is considered excused if it falls into one of the following approved reasons: illness or injury, death of an immediate family member, medical or dental appointment, court appointment, religious holiday, quarantine, or educational experience.

Family assessment and planning team (FAPT). Community-based team that assesses the needs of families in the community and links them to services.

Family/community factors. The circumstances and environment that is present in a student's home and/or community can influence whether or not a student attends school.

Individual factors. Personal characteristics and/or conditions influence whether or not a student attends school.

In-home counseling. A community-based mental health service for children. In-home counseling provides a family-based approach to therapy, parent education, case management, and crisis resolution for children at risk for delinquent behavior and out-of-home placement. Intensive in-home services are designed to restore the family to a successful level of functioning.

School factors. The structure, policies, environment, and staff that make up a school influence whether or not a student attends school.

Socioeconomic status (SES). SES is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and control are emphasized. Furthermore, an examination of SES as a gradient or continuous variable reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources. SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy.

Truancy. The Virginia Code §22.1-258 states that a student is considered truant whenever the student fails to report to school on a regularly scheduled school day and no indication has been received that the student's parent is aware of and supports the student's absence.

Unexcused absence. An absence where (a) either the student misses his scheduled instructional school day in its entirety or misses part of the scheduled instructional school day without permission from an administrator, and (b) no indication has been received by school personnel within 3 days of the absence that the student's parent is aware and supports the absence, or the parent provides an excuse that is unacceptable to the school administration. An administrator may change an unexcused absence to an excused absence when the parent has provided an acceptable excuse for the student's absence or there are extenuating circumstances. Absences resulting from suspensions shall not be considered unexcused.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with an examination of the historical context of truancy in relation to compulsory education laws. Next, the definition of truancy and the conceptual difficulties in calculating national and local school division truancy prevalence rates is examined, followed by discussions of the effect of excused and unexcused absences, reasons for nonattendance, and characteristics of truant students and risk factors associated with truancy. Finally, this literature review concludes with a review of evidence-based intervention and prevention programs aimed at reducing truancy.

Historical Context of Truancy

Compulsory education began in the United States over 150 years ago when Massachusetts passed the first compulsory attendance law in 1852 (Katz, 1976). This law required children between the ages of 8 and 14 to attend public school at least 12 weeks, six of which had to be consecutive if the school remained open for that time. Although not well defined, the law contained penalties for enforcement as well as exemptions (Katz, 1976). Any parents who kept their children out of school were subject to a fine. The law exempted children with mental or physical health problems and children receiving equivalent education by other means. By 1918, every state in the United States had enacted compulsory attendance laws. Prior to the passage of compulsory attendance laws, the existing structure of education was based on voluntary schooling, where parents held the authority to decide whether their children would attend school. Schooling was not accessible to all children. In the United States, education was

available mostly to the wealthy and focused primarily on religious teachings. The compulsory education laws enacted in the latter part of the 19th century represented a move away from voluntary schooling and began an expansion of state authority over the education of children. This movement spurred the establishment of a publicly supported system of education referred to as "common schools." The belief that public schools were created to serve the needs of poor children hindered the acceptance of the idea that publicly supported schools could and should exist for all children, regardless of social class, gender, religion, ethnicity, or country of origin (Cremin, 1957).

Despite opposition, state after state began to adopt systems of common or public schools. The requirements for education were spelled out in each state's constitution; however, these requirements varied from state to state. For example, not all states required children to start or remain in school beyond a specific age, and some states permitted children to miss portions of the school year, particularly, if the children were needed at home to assist in harvesting crops. In some states the penalty for a child considered truant was reform school, while in other states truant children did not face legal penalties. In most states, children with physical and mental disabilities were exempt from mandated school attendance. Many states also permitted equivalent alternative education. In some states, an examination was required as proof of equivalence, while some states had more vague standards of equivalency. Other states required only that the school be open to public inspection. Due to the lack of clarity in state standards and requirements, enforcement of compulsory attendance varied significantly among states.

Between 1900 and 1930, compulsory attendance laws had been transformed into enforceable statutes and were well integrated into the system of public education. These statutes, not only mandated school attendance but also the hiring of truant officers in schools and defined

their role in the enforcement of compulsory attendance. By 1920, compulsory attendance was being more consistently complied with, however, enforcement continued to vary among states. From 1900 to 1930, the establishment of attendance offices in schools and the upgrade in the professional qualifications of truant officers systematized the practice of preventing truancy. As stated by F.V. Bermejo (1923), a supporter of the attendance officer's role:

the aim of the attendance service should be to protect the child from any interference in securing his educational birthright. Compulsion for the few willful violators is tolerated, and curative and remedial measures resorted to, but service to the child its watchword, prevention its motto, and regeneration its goal (Katz, 1976 p. 22).

By the 1950s, court cases such as *State v. Bailey* and *Prince v. Massachusetts* had affirmed the state's authority to mandate and enforce compulsory attendance in the best interest of the child and in the interest and welfare of the state. In the case of *Prince v. Massachusetts* the U.S. Supreme Court declared: "Acting to guard the general interest in youth's well-being, the state as *parens patriae* may restrict the parent's control by requiring school attendance, regulating or prohibiting the child's labor, and in many other ways" (Gee & Sperry, p. 20). In other words, parent's authority could not preempt that of the state; therefore, children were mandated to attend school whether their parents supported their attendance or not.

Challenges to Compulsory Attendance Laws

The issue of the extent of the states' authority in regulating education was a central issue in two legal challenges to compulsory school attendance in the 20th century. In the cases of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* and *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, the question was who should exercise the most control over the content and manner of the child's education, the state or the parent. In the case of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters,* the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the compulsory school

attendance law enacted by the state of Oregon "unreasonably interfered with the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of their children." The ruling upheld the right of private schools to exist and the parents' right to oversee their children's education. The court's ruling in this case limited the state's authority to standardize its instruction to public schooling. At the same time, however, the court's ruling affirmed the constitutionality of compulsory school attendance:

> No question is raised concerning the power of the State reasonably to regulate all schools, to inspect, supervise and examine them, their teachers and pupils; to require that all children of proper age attend some school, that teachers be of good moral character and patriotic disposition, that certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship must be taught, and that nothing be taught which is manifestly inimical to the public welfare. (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*)

In the 1972 case of *Wisconsin v. Yoder,* the Amish religious group challenged the constitutionality of the Wisconsin compulsory attendance law on the grounds that it violated their First Amendment right to a free exercise of religion granted to them under the 14th Amendment. The Amish sought an exemption of compulsory attendance for Amish children beyond the eighth grade, as the Wisconsin compulsory attendance law mandated attendance until age 16. The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in this case granted Amish parents a religious exemption from Wisconsin's compulsory attendance law for their children who had completed eight grades of schooling. While the court's ruling placed a limit on the state's power to compel attendance, the constitutionality of the compulsory attendance statute was upheld.

Compulsory Attendance in Virginia

The first compulsory attendance law was passed in Virginia in 1908 and was last updated in 2006. The Code of Virginia §22.1-254.1 mandates

> that every parent, guardian, or other person in the Commonwealth having control or charge of any child who will have reached the fifth birthday on or before September 30 of a school year and who has not passed the eighteenth birthday shall, during the period of each year the public schools are in session and for the same number of days and hours per day as the public schools, send such child to a public school or to a private, denominational or parochial school, or have such child taught by a tutor or teacher of qualifications prescribed by the Board of Education and approved by the division superintendent or provide for home instruction of such child.

Primary responsibility for identifying students who are not attending school lies with schools. In 1980, the Virginia General Assembly added section 22.1-259 to the Code of Virginia which states that

> every teacher in every school in the Commonwealth shall keep an accurate daily record of attendance of all children in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Board of Education. Such records shall, at all times, be open to any officer authorized to enforce the provisions of this article who may inspect or copy the same and shall be admissible in evidence in any prosecution for a violation of this article as prima facie evidence of the facts stated therein.

Section 22.1-258 of the Code of Virginia spells out the procedure that is to be followed for enforcement of compulsory attendance and states as follows:

> Whenever any pupil fails to report to school for a total of five scheduled school days for the school year and no indication has been received by school personnel that the pupil's parent is aware of and supports the pupil's absences and a reasonable effort to notify the parent has failed, the school principal or his/her designee shall make a reasonable effort to ensure that direct contact is made with the parent, either in person or through telephone conversation, by the attendance officer to obtain an explanation for the pupil's absence and to explain to the parent the consequences of continued nonattendance. The attendance officer, the pupil, and the pupil's parent shall jointly develop a plan to resolve

> the pupil's nonattendance. Such plan shall include documentation of the reasons for the pupil's nonattendance.

If the pupil is absent an additional day after direct contact with the pupil's parent and the attendance officer has received no indication that the pupil's parent is aware of and supports the pupil's absence, the attendance officer shall schedule a conference within 10 school days with the pupil, his parent, and school personnel, which conference may include other community service providers to resolve issues related to the pupil's nonattendance. The conference shall be held no later than 15 school days after the sixth absence. Upon the next absence by such pupil without indication to the attendance officer that the pupil's parent is aware of and supports the pupil's absence, the school principal or his/her designee shall notify the attendance officer who shall enforce the provisions of the Code of Virginia, either one or both of the following: filing a complaint with the juvenile and domestic relations court alleging the pupil is a CHINS, as defined in the Code of Virginia 16.1-228, or instituting proceedings against the parents pursuant to the Code of Virginia 18.2-371 or 22.1-262. In filing a complaint against the student:

> the attendance officer shall provide written documentation of the efforts to comply with the provisions of this section. In the event that both parents have been awarded joint physical custody pursuant to § 20-124.2 and the school has received notice of such order, both parents shall be notified at the last known addresses of the parents.

Any parent or guardian who fails to meet the requirements of the compulsory attendance laws will be guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor (Virginia General Assembly, 2007).

In Virginia, the law does not define a truant specifically but does define a child who is habitually and without justification absent from school as a "child in need of supervision" (VDOE, 2005). According to the VDOE (2005), it is important to distinguish between a truant and a chronic truant. A student displays truant behavior with a single unexcused absence from

school, but a student needs to reach or exceed a specific number of unexcused absences to be identified as chronically truant. The specific number of unexcused absences required before a student is labeled a chronic truant also varies according to state law and school division policies. In Virginia, a student is considered chronically truant when he or she has accumulated six unexcused absences in a school year. The VDOE uses a proxy measure to report truancy: the number of students with whom a conference was scheduled after the student had accumulated six unexcused absences during the school year. Virginia uses this means of measuring chronic truancy because these conferences are typically scheduled only after the student has accumulated six unexcused absences. According to state data, there were 44,572 such conferences held during the 2006-2007 school year (VDOE, 2008). It is reported that these data seem to under-report the number of truants in the state because some divisions do not report scheduling any such conferences. Because the vast majority of Virginia school divisions have reported holding truancy conferences with students, it is readily recognizable that truancy is a problem that varies among school divisions throughout the state. Truancy conference data for 2006-2007 indicated 11 school divisions scheduled over 1,000 truancy conferences in 2006-2007. These school divisions with higher numbers of truancy conferences were geographically located throughout the state indicating that truancy is not localized to specific areas of the state.

Virginia law provides a mechanism for addressing chronic truancy by filing a child in need of supervision (CHINS) petition with the juvenile court. A child may be identified as a "child in need of supervision" if the child is required to attend school and is chronically truant. An intake officer determines whether to file a petition alleging that a chronically truant child is a child in need of supervision or whether the case may be resolved informally through the provision of services. If the intake officer files a petition, the juvenile court is required to hold

an adjudicatory hearing. If the child is adjudicated a CHINS, the juvenile court must hold a hearing to determine the child's disposition. Possible court dispositions include imposing supervision, counseling, and educational programs (e.g., ordering the child to attend school all day every day with no unexcused absences or tardies, ordering the child and parent or guardian to participate in counseling, placing the child on probation or under supervision, suspending the student's driver's license or ability to obtain a learners permit, ordering the parent and child to participate in and complete a specified treatment program, placing the child in a juvenile facility, ordering the child to complete a community service program and placing the juvenile in detention for a specified number of days).

Excused and Unexcused Absences

Most school districts have policies that identify excusable reasons for absences such as illness, injury, medical appointments, death in the family, and religious holidays. In most cases the school requires a note from the parent that explains the reason for the child's absence. According to Harnett (2007), unexcused absences fall into three categories: failure to submit a note or documentation of the reason for an absence, submitting a note for an absence that does not constitute an excusable reason, and presence on school property but failure to attend assigned class. According to Harnett (2007), "It is important to note that the primary issue of chronic truancy is not that there is no excuse provided, but rather, the excuse is not a valid one" (p. 39).

Because schools define excused and unexcused absences differently and accept a range of reasons for absences, the utility of classifying students as excused or unexcused has come under debate. It has been argued that the outcomes for students, schools, and communities are the same regardless of the reasons for students missing school or if the absences were known by the parent (NCSE, 2007). Although excused absences have an effect on learning, it has been

suggested that unexcused absences have a greater negative effect on learning than excused absences. Unexcused absences have been linked to lower grades than excused absences (Finlay, 2006) as well as lower standardized test scores (Gottfried, 2009). According to Gottfried (2010), the effect of absence type on standardized achievement scores remains evident even when controlling for previous achievement. This is important because prior achievement is a significant indicator of a child's current GPA or standardized test performance (Gottfried, 2010). Similar findings were found in a recent study conducted by the Georgia Department of Education (2011). In this study, the relationship between types of absences excused or unexcused and school achievement was examined. Findings from this study suggest that as few as five absences in a school year can have an effect on student learning. This study also found that excused absences result in a decrease in student achievement. These findings are further supported by a report from NCES (2009) that revealed that students with three or more excused or unexcused absences were less likely to score at or above basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than students with no absences. According to NCES (2009), this finding was upheld even when controlling for the variable of race or ethnicity. Although, missing one or two days of school did not correlate with a lower NAEP assessment, the researcher found that the percentage of students meeting minimum requirements decreased significantly for students with three or more absences.

It has been suggested that studying other factors that are correlated with increased unexcused absences may also provided insight into the reason that unexcused and excused absences have a different affect on student achievement. According to Eaton, Brener, and Kann (2008), students with a high number of unexcused absences have been shown to have lower

motivation levels resulting in greater risk for school disengagement are more likely to engage in risk behaviors than those with no absences.

Reasons for Nonattendance

Students are absent from school for a variety of reasons of which some are considered excusable and some are not. According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), reasons for nonattendance can be divided into three broad categories: students who *cannot attend* school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work, or involvement with the juvenile justice system; students who *will not attend* school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment; and students who *do not attend* school because they, or their parents, do not see the value in being there, they have something else they would rather do, or nothing stops them from skipping school. Sheppard (2010) found that the majority of student truancy occurs with the knowledge of the parent. Older students, specifically, those in middle and high school are sometimes permitted to stay home and supervise younger siblings when they are sick and the parents cannot stay home from work (Sparks, 2011). Sheppard (2010) found that some parents allow their children to stay home simply to have a day off. Sheppard also found that out of all student absences from school, truancy without parent permission actually comprised a small proportion. According to Sheppard (2010), the degree to which a student is absent unexcused can be suggestive of the parent's attitude towards the child's school and towards the value of education in general. Henry (2007) found that the attitude a student's parent has about truancy plays an important role in determining whether a student's truant behavior will continue. Whether unexcused absences are tolerated by parents sends a message to the child about whether receiving an education is a valued part of the family (Sheldon, 2007). Just as teachers model various academic skills at school, parent's model values and attitudes

toward education that significantly influence the child's value system. The attitude a child develops toward school plays an important role in how successful the child will be in school (Sheldon, 2007).

Regardless of the reason, students who are frequently truant from school miss out on learning opportunities that often place them at risk for academic failure, disengagement from school, truancy, and eventually dropping out (Finlay, 2006; Gottfried, 2009). Eaton et al. (2008) found that students who were frequently absent, regardless of whether they had parent permission or not to miss school, were more likely to engage in risk behaviors than students with no absences. Henry (2007) found that 10% of 8th grade students reported they had skipped school in the previous 4-week period. Students who were reported to reside in single parent households, those with failing grades, those that did not believe that they would graduate, and those who maintained employment outside of school were most likely to have skipped school. According to Henry (2007), the largest predictor of which eighth grade students skipped school was the number of students who reported smoking (36%), drinking alcohol until intoxicated (37%), and smoking marijuana (36%) (p. 33). Data from the National Incident Based Reporting System indicate that during the 2004-2005 school year the number of crimes committed by children ages 10 to 17 during school hours (Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.) was 26% higher than out of school hours (Monday through Friday, 3 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.). According to MacGillivary and Erickson (2006), both the interview data and the focus group data from the study support that when students skip school they are at increased risk for engaging in "risky behaviors." Chronic truants reported "hanging out, cruising in cars, and getting into trouble" while skipping school (MacGillivary & Erickson, 2006, p. 30). According to Railsback (2004) and Henry (2007), incidences of truancy increase during the middle school years. As a result of

this finding, it has been suggested that early intervention is needed if schools are to be successful in combating truancy.

Factors That Contribute To Truancy

Although the literature on truancy is in its infancy (Heilbrunn, 2007), it is clear that there is no single risk factor that leads to truancy but a variety of individual, school, family, and community factors (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007; Heilbrunn, 2007). In fact, the literature has categorized these factors into four broad categories: individual, school, family, and community.

Individual Factors

Individual factors focus on the attributes of the students—such as their values, attitudes, and behaviors—and how these attributes contribute to their decision not to attend school. Student variables that may cause truant behavior include physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, drug use, perception of self, and detachment from school. DeSocio et al. (2007) identifies physical and mental health issues as contributing towards school absenteeism. They suggest that truancy coexists with student and family mental health problems and may be an indicator for an existing or emerging mental health disorder, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and/or substance abuse. Supporting evidence from Henry's (2007) study implicates students who use alcohol one or more times a month as 26.5% more likely to skip school than peers who do not use alcohol; and if the student drinks to a level of intoxication, his likelihood of skipping school increases to 31.2%. Moreover, 33.9% of the students who have been truant smoke cigarettes and 37.2% smoke marijuana at least once a month. Of equal importance, students who held lower perceptions about themselves were more likely to skip school than students who held higher perceptions of themselves. For example, students that answered *probably won't* graduate from high school and *definitely won't* attend college

committed higher truant behavior at 44.5% and 30%, respectively, than their peers who answered *definitely will* graduate from high school and *definitively will* go to college at 15% and 12.1%, respectively (Henry, 2007). Even more defining, DeSocio et al. (2007) indicate that as many as 30% of youth who are absent on a given school day are representative of school disengagement, or detachment. According to Henry (2007), students who exhibit school disengagement lack commitment to the school, are poor achievers, and hold low aspiration for their futures.

School Factors

Research indicates that there are a number of contributing school risk factors for truancy. Parents and students cite school-related factors as the main contributing factor for truancy (Reid, 2005). School factors such as school structure, school composition, and school climate have a significant impact on a student's engagement or disengagement from school. The level of school connectedness of a student is a critical predictor/risk factor for truancy. In addition to truancy, low levels of school connectedness are also risk factors for school crime and school misconduct (Jenkins, 1995). The more connected a student is to school the less likely they are to become truant or engage in other school-related delinquent activities. One important aspect of school connectedness is relationships between students and teachers. In general, absentees have been found to have less satisfaction in their relations with school personnel, have less satisfaction with school, and often dislike the teachers (Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk, 2003). Poor relations between teachers and students put students at risk for school truancy (Baker et al., 2001; Dougherty, 1999). Other teacher-related risk factors for truancy include unsupportive teachers, differences in teaching and learning styles, and lack of control by teachers in the classroom (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, 1991). Issues with the curriculum and/or content of lessons may also contribute to truancy rates. Many truant students

report being bored in classes due to unchallenging class and homework assignments, and the content and delivery of the curriculum (Malcolm et al., 2003). Kim and Streeter (2006) found that students are more likely to skip school if they perceive it as boring, chaotic, or not intellectually challenging.

A school's overall climate can also put children at risk for truancy. A study conducted by Driscoll, Halcoussis, and Svorny (2003) compared district size, school size, and class size with test scores and attendance rates. They found district size had a negative effect on student performance as measured by standardized test scores, and a negative effect on attendance rates for elementary and middle schools students (Driscoll et al., 2003). The Education Commission of the States (2011) found as school size decreases, student performance, as measured by attendance rates, test scores, and graduation rates, increases. A study by the Legislative Research Commission found that small schools foster higher attendance rates, and when students moved from larger to smaller secondary schools, attendance improved (Hager, 2006). Research surrounding school size has led to the conclusion that as schools get bigger, student achievement declines and larger schools have higher rates of absenteeism, dropouts, and discipline problems.

School composition or the general make up of the school is another important factor that impacts a student's attendance (Eamon, 2005). Urban schools have consistently higher reports of absentee rates than other suburban or rural schools. Chronic truancy rates are estimated at approximately 8% for urban schools with daily absent rates of upwards of 20% (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). In addition schools that have an unwelcoming and unsafe environment due to bullying, gang-related violence or other violence also face higher truancy rates (Malcolm et al., (2003; NCSE, 2006).

School policies and programs influence the climate of the school. Sheldon (2007) found several characteristics of schools where attendance was a problem. The characteristics included poor leadership, low drive for improvement, inexperienced persons in positions of responsibility, high staff turnover, low levels of expectations among staff and students, and inappropriate policies. Principals often use out of school suspension as a disciplinary measure for truant students. Research indicates that this practice often leads to student disengagement and eventually school dropout (Kronick & Hargis, 1998). As reported in the VDOE Annual Report on Discipline, Crime, and Violence, for the 2007-2008 school year, 16,372 Virginia students were suspended due to truancy. This number represented 12% of all short-term suspensions. Push-out policies, such as suspensions for truancy and automatic "Fs" for truant students, are intended to curb attendance issues; however, policies such as these often lead to increased truancy rates (NCSE, 2006).

Family Factors

Family factors are those characteristics that occur within the home environment. Factors in the family domain, including poverty and low SES, inconsistent discipline and ineffective parenting skills, low family social support and high family mobility, parental emotional disorders, child abuse or neglect, single parent homes, large family size, transportation problems, family conflict and domestic violence have been identified as having a major impact on truancy (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004; Teasley, 2004). Truant youth also been exposed to a variety of negative influences and behaviors in their homes. Oftentimes, truant students have a history of familial conflict, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, victimization, exposure to parental and family substance abuse (drug and/or alcohol abuse) and criminal behavior (Baker et al., 2001; Bell et al., 1994; Dukes & Stein, 2001; NCSE, 2006; U.S.

Department of Education [USDOE], 2006). In addition, Baker et al. (2001) cite problematic family dynamics and parental marital discord as triggers for school refusal behavior by students.

While internal family behavior problems and strife affect truancy rates, oftentimes families are unable to meet the basic needs of their children, which also may be a contributing factor to their children's truancy. Parental supervision and discipline are leading risk factors for truancy. Families where parents do not insist children attend school, or notice absenteeism, often have truant children. When parents do not properly supervise their children or emphasize the importance of school attendance, students are more likely to become truant (USDOE, 2007). In addition, in a study by Corville-Smith et al. (1998) absentees perceived parent discipline as inconsistent and ineffective. This lack of parental discipline allows students to miss school with little to no consequences (except for those imposed by the school upon their return). Additionally, Teasley (2004) found that family dynamics play a major role in absenteeism and truancy. Home dynamics such as crowded living conditions, frequent relocation, and weak parent/child relationships have a negative impact on attendance. These home dynamics are more commonly found in lower SES families. O'Keefe's (1994) research on self-reported truancy indicates free school meal eligibility has a significant but small effect on measurable truancy. However, the correlation is weak. In contrast the correlation between free meals and absence levels was found to be much stronger, accounting for 42% of school level variance. According to Teasley (2004), truant students are more likely to come from single-parent homes rather than two-parent homes. Teasley (2004) also found that two parents are more likely to keep track of what is going on because the responsibility is shared and not reliant upon one parent. According to Teasley (2004), overprotective or overly permissive parenting styles contribute to truancy and dropout as do families that are uninterested or unsupportive of education (Epstein & Sheldon,

2002). Parental support and/or lack of parent support for education is a significant risk factor for truancy (Baker et al., 2001). Parents/guardians who do not value education or do not reinforce educational goals are more likely to have a truant child (Bell et al., 1994; NCSE, 2006).

Parenting styles that foster communication between children and parents and strong parent-child relationships are closely associated with good attendance (Bell et al., 1994; Kleine, 1994; McNeal, 1999). Rohrman (1993) found that permissive parenting styles allow children more autonomy in decision making and resulted in higher absenteeism. Weak parent-child relationships as well as low parent-school involvement also increase truancy risks. Parents' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about attending schools can also have an impact on truancy. For example, immigrant parents may not be aware of or understand that attendance in schools is compulsory (DeKalb, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Some parents believe being absent from school for family-related reasons is acceptable. Therefore, they may not insist that the child attend school. Researchers have also pointed out that family practices tend to have more impact on student attendance than does family reasons, such as caring for siblings, which are acceptable reasons for students to miss school (DeKalb, 1999). Such students may have to miss school in order to care for an ill family member, or work to provide the family with an additional income source. According to Kleine (1994), children from families living in poverty, single-parent households, or families with above average number of children are more likely to be truant than their peers. Other family-level risk factors include low levels of family involvement with school and low parental and sibling educational attainment (Hammond et al., 2007). The amount of time a parent spends actively involved in his/her child's education can be an important predictor of truancy. Parents who are involved in their child's education, whether through monitoring

homework, performance, or participation in the parent teacher association, are less likely to have a truant child (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Another compounding risk factor is that higher socioeconomic parents are usually more involved with teachers and schools, often times truant children, who are more likely to come from an impoverished background, have parents who are unable to be as involved due to work or other responsibilities (Bell et al., 1994; Kleine, 1994). Barth (1984) found that a lack of resources, transportation, and family social support can impact parents and thus prevent them from sending their child to school. In some cases, students are absent from school due to family health, childcare, or financial concerns (Baker et al., 2001; Bell et al., 1994; NCSE, 2006; USDOE, 2007). Students may have to miss school in order to care for an ill family member, to care for a younger sibling, or work to provide the family with an additional income source. Children from families living in poverty, single-parent households, or families with above average number of children are more likely to be truant than their peers (Kleine, 1994).

Family interventions for chronic truancy, in general, have focused on either changing dysfunctional family patterns or encouraging more parental involvement in their child's education (Bell et al., 1994). Family therapy that enables children and their families to resume healthy growth and development has proved to be effective. Equally important and effective is involving parents in the education of their chronically truant children. In fact, families are now being recognized as an important influence on student attendance and an important resource for decreasing chronic truancy (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Parental contact by the school serves to improve attendance (Bell et al., 1994), including home visits in more severe cases (Baker & Jansen, 2000). According to Epstein and Sheldon (2002), providing families with a school contact person with whom to discuss their children's attendance or other school-related issues

has proven to be a consistently effective practice. The degree to which schools overcome barriers to communicating with diverse groups of families is associated with gains in student attendance rates and declines in patterns of chronic absenteeism. When patterns of chronic truancy persist with little or no parental response, court referrals or other sanctions may be effective in pressuring the parents to ensure the child's regular attendance and to impress on the child the concern the school has for each individual student (Barrington & Hendricks, 2001).

Community Factors

Community factors often play a significant role in truant behavior. Communities high in poverty, community safety issues, and lack of overall community support often have higher rates of school truancy (Baker et al., 2001; USDOE, 2007).

Students who see little opportunities for careers or employment in their community often do not value the importance of formal education because they believe it will not impact their future. Communities high in poverty, community safety issues, and lack of overall community support often have higher rates of school truancy (Baker et al., 2001; USDOE, 2007). Students who see little opportunities for careers or employment in their community often do not value the importance of formal education because they believe it will not impact their future. Community safety issues affect truancy rates due to the fact that in some communities children fear violence that can occur near home or between home and school therefore choosing to stay at home for safety (NCSE, 2006). Another community issue that affects truancy rates involves the availability of drugs/alcohol within the community. If drugs and alcohol are readily available within a student's community, the student will have an increased risk of use, which is a risk factor for truancy. Finally, impoverished communities often do not have the access to support systems and resources that higher socioeconomic settings have. This means that these

communities cannot provide extracurricular activities for students to engage in which is a protective factor for truancy.

Chronic truant behavior is extremely costly to communities and society as a whole. Chronic truancy, which often leads to school dropout, has a direct financial impact on communities through lost income taxes due to unemployment and lower salaries, higher social service expenditures, criminal justice costs, and the loss of federal and state education funding (Baker et al., 2001; Heilbrunn, 2007). According to a 1993 USDOE bulletin (cited in Baker et al., 2001), individuals who drop out of school have fewer job prospects, have lower salaries when working, and are unemployed longer and more frequently than those who have high school diplomas. In 1999, 6% of high school graduates were considered in poverty while 14% of those in poverty had not completed high school (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). The societal consequences associated with individuals who do not complete school weakens communities (e.g., lower family and individual incomes, loss of national income and tax revenue, higher unemployment as well as increased demand for social services, reduced political participation, and higher health care costs). According to Baker et al. (2001), the financial impact of truancy can be measured in concrete ways: communities have a less educated work force, higher rates of unemployment, crime and incarceration.

Communities have responded to the escalating costs of truancy through multiple approaches. States have passed stricter truancy statutes that, in turn, require the involvement of local law officials, courts, and the juvenile justice system. These structural changes result in community-based interventions.

Truancy Intervention

There are many different types of interventions, settings, and approaches/strategies for truancy reduction. Broad categories include school-based programs and court-based programs. At the same time, many programs include elements from different types of programs to successfully meet the needs of local communities.

School-Based Programs

School districts cross Virginia are examining attendance data in an effort to improve student attendance. As a result, truancy intervention programs are being implemented in many of those school districts. Overall, each program has the same goal: "to improve school attendance in the short term, with the longer term goals of raising grades and encouraging high school graduation for students who are at risk of dropping out" (Heilbrunn, 2007, p. 1). Researchers have identified key components of effective truancy reduction strategies, and programs that incorporate these concepts tend to be more successful. Through an analysis of national research on truancy and dropout prevention, the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University has identified six critical components of effective truancy reduction programs. These components are: community collaboration, family involvement, comprehensive approach, incentives and sanctions, supportive context and program evaluation (Reimer & Dimock, 2005). According to Reimer and Dimock (2005), An effective truancy response must involve a collaborative approach which means that there is a strong community-base, multimodal structure that brings together a variety of perspectives, expertise, and resources to address the problem of truancy. Collaboration allows programs to maximize the different strengths of program partners and increases a program's chances of sustainability. Effective responses to

truancy are multimodal and aligned with the needs and strengths of local communities, schools, and students (Lovrich & Jones, 2011; Smink, 2007; Reimer & Smink, 2005).

As a result, multimodal intervention, also referred to in the literature as multidimensional intervention, multifaceted intervention, multidisciplinary programs, and multiagency programs, is considered to be the most effective strategy to address truancy behavior (Bouffard, Lovrich, & Strand, 2009 p. 29). This approach takes into account the many risk factors that underlie truancy and employs some combination of community stakeholders: schools, juvenile courts, and law enforcement agencies, as well as parents, community organizations, and social services agencies (Baker et al., 2001). Multimodal programs bring together multiple agencies to provide specialized services that address the root cause of the truancy problem. Multimodal intervention began in the 1970s when the movement to "deinstitutionalize" status offenses gained momentum (Steinhart, 1996). The theory underlying this movement was that the courts were not appropriate interventions for youth because they are primarily punitive and do not address the problems that drive youth to commit illegal acts; community-based social services were proposed as the alternative. The rise in juvenile offenses in the 1980s challenged the efficacy of one-dimensional intervention providing only community-based services in lieu of court petitions (Steinhart, 1996).

Advocates of the multimodal approach stress the need for early intervention efforts, starting in elementary school when truancy behavior first becomes manifest (Barth, 1984; Kozinetz, 1995; Levine, Metzendorf, & VanBoskirk (1986). While interventions with older truant students tend to be more difficult because truancy behaviors have become more established, even efforts with such older youth can be successful with careful planning and dedicated effort (Roderick et al., 1997). Thoughtful and well-planned truancy intervention

efforts utilizing a multimodal approach experience high to moderate levels of success at reducing school avoidance behavior among truant students. However, it is suggested that prevention efforts targeted at students identified as high risk for future truant behavior can prevent truancy behavior from ever developing, thereby decreasing the need for mid-term and late intervention efforts (Gottfredson, 1990; Hawkins & Catalano, 1995; Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1977; McCaughlin & Vachu, 1992; McGiboney, 2001; Mogulescu & Segal, 2002; Morley & Rossman, 1997; Riley & McDaniel, 1999; Sigmon et al., 1999; Wilson, 1993). Even for those truant students for whom the juvenile justice system has become their final stopping point, some positive outcomes are said to exist as well.

The NCSE has produced numerous reports over the past decade explaining promising strategies for truancy intervention. There has been little peer evaluation done with these reports, however, they have become a clearinghouse for practice strategies, producing three dozen reports specifically for school districts and law enforcement (Gandy & Schultz, 2007). The initial report by the NCSE, *Youth Out of School: Linking Absences to Delinquency*, delineates an argument that lack of education results in very high risk for juveniles to commit crime and end up in the juvenile justice system. The report also examines the reasons for truancy in Colorado schools, concluding that “47% of truants come from high stressed homes" (Gonzales, Richards, & Seeley, 2002). These data support the conclusion that much of truancy relates to home environments.

The Wilder Foundation (Wilder Research, 2003) reviewed promising truancy interventions for the Hennepin School Success Project in Hennepin County, MN. The report is descriptive in nature and does not promote any specific evidence-based truancy programming. The report examines school-based absenteeism interventions dating back as far as 1991, but that particular program was not evaluated or peer-reviewed. Due to the paucity of truancy

intervention research in the early 2000s, Wilder re-examined the topic in a follow-up report in 2007 (Gandy & Schultz, 2007). The follow-up report attempted to highlight interventions that worked based on rigorous evaluation. Only two interventions met these standards: cognitive-behavioral therapy for children with school refusal issues and the multimodal community-based court approach, a process to eliminate barriers to families attending court while using legal coercion to make families connect with community agencies for assistance. The report recommends future research including control groups with experimental designs and long-term outcome research.

Gandy and Schultz (2007) reviewed over 4,000 truancy intervention programs that were geared toward preventing or reducing truancy. However, over half of the programs reviewed were not rigorously evaluated. Among these programs, Gandy and Schultz (2007) further narrowed their review to the school and community-based programs that addressed mental health concerns that could possibly be replicated. Among the 2,000 identified programs only 14 were replicable and met criteria for promising or suggestive evidence of effectiveness. Gandy and Schultz defined promising as studies demonstrating favorable outcomes using quasi-experimental research designs.

These programs utilized a multimodal approach that involved both the child and the family, and had an individualized case management component that linked children and families to community services (Gandy & Shultz, 2007). Among these later programs reviewed, eight were eliminated because they were geared toward school-refusal behavior, which is distinctly different from truancy; two described outcomes of child-focused interventions; and three described outcomes of programs that were not specifically geared toward truancy reduction. Among the remaining programs reviewed that showed increased attendance rates, only one

program identified, Project Stop Truancy and Recommend Treatment (START), showed promising evidence of effectiveness. The remaining five community-based truancy intervention programs showed suggestive evidence of effectiveness: Check and Connect, Family and Community Involvement, the School Attendance Initiative, Early Elementary Truancy Initiative, and Kern County Truancy Reduction Program (Gandy & Shultz, 2007).

Community-Based Programs

Project START. Project START is a community-based model aligned with national OJJDP guidelines of best practices that address the root causes of truancy. Utilizing a multimodal intervention, Project START brings together the school district, juvenile courts, department of human resources, and local social service providers to reduce truancy among school students. The partnership is perceived as an alternative to the one-dimensional correction model, which has failed to positively affect attendance rates. Project START utilizes three categories of intervention for reducing truancy: no court referral, traditional family court referral, or court referral with community-based services.

The community-based court referral is a process whereby families attend courts that are set up within the schools. This method is perceived to reduce or eliminate the social and economic barriers related to court attendance. Local social service providers are also present at each hearing to refer families to community resources that may assist them in reducing the risk factors related to truancy in elementary, middle, and high school students (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). Fantuzzo et al. (2005) used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of Project START. Matched comparison groups (nonreferred truants) design, participants ($N = 567$) included kindergarten to 12th grade students, who met criteria of 25 or more unexcused absences in the previous school year and ongoing attendance problems within the current school year.

The study was conducted in one urban public school district in the northeastern United States. Participants were matched on age, sex, race, and unexcused absences for 189 students in each of three groups: the intervention community court program (Project START), traditional court intervention, and no intervention. Of the 567 participants, nearly one-third (63%) were African American, 15% were White, and 15% were of other ethnicities. Nearly half of the sample was male (48%). In terms of absences, number of days absent was measured at baseline and subsequently at 30 days, 60 days, and 1-year intervals. The Project START intervention group was offered case management and social service referrals to address academic and social needs. The absenteeism rates of the Project START intervention group decreased, which remained the same after 30 days; however, the absences of the traditional court intervention group gradually increased over the course of the study, and the absences among the no treatment group showed no change. No statistically significant differences were found between the three groups (Fantuzzo et al., 2005).

Check and Connect. Check and Connect is an intervention program that utilizes attendance monitoring, family-focused interventions, and problem solving to reduce truancy and increase school engagement through relationship building (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Check and Connect is based on the premise that if students are actively engaged in school and feel positive about attending school, they will exhibit fewer absences. The Check and Connect model promotes engagement by (a) monitoring engagement (attendance, behavior, and academics) on a weekly basis, and (b) providing students with academic support, problem-solving exercises, feedback, discussion, and opportunities to participate in community service events/recreation, thus encouraging engagement.

The program evaluation included 147 elementary school children with emotional and behavioral disabilities who had missed at least 12% of school days during either the previous year or months prior to referral (Lehr et al., 2004). Student absences and tardies were compared for 2 to 5 years with students in the general population with similar characteristics at the same points in time. All children received either the basic or intensive intervention based on their engagement score (i.e., number of unexcused absences, number of previous grade retentions, GPA) at the time of referral. Children in the basic program received a blanket intervention consisting of group education and monitoring. Children receiving the intensive intervention (N = 147) were provided with academic support, problem-solving skills, and opportunities to participate in community service events and recreational activities (Lehr et al., 2004). The sample was approximately 75% Caucasian, with 32% enrolled in special education classes and 85% deemed at high risk for disengagement. The program assessed the children's school engagement during the intervention by monitoring attendance, behavior problem referrals, and academic problems. The intensive case management intervention was evaluated using a quasi-experimental group design. Results showed that more students in the Check and Connect program than in the general school population were enrolled in school (at 91% and 70%, respectively), and attended regularly (at 85% and 64%, respectively). Results also showed that older students were more likely to be on track to graduate (68%) than their counterparts in the general school population (25%) (Lehr et al., 2004).

Family and Community Involvement

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) conducted a 3-year longitudinal evaluation of the Family and Community Involvement program which used a multifaceted family and community approach to increase overall school attendance and to decrease absences among children who were

chronically absent in 12 elementary schools. The intervention consisted of attendance incentives, parent calls, home visits, the use of an appointed attendance officer and truant officer, family workshops, counseling, and court referrals. Among the 12 schools, the average racial composition of the schools was 54% African American and, on average, 60% of students received free or reduced priced lunches (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Attendance data were collected from approximately 5,000 students each at three different points in time: at baseline, mid-year, and the end of the school year. Results indicated that over the 3-year time period, the average daily attendance increased approximately 1% (from 93% to 94%) and absences decreased 1.9% among the most at-risk, chronically truant children (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Court-Based Programs

As previously indicated, formal court processing and secure confinement and detention are often inappropriate strategies for handling status offenders. This section discusses interventions and strategies to divert status offenders from formal court processing. While the body of research on interventions targeted towards this population is generally limited, promising outcomes have been found for these diversion interventions. Court-based and court diversion programs leverage the power of the court to coordinate and oversee the delivery of services identified for the truant youth, and often for the family. Some programs, such as the St. Louis, MO County Truancy Court, are connected to the court but are designed primarily to divert youth from court before adjudication.

The St. Louis County Truancy Court is a voluntary diversion program in which schools, families, and students can participate before a student's absence from school becomes so severe that the school must refer the case to family court and/or the division of family services. Similarly, the Washtenaw County, MI Status Offense Diversion Program provides effective,

noncourt intervention for status offenders to resolve presenting problems and prevent delinquent behavior. These programs have all demonstrated positive outcomes in reducing excessive absenteeism and diverting youth from formal court proceedings.

Programs that integrate community and school resources have also achieved positive outcomes in reducing truant behavior. A Los Angeles County, CA truancy reduction program called Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) targets elementary school children who have excessive absences. Abolish Chronic Truancy uses a series of graduated interventions to hold students and parents accountable for attendance problems; a case is filed in court against the parents/guardians and/or the child only as a last resort. One example of a community-based truancy intervention that has produced positive outcomes in reducing excessive absences is the Truancy Assessment and Service Centers (TASC). Each TASC is organized as a cooperative, interagency program, drawing on various agencies to provide an effective use of resources. The Kern County, CA Truancy Reduction Program (TRP) is another community-based approach that has been successful in achieving positive outcomes in reducing truancy. The Kern County TRP involves a collaborative effort of parental participation, school involvement, and casework management. Key program components include assessment, home visits, weekly school contacts, counseling with the student and family, referrals to community resources, mentoring and evaluation.

Parent Training and Family Therapy

Behavioral parent training is structured and delivered by a trained professional. The intervention can occur in diverse settings (e.g., schools, community centers, churches, the workplace, or even at home with self-instructional programs) and under various approaches.

Numerous researchers have found that parent training helps reduce aggressive, antisocial, and delinquent behavior among children (Dumas, 1989; Kazdin, Siegel, & Bass, 1992; Satterfield, Satterfield, & Schell, 1987; Tremblay et al., 1991; Tremblay et al., 1992).

The OJJDP *Model Programs Guide* recognizes numerous parent training and family therapy interventions as model programs. Two examples are Helping the Noncompliant Child (HNC), a training program that teaches parents to change maladaptive patterns of interaction with their children by establishing a positive, mutually reinforcing relationship; and Parenting with Love and Limits (PLL), a combination of group and family therapy for adolescent populations with the primary diagnosis of oppositional defiant or conduct disorder. The HNC program has been extensively evaluated by more than 40 studies and has been found to produce short and long-term positive outcomes in self-esteem, academic progress, relationship with parents, delinquency, drug use, and various types of psychopathology comparable with those reported in the community comparison group. Findings from the PLL intervention evaluations show promising outcomes for program participants (compared with the control group) in substance use, recidivism, aggressive behaviors, depression, attention deficit disorder, externalizing problems, parent and child communication, and mothers' perceptions of their adolescents (Baum & Forehand, 1981; Forehand & Long, 1988; Humphreys, Forehand, McMahon, & Roberts, 1978; Long , Forehand, Wierson, & Morgan, 1994; McMahon, Forehand, & Griest, 1981; Peed, Roberts, & Forehand, 1977; Wells & Egan, 1988; Forehand, Griest, & Wells, 1981).

Summary

In summary, research shows that the problem of truancy is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive intervention that targets risk factors at the individual, family, school, and

community levels (Kearney, 2007). Although descriptive and predictive studies are important to our understanding events and issues preceding student truancy, chronic absenteeism, and school dropout, studies that evaluate the effectiveness of truancy interventions are necessary to determine whether these programs successfully serve their intended populations and meet project goals by improving truant student's psychosocial functioning and related behavior (Doll & Hess, 2001).

A serious need exists to carefully document truancy interventions and to empirically evaluate their effectiveness. Furthermore, it is important to establish a continuum of intervention for truant youth involving collaboration with relevant community agencies (Muller & Stoddard, 2006). The apparent lack of methodologically sound, empirical studies conducted to determine truancy program effectiveness continues to impede our understanding of how to best serve the growing numbers of truant youth across the nation. Gandy and Schultz (2007) concluded that few rigorously evaluated truancy intervention studies existed and many of the reviewed studies had very small samples. The reviewed studies were also limited by vague operationalization of concepts and few outcome measures besides counting days of students' absences. Studies were limited to proximal outcomes and lacked related outcome assessment (Gandy & Schultz). The authors recommended expanded examination of truancy intervention programs, particularly for outcomes beyond the current school year of study.

In an effort to address the issue of truancy in the central Virginia school district where this study took take place, a range of initiatives and programs have been developed with varying degrees of success, which include increasing the number of alternative education program options available to students, the creation of an online credit recovery program, implementation of a school division wide student mentoring program, the creation of a truancy docket,

establishment of an interdisciplinary CHINSUP/truancy review committee, utilization of truancy mediation services, implementation of a court diversion program, the creation of a school probation officer pilot program involving the placement of probation officers in select schools, and most recently a proposal for a study of truancy intervention and strategies used within the school division. As a result of the increased focus on truancy reduction, the researcher chose to focus this study on evaluating the efficacy of a truancy program aimed at providing intensive in-home counseling as an alternative to involving truant students in the traditional court process.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this mixed methods study was two-fold: to identify factors that influence truancy and to examine the effectiveness of a treatment intervention on attendance and academic measures (grades, discipline referrals, and promotion/retention outcome) of middle and high school students. Specifically of interest was whether or not diverting students from court referral to treatment services involving in-home counseling and case management would decrease student's unexcused absences and improve academic outcomes. This research study has implications for school funding and policy in terms of how the school division will fund programs to address the issue of truancy and what practices will be implemented to address the problem.

This study was conducted to address a gap in empirical research addressing court versus treatment outcomes for the population of interest. This study borrows from both quantitative and qualitative methodology to answer the research questions. As a result of the merging of these two methodologies, the research design for this study is classified as mixed methods. Data for this study were collected in two phases of a truancy pilot study implemented by the school division in partnership with local community agencies. Quantitative data were collected during the first phase of the truancy pilot implementation and involved a secondary analysis of the data. To expand upon the quantitative data and to answer the related research question, in the second phase of the study, qualitative data were collected through a focus group which included a student survey.

This chapter describes the methodology used to implement this study. As stated earlier, data for this study were collected in two phases. This chapter begins with the structure of Phase I of the study, which includes the following sections: description of the truancy pilot study, the researcher's perspective, the research design, the population and sample, data analysis procedures, and study limitations. For phase II of this study a focused, single-school, mixed methods case study design was used involving data collected from a student survey and a focus group involving participants from Phase I of the truancy pilot. The chapter outline for Phase II includes the following sections: participant selection, demographics of focus group participants, instrumentation, piloting of survey, focus group, data analysis, establishing trustworthiness and study limitations of study design.

Research Design

A mixed methods design was used in this study. The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the methodology involved a secondary data analysis of quantitative data. Further analysis was performed in Phase II of the study utilizing a focused, single school, qualitative case study design. Qualitative case study is an approach to research that allows the researcher to explore of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. For this phase of the study, data were collected through a survey and a focus group using a sample of students from the treatment and control group of the truancy pilot program.

As defined by Johnson, Onwuegbuzi, and Turner (2007), mixed methods research is a type of research design in which a researcher "mixes" both quantitative and qualitative research techniques into a single study in order to better understand a research problem more completely. Comparably, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) defined mixed methods research as "research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences

using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry" (p. 15). The specific qualitative approach used was a case study. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), qualitative case study methodology provides a valuable method to evaluate programs. As Stake (2005) asserts, "Case studies offer a richness and depth of information by capturing as many variables as possible to identify how a complex set of circumstances com together to produce a particular manifestation" (p. 443). This qualitative case approach facilitated exploration of the truancy intervention phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources which included a survey and focus group.

Regardless of how it is defined, the basic concept is that integration of quantitative and qualitative data maximizes the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses of each type of data, thus, enhancing the credibility of the research findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Therefore, the logic behind mixing quantitative and qualitative data in a single study is that as stand-alone paradigms both qualitative and quantitative methods could not sufficiently capture the details of a problem or phenomenon, as in the case of a complex educational issue such as truancy, the focus of this study. Mixed methods methodology is guided by a pragmatic view of knowledge (Creswell, 2003) focusing on the assertion the truth is "what works" (Howe, 1988). The pragmatic view supposes that quantitative and qualitative methods are mutually compatible, and that no single paradigm is better than the other. The pragmatist perspective holds that "research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the researcher the best opportunity to answer the research questions" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16). Many researchers have suggested that when combined, quantitative and qualitative methods are capable of providing a more thorough analysis of the research phenomenon (Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). In particular, combining these methods of data collection has been argued to add depth and

necessary complexity to issues that involve adolescence, such as truancy (Galambos & Leadbeater, 2000). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2005) argue that it is important for mixed method research to be driven by the research questions, and for this reason it is especially important for researchers to address the rationale for collecting both types of data and using a mixed methods design. Thus, the researcher's rationale for the use of mixed methods in this study is as stated earlier, that as stand-alone paradigms, both qualitative and quantitative methods could not sufficiently capture the details of the phenomenon under study nor answer the research questions thoroughly.

Researcher's Perspective

As a social worker employed in the school division where this study takes place, I hold a particular interest in the subject of truancy and, therefore, I must acknowledge my potential for researcher's bias. In my current role, I am responsible for the development of policies, programs, and interventions to address truancy within the school district. In my role, I supervise staff that are designated as truancy officers for the school division who are responsible for the enforcement of compulsory attendance. I work directly with school division leaders, administrators, court personnel, and county agency personnel to address truancy. Consistent with national policy agenda, truancy is a major focus in the school district due to its correlation with accountability measures aimed at improving academic outcomes and on-time graduation rates. With this focus has come a demand for evidence-based practice tied directly to program evaluation outcomes that clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of programs and interventions used to address truancy. Such hard data, as pointed out by Allen-Meares, Washington, and Welsh (2000) is what is necessary to convince school and community leaders to invest in services.

My role and experience has surely shaped my beliefs about truancy and could potentially influence my interpretation and control over this study. In undertaking this research initiative, I must first acknowledge the potential for bias and, second, take appropriate steps to guard against subjectivity. In order to limit the potential for bias, the researcher did not participate in the identification of students for the control or treatment group for Phase I of the truancy pilot. Additionally, the peer examination and peer review strategies were employed. According to Merriam (2009), a peer examination or review is conducted by a colleague who is familiar with the research topic, whereby a discussion regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations is done. For this study, a research specialist in the school district's research and planning department served as the peer examiner reviewing each step of the study's implementation, the methodology, data collection and data interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

In an effort to reinforce the ethical treatment of the participants, certain prescribed steps were taken during the research process of this study. Student names were replaced with a student number that linked the student to the data collected prior to release of the data to the researcher. The key code linking the students' names to the data was stored in a fire safe accessible only to the researcher and authorized research personnel. Student names were not used on the survey or during the focus group. Students' were assigned a number and were asked to state their number before providing responses to focus group questions. The student number was used to link the student to the response. Student names were not used in reporting the findings of this study and will not be used in any published paper regarding this study.

Each participant was provided with a youth assent form indicating that his participation in Phase I of the truancy pilot and Phase II of the focus group was voluntary and he could terminate his participation in the survey and focus group at any point without penalty. The informed consent form outlined each aspect of the participants' participation as well as his option to withdraw from the study at any point during the focus group. Student demographic data were kept confidential at all times, including the audio tapes, transcripts of the tapes, and interview notes and were maintained in a locked file cabinet in a private locked office. Student demographic data were stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's laptop computer that only the researcher had access to. The code key linking the student's name to the assigned number was stored in a locked fire safe in a locked office that only the student researcher and authorized research personnel had access to. All potentially identifiable data were destroyed within 30 days of the conclusion of the study.

Phase I. District-wide Secondary Data Analysis

Procedure

After gaining approval from the school district and IRB (Appendix A) to conduct the study, the researcher was provided access to archival student data collected during the first phase of the truancy pilot. Prior to the release of the data, student identifying information was removed from the data (e.g., student numbers and student names were replaced with a unique identifier number that linked the student's name to the assigned number). The data were provided to the researcher electronically in an encrypted Excel database. Data were then transformed into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Data were cleaned in both Excel and SPSS, assessing for missing data, outliers, normality, and collinearity. Once the data had been cleaned and transformed, a summary table was created in SPSS that contained all the data

needed for the study. Descriptive statistics were then run and used to describe the basic features of the sample population. Results are reported in Chapter 4.

Phase II. Single-School, Mixed Methods

Participant Selection

For the second phase of the study a purposeful sampling method was used to select participants from the treatment and control groups to participate in a follow-up focus group. Nonprobability, purposive sampling is frequently used in educational research to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being studied (Borg, Gail, & Gail, 2007). According to Merriam (2009), "To begin purposeful sampling, you must first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or site to be studied" (p. 61). For the purpose of the focus group, the selection criteria involved identifying a subset of participants from the larger sample that would include participants from the treatment and control groups. The research proposal submitted for the institutional review board (IRB) approval proposed a focus group of five to six participants. According to Merriam (2009), there is no hard and fast rule about how many to include in a focus group, most writers suggest somewhere between six to 10 participants (p. 94). However, determining the actual number of participants to interview depends on several factors: the research questions being asked, the data to be collected, the analysis in progress, and the resources available to support the study. Considering these factors as well as the accessibility of the study participants, the selected site was identified based upon the school where the largest number of study participants were enrolled.

Description of High School

The school is one of nine high schools in the school district. The school is located in the suburban eastern section of the school district. The school serves approximately 1,765 students

grades 9 through 12. The ethnic breakdown of the student population is: 81% Black, 13% White, 4% Hispanic, 2% Other. Fifty-seven percent of the students are eligible for free and or reduced lunch. The state average is 32.6%, which indicates that the school has a higher level of poverty.

Thirty-one students enrolled at the selected high school participated in either the treatment or control group. After the school site was selected, the research and planning director sent notification to the principal that the school had been selected as the site for the focus group. Before meeting with students, the researcher met with the school principal to discuss the focus group and the consent process for parents and students. Following this meeting, a cover letter describing the study along with a parent consent form (Appendix B) with a preaddressed stamped envelope to return the consent form in was mailed in early December 2014 to the parents of the 31 identified students requesting permission for the child to participate in the focus group. The cover letter identified the researcher, the purpose of the research study, the basis for sample selection, and assured the confidentiality of participants in the study. At the same time, a student letter describing the study and a youth assent form (Appendix C) was hand delivered to each student at school.

Both parent consent and student assent were required in order for the student to be eligible to participate in the focus group if the student was under the age of 18. If the student was 18 years old, only informed consent was required from the student. Two incentives for participation were offered, a drawing for a $40.00 gift certificate was offered for one selected participant at the end of the focus group. The names of each participant who completed the survey and focus group were entered into the drawing and each had an equal chance of being selected. Students were also provided pizza and an assortment of snacks and drinks.

Parents were given one week before receiving a follow-up telephone call to answer any questions about the study and to remind them to sign and return the consent form. No more than two follow-up telephone calls were permitted, as approved by the school district's research and planning director. The second contact was made with parents 3 days before the due date for the return of the consent form. If the parent could not be reached by telephone, a reminder letter was mailed.

Bordens and Abbott (1991) warned that a critical problem known as nonresponse bias occurs when a large portion of the respondents fail to return the questionnaire. This failure could result in the returned subjects' questionnaire being significantly different from the those who did not return theirs. Consequently, the results may not represent the opinions of the intended population. Nine parent consent and youth assent forms were returned resulting in a return rate of 29%. The researcher was limited in the number of follow-up contacts with parents to obtain the consent for the child's participation as part of the recruitment plan.

Students who consented to participate in the focus group were contacted and provided the date, time, and location of the focus group. To minimize the loss of instructional time, the focus group was held during student directed study period. Only six of the nine students who consented to participate in the focus group were available on the scheduled day. Two of the students had received out of school suspensions and one student was absent due to illness.

Demographics of Survey and Focus Group Participants

Six students participated in the focus group and completed the survey. Five of the students were females and one was male. One student was a ninth grader, three students were

10th graders, and two students were 11th graders. Four of the students were participants in the control group and two participated in the treatment group. Each of these students had continued to receive weekly follow-up case management and attendance monitoring through the school social worker since their participation in the truancy pilot.

Instrumentation

A survey consisting of three demographic and 26 open-ended questions was developed by the researcher from current research and literature on truancy intervention and factors that influence student truancy (Heilbrunn, 2004; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Kearny, 2007; Reid, 2005).

The survey was constructed utilizing elements of the tailored design method (TDM) (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). The TDM (Dillman et al., 2009) is based on the principles of social exchange theory, which holds that the benefits that a survey provides to the respondents should outweigh the costs to achieve desired response rates. This method suggests a holistic approach towards developing effective survey questions with appropriate choices for the wording, visual design, and implementation of the questionnaire (Dillman et al., 2009). Taking into account these past research findings, and TDM design elements, the final product was a list a Likert scale instrument consisting of three demographic statements followed by 26 questions. Respondents completing the survey were asked to rank the survey items on a 4-point scale (*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree,* and *strongly agree*). The survey was divided into three sections. In the first section, participants were asked to respond to three demographic questions that included their gender, grade level, and the truancy intervention in which they participated. In the second section, questions 1 through 9, participants were asked to rank their responses to questions regarding the effectiveness of the truancy intervention. In the third section, questions

10 through 26 participants were asked to rank factors that contributed to truancy. Factors were grouped according to individual, school, family, and community factors. The survey was administered in the format of a paper-and-pencil instrument.

Piloting of the Survey

A pilot study was conducted to obtain feedback on the survey questions and the design of the instrument and the focus group questionnaire consisting of six semistructured questions to be used in guiding discussion. Three teachers, one principal (who were well-versed in attendance-related matters), and two students not involved in the study were randomly selected to participate in the pilot. The researcher met with pilot participants after school in a conference room at a local middle school. The researcher provided an overview of the study, focus group questions, research questions, and presented the proposed survey instrument. First, pilot study participants were asked to read each focus group question and to comment on the structure, length, content, and clarity of the each question and to offer suggestions for revising, adding, or eliminating questions. After review and discussion, the order of the questions were changed so that questions 3, 4, and 5 related to participation followed each in the sequence of questions. There were no other suggested changes to the focus group questionnaire.

Next, pilot study participants were asked to repeat the same review process for the survey items, reading each question and giving comment on the structure, length, content, and clarity of the each question. Pilot study participants suggested adding a descriptor to questions 10, 18, and 19 to provide clarification. They did not have any structural or sequencing issues with the questions and agreed the data collection tool was a sound interviewing mechanism.

This feedback was incorporated with feedback from the researcher's dissertation committee chair, which assisted in strengthening the instrument's construct and content validity

by pointing out excess and ambiguous verbiage and suggesting ideas for clarification and consolidation leading to the final revised instrument which was utilized for this study and which appears as Appendix D.

Surveys are commonly used to measure program outcomes. However, to yield accurate information, surveys must be both reliable and valid. Instrument validity means that the survey or test measures what it says it is measuring. Reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha) and principle component analysis were performed as diagnostics to test the effectiveness of the survey scale. Cronbach's alpha is a statistic used to determine the reliability and consistency of the responses on a given scale (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). These researchers stress the importance of calculating and reporting Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency reliability on any Likert-type scales designed by the researcher (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Cronbach alpha coefficient scores range from 0 to 1, with 1 being the most reliable and 0 being the least reliable. The acceptable coefficient for good reliability in most social science research is .70 (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Cronbach's alpha for the total scale score of the Student Truancy Survey-3 is .946 suggesting that the survey items have high internal consistency. Since there was not much variation in survey items, it was not necessary to delete any survey questions. Therefore, the survey was maintained with the complete set of questions as originally intended. The survey was submitted to the IRB for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research at Virginia Commonwealth University and received approval.

Focus Group

As Krueger and Casey (2009) posit, "The purpose of a focus group is to promote a comfortable atmosphere of disclosure in which people can share their ideas, experiences, and attitudes about a topic" (p. 9). As a method of data collection, it has been suggested that focus

groups are based on two fundamental assumptions. The first is that individuals can provide a rich source of information about a topic. The second is that the collective and individual responses encouraged by the focus group setting will generate material that differs from other methods (Glitz, 1998). According to Krueger and Casey (2009), a focus group typically includes the following traits: (a) focus groups consist of 6 to 10 participants, (b) focus groups are led by a trained moderator, and (c) focus groups have the purpose of discussing one topic or issue in-depth.

The purpose of the focus group for this study was to document the perceptions of students, who participated in the treatment or control group of the truancy pilot, to determine whether they felt that the intervention was effective in improving their attendance and to identify what factors they believed contributed to school truancy. Four students from the treatment group and two from the control group participated in the focus group and survey. As a means of data collection, semistructured interview questions were utilized to guide the discussion. According to Isaac and Michael (1985), semistructured interviews are built around a core of structured questions that allow the interviewer to probe and branch off to explore greater depth.

The focus group was held in the principal's conference room at the school to minimize interruptions. Students reported to the conference room at the beginning of their directed study period. At the beginning of the focus group, students were reminded of the purpose of the focus group and the reason they had been selected to participate due to their involvement in the truancy pilot either as a participant in the treatment or control group. Confidentiality and steps taken to protect student information and identity was reviewed. Students were informed that their names would not be used during the focus group or identified on the survey or any data collected as part of the focus group. Students were then provided an assigned number. This number linked the

student to the survey that they were asked to complete as well as to responses given during the focus group. Students were also asked to state the number before providing a response to a focus group question.

During the focus group students were asked to complete a brief survey consisting of 28 questions and to participate in a focus group where they were asked to respond to five to six predetermined questions regarding their perception of the truancy intervention that they participated in. Student responses were audio-recorded using Audacity®, which is free software for recording and editing. The audio recording of the focus group interview was performed using the student researcher's password-protected laptop computer. During the focus group, the researcher also took brief notes by hand. At the conclusion of the focus group, the researcher downloaded the audio tape to a password-protected external hard drive that was secured, along with interview notes, in a fire safe located in a private, locked office. Like any information-gathering tool, focus groups have some advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages of focus groups. Advantages of focus groups include:

- Focus groups are quick and relatively easy to set up.
- Focus group dynamics can provide useful information that individual data collection does not provide.
- Focus groups are useful in gaining insight into a topic that may be more difficult to gather through other data collection methods.

Disadvantages of focus groups. Disadvantages of focus groups include:

- Focus groups have less control over group; less able to control what information will be produced.

- Focus groups are limited in terms of their ability to generalize findings to a larger population, mainly because of the small sample size and the likelihood that the participants will not be randomly selected.
- Focus groups are susceptible to facilitator bias.
- Focus group discussion can be dominated or sidetracked by a few individuals.
- Focus group data analysis is time consuming and needs to be well planned in advance.
- Focus groups require a carefully trained interviewer who is knowledgeable about group dynamics. The moderator may knowingly or unknowingly bias results by providing cues about what types of responses are desirable.
- Focus group results may be biased by the presence of a very dominant or opinionated member; more reserved members may be hesitant to talk.

Data Analysis

Transcribing the Data

Once the survey and focus group data were collected, the researcher began the data analysis process. The first step involved transcribing the data from the audio recording taken during the focus group. Audio recording of the focus group interview was completed using Audacity®, free software for recording and editing on the researcher's password-protected computer. Prior to assigning any codes, the researcher listened to the audio recording several times in its entirety and read through field notes repeatedly to refresh her memory of the focus group interview. This process was begun within hours of completing the focus group.

After listening to the audio recording, reviewing field notes, and reviewing the research questions, the researcher began the process of transcribing the audio recording. During this

process, the researcher listened to student responses to each question and checked to ensure that each statement could be attributed to a specific student. As stated previously, each student was assigned a unique number at the beginning of the focus group and was asked to state their number before responding to a question. The number was used to link the response to the student. In addition to the audio recording, the researcher also took notes throughout the focus group recording quotes and noting the student number associated with the particular statement or quote. It was evident at the beginning of the audio recording that students required more prompts from the researcher to state their number before giving a response. The researcher was pleased that the field notes were available as a backup to the audio recording in connecting students to specific statements, phrases, and quotes. The students required less prompting to state their number before responding as the focus group progressed and they clearly became more comfortable with the process.

The complete audio recording was transcribed yielding 66 pages of text. Each page was analyzed systematically. Data were extracted manually from transcripts and summarized onto a series of four charts. The researcher decided that it would be easier to identify all the quotations prior to assigning them codes. Patton (2002) notes that quotations "reveal the respondents' levels of emotion, the way in which they have organized the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions" (p. 6). For the purposes of this study, quotations were one or more sentences or phrases, spoken by a participant, which conveyed a complete thought. The researcher used a thematic display to visually explore students' responses to questions and to identify quotes and phases and to begin organizing the data into categories according to factors: individual, school, family, or community. During the transcription process, the researcher encountered several unfamiliar terms. For example, student–MNO3749 stated

that "the entire school is on restricted movement." The researcher was not clear what restricted movement meant within the context of the school environment. Student–MNO3749 was contacted by the researcher for an explanation of this term. Student–MNO3749 explained that there had been a series of physical altercations between students at the school resulting in students being placed on restricted movement meaning that students were not permitted to leave their classroom once the bell rang, or the student had to have an adult escort if it were necessary for a student to leave class. This explanation enabled the proper category of this quotation.

Inductive Coding

The next step began the process of assigning codes to the quotations. Assigning codes to the pieces of data is the way to begin constructing categories by grouping the comments that seem to go together (Merriam, 2009). Each quotation was assigned at least one code; however, some quotations were assigned multiple codes (e.g., drug use was identified as an individual, school and family factor and was subsequently coded under each of the three categories). Codes were organized into categories using specific terms and language used by participants. If the quotation was identified as an individual factor, it was coded as 1, school factor was coded as 2, family factor was coded as 3, and community factor was coded as 4. In addition to these codes, it was necessary to add additional codes to include the six questions from the focus group questionnaire as well as codes to indicate whether the student participated in the treatment or control group; and finally, it was necessary to add codes for subcategories that surfaced. After completing the coding process, the researcher had created 42 unique codes.

The researcher was aware that a risk in coding is to have codes that are redundant in meaning. Merriam (2009) warns that having too many codes can be unmanageable and that this can lead to confusion in meaning. She contends that fewer categories enable more effective

communication of findings. Merriam (2009) suggests narrowing dozens of codes at the beginning of the data analysis process into five or six themes. Through this process of the researcher discovered numerous redundant codes. One example was the codes "teacher/student relationship" and "school climate/safety." After reviewing the quotations assigned to these two quotes, the researcher was able to identify that they were redundant in meaning. As a result, the code "teacher/student relationship" was eliminated. Through this process, the researcher developed a clearer understanding of the meaning of each code and was confident that the codes had been consistently applied. One additional benefit of this process was that it allowed the researcher to reduce the number codes from 42 to 29. All codes had at least four quotations assigned to it associated with more than one participant.

The researcher coded the data into categorized themes and patterns and looked for key issues, recurrent events, or comments as well as references to school truancy associated with identified factors; individual, family, school, and community became categories of focus. Using a method of color coding information from transcriptions, the researcher was able to identify emergent themes and patterns. An instance of a theme might be expressed in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire document. Thus, the researcher may assign a code to a text chunk of any size, as long as that chunk represents a single theme or issue of relevance (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). The goal is to identify important themes or categories within a body of content, and to provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting. Through careful data preparation, coding, and interpretation, the results of qualitative content analysis can support the development of new theories and models, as well as validating existing theories and providing

thick descriptions of particular settings or phenomena (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 11). Themes are identified by factor and results are discussed in Chapter 4.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that while all research must have truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality in order to be considered worthwhile, the nature of knowledge within the quantitative paradigm differs from the knowledge in qualitative paradigm. As a result, each paradigm requires specific criteria for addressing "rigor" or "trustworthiness." Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted that within the quantitative paradigm, the criteria to reach the goal of rigor are established through internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. On the other hand, they proposed that the criteria in the qualitative paradigm to ensure "trustworthiness" are addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To establish trustworthiness for the qualitative phase, the researcher examined four criteria, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is establishing confidence in the truthfulness of the findings, which is similar to internal validity. Transferability is determining the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts, which is similar to external validity (Trochim, 2006). In this study, the issue of transferability was addressed by reviewing the relevant literature, providing detailed information regarding procedures used to implement the study and using a variety of sources for data collection. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a single method can never adequately illuminate a phenomenon. Using multiple methods can help to facilitate a deeper understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability involves demonstrating that the findings are consistent and could be repeated, which is similar to reliability. Confirmability is

establishing the degree to which the findings are free of bias and can be confirmed by others who read or review the research. Results are determined by the subjects and conditions are free of bias (Bradley, 1993, p. 437). A strategy for assuring credibility is triangulation, which includes the use of multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple methods of confirming the data. A strategy for assuring dependability and confirmability is the use of an audit trail, which for this study included the audio recording of the focus group, the transcripts of the focus group interviews, survey data, and the files of coding. Dependability was also established through constantly checking the consistency of the study processes to ensure that each step was being carried out with fidelity.

Study Limitations

The methodology of this study has several limitations. The first involves the nature of secondary data and the lack of control over data quality and as well as the lack of control over the precise timing of the data collection (Tomlinson-Keasey, 1996). Another limitation is maturation. Patton (2002) warned that researchers must acknowledge that all forms of longitudinal design are susceptible to history or experience bias, since the passage of time results in natural and developmental changes in the subjects. He further noted that changes in external circumstances for society as a whole would yield confounding influences. For example, the participants' recall of their experience with the truancy intervention may be more difficult to recall as a result of the passage of time. In addition, students would have increased in chronological age since their involvement in the truancy pilot. This maturation specifically affects the students who participated in the truancy pilot during the 2012-2013 school year and were selected to participate in the focus group and survey in December 2014. While maturation

may be an issue for the focus group and survey completion part of the study, the quantitative demographic data would not have been influenced by this threat.

The survey instrument used in this study has no documented measures of validity or reliability. The instrument has been used in other unpublished dissertations and was adapted for use in this study. The instrument was piloted with a panel consisting of educators and students and reviewed by the researcher's dissertation chair. Reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha) and analysis of each question were performed as diagnostics to test the effectiveness of the survey scale. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale score of survey instrument was .946, suggesting that the survey items had high internal consistency. The survey was submitted to IRB and was approved for use in this study.

Lastly, researcher bias is a threat to the validity of this study. Patton (2002) states that acknowledging this potential bias is one method to increase credibility in the research findings. The researcher is an employee in the school system which is being studied, and has had 15 years of experience in working with middle and high school students regarding issues of attendance and truancy. The researcher's experience includes direct supervision of school social workers whose many roles include that of school truancy officer, developing and implementing policies and procedures for the enforcement of compulsory attendance, working directly with court services personnel and juvenile judges regarding truancy and student's compliance with court ordered school attendance. The researcher's knowledge and experience of the subject matter increased the researcher's effectiveness in the interview process. Participants felt comfortable talking with and interacting with the researcher. Although, the researcher's knowledge and observations of conditions in the school system helped to shape the direction and research questions of the study, every attempt was made to assure objectivity in the design of the

methodology and instrumentation and in the interpretation of obtained results. The researcher was not involved in the selection of students for Phase I of the truancy pilot and was not involved in the collection of the data.

The purpose of this mixed methods study was two-fold: to examine the effectiveness of the treatment intervention and to determine students' perceptions of factors that contribute to truancy. Specifically of interest was whether or not diverting students from court referral to treatment services involving in-home counseling and case management would decrease student's unexcused absences and improve academic outcomes. Using qualitative methods to expand upon the quantitative created an understanding of the collective experiences of participants in this study.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to determine the effectiveness of a truancy intervention program aimed at reducing truancy by linking truants and their families to in-home counseling services and case management as an alternative to court referral and to determine students' perceptions of factors that contribute to truancy. This chapter is divided into two sections. In section one, results of the secondary data analysis of data collected in Phase I of the truancy intervention program is presented. Truancy intervention participants in the truancy pilot were divided into two groups, treatment and control. In section two, the qualitative results from the survey and focus group obtained during Phase II of the study are summarized. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study.

1. Are there differences in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment?

H_{01}: There is no statistically significant difference in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment.

H_{A1}: There is a statistically significant difference in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment.

2. What other effects did the treatment have?

a. Are there differences in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups?

H_{02}: There is no statistically significant difference in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups.

H_{A2}: There is a statistically significant difference in academic outcomes for English, math, science and social studies between the two groups.

b. Are there differences in discipline referrals between the two groups?

H_{03}: There is no statistically significant difference in disciplinary referrals between the two groups.

H_{A3}: There is a statistically significant difference in disciplinary referrals between the two groups.

c. Are there differences in retention and promotion rates between the two groups?

H_{04}: There is no statistically significant difference in retention rates between the two groups.

H_{A4}: There is a statistically significant difference in retention rates between the two groups.

3. What are the students' perceptions of the truancy reduction interventions?

Statistical Analysis

The statistical procedure for Research Questions 1, 2(a), and 2(b) was Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Since subjects were not randomly assigned to the treatment or control group, prior to testing each null hypotheses, preliminary statistical analyses were conducted on the pretest sample means to assess whether there were pre-existing differences between the treatment and control group on each of the variables tested. Although all participants had a

history of truancy, having been absent unexcused at least 10% (or 18 days) of the prior school year, participants varied considerably in the level of prior year unexcused absences and other outcome variables.

Prior to conducting the ANCOVA for each hypotheses, the homogeneity of slopes assumption was tested. The researcher tested the assumption that the regression slope of the dependent variable (post-treatment means) on the covariate (pre-treatment means) were equal. The test of homogeneity evaluated the interaction between the covariate (pre-treatment means) and the factor (Group: Treatment and Control) in the prediction of the dependent variable (post-treatment means). The interaction between the covariate (pre-treatment means) and the factor (Group: Treatment and Control) was assessed to ensure that the differences in groups on the dependent variable did not vary as a function of the covariate. With no evidence of a violation of the homogeneity assumption, the researcher proceeded to conduct a one-way ANCOVA for each hypothesis.

For Research Question 2(c), the statistical test used to test the null hypothesis was Chi-square. Chi-square is a statistical test that tests for the existence of a relationship between two variables. For this research question, a 2 X 2 cross tabulation of treatment and control group by retention/promotion was used.

The second phase of this study expands upon the quantitative data results using qualitative data collected through purposive sampling of a select number of study participants regarding their perception of the truancy intervention. The method of data collection involved the use of a survey and focus group discussion guided by a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. These data represent the perceptions of the treatment interventions from the voices of study participants.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics: About the Sample

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize student demographic and academic measures. The sample population for the truancy pilot for Phase I of this study consisted of 390 students ranging in age from 12 to 17. The sample population was divided into two groups, treatment and control. The treatment group subjects were diverted from court intervention and received in-home counseling and case management services through private contractors funded through the FAPT. Subjects in the control group were referred to court for a hearing before the judge and received no treatment services. The treatment group consisted of 280 students and the control group consisted of 110 students. Fifty-one percent of the sample population were males (n = 198) and 49% were females (n = 192). For the treatment group, 53% of the subjects were males (n = 146) and 47% were females (n = 134). For the control group, 47% were males (n = 52) and 53% were females (n = 58). Table 2 depicts gender demographics by group type.

Table 2

Gender Demographic by Group Type

	Male (%)	Female (%)
Treatment group	146 (37)	134 (34)
Control group	52 (47)	58 (53)

Within the sample population, subject participants ranged in age from 12 to 17 with a mean age of 15.0 years. In terms of ethnicity, 33% of the subjects reported their ethnicity as White, 52% were identified as Black, 9% were Latino, 4% were Asian, 1% was American Indian, and 1% fell in the category of Other (with no ethnicity specified). Table 3 details the ethnicity of participants by treatment and control group. One percent of the treatment

Table 3

Ethnicity by Treatment and Control Group

	n	Treatment (%)	Control (%)
Asian	15	4(1)	11(3)
White	127	41(10)	86(22)
Other	9	4(1)	5(1)
Black	201	170(43)	31(8)
Latino	36	9(3)	27(7)
American Indian	4	2(.5)	2(.5)

sample and 3% of the control group sample was identified as Asian. Ten percent of the treatment sample and 22% of the control group sample's ethnicity was identified as White. One percent of the treatment sample fell in the category of Other, while 1% of the control group sample fell into this category. The largest percentage of the sample population was identified as Black. Forty-three percent of the treatment sample and 8% of the control sample was identified as Black. Three percent of the treatment sample's ethnicity was identified as Latino and 7% of the control group was identified as Latino. For American Indian, .5% made up the treatment group and .5% comprised the control group. The largest percentage of the treatment group were Black while students whose ethnicity was identified as white made up the largest percentage of the control group.

Research Question 1

Are there differences in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment?

To test the null hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment, a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted. The results of the ANCOVA for testing the null hypothesis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Unexcused Absences (Pre and Post Intervention)

	X (pre)	SD	X (post)	SD
Treatment	16.32	3.77	8.76	4.53
Control	12.59	3.06	5.83	3.74
Total sample	15.26	3.96	7.93	4.52

After adjusting for the covariate, no statistically significant difference F (387) = 1.917, p = .167) was found between the treatment and control group for post unexcused absences. The partial eta square value (η2 = .260) indicates a large effect size. Both groups showed a decrease in unexcused absences following the treatment. These results suggest that there was an equal effect for both groups. In other words, there was no difference in the effect of in-home counseling and case management and court referral in reducing unexcused absences. Since no statistically significant differences were found, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Research Question 2

What other effects did the treatment have? This question has three subquestions:

a. Are there differences in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups?

b. Are there differences in discipline referrals between the two groups?

c. Are there differences in retention and promotion rates between the two groups?

Subquestion 2a. Are there differences in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups? For this question, the variables measured for academic outcomes were pretest and posttest grades in English, math, science, and social studies. To test the null hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference in academic outcomes between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment, a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted for each subject. Results of pre and post treatment means are presented in Table 5. For the purpose of interpretation, grades were not calculated based on GPA. Grades were coded as follows: A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, D = 4, 5 = F. As a result, numbers that appear to be decreasing are actually increasing.

Table 5

Pre and Post Grades for Academic Subjects

		N	X (pre)	X (post)	Dif
English	Treatment	277	3.52	3.24	.28
	Control	111	3.61	3.28	.33
	Total	388	3.55	3.25	.30
Math	Treatment	274	4.03	3.74	.29
	Control	108	4.05	3.77	.28
	Total	382	4.03	3.75	.28
Science	Treatment	278	3.72	3.49	.23
	Control	111	3.78	3.63	.15
	Total	389	3.73	3.53	.20
Social studies	Treatment	277	3.62	3.36	.26
	Control	111	3.74	3.59	.15
	Total	388	3.65	3.43	.22

Note. Grade coding: A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, D = 4, F = 5.

English grade. After adjusting for the covariate, no statistically significant difference was found between the treatment and control group F (384) = 0.069, p = .793 in performance for

English post treatment. To determine the effect size of the treatment, partial eta square was calculated (η_2= .551), which indicates a large effect size. The pretest and posttest grade for English for participants in the control group and treatment group equated to a letter grade of C. While the change was not sufficient to elevate the grade to a higher letter grade, the mean English grade for the treatment group, who received the intervention of in-home counseling and case management services, was higher than those that went through court intervention, a gain of (.30). No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups in performance in English post treatment intervention, therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Math grade. For this question, the variables measured for academic outcomes were pretest and posttest grades in math. For the subject math, after adjusting for the covariate, no statistically significant difference F (379) = .094, p =.760 was found between the control and treatment group in math performance post treatment intervention. To determine the effect size of the treatment, partial eta square was calculated (η_2= .000), which indicates a small effect size. There was no statistically significant effect of the treatment on math performance between the two groups post treatment. The difference between the mean scores for the two groups was a gain of .28 in the final grade for math. The mean math scores for the control group, who went through the traditional court process, was slightly higher than the mean scores for the treatment group who received in-home counseling and case management services. There was no statistically significant difference in math performance between the two groups post treatment intervention, therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Science grade. For this question, the variables measured for academic outcomes were pretest and posttest grades in science. For the subject science, after adjusting for the covariate, a nonstatistically significant difference F (386) = 2.417, p = .121 was found between the treatment

and control group in performance in science post treatment intervention. To determine the effect size of the treatment, partial eta squared was calculated (η_2= .606, which indicates a large effect size. There was a statistically significant positive effect of the treatment on science performance between the two groups post treatment. Mean science grade for participants in the control group pre and post treatment equated to a letter grade of C. The difference between the mean scores for the two groups was a gain of .20 in the final science grade. The mean science grades for the control group who went through the traditional court process were slightly higher than the treatment group who received the treatment intervention of in-home counseling and case management services. Since there was a statistically significant difference in science performance between the two groups post treatment intervention, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Social studies grade. For this question, the variables measured for academic outcomes were pretest and posttest grades in social studies. For the subject social studies, after adjusting for the covariate, a statistically significant difference F (383) = 3.965, p = .047 was found between the control and treatment group in academic performance in social studies from pre- to post-treatment intervention. To examine the effect size of the treatment, partial eta squared was calculated (η_2= .505), which indicates a large effect size. Overall, mean social studies grades for participants in the control and treatment group pre-treatment equated to a letter grade of C-. The overall mean letter grade improved to that of C between the two groups post-treatment intervention. The difference between the mean scores for the two groups was a gain of .22 in the final social studies grade. The mean social studies grade for the control group, who went through the traditional court process, were slightly higher than the treatment group who received the treatment intervention of in-home counseling and case management services. Since a

statistically significant difference was found in social studies performance between the two groups from pre- to post-treatment, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Subquestion 2b. Are there differences in discipline referrals between the two groups? The mean scores for disciplinary referrals pre and post treatment are reported in Table 6. After

Table 6

Discipline Referrals (Pre-Post Intervention)

	X (pre)	SD	X (post)	SD
Treatment	5.55	3.77	3.48	4.53
Control	3.24	3.06	1.76	3.74
Total sample	15.26	3.96	7.93	4.51

adjusting for the covariate, a statistically significant difference F (388) = 19.309, p = .000 was found in the number of discipline referrals between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment. To determine the effect size of the treatment, partial eta squared was calculated (η_2=.079), which indicates a large effect size. No other significant differences were found for disciplinary referral for the treatment group as a result of the intervention. Participants in the treatment and control group varied considerably in both the number of discipline referrals received as well as in the type of offenses they committed. Disciplinary referrals for participants ranged from 0-31 for the school year. While many of the disciplinary referrals were generated due to truancy-related issues (i.e., skipping classes and excessive tardiness to class), others were due to nontruancy-related behaviors. Since there was no statistically significant difference in post treatment disciplinary referrals between the two groups following the implementation of the treatment, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Subquestion 2c. Are there differences in retention and promotion rates between the two groups? For this research question, a Pearson Chi-square test is appropriate to use because the dependent variable (retention/promotion) is measured on a nominal scale of measurement and there are two independent groups (treatment and control). Chi-square was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in retention and promotion between the two groups (treatment and control). Results of the Chi-Square χ 2 (1) = 3.223, p = .073 was not statistically significant. This indicates there was no significant difference between the treatment and control group for promotion and retention (see Table 7)

Table 7

Retention/Promotion for Treatment and Control Group

	Retention/Promotion		
	Retained (%)	Pass (%)	Total (%)
Treatment	51 (13)	229 (59)	280 (72)
Control	12 (3)	99 (25)	111 (28)
Total sample	63 (16)	328 (84)	391 (100)

Additional analysis. **A**dditional analysis examined differences between high school and middle school students. Chi-squared for middle school students χ 2 (1) = 0.583, p = .445 was not significant for promotion and retention. Fifteen percent of middle school students in the treatment group were retained and 85% were promoted. Eight percent of middle school students in the control group were retained and 92 % were promoted. Results of Chi square (χ 2 (1) = 2.581, p = .108 for high school students was not statistically significant for retention and promotion. Nineteen percent of high school students in the treatment group were retained and 81% were promoted, whereas 11% of high school students in the control group were retained and

88% were promoted. Since there was no statistically significant difference in retention and promotion rates between the two groups following the implementation of the treatment, the null hypothesis was accepted. Table 8 presents a summary for the variables. Results indicate that there was no effect of the treatment for English, math and science grades. There was an effect of the treatment found for social studies due to a modest gain in performance for the control group.

Table 8

Summary Table for Variables

Variables	Significant difference
Absences	No
Grades	
English	No
Math	No
Science	No
Social studies	Yes
Discipline referrals	Yes
Retention/promotion	No

An effect of the treatment was found for retention/promotion for the treatment group. Fifty-nine percent of the participants in the treatment group were promoted while 13% were retained. In comparison, 25% of participants in the control group were promoted, while 3% were retained.

Research Question 3

What are the student's perceptions of the truancy reduction interventions?

To investigate participants' perceptions of the truancy intervention, data were collected through two sources. First, participants were administered a survey consisting of 26 open-ended questions. Next, participants engaged in a focus group discussion where they were asked to

respond to a set of predetermined questions regarding their experience with truancy interventions. The results of the survey data are presented followed by results of the focus group data.

Survey Results

Appendix E displays the mean rating and standard deviation scores of each survey item ranked from highest to lowest mean. Mean scores ranged from 3.50 to 2.25, with standard deviation scores ranging from 1.291 to .00. Among the survey items, "I am aware of the school district's truancy policy" had the highest mean (M = 3.50, SD = .577). Although there were six survey respondents, two did not respond to this item. Fifty percent of the respondents *strongly agreed* and 50% *agreed* that they were aware of the school district's truancy policy. The survey items, "improving relationships between school staff" (M = 3.50, SD = .957), "teaching style (lack of respect and/or support of student needs)" (M = 3.25, SD = .957) and "obligation to stay home (due to the need to care for younger siblings or due to financial expectations)" (M = 3.25, SD = .957) were equally ranked.

Fifty percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 33% *agreed*, and 17% *disagreed* that the relationship between school staff and students contributed to truancy among students in their school. Sixty-seven percent of respondents either *strongly agreed* or *agreed*, while 33% of respondents *disagreed* that "teaching style (lack of respect and/or support of student needs)" contributed to their truancy. Fifty percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 33% *agreed*, and 16% *disagreed* that "obligation to stay home (due to the need to care for younger siblings or due to financial expectations)" contributed to their truancy.

For the question, "disruptive events occurring at home," the mean was (M = 3.00, SD = 1.155). Fifty percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 17% *agreed*, and 33% *disagreed* that "disruptive events occurring at home" contributed to their truancy. The questions, "student health concern" (M = 3.00, SD = .816), "grade retention" (M = 3.00, SD = .816), "lack of motivation to achieve" (M = 3.00, SD = .816), "the truancy intervention was helpful in improving my school attendance" (M = 3.00, SD = .816), "the truancy intervention was helpful in preventing me from further truancy" (M = 3.00, SD = .816), and "the truancy intervention was helpful in reducing the number of disciplinary referrals that I received" (M = 3.00, SD = .816) were equally ranked. Seventeen percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 67% *agreed*, and 16% *disagreed* that "student health concerns" contributed to their truancy. Thirty-three percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, and 17% *disagreed* that "grade retention" contributed to their truancy. Seventeen percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 67% *agreed*, and 16% *disagreed* that a "lack of motivation to achieve" contributed to their truancy. Seventeen percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, and 33% *disagreed* that the truancy intervention was helpful in improving the respondent's school attendance." Seventeen percent *strongly agreed*, 67% *agree*, and 16% *disagreed* that "the truancy intervention was helpful in preventing the respondent from further truancy." Seventeen percent *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, 17% *disagreed*, and 16% *strongly disagreed* that "the truancy intervention was helpful in reducing the number of disciplinary referrals that the respondent received."

For the question, "having an assigned mentor at school would be helpful in encouraging student attendance," the mean was (M = 3.00, SD = .000). Seventeen percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 68% *agreed*, and 16% *disagreed* that "having an assigned mentor at school would be helpful in encouraging student attendance." "Negative peer role models" had a mean

of (M = 2.75, SD = 1.500). Thirty-three percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 17% *agreed*, 33% *disagreed*, and 17% *strongly disagreed* that "having an assigned mentor at school would be helpful in encouraging student attendance." "Teacher/student relationship" had a mean of (M = 2.75, SD = 1.258). Seventeen percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, 17% *disagreed*, and 16% *strongly disagreed* that "teacher/student relationship" contributed to their truancy.

For the question, "having access to credit recovery programs would encourage student attendance at my school," the mean was (M = 2.75, SD = .957). Thirty-four percent *strongly agreed*, 33% *agreed*, and 33% disagreed that "having access to credit recovery programs would encourage student attendance at the respondents' school. The questions, "lack of preparedness to do school work" (i.e., do not have school supplies/books incomplete homework) (M = 2.25, SD = .50), "not prepared for the test" (M= 2.75, SD = .50), "behavior and emotional problems " (M = 2.75, SD = .50), and "drugs/alcohol use" (M= 2.75, SD = .50) were equally ranked. Seventeen percent *strongly agreed*, 68% *agreed*, and 16% *disagreed* that "lack of preparedness to do school work" contributed to their truancy. Eighty-three percent of the respondents *strongly agreed* and 17% *disagreed* that "behavior and emotional problems" contributed to their truancy. Sixty-seven percent of respondents *agreed*, and 33% *disagreed* that "drugs and/or alcohol use" contributed to their truancy. "Fear of not being safe at school" (M = 2.50, SD = 1.291) and "School bullying" (M = 2.50, SD = 1.291) were equally ranked. Thirty-three percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 17% *agreed*, 33% *disagreed*, and 17% *strongly disagreed* that school bullying contributed to their truancy.

The question, "providing parent education regarding the importance of school attendance would reduce student absences at my school" (M = 2.50, SD = .577), "lack of effective and

consistently applied school attendance policies" (M = 2.50, SD = .577), and "frequent family moves" (M = 2.50, SD = .577) were equally ranked. Sixty-seven percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, and 33% *disagreed* that a "lack of effective and consistently applied school attendance policies" contributed to their truancy. Seventeen percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, and 33% *disagreed* that "frequent family moves" contributed to their truancy.

The mean for the question, "out of school suspensions" was (M = 2.25, SD = .957). Seventeen percent of respondents *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, 17% *disagreed*, and 16% *strongly disagreed* that out of school suspensions contributed to their truancy. Survey questions, "having tutoring programs at my school would encourage student attendance," (M = 2.25, SD = .500), and "family health concerns" (illness of parent, sibling or other family member) (M = 2.25, SD = .500) were equally ranked. Fifty percent of respondents *strongly agreed* and 50% *agreed* that having tutoring programs at their school would encourage their attendance. Similarly, 50% of respondents *strongly agreed*, and 50% *agreed* that "family health concerns" (M = 2.25, SD = .50) contributed to their truancy.

Focus Group Results

Inductive Coding

The causes of truancy were priori coded into four areas: individual factors, school factors, family factors, and community factors. The researcher used verbatim quotations from participants to provide a detailed narrative summary for each theme. When necessary, the researcher paraphrased participants' responses; however, paraphrasing was done only when it was necessary to provide grammatical continuity. The qualitative analysis of factors that influence truancy and participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of truancy interventions fell into four categories: individual factors, school factors, family factors and community factors. Within these categories, four major themes emerged: student engagement, school safety/climate, parent

support/family obligations, and community safety/violence. Table 9 presents the emerging themes and subthemes.

Table 9

Emerging Themes and Subthemes

Categories	Emerging themes	Subthemes
Individual factors	Student engagement	Student motivation
		Student health conditions
		Child care
		Peer relationships
School factors	School safety/climate	School safety
		School suspension
		School size
		Grade retention
		Teacher quality
		Teacher/student relationship
		Low expectations
		Grade retention
		Options for earning credits
Family factors	Parent support/family Obligations	Parent involvement
		Family obligations
		Family mobility
		Domestic violence
Community factors		Safety
		Violence
		Gangs
		Drugs

Individual factors: This category includes personal factors such as values, attitudes, and behaviors that participants perceive as contributing to truancy and follows the conceptual framework of student engagement. For individual factors, the largest subthemes were student health conditions and peer relationships. As stated by one participant, "Health issues are an issue

for me. I have asthma and sometimes I miss school because of it. I don't be trying to miss for no reason but if I don't feel well, I am not coming." There was consensus among participants that at their school students are marked absent unexcused if they do not bring a doctor's note to excuse an absence due to illness. Since most illnesses do not require a doctor's visit, these unexcused absences count are viewed as counted unfairly against students.

Family responsibilities, which included child care needs, served as the other subtheme. As participant MNO-C3749 stated:

> I have a child of my own, I can't always come to school especially, when I don't have someone to watch her or if she is sick. . . .There are a lot of students in this school that are in the same situation as I am. I know at least 10 other girls that have a child. I think having a day care program at school would help.

The majority of the responses in this subtheme indicated that child care was a major issue that caused some students to be truant and that school staff do not understand the issue and the demands that are placed on students that have to support children. It was suggested that day care programs be made available in schools so that students who have children can have access to child care. The final subtheme was peer relationships. As stated by MD-C3633, "I don't get along with a lot of the students at this school. There is a lot of bullying that goes on here, so I sometimes avoid school just to stay out of the drama." FH-C2761 said, "School is not for everybody. Some students come because they are forced to come, it's the law, they do not have any hope that they will graduate." Several participants agreed with this comment, stating that some students do not have any hope that they will graduate because they are already behind academically and cannot catch up. These comments were followed by the comment by MQ-3000, who stated, "Some student's don't see the benefit of having a diploma, it don't change

their life circumstances." Three participants verbalized agreement with this comment. There was consensus that having a high school diploma does not assure a better quality of life. Two participants acknowledged that they have family members who have high school diplomas who cannot find a job and cannot financially support themselves. They acknowledged that this is a common problem that impacts their belief that "schooling can make a difference."

School factors. Under the category of school factors, several subthemes emerged: school safety, school size, school climate, teacher quality, student/teacher relationships, and low expectations for student achievement. Among these subthemes, school safety emerged as the largest subtheme that revealed the following quotes:

> "I do not feel safe at this school, students are quick tempered, ready to fight for no or little reason. Students fight often in this school."
>
> "Some students are more concerned about maintaining self-image with peers, will hurt/fight peers to maintain that image."
>
> "Students fight at school because it is actually a safer environment to fight in than the community where there is a greater chance that they will get severely injured or killed."
>
> "Schools can't change bad kids. Suspension won't change behavior patterns."
>
> "Some kids live in violence all day. It's crazy to think they are going to be different when they come to school, when that is all they know."

School safety was acknowledged as a barrier to school attendance that each participant identified. One participant stated that she does not feel safe at the school. There was consensus among participants that there are frequent incidents of fighting among peers. Participants pointed out that all students were on restricted movement because of several recent fights among students.

School climate. School climate emerged as a subtheme under school factors that contributes to truancy. Four out of the six participants agreed that student safety was an issue at the school due to overly aggressive peers.

> "Over-crowded hallways, student's bump other students either on purpose or by accident, can result in fight. Difficult to get to class on time because of over-crowding, can't get through hallways safely. I am always afraid that I will get jumped in the hallway because I bumped into someone, I have seen kids get punched for accidently stepping on someone's shoes, its, really crazy."
>
> "School administration is aware of the problem but they mark us tardy to class anyway."
>
> "I don't think that the staff at this school cares about the welfare of the students, they just care about rules that don't make sense."

Teacher/student relationship. Teacher/student relationship was the second largest subtheme. One participant stated, "Teachers in this school don't care about the students." Three participants agreed with this statement citing a lack of care shown towards students and a lack of interest in helping students to learn. The following quotes were provided:

> "If I do not feel that I am being respected by the teacher, I just give up and don't complete class or homework." Why should I care if they don't"?
>
> "Teachers don't always want to help students make up their work because they are angry about students being absent from school. It's not fair because they don't always know the reason the student is absent."
>
> "I have had teachers refuse to give me make up work because they do not feel that I am making the effort to come to school. "

"Teachers play favorites, they just don't like certain students and they go out of their way to fail them."

"I think some of the teachers at this school do care about the students. They are just overwhelmed with the needs and the behaviors."

"I think if classes were more interesting students would want to come to school. Even the teachers don't want to be here and they don't show any interest for teaching, like it's a chore that they hate it."

Four participants were in agreement that the relationship between the teacher and the student impacted on the student's decision to attend school or to skip class. Two participants stated that student behavior (disruptive classroom behavior) makes it difficult for teachers to teach and that teachers get angry and sometimes give up because of it. There was a consensus that many of the teachers were not giving their best effort to teach.

"Honestly, I feel that most of my teachers gave up on us a long time ago."

"They don't expect us to learn anything anymore."

Grade retention. Grade retention was cited as a reason students become truant. As one participant quoted, "When student's fail, they give up, feel hopeless, like they can't learn." Three participants stated that there was a need for more options for earning credits.

Suspensions. Suspensions (out-of-school) were noted to be a major issue at the school. Two participants cited suspensions as a productive way to get rid of students who disrupt learning for students who want to learn. Four participants saw suspensions as being overused by the administration and agreed with the following quote from two of the participants:

"School suspensions-contribute to truancy. Principals suspend students for being absent or habitually tardy; suspensions don't work. Students who do not want to come to school in the first place don't care about being suspended."

"They are always looking for a reason to suspend kids here, man…some of these reasons are crazy, like, if someone hits me and I hit them back. . .what am I supposed to do, just let them beat my ass for no reason? I ain't hearing that. . .I'm gonna defend myself no matter what they do."

School policies. School policies emerged as a subtheme that contributes to truancy. Three participants cited a lack of flexibility in enforcing rules by the school staff. Two participants stated that rules were necessary but agreed that there should be some flexibility because everybody's situation is not the same.

"School rules about how students earn credits need to be more flexible-we need more flexibility in how credits are earned and more options for earning credits."

"Some students are pushed out of school, forced to quit because of stupid rules like, you can't live with a relative that don't have custody of you and go to the school in that zone. What difference does it make, I think kids should go to whatever school they want to."

Family factors. Parent involvement/family obligations were cited as the third largest subtheme. Participants expressed that parent involvement at school was important, however. They noted that there were many reasons that interfered with parents' ability to be involved. Below are some quotes from participants about factors that interfere with parent involvement and how it impacts school attendance:

"Parents are too busy to help their kids with school stuff."

"Some parents don't know how to help because they didn't complete school or the work has changed since they were in school."

"My mom keeps moving from one place to another, we have already moved two times this year, I am tired of moving—I am not always sure why we are moving."

"My mother and her boyfriend don't get along and there is always 'drama' going on. Sometimes I just go to sleep instead of doing homework because I want to avoid the drama."

"I didn't get consequences for skipping school. My parents just yelled at me and threatened to take away my phone and other things but that never happened until I went to court. Then they got really mad because they had to miss work. I don't think if they had acted like they cared before I got involved in court, I would be in this situation."

"I don't think my mom is the blame for my decision to skip school. I think that attending school is up to me."

"My mom can't afford daycare for my brother and sister so I have to stay home and watch them when they are sick and can't go to school. She can't miss work to stay home with them so, I have to do it. I think that should be an excusable reason, helping your family out. It ain't like you can leave kids home alone."

Community factors. Community safety and violence merged as a subtheme under community factors that contribute to truancy.

"I am late for school because I walk to school and have to take the long way around to avoid walking through certain neighborhoods because I will get jumped."

"There is often gun fire in my neighborhood so, I never go outside. When I miss the bus, I stay home instead of walking to school."

"There are gangs in my neighborhood and no female should ever be outside alone."

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Emergent themes were coded into four areas: individual factors, school factors, family factors and community factors. The qualitative analysis of factors that influence truancy and participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of truancy interventions revealed four major themes: student engagement, school safety/climate, parent involvement/family obligations, and community safety/violence. From these themes, subthemes emerged for each factor. Individual factors subthemes included, student heath, child care responsibilities, and peer relationships. School factors subthemes identified were school safety, school size, school climate, teacher quality, student/teacher relationships, and low expectations for student achievement. Family factors subthemes that emerged included parent involvement/family obligations, grade retention, suspension, and school policies. Community factors subthemes identified were community safety and violence.

The qualitative findings of this study provide two major insights. First, participants face an array of barriers to attendance and completion of high school. Second, the qualitative and quantitative data reinforced the literature in identifying factors that contribute to school truancy. The various barriers confronted by the participants are familiar ones and are cited in the literature, such as school disengagement, school safety, school climate, student/teacher relationships, and parent involvement. This is a long list and any one barrier can lead to school alienation and truancy. The need for a comprehensive approach to addressing truancy is further highlighted in the complicated nature of the issues that impact students' decisions not to attend school. School and family factors were identified as the largest contributors to truancy. One of the main assumption held regarding the truancy pilot is that truancy is not merely a reflection of

the individual student, but that it is often rooted in family circumstances, and that family human service needs in many domains (e.g., child care, mental health, substance use, unemployment, and poverty) can all generate barriers to school attendance. This is certainly supported by the qualitative data of this study and is further discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the research findings, implications for practice, limitations, and recommendations for further research. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the effectiveness of a treatment intervention on the attendance and academic outcome measures of middle and high school truant students. Specifically of interest was the question of whether diverting students from court referral to treatment services involving in-home counseling and case management would decrease student's unexcused absences and improve final grades. The sample for this study consisted of 391 middle and high school students from a large school district in central Virginia. Data for this study were collected in two phases of a truancy pilot study implemented by the school division in partnership with local community agencies. Quantitative data were collected during the first phase of the truancy pilot implementation. Variables included in this data collection are described in Table 8. To expand upon the quantitative data and to answer the related research question, qualitative data were collected through a survey and a focus group. The three research questions and hypotheses that guided this study are:

1. Are there differences in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment?

$H0_1$: There is no statistically significant difference in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment.

HA_1: There is a statistically significant difference in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment.

2. What other effects did the treatment have? This question has three subquestions:

a. Are there differences in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups?

$H0_2$: There is no statistically significant difference in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups.

HA_2: There is a statistically significant difference in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups.

b. Are there differences in discipline referrals between the two groups?

$H0_3$: There is no statistically significant difference in disciplinary referrals between the two groups.

HA_3: There is a statistically significant difference in disciplinary referrals between the two groups.

c. Are there differences in retention and promotion rates between the two groups?

$H0_4$: There is no statistically significant difference in retention rates between the two groups.

HA_4: There is a statistically significant difference in retention rates between the two groups.

3. What are the student's perceptions of the truancy reduction interventions?

Summary

The current research on community-based truancy intervention programs has focused mostly on evaluating post intervention outcomes to determine their effectiveness in reducing

truancy (Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Giacomazzi et al., 2006). While the reported outcomes of these programs were largely effective (Evans, Hendricks, McKinley, & Sale, 2010; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Giacomazzi et al., 2006; Huddleston & Shoenfelt, 2006), the degrees of evidence supporting the success of community-based truancy intervention program are debatable, given that the current literature on these programs focuses on quantitative post intervention outcomes such as attendance, grades, and behavior, and failed to examine middle and high school participants' perceptions regarding how effective community-based programs offered as an alternative to court referral improve school attendance and academic performance. To answer important questions about the effectiveness of these programs, it is necessary that researchers employ qualitative methodology that assesses middle and high school truants' thoughts, values, and experiences about truancy intervention programs. Through investigating the middle and high school truants' perspectives, a deeper understanding can be gained regarding how best to design truancy intervention programs to best meet the unique and complex needs of truant middle and high school students. This course of research represented an important step in reducing truancy among truant middle and high school students and eliminating barriers to achievement.

Current research has failed to comparatively examine the effectiveness of community-based truancy intervention programs that operate as a diversion from court referral for status offending youth who have committed no crime, but are subjected to the juvenile justice system. This line of research represents an important step in providing an alternative to placing truancy youth on a path to the juvenile justice system that may do more harm than good.

Similar to the results of this study, evaluations of community-based truancy intervention programs have produced varied results. Although some studies have shown truancy programs

are successful in reducing subsequent truancy (Davidson, Redner, Admur, & Mitchell, 1990; Krisberg & Austin, 1993; Shelden, 1999), others have shown no impact, and some programs have even been shown to have a negative impact. The scant number of studies that exist (Elliott & Blanchard, 1975; Klein, 1976) found little or no difference in the effect of truancy intervention outcomes between diverted and nondiverted youth; however, methodology used to determine these outcomes has been questioned. This suggests a need for more rigorous research.

Although additional research is needed to determine the components of an effective community-based truancy intervention program, Dryfoos (1990) and Shelden (1999) argue that from the few programs that exist, the most successful programs are those providing intensive, comprehensive, holistic services over a sustained period, coupled with placement in community-based programs with a component of treatment services.

The literature supports that truancy is a complex issue and that there are a multitude of reasons that cause students to be truant from school. Most interventions aimed at reducing truancy draw on a risk/protective factors framework. Understanding why students are truant is important in addressing the problem and key to designing appropriate interventions. Yet identifying the causes of truancy is extremely difficult to do because, like other forms of educational achievement (e.g., test scores), it is influenced by a variety of factors related to both the individual student, school, family, and community. The methodology used in this study allowed for the integration of quantitative and qualitative techniques which were essential in making comparisons between the two groups and in collecting data regarding participants' perceptions of the effect of the treatment on attendance, disciplinary referrals, and academic outcomes. As single paradigms, neither of these methodologies could have sufficiently answered the research questions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 sought to examine whether differences existed in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment. For this research question attendance data collected during the first phase of the truancy pilot were used to compare differences in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group pre and post treatment. An ANCOVA was conducted to determine if significant difference existed in unexcused absences between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment. After adjusting for prior year's unexcused absences as the covariate, no statistically significant difference was found between the treatment and control group for unexcused absences following the administration of the treatment. Both groups showed a decrease in unexcused absences, which suggests that there was no differential effect of the treatment. In other words, there was no difference in the effect of in-home counseling and case management and court referral in reducing unexcused absences. These findings are similar to results found by (Maynard, Brandy, McCrea, Pigott & Kelly, 2012) who synthesized results from 16 studies to determine whether treatment effects varied by program type (school, court, or community-based), focal modality (group, family, mentoring, alternative education, and behavioral contracting), duration of treatment, collaborative interventions, or multimodal interventions. They found no significant differences in mean effect size between school, court, or community-based programs. Nor was there evidence to suggest that collaborative and multimodal interventions were more effective than single modal interventions. The length of treatment also did not demonstrate a relationship to the overall mean effect size; shorter-term interventions produced statistically similar effects compared with longer-term interventions. The researchers also found that truancy interventions demonstrated a significant overall positive and

moderate mean effect size (0.465) on attendance. While overall the interventions improved attendance by an average of 4.69 days, the researchers found that the post intervention absenteeism rates remained above desirable levels. These researchers suggest that these findings be interpreted with caution because of the low number of studies included for each variable tested. These findings are consistent with the findings of (Kilma, Miller, & Nunlist, 2009) who conducted a meta-analysis to assess the impact of truancy interventions on increasing attendance. To be included in the meta-analysis, evaluations needed to include a comparison group equivalent on variable of attendance patterns and academic achievement. Studies with high attrition or a single group pre/posttest design were excluded from the analysis. The search for program studies identified 877 possible studies; only 22 studies met the criteria for methodology and relevant outcomes. These 22 studies included data on 35 independent samples for the attendance outcome. A variety of program types were included (e.g., mentoring, behavior, alternative educational). The 35 samples included 3,745 participants in the treatment groups; the number of participants in the control groups was not reported. The researchers found that, overall, interventions designed to increase attendance demonstrated a significant positive, but small effect (0.191).

The findings of Research Question 1 are supported by the qualitative results that indicate that respondents perceived that the truancy intervention was effective in encouraging school attendance. However; neither truancy intervention was identified as being more effective than the other. Survey responses indicated that 17% of respondents *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, and 33 % *disagreed* that the truancy intervention was helpful in improving the respondents' school attendance. Seventeen percent *strongly agreed*, 67% *agree*, and 16% *disagreed* that the truancy intervention was helpful in preventing the respondent from further truancy. The six participants

described how their daily school attendance had improved as a result of participating in either truancy intervention. For example, a participant from the control group stated the following:

"I don't think that I would be on track to graduate if I had not gone to court."

Q. How was court helpful to you?

It made me take school more seriously. I had to show the judge my grades and my attendance got reported to the judge. I don't want to go to detention and I know the judge would lock me up, she don't play. She put my friend's mom in jail, now, my mom is always saying. 'I am not going to jail for you so, you better get up and get to school.' I don't think she cared before we went to court. I passed more classes because I stopped skipping classes.

Q. Why did you stop skipping?

Researchers have found that truancy has a negative effect on a students' grades and standardized test scores. In a study conducted by (George, 2011), he concluded that students who met the threshold to have a truancy petition filed against them had accumulated 10 or more unexcused absences in a year. These students also had a higher number of excused absences than their peers. According to George (2011), students with a truancy petition missed approximately 15% of class time, compared to 4% for other students. Consequently, students with truancy petitions tended to have lower academic achievement than other peers, including; lower annual grade point average (GPA), fewer academic credits, and a larger number of suspensions and expulsions (George, 2011). It was reported that two-thirds of students who receive a truancy petition in their 9th grade will not graduate with their classmates. Students with truancy petitions earned only about half of the credits they would need to graduate on time. George (2011) also found that petitioned students also had low academic expectations; half of

the students with truancy petitions who participated in the survey did not expect to engage in any additional education beyond high school.

Similar to these findings, Strickland (1998) conducted a study of high school juniors in Chicago to determine if there was a correlation between attendance and GPA. He found chronic absenteeism to be a major indicator of poor academic achievement. He also determined that when attendance improved, students' grades also improved.

According to Rumberger and Lim (2008), the primary indicator of a student at risk for truancy and eventually dropping out is poor attendance (below 80%), behavior referral and failing grades in core subjects (English and mathematics). According to Neild, Balfanz, and Herzog (2007, p. 9), a student with even one of these indicators is at greater risk to become truant and eventually drop out.

Research Question 2

The question posed for Research Question 2 was: What other effects did the treatment have? This question sought to examine differences in academic outcomes for English, math, science, and social studies between the two groups. For this question, the variables measured for academic outcomes were pretreatment and post treatment final grades in English, math, science, and social studies. A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted for each subject. Findings for Research Question 2 indicated that no statistically significant difference was found between the treatment and control group for English, math, or science after the truancy interventions. For social studies however, a statistically significant difference was found between the treatment and control group. The treatment group showed a gain of .26 in the final social studies grade following the treatment intervention compared to a gain of .15 for the control group.

Three students who participated in the focus group who went through the traditional court process indicated that they saw no effect on their grades, while one student from the control group indicated that her grades had improved in several classes but not in math. The two students from the treatment group indicated that their grades had improved (defined as having passed core subjects that they were failing prior to participating in the treatment group) while participating in the truancy pilot. These students received the treatment of in-home counseling and case management, which included daily attendance monitoring and assistance with homework completion.

Research Question 2(c) seeks to determine if differences exist between the two groups in discipline referrals following the treatment. After adjusting for the number of referrals prior to the intervention as the covariate, an ANCOVA was performed. Results indicated that a statistically significant difference was found in the number of discipline referrals between the treatment and control group following the implementation of the treatment. The control group showed a significantly greater decrease in disciplinary referrals.

This finding is supported by the Phase II results that indicate that 17% *strongly agreed*, 50% *agreed*, 17% *disagreed*, and 16% *strongly disagreed* that the truancy intervention was helpful in reducing the number of disciplinary referrals that the respondents received following the treatment. Focus group participants described their perceptions of the effect of the truancy intervention on the number of disciplinary referrals they had received after the treatment. Three of the participants (two from the control group and one from the treatment group) stated that they had received fewer disciplinary referrals because they had stopped skipping classes. One participant stated that skipping classes was not her issue, her problem was being tardy to class. She reported receiving frequent disciplinary referrals that resulted in her receiving in-school

suspensions before she began participating in in-home counseling and case management services. She reported that having the case manager check in on her at home before school helped her to get to school on time and avoid a tardy referral. The participant reported that she and her case manager were able to devise a plan to help her get to class on time to avoid tardy referrals during the school days. She had been able to avoid receiving further disciplinary referrals while the case management services were in place but admits that since the services ended, she has received several disciplinary referrals for being tardy to school and class.

The literature on school engagement parallels the perceptions of these participants. Evans et al. (2010) found that a statistically significant decrease in disciplinary offenses was sustained one semester after truancy court. The literature also found that the average number of disciplinary referrals decreased among truants who were exposed to social activities such as sports and field trips (Baker & Jansen, 2000).

Evans et al. (2010) conducted a study that evaluated the effectiveness of a school-based truancy intervention in four middle schools in a mid-sized school district. Cumulative data from 185 youth attending a truancy court from 2004 through 2008 were included in the analyses. Results indicated a differential impact of the truancy court intervention depending on the severity of the truancy at baseline. The truancy intervention was most successful in increasing attendance for students with severe truancy, but had limited impact on students with moderate truancy and no impact on mild truancy. The intervention did not result in improved school attachment or GPAs, nor did it significantly reduce disciplinary offenses. Furthermore, the aftercare intervention, consisting of regular meetings with an authority figure (e.g., a juvenile officer) was only effective in maintaining truancy court attendance gains for students with severe truancy at baseline, although it was associated with a substantial decrease in discipline offenses for all

groups. These results suggested that truancy courts similar to the one described in the study may have an impact on truancy for severely truant students, but may have a limited effect on students with mild or moderate truancy.

Research Question 2(c) seeks to determine if differences exist between the two groups in retention and promotion rates following the treatment. For this research question, a Pearson Chi-square test was performed. Results of the Chi-square indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in retention and promotions post treatment. Nineteen percent of high school students in the treatment group were retained and 81% were promoted, whereas 11% of high school students in the control group were retained and 88% were promoted.

According to Baker and Jansen (2000), studies indicate that students who are absent have lower achievement and may be penalized on test scores. Sustained absences may lead to retention and later to truancy (Baker & Jansen, 2000). In addition, schools that experience high rates of absenteeism suffer loss of learning for students and loss of instructional time (Mayer & Mitchell, 1993). Essentially, when students are absent, not only do those students miss learning opportunities, but teachers must also try to provide remediation when the student returns.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked the question: What are the students' perceptions of the truancy reduction interventions? To answer this question, data were collected from two sources: a survey consisting of 26 open-ended questions and a focus group held with six high school students. Four of the students participated in the control group and two participated in the treatment group. This question examined participants' perceptions of how effective the truancy interventions were in improving their attendance, grades, behavior, and rate of promotion. Each

participant was asked questions from the same interview protocol guide and each participated in a focus group. The semistructured interview protocol guide can be found in Appendix D. Descriptive statistics for each survey item (Appendix E) revealed the mean scores for each item which were ranked from highest to lowest. Seven items on the survey were linked to individual factors: questions: 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 23. The range of means for items related to individual factors was (M=3.00, SD = .816 to M = 2.25, SD = .50). Thirteen questions on the survey were associated with school factors: questions: 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22 and 26. The range of means for items related to school factors was (M= 3.50, SD = .577 to M= 2.25, SD = .50), which was the largest range of all the constructs. Five questions on the survey were linked to family factors: 8, 19, 21, 24 and 25. The range of means for items related to family factors was (M = 3.25, SD = .957 to M = 2.50, SD = .577), which was the second largest range of the constructs. One question on the survey linked to community factors: question 15. The means for this factors was (M = 2.75, SD = .50). The results indicate that school and family-related factors were the most frequently cited reasons for truancy among these participants. These findings are consistent with results obtained from the National Education Longitudinal Study of eighth graders that reported a wide variety of reasons for those who dropped out; school-related reasons were mentioned by 77%, family-related reasons were mentioned 34%, and work-related reasons were mentioned 32%. The most specific reasons were "did not like school" (46%), "failing school" (39%) "could not get along with teachers" (29%), and "got a job" (27%), (Berktold, Geis, & Kaufman, 1998). This may suggest that even though the sample for this study is small, it may be representative of the larger sample population of participants in Phase I of the truancy pilot.

The responses from the survey and focus group indicated that participants perceived that that there was no difference in the effect of the truancy interventions. Participant's indicated that neither of the truancy interventions was more effective than the other in improving their attendance, grades, behavior, and rate of promotion. While the truancy interventions of court referral and in-home counseling and case management was perceived by participants as having a moderately positive impact in improving their attendance, grades, behavior, and rate of promotion, there was consensus among participants that neither of these interventions addressed the primary source of their truancy which was school factors. This outcome was unexpected but is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by (Malcolm et al., 2003) who found school factors to be the largest group of reasons given for missing school by truant students, whereas very few reported family or home factors as a cause of their absences. Participants in this study suggested that the following within school factors be a focus of truancy intervention.

School Factors

School safety. Participant's identified school safety as a major barrier to school attendance. They reported that there were frequent fights among students. Participant comments included the following:

"I do not feel safe at this school."

"Students are quick tempered, ready to fight for no or little reason."

"Student's fight often in this school."

"Over-crowded hallways is a problem." (If students bump other students either on purpose or by accident, this can result in a fight.)

"It is difficult to get to class on time because of overcrowding, can't get through hallways safely."

"Some students are more concerned about maintaining self-image with their friends, they will hurt/fight other students to maintain that image."

"I think some students fight at school because it is actually a safer environment to fight than the community where there is a greater chance that they will get severely injured or killed."

"Schools can't change bad kids and suspension won't change behavior patterns"

"Some kids live in violence all day; it's really crazy to think we are going to be different when we come to school, when that is all we see, schools just don't understand."

School safety has been and remains a focus of truancy intervention studies. Research suggests that a variety of school-level factors influence student attendance. The culture and climate of the school, the condition of the school facility, as well as the rigor and relevance of the school's instructional program can shape the students' perceptions of the school environment and influence the students' desire to attend (Corville-Smith et al., 1998). The culture and climate of the school, particularly as it relates to teacher-student relationships and more broadly to issues of student safety, has been associated with student absenteeism (Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Malcolm et al., 2003). The likelihood that a student will not attend school increases when students feel unsafe or threatened in the school environment.

Another issue key to school safety is that of bullying. Students who experience bullying and victimization by peers or teachers tend to miss more school than peers who do not experience these conditions (Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Malcolm et al., 2003). Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009) reported that 7% of students age 12 to 18 who participated in the 2007 National Crime Victimization Survey reported that they "avoided school activities or one or more places in school because they thought someone might attack or harm them" (p. 56). The

same survey revealed that "approximately five percent of students ages 12-18 reported that they were afraid of attack or harm at school, compared with three percent of students who reported that they were afraid of attack or harm away from school" (p. 54). The prevalence of fear and avoidance among students appeared greatest among middle school students and high school freshman and sophomores (Dinkes et al., 2009). These are also the grade levels which research suggests are most likely to predict student absenteeism, truancy, and high school dropout (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried, 2013). Bullying appears to be a significant predictor of student absenteeism and, at the high school level, a significant predictor for students who ultimately become truant and eventually drop out of school. Recent research indicates that bullying is now widely recognized as a major factor in student academic performance and student avoidance behaviors (Kearney, 2008).

School suspension. Participants cited school suspension as a contributing factor in their school attendance. Four out of six participants indicated that they had been suspended from school due to excessive tardiness to class. School suspension is perceived by participants as an ineffective response to truancy as reflected in the following statements:

> "School suspensions contribute to truancy. Principals suspend students for skipping class and for being tardy."
>
> "Suspensions don't work, students who do not want to come to school in the first place don't care about being suspended."
>
> "You get suspended when you get 3 tardies. I don't think that is fair."
>
> "I don't get suspended out of school anymore because that is reported to the judge."
>
> "I don't get into trouble as much, but I don't think it is because of the program, I think I just grew up a little."

"I just ignore a lot of stuff now, I don't argue with teachers and other students, so I don't get into trouble as much."

Truancy intervention studies suggest that truancy is associated with myriad of other behavioral issues, including suspension, expulsion, and higher rates of drug use, violent behavior, and delinquency (Alarid, Sims, & Ruiz, 2011). The presence of bullying, fights, discriminatory practices or language, as well as poor student-teacher relationships can all contribute to a student's decision not to attend school. According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), school policies and procedures can unintentionally alienate students who are at risk for truancy and school disengagement. The literature suggests that suspending students as a means of punishment for poor attendance is counterproductive because it pushes students out of school instead of encouraging them to attend (Cumbo, Burden, & Burke, 2012, p. 16).

It has been suggested that truancy interventions aimed at improving student attendance, behavior, and achievement focus on school policies and practices that facilitate student engagement. To be successful in school, students not only must value school, they must believe they are capable of achieving success. Students' perceptions of themselves and their abilities are a key component of achievement motivation and an important precursor of student engagement (National Research Council, 2004). Research illustrates that truancy decreases when students receive educational instruction in a supportive, engaging, and enriching school climate (Marvul, 2012). Student engagement is a combination of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional components which help to explain students' involvement with school (Finn & Voelkl, 1993); their psychological investment towards learning (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992); and students' motivation to learn (Steinberg, 1996). Thus, if students who are becoming disengaged from school can be identified before they fully disengage by becoming truant and falling behind

academically, we could reduce the number of high school dropouts. Because student engagement is based on what students do, think, and feel, it is a stronger predictor of whether students will drop out than students' demographic characteristics (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, and free and reduced-price meals system status) (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). Students who are in the process of disengaging from school are more likely to be absent from school, exhibit behavioral problems, fail to complete assignments, and fail to pass courses (Finn & Voelkl, 1989). These student behaviors can be thought of as early warning indicators (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012), as they occur in advance of students dropping out.

School size. School size, particularly with regard to high schools, is a issue of strong interest among educators and policymakers. Considerable research effort has been expended studying the relative effects of large and small schools on student attitudes toward school. Research suggests that the attitudes of low-SES and minority students are especially sensitive to school size and benefit greatly from attending small schools. Participants in this study expressed concern about the conditions and size of the school. The following comments were made:

> "There are too many students in this school. You can't travel in the hallways here between classes because of all the students. If you accidentally bump into someone, you will get attacked."
>
> "The classes have too many students for teachers to really work with students."

School size, particularly with regard to high schools, is an issue of strong interest among educators and policymakers. Considerable research effort has been expended studying the relative effects of large and small schools on student attitudes toward school. Research suggests that the attitudes of low socioeconomic and minority students are especially sensitive to school

size and benefit greatly from attending small schools. Participants in this study expressed concern about the conditions and size of the school. The following comments were made:

> "There are too many students in this school. You can't travel in the hallways here between classes because of all the students. If you accidentally bump into someone, you will get attacked."
>
> "The classes have too many students for teachers to really work with students."

The impact of high school size on dropout rate was investigated using the school data of the High School and Beyond Study of the National Center of Educational Statistics. Information from 744 public, comprehensive high schools was employed to test a model depicting a direct influence of school size on the school social climate, as well as an indirect effect on dropout rate. The findings indicated that potential links between school size and dropout rate were almost totally attributable to the social climate, particularly those elements dealing with student participation and the severity of the problems in the school environment. Results indicated there is a statistically significant relationship between school size and dropout rate. As school size increases, the dropout rate also increases.

Grade retention. Although some recent studies have suggested that retention may have some positive effects on academic achievement (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1994; Roderick et al., 1999), virtually all the empirical studies to date suggest that retention, even in lower elementary grades, significantly increases the likelihood of dropping out (Easton, 2000; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Grisson & Sheppard, 1989; Rumberger, 1995). For example, Rumberger (1995) found that students who were retained in grades 1 to 8 were four times more likely to drop out between grades 8 and 10 than students who were not retained, even after

controlling for SES, eighth grade school performance, and a host of background and school factors. Participant comments regarding grade retention included the following:

"When student's fail, they give up. . . feel hopeless, like they can't learn."

"I think there should be more options for earning credits and more programs so that students can have choices."

Research indicates that retention, even in lower elementary grades, significantly increases the likelihood of truancy and eventually school dropout (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Previous studies have also linked grade retention, or previous grade failure, to delinquency and adult crime. Retention in ninth grade—the transition year to high school—dramatically increases the likelihood of dropping out.

School climate. School climate is recognized as an important focus for truancy intervention. A positive school environment is associated with higher rates of school attendance and academic achievement (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Alessandro, & Guffy, 2012). Specifically, schools with positive climates tend to have fewer student discipline problems and fewer high school suspensions (Cohen & Geier, 2010). Research has also shown associations between school climate and lower levels of alcohol and drug use, bullying and harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009). School climate was a topic of much discussion during the focus group.

There is a growing body of research that suggests that school culture influences student learning, engagement, and achievement (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Researchers note that disengagement can lead to a significant increase in "deviant behavior"—including truancy (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). Klem and Connell (2004) noted that "Perhaps the most important finding in research concerning truancy prevention, attendance, student engagement, and effective small schools is that students are more likely to remain and

achieve in schools where people care about them (Bernard, 2004). If relationships between staff and students and their families are to affect student outcomes, they must be based upon trust, respect, fairness, and equity. The research shows that in schools where there is trust, caring, and support, there is higher attendance, higher student performance, and a lower rate of suspensions (Strand & Peacock, 2002). A caring and supportive school in which a student's culture is respected, and where children can identify and make connections with their heritage is vitally important for students of diverse cultures. In a recent study, 150 Native students reported in interviews that "being well-grounded and connected to their tribal culture" was a large part of why they stayed in school (Strand & Peacock, 2002). Students who were doing well in school reported that participation in a school culture that included Native history, language, and culture was also a factor.

Teacher quality. Changing instructional practices and emphasizing greater personalization and student engagement is a truancy intervention that could improve attendance, as it results in increased levels of student engagement. Teachers have a significant influence on student learning, engagement, and achievement (Cohen et al., 2009). Researchers note that disengagement can lead to a significant increase in deviant behavior—including truancy (Appleton et al., 2008). Klem and Connell (2004) noted that "students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school" (p. 270). Higher-levels of student engagement reduce the risk of students missing school or dropping out of school (Appleton et al., 2008).

Teacher/student relationships. Improving school climate is the final school intervention that has been found to increase student attendance and decrease truancy. According

to Kim and Streeter (2006), schools should "promote an environment where students feel connected to the school and invested in learning" (p. 401). This type of environment is created through the enhancement of student-teacher relationships and engagement of students. Participant comments included the following:

"Teachers in this school don't care about the students."

"If I do not feel that I am being respected by the teacher, I just give up and don't complete class or homework."

"Teachers don't always want to help students make up their work because they are angry about them being absent from school. It's not fair because they don't always know the reason the student is absent."

"I have had teachers refuse to give me make up work because they do not feel that I am making the effort to come to school."

"Teachers play favorites, they just don't like certain students and they go out of their way to fail them."

"I think some of the teachers at this school do care about the students. They are just overwhelmed with the needs."

"I think the teachers here have a difficult job, I think they care but they are overwhelmed with all the issues that go on here, they get overwhelmed just like we do."

School culture is related to school avoidance behaviors as well as student perceptions of the school. As stated previously, school avoidance and refusal behavior has a noticeable effect on rates of chronic absenteeism and truancy (Kearney, 2008). The school's culture often serves as a catalyst for school avoidance behaviors. The presence of bullying, fights, discriminatory

practices or language, as well as poor student-teacher relationships all contribute to the student's reluctance to attend school.

According to Reid (1999), in order to really address truancy, schools need to recognize the ways in which school culture and policies contribute to truancy and high rates of absenteeism. In this study, participants identified school factors such as school safety and teacher/student relationships as having the greatest impact on their decision to skip school. Participants expressed that they felt a general lack of care and concern from teachers and described some of the teachers as being disrespectful and unwilling to provide assistance to students who had been absent despite the reason. One participant stated that she had been denied make-up work upon her return to school from an absence due to illness.

Low expectations. Student motivation is highly correlated with student perception of teacher expectations. Truancy intervention studies involving middle and high school students have shown that students shape their educational expectations from their perceptions of their teachers' expectations (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999). Students who perceive that their teachers have high expectations of their academic achievement are more motivated to try to meet those expectations and perform better academically than their peers who perceive low expectations from their teachers (Muller et al., 1999). Due to the influence of expectations on motivation, expectations can be an important factor on a students' academic achievement. Some participants in the focus group expressed that they felt that their teachers held low expectations for their performance. Three participants shared that their level of motivation is impacted by low teacher expectations. Each expressed that they have higher ability but that their grades are low because of a lack of consistent effort. Participant comments included the following:

"I don't feel inspired to work to my potential at this school. I feel that the teachers are willing to accept less so, I give them less."

"I could have higher grades but why bother, if the teacher doesn't care."

"I can't tell you how many times I have turned in work and the teacher has lost it. She will remember that I turned it in but she doesn't know where it is and then I get a failing grade, she just doesn't care."

"Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high are more likely to report engagement in school" (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003, p. 270). Higher levels of student engagement reduce the risk of students missing school or dropping out of school (Appleton et al., 2008). Teachers can provide high expectations for all students, guide students in focusing on their strengths, and challenge students to work beyond what they think they can do (Bernard, 2004; Waxman et al., 2003). This is especially important for children of diverse cultures, who may in the past have had teachers with low expectations of them. According to Bernard (2004), educators who hold high expectations for their students do not label them as "at risk" or anything else.

Three participants shared that their level of motivation is impacted by low teacher expectations. Each expressed that they have higher ability but that their grades are low because of a lack of consistent effort.

Although family factors were not perceived to play as significant of a role as school factors, participants identified following factors as a focus of truancy intervention.

Family Factors

Parent involvement. Parental support and/or lack of parent support for education is another critical risk factor for truancy. A generalized lack of parental/guardian support is often

associated with truancy (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). Parents/guardians who do not value education or do not reinforce educational goals are more likely to have a truant child (Bell et al., 1994; NCSE, 2006). In addition, the time a parent spends actively involved in their child's education can be an important predictor of truancy. Parents who are involved in their child's education, whether through monitoring homework, performance, or participation in the parent teacher association, are less likely to have a truant child (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Participant comments included the following:

> "Parents are too busy to help their kids with school stuff."
>
> "Some parents don't know how to help because they did not complete school or the work has changed since they were in school."
>
> "My mother and her boyfriend don't get along and there is always 'drama' going on. Sometimes, I just go to sleep instead of doing homework because I want to avoid the drama."
>
> "I didn't get consequences for skipping school. My parents just yelled at me and threatened to take away my phone and other things, but that never happened until I went to court. Then they got really mad because they had to miss work. I do think if they had acted like they cared before I got involved in court, I would not be in this situation."

Past research has suggested that family characteristics such as the number of parents in household and parental practices all influence student attendance. For example, students from single-parent families are more likely to miss school than students from two-parent families (Finlay, 2006). Parents who are actively involved in their child's school experience and monitor their child's participation in school—these behaviors include talking with their child about school, checking homework, and participating in school-based parent organizations. Sixty-four

percent of students who responded to the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement indicated that they attended school because of their parent or guardian (Yazzi-Mintz, 2009). However, it bears noting that the existing research also suggests that parental "over-involvement" can be detrimental to student attendance (Corville-Smith et al., 1998). Corville-Smith and her colleagues (1998) found that students who perceive their parents as controlling were less likely to attend school than those who perceived their parents as supportive. The sooner parents become involved in the process and in identifying the causes behind their child's absences, the greater the chances are of correcting the behavior.

Family obligations. Students may have to miss school in order to care for an ill family member, to care for a younger sibling, or work to provide the family with an additional income source. Children from families living in poverty, single-parent households, or families with above average number of children are more likely to be truant than their peers (Kleine, 1994). The following participant comment supports what these researchers have found.

> "I missed school because of work. I have to help my mom pay bills. I sometimes work late and then I over sleep the next morning."

Family obligations are noted as a reason some students do not attend school. As children enter early adolescence, family responsibilities can keep them from school. In high-poverty environments, young adolescent girls sometimes provide emergency day care for younger siblings or are responsible for getting younger children to school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). There is also growing evidence of even young adolescents taking on elder-care responsibilities in single-parent, multigenerational households (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Adolescents, moreover, are sometimes pulled into working to help support family or personal needs. Dustmann, Rajah, and Smith (1997) studied the link between the student working part time while in school and

truancy in the United Kingdom using data from the National Child Development Study, which is a study of children born in 1958 and going through the school system in the 1960s. They found that the probability of playing truant increased with the numbers of hours worked. Taking endogeneity into account, they found a significant effect of part-time working on truancy. Those who did more part-time working had higher rates of truancy.

Family mobility. While family problems affect truancy rates, oftentimes families are unable to meet the basic needs of their children, which also may be a contributing factor to their children's truancy. The following comment was made by one participant:

> "My mom keeps moving from one place to another, we have already moved two times this year, I am tired of moving-I am not always sure why we are moving. I used to have to change schools every time we moved but now, the principal just lets me stay here. I think that has been helpful to me."

Studies have found that children who move frequently have lower attendance rates. Children who are subject to multiple moves have fewer if any long-term relationships with teachers or peers. They may stay home from school to avoid continual adjustments to new school buildings, new curricula, new teaching methods, and new classmates (Chang & Romero, 2008; Railsback, 2004). Students who are homeless or reside in temporary housing are also more likely to miss school. Citing reports from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Coalition for the Homeless (2007) reported that while 87% of homeless youth are enrolled in school only 77% attend school regularly. The National Coalition for the Homeless (2007) report that children who are homeless are also more mobile than their peers making regular school attendance more difficult. They estimated that half of homeless youth change schools two or more times each

academic year. Forty percent change schools at least one time. Thus, the child's home status significantly predicts whether the child will attend regularly.

Domestic violence. Truant students are more likely to come from families where domestic violence, family conflict which includes arguing, violence, divorce, and poor sibling and parent relationships is present in the home (George, 2011; Reid, 1999). In these cases, the child may miss school as a direct result of any one of these situations. Or, they may fall behind in their academics because of their situation, which then causes them to avoid school. The following comment was made by one participant:

> "My mom and her boyfriend don't get along and there is always 'drama' going on. Sometimes, I just go to sleep instead of doing homework because I want to avoid the drama."

A traumatic event such as witnessing or being a victim of domestic violence can interrupt the school routine and the processes of teaching and learning. There are usually high levels of emotional upset, potential for disruptive behavior, and often absences from school. Students traumatized by exposure to violence have been shown to have lower GPAs and more reported absences from school than other students. They may have increased difficulties concentrating and learning at school and may engage in unusually reckless or aggressive behavior. The following is a related comment made by one participant:

> "My mother and her boyfriend don't get along and there is always 'drama' going on. Sometimes, I just go to sleep instead of doing homework because I want to avoid the drama."

Focus group participants were also asked the following two questions: In what way has your participation in the truancy intervention impacted your attendance, and in what way has

your participation in the truancy intervention impacted your grades? Five out of the six participants reported that their attendance had improved since they participated in the truancy intervention. Of these same five participants, two reported that their grades had improved. Participants gave no weight to either intervention (court referral or in-home counseling with case management) for the improvement in their attendance or grades. Two of the participants, one from the treatment group and the other from the control group, attributed their improvement in attendance to reasons outside of the truancy intervention. The participant from the treatment group cited "self-motivation" as the reason for her improved attendance. She stated that she made the decision that she wanted to graduate and enrolled in an evening course to earn additional credit. She has been working with the school counselor and a plan has been implemented to help her earn the credits she needs through the credit recovery program. She reported that "Once I could see that my situation was not completely hopeless, it seemed like it was worth the effort to graduate, I just needed some hope."

The participant from the control group attributed her improved attendance to "things having stabilized at home." She reported that her mother's boyfriend moved out of the home and that "things were less chaotic, there was less fighting and drama," she ended her comment stating, "I felt like I could concentrate on school again." Another participant from the control group stated that "without court intervention, I probably would have dropped out." She reported that she did not take attending school as a "big deal" until she landed in detention for 10 days. Once released from detention, she was placed on "truancy supervision" as an alternative to probation. Under truancy supervision, the participant reported that she is under court-ordered school attendance and is subject to 60-day court reviews and random drug screenings. If she fails to attend school, she has been told that she will be placed back in detention. The participant

verbalized that she did not view her experience as a successful intervention because she feels that "the court is forcing her to attend a school that she hates."

The causes of truancy are as different and as diverse as the students who make up our schools. There is no single, identifiable cause of truancy. Instead, research suggests that there are many different factors and combinations of factors that lead to truancy. The complexity of truancy is illustrated by the variety of reasons that students report for missing school, which is a consequence of the problems that these students face in their daily lives. Through focus group interviews and open-ended survey questions students candidly discussed their truancy experiences while participating in the truancy pilot program; not surprisingly, there is a tremendous amount of overlap between what research reveals and what students identified as factors that contribute to truancy.

Findings

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge and work done by previous researchers in the area of truancy intervention. From the results of this study, it can be suggested that the intervention of in-home counseling and case management was successful in reducing further unexcused absences among the students in the sample however, no difference was found in academic outcomes for English, Math, Science and retention and promotion was found. Neither treatment, in-home counseling and case management or court referral was found to be more effective than the other therefore, the question of whether diverting truants to treatment is more effective than referring students to the court system is not answered by this study and remains a question for further study.

The findings from this study are not solid enough to draw definitive conclusions. But it is not too early to consider the possibility that the program as currently operationalized may not be able reduce truancy sufficiently with this population of students.

Implications for Practice

The truancy pilot was developed as a diversion to court referral. A question of interest for the members of the FAPT team was whether diverting students from court referral to community-based treatment services such as in-home counseling and case management would be more effective in reducing student truancy and improving academic measures than referring students to court. Of concern is the issue that truancy is a status offense and referring the child to the court puts the child on a path to the juvenile justice system, which research suggests can lead to worse outcomes. One assumption of the program was that truancy is not solely a problem of the individual student, but that it is often rooted in family dynamics that create barriers to the child attending school. Research suggests that the issue of truancy needs to be approached in a holistic manner that acknowledges the student within the context of their family (Catalano et al., 1999; Reimer & Dimock, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). In order to address attendance issues fully, any family-based needs that are contributing to the issue must be identified. The specific needs of the student and their family, match services/interventions to those needs, and problem-solve challenges in a safe supportive environment. The FAPT adopted a family-centered approach to the truancy intervention through the provision of in-home counseling and case management services. In-home counseling has been shown to resolve issues related to family dynamics and increase student attendance (Kumpfer et al., 2003). Research suggests that in-home counseling is more effective at addressing family issues than therapy conducted in an individual or multifamily/peer group setting (Lay, Blanz, & Schmidt, 2001; Thompson et al.,

2009). The in-home counseling modality used for the truancy pilot was based on the multisystemic therapy model in which therapists work with families to empower parents and improve their effectiveness by identifying strengths, developing natural support systems and removing barriers that can range from a simple lack of parenting skills to dealing with more serious issues of child neglect or violence in the home that impede family functioning. Due to the strong influence of the family on a child's education and overall well-being, truancy interventions must attend to issues pertaining to family dynamics (Kumpfer et al., 2003).

Another assumption of the truancy pilot was based on an understanding that interagency partnership and collaboration between agencies is the key to successfully addressing truancy. Each agency acknowledged the impact of truancy on their client population and agreed to approve participation in this initiative. It was clearly recognized that from a prevention perspective this would be a much-needed benefit to the community.

The findings from this study hold several implications for practice. First, the truancy intervention, as operationalized, assumes that addressing family factors thus improving family functioning would result in improved school attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes. While quantitative findings support a positive effect of the treatment on attendance, the margin of increase was small for attendance averaging a gain of 3 to 5 days overall. A similar finding was found for academic outcomes that indicated that the only course where participants made a significant gain was in social studies. For disciplinary referrals the outcome was much stronger as findings indicated that participants showed a significant decrease in referrals following the treatment. While no significance was found in promotion/retention rates following the treatment, more participants in the control group were promoted than in the treatment group. An unexpected finding of this study was that neither of the treatments was found to be more

effective than the other in producing the outcomes. The qualitative findings from participants supported the quantitative findings. Participants attributed their truancy to within school factors and indicated that family factors played less of a role. Given this revelation, the question of whether the intervention was focused in the right direction is now in question. The intervention focus was on family factors but due to the complexity of truancy, it is possible that the intervention as currently operationalized may not be able reduce truancy sufficiently with a single focus on family factors. It may be necessary to consider both family and within school factors in designing future truancy interventions.

Given these findings, the question that members of the FAPT will have to decide is whether these outcomes are sufficient to support the cost of implementing the intervention. Cost/benefit analysis is considered sound practice in evaluating any program or service. Given the state of the economy and the impact on operating budgets, stronger outcomes are often necessary to support the expenditure. Facing the growing emphasis on accountability for achieving results, school divisions are increasingly making funding decisions based on the evidence that programs produce desired outcomes. Making a case for continued funding of the truancy pilot may prove to be a challenge.

In prior studies, in talking about their teachers, truants and students who have dropped out readily identified the best teachers as those who cared about them in and out of classes. Caring meant that teachers wanted and expected students to do well and that they were willing to help them do so. Interestingly, it was perceived by participants in this study that teacher's expectations of them were too low—not that the work was too difficult—that was presented by the participants as a detriment to their motivation. Participants voiced that they wanted to be challenged and wanted their teachers to recognize their potential.

Participants reported missing school because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to and from school. The correlation between truancy and school safety has been shown in numerous studies. When students do not feel safe, it increases the likelihood that they will become truant and will disengage from school. School and community safety is an issue that schools and communities must work in unison to ensure if truancy intervention is to be successful.

Participants cited overcrowded conditions at their school as a barrier to school attendance. It is clear that truancy interventions with students who are chronically truant must focus on helping students become re-engaged through improved teacher/student relationships that invoke mutual respect, a sense of safety and an academically supportive, interesting and relevant curriculum.

Limitations

A limiting aspect of this study is the relatively small sample of respondents included in the focus group and survey sample which limits the generalizability of the research findings. A second design limitation was the inability to use random assignment in the assignment of participants to treatment groups. Use of random assignment would have strengthened the validity of the study and any conclusion regarding cause and effect.

Recommendations

The researcher should consider the need for a larger sample size in future studies. It is recommended that when planning truancy studies and determining sample size the researcher take into account potential challenges in gaining access and consent for parents and students. It is recommended that the researcher anticipate student mobility and transfer as the year progresses when conducting studies in an educational setting.

Due to the inherent limitations to single, group and pre-posttest study design, it is recommended that future research evaluating outcomes of interventions utilize a comparison group design, preferably with random assignment to limit other potential confounding variables. It may be necessary to include a combined focus of family and within school factors. The other change that I would make is in relation to the timing of the survey and focus group. Although I had received approval from the school district to conduct the study, I could not proceed with the study until the IRB approval was received. The IRB approval process took much longer than I had anticipated. The consequence of the lengthy wait period was that once approval was received, I had a short window of time to initiate the consent process and to hold the focus group in order to meet the timeline set by the school district in conducting the focus group. Additionally, the school district limited the number of follow-up contacts I could initiate with parents and students to remind them to return the consent forms. I was restricted to two follow-up contacts which may have impacted the return rate. These are issues that need to be planned for well in advance when initiating research in a school division.

List of References

List of References

Agar, M. (1991). The right brain strikes back. In N. G. Fielding & R. M. Lee (Eds.), *Using computers in qualitative research* (pp. 181–194). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Alarid, L. F., Sims, B. A., & Ruiz, J. (2011). School-based juvenile probation and police partnerships for truancy reduction. *Journal of Knowledge and Best Practices in Juvenile Justice and Psychology, 5*(1), 13–20. College of Juvenile Justice and Psychology, Texas Juvenile Crime Prevention Center.

Allen-Meares, P., Washington, R. O., & Welsh, B. L. (2000). *Social work services in schools* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Horsey, C. S. (1994). From first grade forward: Early foundation of high school dropout. *Sociology of Education, 70*(2), 87–107.

Alliance for Excellence Education. (2011). *Education and the economy: Boosting Virginia's economy by improving high school graduation rates*. Retrieved from www.all4ed.org

Anderson, A. (2004). Check and connect: The importance of relationships for promoting engagement with school. Journal of School Psychology, 42, 95–113.

Anderson, A. R., Christenson, S. L., Sinclair, M. F., & Lehr, C. A. (2004). Check and connect: The importance of relationships for promoting engagement in school. *Journal of School Psychology*, *42*, 95–113.

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2008). *2008 Kids count data book*. State profiles of child well-being. Retrieved from http://www.aecf.org

Applegate, K. (2003). *The relationship of attendance, socio-economic status, and mobility and the achievement of seventh graders* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Saint Louis University, St. Louis, MO.

Appleton, J. J., Christenson, S. L., & Furlong, M. J. (2008). Student engagement with school: Critical conceptual and methodological issues of the construct. *Psychology in the Schools, 45*, 369–386.

Appleton, J. V. (1995). Analyzing qualitative interview data: Addressing issues of validity and reliability. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 22*, 993–997.

Arcia, E. (2006). Achievement and enrollment status of suspended students. *Education and Urban Society, 38*(3), 359–369.

Attar-Schwartz, S. (2009). Peer sexual harassment victimization at school: The roles of student characteristics, cultural affiliation, and school factors. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 79*, 407–420.

Attwood, G., & Croll, P. (2006). Truancy in secondary school pupils: Prevalence, trajectories and pupil perspectives. *Research Papers in Education, 21*, 467–484.

Austin, J., Johnson, K., & Weitzer, R. (2005). Alternatives to secure detention and confinement of juvenile offenders. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

Baker, D., & Jansen, J. (2000). Using groups to reduce elementary school absenteeism. Social Work in Education, 22, 46–53.

Baker, M. L. (2000). *Evaluation of the truancy reduction demonstration program: Interim report*. Denver, CO: Colorado Foundation for Families and Children.

Baker, M. L., Sigmon, J. N., & Nugent, M. E. (2001, September). Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school. *Bulletin of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*, 1–15.

Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). *The importance of being in school: A report of absenteeism in the nation's public schools*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.

Balfanz, R., & Chang, H. N. (2013). Improve attendance: Increase success. *Principal Leadership, 14*(3), 20–24.

Bamberger, M. (Ed.). (2000). *Integrating quantitative and qualitative research in development projects*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Barrett, D. E., Katsiyannis, A., Willson, V. W., & Zhange, D. (2007). Truancy offenders in the juvenile justice system: Examinations of first and second referrals. *Remedial and Special Education*, *28*(4), 244–256.

Barrington, B. L., & Hendricks, B. (2001). Differentiating characteristics of high school graduates, dropouts and nongraduates. *The Journal of Educational Research, 89*, 309–319.

Barth, R. P. (1985). Reducing nonattendance in elementary schools. *Social Work Education, 6*, 151–166.

Baum, C., & Forehand, R. (1981). Long-term follow-up assessment of parent training by use of multiple outcome measures. *Behavior Therapy, 12*, 643–652.

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2005, December). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 544–559.

Bazemore, G., Stinchcomb, J. B., & Leip, L. A. (2004). Scared smart or bored straight? Testing deterrence logic in an evaluation of police-led truancy intervention. *Justice Quarterly, 21*(2), 269–299.

Bell, A. J., Rosen, L. A., & Dynlacht, D. (1994). Truancy intervention. *Journal of Research and Development in Education, 27*, 203–211.

Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Berktold, J., Geis, S., & Kaufman, P. (1998). *Subsequent educational attainment of high school dropouts*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Bermejo, F. U. (1923). School attendance service in American cities. Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing.

Bernard, M. E. (2004, October). *The relationship of young children's social and emotional development and reading achievement*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Council for Educational Research, Adelaide.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). Qualitative research in education. An introduction to theory and methods (4th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bordens, K. S., & Abbott, B. B. (1991). *Research design and methods: A process approach*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Borg, W. R., Gail, J. P., & Gail, M. D. (8th Ed.). (2007). *Educational research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Boruch, R. F. (1979). Educational program evaluations: Some implications for evaluation policy. A summary. *American Behavioral Scientist, 2*(23), 275–278.

Bosworth, D. (1994). Truancy and pupil performance. *Education Economics, 2*(3), 243–263.

Bouffard, L., Lovrich, N., & Strand, P. (2009). Models of change: Systems reform in juvenile justice. Truancy: Review of research literature on school avoidance behavior and promising educational re-engagement programs.

Boutilier, A., & Cohen, M. (2009). *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: Diversion literature review*. Bethesda, MD: Development Services Group, Inc.

Bradley, J. (1993). Methodological issues and practices in qualitative research. *Library Quarterly, 63*(4), 431–449.

Branham, D. (2004). The wise man builds his house upon the rock: The effects of inadequate school building infrastructure on student achievement. *Social Science Quarterly, 85*(5), 1112–1128.

Brown, I., Berg, I., Hullin, R., & McGuire, R. (1990). Are interim care orders necessary to improve school attendance in truants taken to juvenile court. *Educational Review, 42*, 231–245.

Brush, C., & Jones, B. (2002). *Student voices: Why school works for alternative high school students*. Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education. Retrieved from www.ode.state.or.us/stusvc/wheyschworks.pdf

Butler, C., Reed, D., & Robles-Pina, R. (2005). High school students' perceptions regarding truancy and related delinquent behaviors: Impact on students with special disabilities. *Journal of At-Risk Issues, 11*(2), 33–38.

Butler, S., Baruch, G., Hickey, N., & Fonagy, P. (2011). A randomized controlled trial of multisystemic therapy and a statutory therapeutic intervention for young offenders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 50*(12), 1220–1235.

Bynum, J. E., & Thompson, W. E. (1996). *Juvenile delinquency: A sociological approach* (3rd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Cairns, R., Cairns, B., & Neckerman, H. (1989). Early school dropout: Configurations and determinants. *Child Development, 60*, 1437–1452.

Caldas, S. J. (1993). Re-examination of input and process factor effects in public school achievement. *Journal of Educational Research, 86*, 206–214.

Cantelon, S., & LeBoeuf, D. (1997). *Keeping young people in school: Community programs that work.* Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Protection. Retrieved from http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/dropout.pdf

Catalano, F. R., Arthur, M. W., Hawkins, J. D., Berglund, L., & Olson, J. J. (1999). Comprehensive community and school-based interventions to prevent antisocial behavior. In R. Loeber & D. Farrington (Eds.), *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions* (pp. 248–283). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Catalano, F. R., Loeber, R., & McKinney, K. C. (1999). School and community interventions to prevent serious and violent offending. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile and Delinquency Prevention.

Chang, H. D., & Romero, M. (2008, September). *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. Washington, DC:

National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html

Clay, B. (2004). Reading, writing and reinforcement: A new look at truancy. *Behavior Analysis Digest, 16*, 1–2.

Coalition for Juvenile Justice. (2009). Deinstitutionalization of status offenders. *Factsheet*. Retrieved from www.juvjustice.org

Cohen, J., & Geier, V. K. (2010). School climate research summary: January 2010. New York, NY. Retrieved from www.schoolclimate.org/climate/research.php

Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, teacher education and practice. *Teachers College Record, 111*(1), 180–213.

Colorado Foundation for Families and Children. (2002). *Youth out of school: Linking absence to delinquency*. Denver, CO: Author.

Corville-Smith, J. (1995). Truancy, family processes, and interventions. In B. Ryan, G. Adams, T. Gullotta, R. Weissberg, & R. Hampton (Eds.), *The family-school connection: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 270–287). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Corville-Smith, J., Ryan, B., Adams, G., & Dalicandro, T. (1998). Distinguishing absentee students from regular attenders: The combined influence of personal, family and school factors. *Journal of Youth Adolescence, 27*(5), 629-637.

Cremin, L. A. (1957). *The republic and the school: Horace Mann on the education of free men*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Maietta, R. C. (2002). Qualitative research. In D. C. Miller & N. J. Salkind (Eds.), *Handbook of research design and social measurement* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. L. (2005). Choosing a mixed methods design. In J. W. Creswell & V. L. Plano-Clark (Eds.), *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (pp. 58–88). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano-Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cumbo, G. L., Burden. H., & Burke, B. A. (2012). *Truancy reduction: Research, policy and practice*. Seattle, WA: Center for Children and Youth Justice.

Cutcliffe, J. R., & McKenna, H. P. (1999). Establishing the credibility of qualitative research findings: The plot thickens. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 30*(2), 374–380.

Cullingford, C. (1999). The relationship between delinquency and non-attendance at school. In E. Blyth & J. Milner (Eds.), Improving school attendance (pp. 5–19). London, UK: Routledge.

D'Agostino, R. B. (1998). Tutorial in biostatistics: Propensity score methods for bias reduction in the comparison of a treatment to a nonrandomized control group. *Statistics in Medicine, 17*, 2265–2281.

Davidson, J., Edward, S., Malcolm, H., & Wilson, V. (2008). 'Bunking off': The impact of truancy on pupils and teachers. *British Educational Research Journal*, *34*, 1–17.

Davidson, W., Blakely, R., Mitchell, C., & Emshoff, J. (1987). Diversion of juvenile offenders: An experimental comparison. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 55*(1), 68–75.

Davidson, W. S. II, Redner, R., Admur, R., & Mitchell, C. (1990). *Alternative treatments for troubled youth: The case of diversion from the justice system*. New York, NY: Plenum.

Davies, J. D., & Lee, J. (2006). To attend or not to attend? Why some students choose school and others reject it. *Support for Learning, 2*1(4), 204–209.

DeKalb, J. (1999). Student truancy. *ERIC Digest, 125*, 1–7.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeSocio, J., VanCura, M., Nelson, L. A., Hewitt, G., Kitzman, H., & Cole, R. (2007). Engaging truant adolescents: Results from a multifaceted pilot intervention. *Preventing School Failure 51*(3), 3–9.

DeVos, S. (2001). Family structure and school attendance among children 13-16 in Argentina and Panama. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 32*(1), 99–115.

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Dillon, C. O., Liem, J. H., & Gore, S. (2003). Navigating disrupted transitions: Getting back on track after dropping out of high school. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 73*(4), 429–440.

Dinkes, R., Kemp, J., & Baum, K. (2009). *Indicators of school crime and safety: 2008* (NCES 2009-022/NCJ 226343). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Doll, B., & Hess, R. S. (2001). Through a new lens: Contemporary psychological perspectives on school completion and dropping out of high school. School Psychology Quarterly, 16(4), 351–356.

Dougherty, J. W. (1999). *Fastback: Attending to attendance*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.

Dryfoos, J. G. (1990). *Adolescents at risk: Prevalence and prevention*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

Duke, D., & Meckel, A. (1980). Student attendance problems and school organization: A case study. *Urban Education, 15*, 325–357.

Dukes, R. L., & Stein, J. A. (2001). Effects of assets and deficits on the social control of at-risk behavior among youth: A structural equations approach. *Youth and Society, 32*, 337–359.

Dumas, J. E. (1989). Treating antisocial behavior in children: Child and family approaches. *Clinical Psychology Review, 9*, 197–222.

Dustmann, C., Najma, R., & Smith, S. (1997). Teenage truancy, part-time working and wages. *Journal of Population Economics, 10*, 425–442.

Driscoll, D., Halcoussis, D., & Svorny, S. (2003). School district size and student performance. *Economics of Education Review, 22*, 193–203.

Eamon, M. (2005). Social-demographic, school, neighborhood, and parenting influences on academic achievement of Latino young adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 34*(2), 163–175.

Easton, L. B. (2000). Lessons from learners. Educational Leadership, 9, 64–68.

Eastwood, P. (1989). Attendance is important: Combating truancy in the secondary school. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 14*, 23–31.

Eaton, D. K., Brener, N., & Kann, L. K. (2008). Associations of health risk behaviors with school absenteeism: Does having permission for the absence make a difference? *Journal of School Health, 78*(4), 223–229.

Education Commission of the States. (2011). *School size* (Policy Brief). Retrieved from www.ecs.org

Edwards, L. P. (1996). The future of the juvenile court: Promising new directions. The future of children. *The Juvenile Court, 6*, 131–139.

Ehrenberg, R. G., Ehrenberg, R. A., Rees, D. I., & Ehrenberg, E. L. (1991). School district leave policies, teacher absenteeism, and student achievement. *The Journal of Human Resources, 26*, 72–105.

Elliott, D. S. (1994, February). *Youth violence: An overview*. Paper presented at the Aspen Institute Children's Policy Forum, Children and Violence Conference, Queenstown, MD.

Elliott, D. S., & Blanchard, F. (1975). An important study of two diversion projects. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association meeting, Chicago, IL.

Elliott, D. S., Dunford, F., & Knowles, B. A. (1978). *Diversion: A study of alternative processing practices. An overview of initial study findings.* Boulder, CO: Behavioral Research Institute.

Elliott, J. G. (1999). Practitioner review: School refusal. Issues of conceptualization, assessment, and treatment. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 40*(7), 1001–1012.

Enomoto, E. K. (1994). The meaning of truancy: Organizational culture as multi-cultures. *The Urban Review, 26*, 187– 207.

Ensminger, M. E., & Slusarcick, A. L. (1992). Paths to high school graduation or dropout: A longitudinal study of first grade cohort. *Sociology of Education, 6*, 95–113.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for. Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research, 95*(5), 308–320.

Evans, C. J., Hendricks, M. A., McKinley, L., & Sale, E. W. (2010). Evaluation of a truancy court intervention in four middle schools. *Psychology in Schools*, *47*, 173–183.

Farrington, D. (1996). Later life outcomes of truants in the Cambridge study. In I. Berg & J. Nursten (Eds.), *Unwillingly to school* (4th ed., pp. 96–118). Gaskell Press.

Fantuzzo, J., Grim, S., & Hazan, H. (2005). Project START: An evaluation of a community-wide school-based intervention to reduce truancy. *Psychology in Schools*, *42*, 657–667.

Finlay, K. (2006). *Jacksonville: How do students with excused absences compare to students with unexcused absences?* Denver, CO: National Center for School Engagement. Retrieved from http://www.schoolengagement.org

Finn, J. D., & Voelkl, K. E. (1993). School characteristics related to student engagement. *Journal of Negro Education, 62*, 249–268.

Forehand, R., Griest, D. L., & Wells, K. C. (1981). Side effects of parent counseling on marital satisfaction. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 29*, 104–107.

Forehand, R., & Long, N. (1988). Outpatient treatment of the acting out child: Procedures, long-term follow-up data and clinical problems. *Advances in Behaviour Research and Therapy, 10*, 129–177.

Fraser, M. (2004). Incomes and poverty in Hamilton. *Social Planning and Research Council Document*, 1–4.

Fraser, M. W., Kirby, L. D., & Smokowski, P. R. (2004). Risk and resilience in childhood. In M. W. Fraser (Ed.), *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective* (2nd ed., pp. 13–66). Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers Press.

Galambos, N. L., & Leadbeater, B. J. (2000). Trends in adolescent research for the new millennium. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 24*(3), 289–294.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.

Galloway, D. (1982). A study of persistent absentees and their families. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 52*, 317–330.

Gandy, C., & Schultz, J. L. (2007). Increasing school attendance for K-8 students: A review of research examining the effectiveness of truancy prevention programs. St. Paul, MN: Wilder Research Foundation. Retrieved from www.wilder.org./download.0.html?report=1977

Garry, E. M. (1996, October). Truancy: First step to a lifetime of problems. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, 1–7.

Gastic, B. (2008). School truancy and the disciplinary problems of bullying victims. *Educational Review*, *60*, 391–404.

Gee, E. G., & Sperry, D. J. (1998). *Education law and the public schools*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon Publishers.

George, T. (2011). *Truancy in Washington state: Trends, student characteristics, and the impact of receiving a truancy petition*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Center for Court Research. Retrieved from http://www.courts.wa.gov/wsccr/docs/TruancyEvalReport.pdf

Georgia Department of Education. (2006, July). *Georgia performance standards by grade level, K-8*. Retrieved from https//georgiastandards.org/standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/GPS_by_Grade_Level_K-8.aspx

Georgia Department of Education. (2011, September). *GDOE research shows student attendance significantly impacts student achievement.* Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_communications.aspx?ViewMode=1&obj=2064

Giacomazzi, A., Mueller, D., & Stoddard, C. (2006). Dealing with chronic absenteeism and its related consequences: The process and short-term effects of a diversionary juvenile court intervention. *Journal Of Education For Students Placed At Risk*, *11*(2), 199–219.

Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus groups. *Social Research Update, 19*(8).

Gleason, P., & Dynarski, M. (2002). Do we know whom to serve: Issues in using risk factors to identify dropouts. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk, 7*, 25–41.

Gliem, J. A., & Gliem, R. R. (2003, October 8-10). *Calculating, interpreting, and reporting Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for Likert-type scales*. Paper presented at the Midwest Research to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education, Ohio State University, Columbus. Retrieved from http://www.ssnpstudents.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Gliem-Gliem.pdf

Glitz, B. (1998). *Focus groups for libraries and librarians.* New York, NY: Forbes Custom Publishing.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 8*(4), 597–607.

Goldschmidt, P., & Wang, J. (1999). When can schools affect dropout behavior? A longitudinal multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 36*, 715–738.

Goldstein, J. S., Little, S. G., & Akin-Little, A. (2003). Absenteeism: A review of the literature and school psychology's role. *The California School Psychologist, 8*, 127–139.

Gonzales, R., Richards, K., & Seeley, K. (2002). *Youth out of school: Linking absences to delinquency.* Colorado Foundation for Families and Children. Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/index.html

Gordon, D. A., Graves, K., & Arbuthnot, J. (1995). The effect of functional family therapy for delinquents on adult criminal behavior. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 22*, 60–73.

Gottfredson, D. C. (1990). Changing school structures to benefit high-risk youths. In P. E. Leone (Ed.), *Understanding troubled and troubling youth*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gottfried, M. A. (2009). Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 31*(4), 392–415.

Gottfried, M. A. (2010). Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach. *American Educational Research Journal, 47*(2).

Gottfried, M. A. (2014). Can neighborhood attributes predict school absences? *Urban Education,* 49(2), 216–250.

Greene, B. F. (1990). *A study of attendance and achievement* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Greene, J. C., Caracelli, V. J., & Graham, W. F. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11*(3), 255–274.

Grisson, J. B., & Sheppard, L. (1989). Repeating and dropping out of school. In L. A. Sheppard & M. L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention (pp. 34–63). New York, NY: Falmer.

Guare, R. E., & Cooper, B. S. (2003). *Truancy revisited*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective evaluation: Improving the usefulness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hager, G. (2006). *School size and student outcomes in Kentucky's public schools* (Research Report No. 334). Retrieved from http://www.lrc.ky.gov/lrcpubs/RR334.pdf

Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J., & Drew, S. (2007). *Dropout factors and exemplary programs*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center, Communities in Schools.

Harnett, S. (2007, December/January). Does peer group identity influence absenteeism in high school students? *The High School Journal*, 35–44.

Hawkins, J. D., & Catalano, R. (1995). *Risk focused prevention: Using the social development strategy.* Seattle, WA: Developmental Research and Programs, Inc.

Heilbrunn, J. (2004). *Juvenile detention for Colorado youth: Exploring the issues*. Denver, CO: National Center for School Engagement.

Heilbrunn, J. Z. (2007). *Pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: A literature review*. Denver, CO: National Center for School Engagement.

Heilbrunn, Z. J., & McGillivary, H. (2005). *National Center for School Engagement: How to evaluate your truancy reduction program*. Retrieved from http://www.schoolengagement.org/index.cfm/Achievement.

Helm, C. M., & Burkett, C. W. (1989). Effects of computer-assisted telecommunications on school attendance. Journal of Educational Research, 82, 362–365.

Henggeler, S. W., Melton, G. B., & Smith, L. A. (1992). Family preservation using multisystemic therapy: An effective alternative to incarcerating serious juvenile offenders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 60*, 953–961.

Henry, K. L. (2007). Who's skipping school: Characteristics of truants in 8th and 10th grade. Journal of School Health, 77(1), 29–35.

Henry, K. (2010). Skipping school and using drugs: A brief report. Drugs: *Education, Prevention, and Policy, 17*, 650–657.

Henry, K. L., & Huizinga, D. A. (2007). School-related risk and protective factors associated with truancy among urban youth placed at risk. Journal of Primary Prevention, 28(6), 505–519.

Heyne, D. (2002). Evaluation of child therapy and caregiver training in the treatment of school refusal. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 41*(6), 687–695.

Howe, K. R. (1988). Against the quantitative-qualitative incompatibility thesis, or dogmas die hard. *Educational Researcher, 17*, 10–16.

Hoyle, D. (1998). Constructions of pupil absence in the British education service. *Child and Family Social Work, 3*, 99–111.

Huddleston, M. R., & Shoenfelt, E. L. (2006). The truancy court diversion program of the family court, Warren circuit division III, Bowling Green, Kentucky: An evaluation of impact on attendance and academic performance. *Family Court Review, 44*(4), 683–695.

Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., & Thornberry, T. (1995). Urban delinquency and substance abuse: Initial findings. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Humphreys, L., Forehand, R. L., McMahon, R. J., & Roberts, M. W. (1978). Parent behavioral training to modify child noncompliance: Effects on untreated siblings. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, 9*, 235–238.

Ingersoll, S., & LeBoeuf, D. (1977). Reaching out to youth out of the education mainstream. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Isaac, S., & Michael, W. (1985). *Handbook in research and evaluation* (2nd ed.). San Diego, CA: EdITS.

Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 3–20.

Jenkins, P. H. (1995). School delinquency and school commitment. *Sociology of Education, 68*, 221–239.

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7), 14–26.

Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Turner, L. A. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1(2), 112–133.

Jones, T., & Lovrich, N. (2011). *Updated literature review on truancy: Key concepts, historical overview, and research relating to promising practice—with particular utility to Washington state*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University.

Justice Policy Institute. (2009). *The cost of confinement: Why juvenile justice policies make good fiscal sense*. Retrieved from http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/09_05_REP_CostOfConfinement_JJ_PS.pdf

Kamradt, B. J. (2000). Wraparound Milwaukee: Aiding youth with mental health needs. *Juvenile Justice Journal, 7*(1), 14–23.

Katz, M. (1972). Who went to school? *History of Education Quarterly*, 432–454.

Katz, M. S. (1976). A history of compulsory education laws. *Fastback Series*, *75*. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED119389.pdf

Kazdin, A. E., Siegel, T. C., & Bass, D. (1992). Cognitive problem-solving skills training and parent management training in the treatment of antisocial behavior in children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 60*, 733–747.

Kearney, C. A. (2007). Forms and functions of school refusal behavior in youth: An empirical analysis of absenteeism severity. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 48*(1), 53–61.

Kelley, B., Loeber, R., Keenan, K., & DeLamarte, M. (1997). Developmental pathways in boys' disruptive and delinquent behavior. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Kielb, C., & Lin, S. (2010). Impact of school building conditions on student absenteeism in New York state elementary schools: A survey of school nurses. *Journal of School Nurses, 23*(5), 267–275.

Kilma, T., Miller, M., & Nunlist, C. (2009). *What works? Targeted truancy and dropout programs in middle and high school* (Document No. 09-06-2201). Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Kim, J. S., & Streeter, C. L. (2006). Increasing school attendance: Effective strategies and interventions. In. C. Franklin, M. B. Harris, & P. Allen-Meares (Eds.), *The school services sourcebook: A guide for school-based professionals* (pp.397-404). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

King, N. (1998). Cognitive-behavioral treatment of school-refusing children: A controlled evaluation. *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 34*(4), 395–403.

King, N. (2001). Cognitive behavioural treatment of school-refusing children: Maintenance of improvement at 3-to-5-year follow-up. *Scandinavian Journal of Behaviour Therapy, 30*(2), 85–89.

Klein, M. W. (1976). Issues and realities in police diversion programs. *Crime and Delinquency, 22,* 421–427.

Kleine, P. A. (1994). *Chronic absenteeism: A community issue* (Report No. EA026196). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED375494). East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning.

Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health, 74*(7), 262–273.

Kozinetz, C. A. (1995). Using administrative data to identify elementary schools at increased risk for student absences. *Journal of School Health, 65*, 262–264.

Krisberg, B. A., & Austin, A. (1993). *Reinventing juvenile justice*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kronick, R., & Hargis, C. (1998). *Dropouts: Who drops out and why and the recommended action* (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Krueger, R. A. (1988). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. London, UK: Sage.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kumpfer, K. L., Alvarado, R., & Whiteside, H. O. (2003). Family-strengthening approaches for the prevention of youth problem behaviors. *American Psychologist, 58*, 457–465.

Kvale, S. (1989). *Issues of validity in qualitative research.* Lund, Sweden: Chartwell Bratt.

Lagana, M. (2004). Protective factors for inner-city adolescents at risk of school dropout: Family factors and social support. *Children and Schools, 26*(4), 211–220.

Lamdin, D. J. (1996). Evidence of student attendance as an independent variable in education production functions. *Journal of Educational Research, 89*, 155–162.

Lay, B., Blanz, B., & Schmidt, M. H. (2009). Effectiveness of home treatment in children and adolescents with externalizing psychiatric disorders. European Child and Psychiatry, 10(1), 80–90.

Lehr, C. A., Sinclair, M. F., & Christenson, S. L. (2004). Addressing student engagement and truancy prevention during the elementary school years: A replication of the check and connect model. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 9*(3), 279–301.

Leininger, M. M. (1985). Nature, rationale and importance of qualitative research methods in nursing. In M. M. Leininger (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in nursing* (pp. 1–28). New York, NY: Grune & Stratton.

Levine, R. S., Metzendorf, D., & VanBoskirk, K. A. (1986). Runaway and throwaway youth: A case for early intervention with truants. *Social Work in Education, 8*, 93–106.

Lincoln, S. (1976). Juvenile referral and recidivism. In R. M. Carter & M. W. Klein (Eds.), *Back on the street: Diversion of juvenile offenders*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lindstadt, M. A. (2005). Employing mediation to approach truants. *Family Court Review, 43*(2), 303–322.

Lipsey, M., Cordray, D., & Berger, D. (1981). Evaluation of a juvenile diversion program: Using multiple lines of evidence. *Evaluation Review, 5*(3), 283–306.

Lipsey, M. W., & Cullen, F. T. (2007). The effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation: A review of systematic reviews. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science, 3*.

Lochman, J. E. (2000). Parent and family skills training in targeted prevention programs for at-risk youth. *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 21*(2), 253–265.

Loeber, R., & Farrington, D. P. (2000). The significance of child delinquency. In R. Loeber & D. P. Farrington (Eds.), *Child delinquents: Development, intervention, and service needs* (pp. 1–24). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Loeber, R., & Farrington, D. P. (2000). Young children who commit crime: Epidemiology, developmental origins, risk factors, early interventions, and policy implications. *Development and Psychopathology, 12*(4), 737–762.

Long, P., Forehand, R., Wierson, M., & Morgan, A. (1994). Moving into adulthood: Does parent training with young noncompliant children have long-term effects? *Behaviour Research Therapy, 32*, 01–107.

Lundman, R. J. (1993). *Prevention and control of juvenile delinquency* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford Press.

MacDonald, R., & Marsh, J. (2007). Missing school: Educational engagement, youth transitions, and social exclusion. *Youth and Society, 36*, 143–162.

MacGillivary, H., & Erickson, G. (2006). *Data to drive decisions: School attendance, truancy, and juvenile crime in Denver.* Presentation delivered to the National Center for School Engagement.

Malcolm, H., Wilson, V., Davidson, J., and Kirk, S. (2003). *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs* (SCRE Centre Report 424). Nottingham, UK: Department for Education.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Martin, N., & Halperin, S. (2006). *Whatever it takes: How twelve communities are reconnecting out-of-school youth.* Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum. Retrieved from http://www.aypf.org/publications/WhateverItTakes/WITfull.pdf

Marvul, J. N. (2012). If you build it, they will come: A successful truancy intervention program in a small high school. *Urban Education*, *47*(1), 144–169. Retrieved from http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/data

Mayer, G., & Mitchell, L. (1993). A dropout prevention program for at-risk high school students: Emphasizing consulting to promote positive classroom climates. *Education Treatment of Children, 16*(2), 135–146.

Maynard, B. R., McCrea, K. T., Pigott, T. D., & Kelly, M. S. (2012, July). *Indicated truancy interventions: Effects on school attendance among chronic truant students.* Oslo, Norway: Campbell Collaboration.

McCaughlin, T. F., & Vachu, E. F. (1992). The at-risk student: A proposal for action. Journal of Instructional Psychology, 19, 66–68.

McCluskey, C. P., Bynum, T. S., & Patchin, J. W. (2004). Reducing chronic absenteeism: An assessment of an early truancy initiative. *Crime and Delinquency, 50*(2), 214–234.

McGiboney, G. (2001). Truants welcome here: An alternative school designed specifically for truants is boosting student attendance. *American School Board Journal*, *188*, 43–45.

McMahon, R. J., Forehand, R., & Griest, D. L. (1981). Effects of knowledge of social learning principles on enhancing treatment outcome and generalization in a parent training program. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 49*, 526–532.

McNeal, R. B. (1999). Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out. *Social Forces, 78*(1), 117–144.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, D. (1986). Effects of a program on therapeutic discipline on the attitude, attendance, and insight of truant adolescents. *Journal of Experimental Education*, *55*(1), 49–53.

Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division. (2003). *Wraparound Milwaukee: 2002 annual report*. Milwaukee, WI.

Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., Timewell, E., & Alexander, L. (1990). *In-depth interviewing: Researching people*. Hong Kong: Longman Cheshire.

Mitchell, M. L., & Jolley, J. M. (2004). *Research design explained*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt.

Mogulescu, S., & Segal, H. J. (2002). *Approaches to truancy prevention*. New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice Youth Program.

Morgan, D. L. (1998). Practical strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods: Applications to health research. *Qualitative Health Research, 8*, 362–376.

Morley, E., & Rossman, S. B. (1997). *Helping at-risk youth: Lessons from community-based initiatives.* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Mueller, D., Giacomazzi, A., & Stoddard, C. (2006). Dealing with chronic absenteeism and its related consequences: The process and short-term effects of a diversionary juvenile court intervention. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 11*(2)*,* 199–219.

Muller, C., Katz, S. R., & Dance, L. J. (1999). Investing in teaching and learning dynamics of the teacher-student relationship from each actor's perspective. Urban Education, 34(3), 292-337.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). Students absence from school. In *The condition of education 2002* (pp. 40–41, 7, 159–160, 274). Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://nces.edgov/programs/coe/2002/pdf17_2002.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (2006a). *The condition of education 2006*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006071

National Center for Education Statistics. (2006b). *School absenteeism*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2006pdf/24_2006.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Every day counts: The forum guide to collecting and using attendance data.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for School Engagement. (2005). *Gender differences among truant youth*. Denver, CO: Author.

National Center for School Engagement. (2006). *School policies that engage students and families*. Denver, CO: Author.

National Center for School Engagement. (2006). *Guidelines for a national definition of truancy and calculating rates*. Denver, CO: Author.

National Center for School Engagement. (2007). *Pieces of the truancy jigsaw: A literature review*. Retrieved from www.schoolengagement.org

National Criminal Justice Reference Service. (2007). *National Center for School Engagement: Truancy toolkit*. Retrieved from www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/pr/217271.pdf

National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. (1990). *Stuck at the shelter: Homeless children and the DC school system*. Washington, DC: Author.

National Research Council. (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn.* Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to learn. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Neild, R., Balfanz, R., & Herzog, L. (2007). An early warning system. *Educational Leadership, 65*(2), 28–33.

Newmann, F. M., Wehlage, G. G., & Lamborn, S. D. (1992). The significance and sources of student engagement. In F. M. Newmann (Ed.), *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools* (pp. 11–39). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Newton, R., & Rudestram, K. (1999). *Your statistical consultant*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Obama, B. (2010, March). Remarks by the President at the America's promise alliance education event. U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-americas-promise-alliance-education-event

Obama, B. (2011). *Remarks by the President in State of Union Address*. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/remarks-presidet-state-union-address.

Office of Education Accountability. (2004). *Teaching to empty desks: The effects of truancy in Tennessee schools* (Authorization No. 307312). Nashville, TN: Comptroller of Treasury.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2004). Truancy reduction: Keeping youth in school and out of trouble. *OJJDP News at a Glance, 3*(1). Retrieved from https://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/news_at_glance/203557/

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2007). *Trends in justice system's responses to status offending* (OJJDP Briefing Paper). Washington, DC: Charles Puzzanchera.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2008). *Petitioned status case offenses in juvenile courts 200.* Retrieved from www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp

O'Keefe, D. (1994). *Truancy in English secondary school: A report prepared for the DfEE*. London, UK:HMSO.

O'Keefe, D., & Stoll, P. (1995). *Issues in school attendance and truancy*. London, UK: Pittman Publishing.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2000, November). *Expanding the framework of internal and external validity in quantitative research*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Educational Research, Ponte Vedra, FL (ERIC Document Reproduction Service N. ED448205).

Pasternak, C. S. (19860. *Why isn't Johnny in school? Effective strategies for attendance improvement and truancy prevention.* Springfield, IL: Prevention First, Inc.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pearce, N., & Hillman, J. (1998). Wasted youth: Raising attainment and tackling social exclusion. London, UK: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Peed, S., Roberts, M., & Forehand, R. L. (1977). Evaluation of the effectiveness of a standardized parent training program in altering the interactions of mothers and their noncompliant children. Behavior Modification, 1, 323–350.

Pierce *v*. Society of Sisters, 268 U.S. 510 (1925).

Prince *v*. Massachusetts, U.S. 321 U.S. 158 (98).

Puzzanchera, C., Adams, B., & Sickmund, M. (2010). *Juvenile court statistics 2006-2007*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Puzzanchera, C., & Sickmund, M. (2008). *Juvenile court statistics 2005.* Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Puzzanchera, C., Stahl, A. L., Finnegan, T. A., Tierney, N., & Snyder, H. N. (2003). *Juvenile court statistics 1999*. Washington, DC: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Quinn, L. (1995). Using threats of poverty to promote school attendance: Implications of Wisconsin's 'learnfare' experiment for families. *Journal of Children and Poverty, 1*, 5–16.

Railsback, J. (2004). *Increasing student attendance: Strategies from research and practice*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Reid, K. (1999). *The self-concept and persistent school absenteeism. Truancy and school absenteeism.* London, UK: Routledge.

Reid, K. (1999). Tackling truancy in schools: *A practical manual for primary and secondary schools.* New York, NY: Taylor and Francis, Inc.

Reid, K. (2005). The causes, views and traits of school absenteeism and truancy: An analytical review. *Research in Education, 74*, 59–82.

Reid, K. (2008). The causes of nonattendance: An empirical study. *Educational Review, 60*(4), 345–357.

Reimer, M. S. & Dimock, K. (2005). *Truancy prevention in action: Best practices and model truancy programs*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, Clemson University.

Reimer, M. S., & Smink, J. (2005). *Information about the school dropout issue. Selected facts and statistics*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, Clemson University.

Rhodes, J. L. F. (2007). *Interrelationships between demographic, psychosocial, and academic characteristics and GED attainment among at-risk youth* (Unpublished master's thesis). Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

Richards, E. (2006). *Milwaukee looks for solutions to truancy: Racine's use of courts, proposal to mail citations to be study*. Milwaukee, WI: J. Sentinel.

Riley, P., & McDaniel, J. (1999). Youth out of the education mainstream: a North Carolina profile. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Roby, D. E. (2004). Research on school attendance and student achievement: A study of Ohio schools. *Educational Research Quarterly, 28*, 3–14.

Rocca, K. (2003). Student attendance: A comprehensive review. *Journal on Excellence in Teaching, 14*(1), 85–107.

Roderick, M., Arney, M., Axelman, M., Dacosta, K., Steiger, C., Stone, M,. . .Waxman, E. (1997). *Habits hard to break: A new look at truancy in Chicago's public high schools: Research in brief.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration. Assessed at http://www.consortium-chicago.org/publications/pdfs/p0a09.pdf

Roderick, M., Bryk, A. S., Jacob, B. A., Easton, J. Q., & Allensworth, E. (1999). *Ending social promotion: Results from the first two years*. Chicago, lL: Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Rohrman, D. (1993). Combating truancy in our schools—a community effort. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 76*(77), 40–45.

Rojek, D. G., & Erickson, M. L. (1982). Reforming the juvenile justice system: The diversion of status offenders. *Law and Society Review, 16*(2), 241–264.

Rothman, S. (2001). School absence and student background factors: A multilevel analysis. *International Education Journal, 2*(1), 59–68.

Rumberger, R. (1987). High school dropouts: A review of the issues and evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 57*, 101–121.

Rumburger, R., & Lim, S. (2008). *Why students drop out of school: A review of 25 years of research*. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Dropout Research Project, California Dropout Research Project.

Rumberger, R. W. (1995). Dropping out of middle school: A multilevel analysis of students and schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*, 583–625.

Rumberger, R.W. & Larson, K.A. (1998). Student mobility and the increased risk of high school drop out. *American Journal of Education, 107,* 1–35.

Salsich, A., & Trone, J. (2013*). From courts to communities: The right response to truancy, running away and other status offenses*. New York, NY: The Vera Institute of Justice Status Reform Center.

Sandelowski, M. (1986). The problem of rigor in qualitative research. *Advances in Nursing Science, 8*(3), 27–37.

Sandelowski, M. (1993). Rigor or rigor mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited. *Advances in Nursing Science, 16*(2), 1–8.

Sampson, R., & Wilson, W. (1994). Toward a theory of race, crime and urban inequality. In J. Hagan & R. Peterson (Eds.), *Crime and inequality* (pp. 37–54). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Satterfield, J. H., Satterfield, B. T., & Schell, A. M. (1987). Therapeutic interventions to prevent delinquency in hyperactive boys. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 26*, 56–64.

Sexton, T. L., & Turner, C. T. (2010). The effectiveness of functional family therapy for youth with behavioral problems in a community practice setting. Journal of Family Psychology, 24(3), 339–348.

Schroeder, J., Chaisson, R., & Pogue, R. (2004). Pathways to death row for America's disabled youth: Three case studies driving reform. *Journal of Youth Studies, 7*(4), 451–472.

Shahdish, W. R., Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (Eds.). (2002). *Construct validity and external validity*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Shelden, R. G. (1999). Detention diversion advocacy: An evaluation. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin.* Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Sheldon, S. B. (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family, and community partnerships. *Journal of Educational Research, 100*(5), 267–275.

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2004). Getting students to school: Using family and community involvement to reduce chronic absenteeism. *School Community Journal 4*(2), 39–56.

Sheppard, A. (2005, September). Development of school attendance difficulties: An exploratory study. *Pastoral Care*, 19–25.

Sheppard, A. (2010). School attendance and attainment: Poor attenders' perceptions of schoolwork and parental involvement in their education. *British Journal of Special Education, 36*(2), 104–111.

Sheverbush, R. L., & Sadowski, A. F. (1994). A family systems approach to the problem of truancy. Unpublished paper, Pittsburg State University, Kansas.

Sheverbush, R. L., Smith, J. V., & DeGruson, M. (2000). *A truancy program: The successful partnering of schools, parents, and community systems*. East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning.

Sickmund, M. (2009). Delinquency cases in juvenile court, 2005. *Factsheet.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Sigmon, J. N., Nugent, M. E., & Engelhardt-Greer, S. (1999). *Abolish chronic truancy now diversion program. Evaluation report*. Alexandria, VA: American Prosecutors Research Institute.

Smith, E. P., Wolf, A. M., Cantillon, D. M., Thomas, O., & Davidson, W. S. (2004). The adolescent diversion project: 25 years of research on an ecological model of intervention. *Journal of Prevention and Intervention, 27*(2), 29–47.

Sommer, B. (1985). Truancy in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 5*, 145–160.

Sparks, S. D. (2010). Districts begin looking harder at absenteeism. *Education Week*, 30(6).

Sparks, S. D. (2011). Early years absenteeism seen as critical. *Education Week, 31*(2), 11–13.

Stahl, A. L. (2008). Petitioned status offense cases in juvenile courts, 2004. *Fact Sheet*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443–466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Steinhart, D. J. (1996). *Status offenses. The future of children*. The Juvenile Court, 6, 86–99.

Strand, J. A., & Peacock, T. D. (2002). *Nurturing resilience and school success in American Indian and Alaska native students*. Charles Town, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED471488).

Strickland, V.P. (1998). *Attendance and grade point average: A study* (Report No. SP038147). East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED423224).

Sundius, J., & Farneth, M. (2008). *Missing school: Habitual truancy and chronic absence*. Baltimore, MD: The Open Society Institute.

Sutphen, R. D., Ford, J. P., & Flaherty, C. (2010). Truancy interventions: A review of the research literature. *Research on Social Work Practice, 20*(2), 161–171.

Svec, H. (1986). School discrimination and the high school dropout: A case for adolescent advocacy. *Adolescence, 21*, 449–452.

Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Teasley, M. L. (2004). Absenteeism and truancy: Risk, protection, and best practice implications for social workers. *Children and Schools, 26*(2), 117–128.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Testerman, J. (1996). Holding at-risk student: The secret is one-on-one. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*, 364.

Thapa, A.,Cohen, J., Higgins-D'Alessandro, A., & Guffy, S. (2012, August). *School climate research summary* (Issue Brief No. 3). Bronx, NY: National School Climate Center.

Thompson, M. S., Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Sundius, M. J. (1992). The influence of family composition on children's conformity to the student role. *American Educational Research Journal, 29*, 405–424.

Thompson, S. J., Bender, K., Windsor, L. C., & Flynn, P. M. (2009). Keeping families engaged: The effects of home-based family therapy enhanced with experiential activities. *Social Work Research, 33*(2), 121–126.

Timmons, M. J., Bender, M. B., Kishna, M. A., & Mitchell, C. C. (2006). An independent effectiveness trial of multisystemic therapy with juvenile justice youth. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 35*(2), 227–236.

Tremblay, R. E, McCord, J., Boileau, H., Charlebois, P., Gagnon, C., LeBlanc, M., & Larivee, S. (1991). Can disruptive boys be helped to become competent? *Psychiatry, 54*, 148–161.

Tremblay, R. E., Vitaro, F., Bertrand, L., LeBlanc, H., Beauchesne, H., Boileau, H., & David, L. (1992). Parent and child training to prevent early onset of delinquency: The Montreal longitudinal-experimental study. In J. McCord & R. E. Tremblay (Eds.), *Preventing antisocial behavior: Interventions from birth through adolescence*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Trochim, W.M.K. (2006). Qualitative measures. *Research Methods Knowledge Base*. Retrieved from http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qual.php

U.S. Department of Education. (1996). *Manual to combat truancy*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006). *Indicators of school crime and safety* (NCES 2007-003). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Education. (2007). *Truancy: A serious problem for students, schools, and society*. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/truancy/problem_pg11.html

U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2001). *A profile of the working poor, 1999* (Report 947). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Van Ry, V. L., & King, D. L. (1998, Summer). The Kern county truancy reduction program: Meeting diverse needs to keep children in school. *ERS Spectrum*, 25–35.

Vera Institute of Justice. (2011). *School building truancy policies and practices survey findings*. New York, NY: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ccyj.org/

Virginia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Virginia cohort reports. Graduation, completion, dropout, and postsecondary data.* Retrieved from http://www.doe.virginia.govv/statistics_reports/graduation_completion/cohort_reports/

Virginia Department of Education. (2005, August). *Improving school attendance: A resource guide for Virginia schools.* Retrieved from http://www.nnsdfsc.org/files/School%20Attendancne%202005.pdf

Virginia Department of Education. (2006). *Virginia school report card*. Retrieved from https://plpe.doe.virginia.gov/reportcard

Virginia Department of Education. (2007-2008). *Virginia annual report on discipline, crime, and violence*. Retrieved from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/school_climate/discipline_crime_violence/07_annual_report.pdf

Virginia General Assembly. (2007). Code of Virginia. Retrieved from https://legi–s.state.va.us/laws/codeofva.

Visscher, A. J., & Bos, K. T. (1993). Combating truancy: Can the computer help schools? *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 18*, 198–200.

Vogt, W. P. (2007). *Quantitative research methods for professionals*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Waxman, H. C., Gray, J. P., & Padron, Y. N. (2003). *Review of research on educational resilience* (Research Report 11). Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence.

Wells, K. C., & Egan, J. (1988). Social learning and systems family therapy for childhood oppositional disorder: Comparative treatment outcome. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 252*, 138–146.

Welsch, W. N., Jenkins, P. H., & Harris, P. (1999). Reducing minority over-representation in juvenile justice: Results of community-based delinquency prevention in Harrisburg. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 36*, 87–110.

White, M., Fyfe, J., Cambell, S., & Goldkamp, J. (2001). The school-police partnership: Identifying at-risk youth through a truant recovery program. *Evaluation Review, 25*(5), 507–533.

Wilder Research Center. (2003). *Effective truancy prevention and intervention: A review of relevant research for the Hennepin county school success project*. Retrieved from http://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Publications/Studies/Increasing%20School%20Attendance%20for

Wilkins, J. (2008). School characteristics that influence student attendance: Experiences of students in a school avoidance program. *High School Journal, 91*(3), 12–24.

Wilson, K. (1993). Tough on truants. *American School Board Journal, 180*, 43–46.

Wimberly, G. (2002). *School relationships foster success for African American students* (ACT Policy Report). Iowa City, IA: ACT.

Winokur Early, K., Hand, G., Blankenship, J., & Chapman, S. (2012). *Redirection continues to save money and reduce recidivism.* Tallahassee, FL: Justice Research Center.

Yazzie-Mintz, E. (2009). *Engaging the voices of students: A report on the 2007 and 2008 high school survey of student engagement.* Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy.

Yin, R. K. (1994). Discovering the future of the case study method in evaluation research. *Evaluation Practice, 15,* 283–290.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research, design, and methods* (3rd ed.). Newbury, Park: Sage.

Zhang, D., Katsiyannis, A., Barrett, D. E., & Wilson, V. (2007). Truancy offenders in the juvenile justice system: Examinations of first and second referrals. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*(4), 244–256.

Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). Qualitative analysis of content. In B. Wildemuth (Ed.), *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science* (pp. 308–319. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Zinth, K. (2005). Truancy and habitual truancy. Examples of state definitions. *Education Commission of the States, 103*.

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

VCU Make it real.

Office of Research
Office of Research Subjects Protection
BioTechnology Research Park
800 East Leigh Stree, Suite 3000
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0568

(804) 828-0868
Fax: (804) 827-1448

TO: Jonathan D. Becker, PhD, JD

CC: Janice Parrish

FROM: VCU IRB Panel B

RE: IRB HM20002639 STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAM FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

On 10/30/2014, the referenced research study was ***approved*** by expedited review according to 45 CFR 46.110, categories 6 and 7, by VCU IRB Panel B.

- This study involves children, and is approved under children's category:

45 CFR 46.404	Research involving no greater than minimal risk to children, with adequate provisions for soliciting the assent of the children and permission of their parents or guardians, as set forth in Sec. 46.408. Note: For children involved in this study, the IRB finds that **the permission and signature of one parent is required. Refer to Consent Groups section of the electronic protocol for approved Waiver/s.**

- The information found in the electronic version of this study's smart form and uploaded documents now represents the currently approved study, documents, informed consent process, and HIPAA pathway (if applicable). You may access this information by clicking the Study Number above.

This approval expires on 9/30/2015. Federal Regulations/VCU Policy and Procedures require continuing review prior to continuation of approval past that date. Continuing Review notices will be sent to you prior to the scheduled review.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Subjects Protection (ORSP) or the IRB reviewer(s) assigned to this study.

The reviewer(s) assigned to your study will be listed in the History tab and on the study workspace. Click on their name to see their contact information.

Attachment – Conditions of Approval

Conditions of Approval:

In order to comply with federal regulations, industry standards, and the terms of this approval, the investigator must (as applicable):

1. Conduct the research as described in and required by the Protocol.
2. Obtain informed consent from all subjects without coercion or undue influence, and provide the potential subject sufficient opportunity to consider whether or not to participate (unless Waiver of Consent is specifically approved or research is exempt).
3. Document informed consent using only the most recently dated consent form bearing the VCU IRB "APPROVED" stamp (unless Waiver of Consent is specifically approved).
4. Provide non-English speaking patients with a translation of the approved Consent Form in the research participant's first language. The Panel must approve the translated version.
5. Obtain prior approval from VCU IRB before implementing any changes whatsoever in the approved protocol or consent form, unless such changes are necessary to protect the safety of human research participants (e.g., permanent/temporary change of PI, addition of performance/collaborative sites, request to include newly incarcerated participants or participants that are wards of the state, addition/deletion of participant groups, etc.). Any departure from these approved documents must be reported to the VCU IRB immediately as an Unanticipated Problem (see #7).
6. Monitor all problems (anticipated and unanticipated) associated with risk to research participants or others.
7. Report Unanticipated Problems (UPs), including protocol deviations, following the VCU IRB requirements and timelines detailed in VCU IRB WPP VIII-7:
8. Obtain prior approval from the VCU IRB before use of any advertisement or other material for recruitment of research participants.
9. Promptly report and/or respond to all inquiries by the VCU IRB concerning the conduct of the approved research when so requested.
10. All protocols that administer acute medical treatment to human research participants must have an emergency preparedness plan. Please refer to VCU guidance on http:/www.research.vcu.edu/irb/guidance.htm.

11. The VCU IRBs operate under the regulatory authorities as described within:
    a. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Title 45 CFR 46, Subparts A, B, C, and D (for all research, regardless of source of funding) and related guidance documents.
    b. U.S. Food and Drug Administration Chapter I of Title 21 CFR 50 and 56 (for FDA regulated research only) and related guidance documents.
    c. Commonwealth of Virginia Code of Virginia 32.1 Chapter 5.1 Human Research (for all research).

Appendix B

Research Subject Information and Permission Form (Parent)

TITLE: A Study of the Effectiveness of a Truancy Reduction Program for Middle and High School Students

VCU IRB NO: HM20002639

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to discover your child's perceptions of his experience in participating in the school division's Truancy Reduction Program. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because he or she participated in the school division's truancy reduction program either through direct referral to the court or through participation in a truancy pilot program involving in-home counseling and case management services as an alternative to going through the court process.

This study is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation and is not being conducted by Henrico County Schools. However, results from the study will be shared with school division staff to inform best practice.

Description of the Study and Your Child's Involvement

If you give permission for your child to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this permission form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to your child.

In this focus group meeting your child will participate in a group with 5 or 6 other children. The focus group will last approximately 40 minutes. At the beginning of the focus group your child will be asked to complete a brief survey of 8-10 questions regarding school climate. Examples of questions that your child will be asked include: "I feel safe at my school and "Teachers are willing to help me when I need help at my school." Afterwards, your child will participate in a group during which he/she will be asked to respond to five or six questions about his or her experience with the truancy program. Examples of questions that your child may be asked during the focus group include:

1. What do you consider to be the reasons why students are truant from school?
2. What do you think about how truancy is handled at your school?
3. How has your participation in the truancy intervention____(in-home counseling or court) impacted your attendance?
4. In what way has your participation in the truancy intervention impacted your grades?
5. How has your participation in the truancy intervention impacted the number of disciplinary referrals you have received?
6. What do you think would be most helpful in reducing truancy among students?

Your child's response to these questions will be audio-recorded using a digital recorder to

ensure that we get all group participants' ideas; however, your child's name will not be recorded on the tape. Instead, your child will be assigned a number that will be used to link him to the responses given.

Risks and Discomforts

Sometimes talking about school truancy can make children feel uncomfortable or become upset. If your child does become upset, I will allow your child to speak to his or her guidance counselor who can help your child deal with his feelings. During the focus group, several questions will be asked about your child's experience with the court or with the services received through the truancy pilot program and what impact this experience had on his school attendance, academic performance and rate of disciplinary referrals. Your child does not have to talk about any subject he/she does not want to talk about. Your child may choose not to answer specific questions and may leave the focus group at any time and return to class. If your child chooses to stop his participation in the focus group, information obtained about your child during the focus group will be removed from the focus group data.

Benefits to You and Others

Your child may not get any direct benefit from participation in this study, but, the information we learn from your child's participation may help us to improve programs and services to meet the needs of other students who are experiencing similar issues.

Costs

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time your child will spend participating in the focus group, which will take approximately 40 minutes.

Payment for Participation

As an incentive for participating in this study, your child's name along with the names of all other study participants will be entered into a one time drawing for a $40.00 gift certificate at a local mall. The drawing will take place at the conclusion of the focus group and the gift certificate will be awarded to the selected child at that time.

Alternatives

The alternative is for your child not to participate in the study.

Confidentiality

Potentially identifiable information about your child will consist of demographic data, data code key, audio recordings and interview notes. Demographic data about your child will be collected from the Henrico County Schools Research and Planning Department. Demographic data will include your child's age, grades in English, Math Science and Social Studies, gender, number of

disciplinary referrals, attendance and promotion/retention status. In order to determine the impact of the truancy reduction program on your child's academic performance, attendance, discipline referral rate, and promotion/retention status, demographic data about your child will be collected before and after the truancy intervention. Demographic data collected about your child will be identified by an assigned number, not by his name. Demographic data about your child will be maintained in a password protected file on a computer that only authorized study personnel will have access to. The data code key linking your child's name to the assigned number will only be accessible to authorized research study personnel and will be stored in a locked fire safe in a separate location.

The focus group session will be audio recorded, but your child's name will not be recorded. At the beginning of the focus group, your child will be assigned a number that will be used to match your child to his responses to focus group questions. Your child will be asked to use the assigned number so that no names are recorded. The audio tapes and the interview notes will be stored on a password protected external hard drive which will be stored in a locked fire safe that only authorized study personnel will have access to. After the information from the recordings is transcribed and added to data analysis software and coded, the recordings will be destroyed 30 days following the completion of the study. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel. No one in the school will have access to focus group data or any information obtained from your child during the focus group. A data and safety-monitoring plan has been established.

We will not tell anyone the answers your child give us; however, information from the study and the permission form signed by you and the assent form signed by your child may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

If as part of this research, your child tells us that someone is hurting her or him, or that he/she might hurt themselves or someone else, the law says that we have to let people in authority know so they can protect your child.

What we find from this study may be presented at conferences or published in papers, but your child's name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your child does not have to participate in this study. If you give permission for your child to participate, he may stop at any time without any penalty. If your child elects to withdraw from participation, any responses that he/she provided and any data collected about your child will be removed from the study without penalty. Your child may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study. Your decision of whether or not to allow your child to take part in this study will not change their grade in any way or impact their academic standing with Henrico County Schools.

Your child's participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff or without your consent. The reasons might include:

- The study staff thinks it is necessary for your child's health or safety.
- Your child has not followed study instructions.
- The researcher has stopped the study, or
- Administrative reasons require your child's withdrawal.

If your child leaves the study before the end of the focus group, your child's name will not be included in the drawing for the $40.00 gift certificate and all study data collected pertaining to your child will be removed from data results.

Questions

In the future, you may have questions about your child's participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about your participation in this research, contact:

Dr. Jonathan Becker, Assistant Professor, VCU School of Education, at (804) 827-2655 or email: jbecker@vcu.edu.

Jan R. Parrish, VCU Student Investigator, at (804) 651-6223 or email: jrparrish@vcu.edu.

The researcher/study staff named above is the best person(s) to call for questions about your participation in this study.

If you have any general questions about your rights as a participant in this or any other research, you may contact:

Office of Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 3000
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: (804) 827-2157

Contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about research. You may also call this number if you cannot reach the researcher or if you wish to talk with someone else. General information about participation in research studies can also be found at http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm.

Permission

I have been given the chance to read this permission form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My

signature indicates that I give permission for my child to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the permission form once I have given permission for my child to participate.

_____

Name of Child

_____

Participant name printed Participant signature Date

_____

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian
(Printed)

_____

Parent or Legal Guardian Signature Date

_____

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness*
(Printed)

_____

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent Discussion/Witness Date

_____

Jonathan Becker, PHD. Principal Investigator Signature** Date

** A witness to the signature of a research participant is required by VA Code. If the witness is to be someone other than the person conducting the informed consent discussion, include a line for the witness to print his/her name and lines for signature and date.*

*** The purpose of this signature is to ensure that the principal investigator is aware of who has been enrolled in studies. The principal investigator's signature date need not correspond to that of subject or witness, but should be provided after both the subject and witness have signed.*

Appendix C

Student Cover Letter and Assent Form

Dear Student:

I am a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University. I am conducting a study involving middle and high school students. The purpose of this study is to obtain information regarding student's perception of the school division's Truancy Reduction Program. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your participation in this program. Your input could prove valuable in helping to reform school procedures and policies regarding how Henrico County School addresses school truancy.

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with 5 or 6 other students for approximately 40 minutes. During the focus group, you will be asked to complete a brief survey and to participate in a group discussion. During this discussion, you will be asked to respond to questions about your experience with the truancy process. I would like to know your thoughts and feelings about your experience and how you would improve the truancy process. By participating in the focus group, you will represent other students who are not a part of the discussion. You will also help school leaders to improve interventions aimed at improving student attendance and helping more students to graduate on time.

Please talk to your parents about this study before you decide whether to participate. I will also ask your parents for permission for you to take part in this focus group. If your parents give permission for you to participate in the focus group, you can still decide not to participate. Taking part in this study is up to you. There is no penalty for stopping your participation. No one will be upset if you don't want to participate. If you elect to withdraw from participation, any responses that you provided and any data collected about you will be removed from the focus group data. You may also decide not to answer any question that you do not wish to respond to on the survey or during the group discussion. In order to participate in the focus group, you will likely miss your lunch period or one advisory class period. Lunch consisting of pizza, drinks and other treats will be provided for you to eat during the focus group. Additionally, all students who complete the focus group will be entered into a drawing at the end of the group for a gift certificate for $40.00.

If you agree to participate in this focus group, you will need to sign and **return the enclosed consent form on or before December 1, 20014.** You can either return your signed consent form in the self-addressed envelope enclosed **or** you can return your signed consent form to one of the school social workers at your school (Mrs. Aikin or Mrs. Rockwell). Your parent will also need to sign and return the parent consent form that has been mailed to your home address **on or before December 1, 2014.**

You can ask me any questions that you have about this study and I will try to answer them for you. If you have questions that you think of later, you can call me at (804) 343-6500 or email me at jrparrish@vcu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration of participating in this focus group.

Sincerely,

Jan R. Parrish, VCU
School of Education

Youth Assent Form

TITLE: A Study of the Effectiveness of a Truancy Reduction Program for Middle and High School Students

VCU IRB NO.: HM20000567

This form may have some words that you do not know. Please ask someone to explain any words that you do not know. You may take home a copy of this form to think about and talk to your parents about before you decide if you want to be in this study.

What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to obtain your perceptions of the Truancy Reduction program that you participated in. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you participated in the school division's truancy reduction program either through direct referral to the court or through participation in a truancy pilot program involving in-home counseling and case management services as an alternative to going through the court process. This study is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation and is not being conducted by Henrico County Schools. However, results from the study will be shared with school division staff to inform best practice.

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in a focus group with 5 or 6 other students for approximately 40 minutes. At the beginning of the focus group, you will be asked to complete a brief survey of about 8-10 questions. Afterwards, you will participate in a group discussion. During this discussion, you will be asked to respond to five or six questions about your experience with the truancy process through the court or your experience with the in-home counseling and case management services. I would like to know your thoughts and feelings about your experience and how you would improve the truancy process. The conversation that we will have during the focus group will be audio recorded so that I can listen to what we have discussed after the focus group.

To protect your identity, your name will not be used in this study or in any information shared about this study. Demographic data about you will also be collected. This data will include your age, grade, attendance, grades, disciplinary referrals and promotion/retention status. This data is being collected for research purposes only. Demographic data about you will be identified using an assigned number; your name will not be used.

What will Happen to me if I choose to be in this study?

In this study, you will participate in a focus group where you will be asked to complete a brief survey and to respond to 5 or 6 questions such as, What would help more students come to school regularly school and, what is the most important thing that keeps students attending school?

At the beginning of the focus group, you will be assigned a number that will be used to match you to the response that you give to the questions. You will be asked to use the assigned number so that your name is not used. Your response to these questions will help me to better understand your experience with the truancy program that you participated in. The focus group sessions will be audio recorded to ensure that I receive all of your feedback, but your name will not be recorded. The audio tapes and the interview notes will be stored on a password protected external hard drive which will be stored in a locked fire safe. After the information from the recordings is transcribed and added to data analysis software and coded, the audio recording will be destroyed 30 days following the completion of the study. Access to all data about you will be limited to study personnel.

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this form. Do not sign the form until you have all your questions answered, and understand what will happen to you.

What might happen if I am in this study?

Sometimes talking about school makes people uncomfortable. You do not have to talk about anything you do not want to talk about. If you do become uncomfortable, I will help you and/or allow you to speak to your guidance counselor.

You may choose not to answer specific questions and may leave the focus group at any time. If you choose to stop your participation in the focus group, any information obtained from you will be removed from the focus group data.

What do I get if I am in this study?

If you participate in this study, your name, along with the names of all other study participants, will be entered into a one time drawing for a $40.00 gift certificate at a local mall. The drawing will take place at the conclusion of the focus group and the gift certificate will be awarded to the selected child at that time.

If you miss your lunch period to participate in this study, lunch will be provided during the focus group and you will be permitted to eat your lunch during our discussion.

Will you tell anyone what I say?

No one in your school will have access to any of the information that you share in the focus group. I will not tell anyone the answers you give us. I will not share your answers with your teachers, parents, or friends; however, other members of the focus group will know what you say. If you tell me that someone is hurting you, or that you might hurt yourself or someone else, the law requires me to let people in authority know so they can help you. If I talk about this study at conferences or in writing, I will never use your name.

Do I have to be in this study?

You do not have to be in this study. If you choose to be in the study you may stop at any time. No one will blame or criticize you if you drop out of the study. Your decision of whether or not to take part in this study will not impact your academic standing in any way.

Questions

If you have questions about being in this study, you can talk to the following persons or you can have your parent or another adult call:

Jan R. Parrish, VCU Student Investigator, at (804) 651-6223 or email: jrparrish@vcu.edu or

Dr. Jonathan Becker, Assistant Professor, VCU School of Education, at (804) 827-2655 or email: jbecker@vcu.edu.

Do not sign this form if you have any questions. Be sure someone answers your questions.

Assent

I have read this form. I understand the information about this study. I am willing to participate in this study.

_____

Youth name printed Youth signature Date

_____

Name of Person Conducting Informed Assent Discussion/Witness * (printed)

_____

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Assent Discussion / Witness* Date

** A witness to the signature of a research participant is required by VA Code. If the witness is to be someone other than the person conducting the informed assent discussion, include a line for the witness to print his/her name and lines for signature and date.*

Jonathan Becker, J.D., PhD, Principal Investigator Signature** Date

*** The purpose of this signature is to ensure that the principal investigator is aware of who has been enrolled in studies. The principal investigator's signature date need not correspond to that of subject or witness, but should be provided after both the subject and witness have signed.*

Appendix D

Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

INTRODUCTION AND SETUP – 5 min.

GREETING: Hello and welcome. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion. My name is Jan Parrish and I am conducting the interview today. The purpose for this group discussion is to help me better understand your thoughts and feelings about your perceptions about the truancy program that you participated in. I am interested in hearing your honest opinions about the program and your experience. As we engage in discussion, and respond to questions, keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. You are not being tested. Remember, the feedback that you share today is all confidential.

ASSENT FORM
Before we get started let's review these assent forms (thoroughly review assent form). I will be audio recording this interview today because I don't want to miss any of your comments. These recordings will only be listened to by me as part of this study. Your name or any other identifying information will not be recorded. I will only label the recording and report it out with an anonymous number and letter combination like A1. Your identity will be protected. No one will know what you have said or that you have participated. Do you have any questions?

PARTICIPANT SETUP
Let's talk a little about what we're going to be doing here today. I want to hear about your experience with the Truancy Reduction Program which you participated in. I will be using your feedback to help improve the truancy program and some of the information that you share may also be used in a graduate program paper. Some of you may already know each other, but for my sake and for those who don't know each other, let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your name, your grade,

The first question I'd like to ask is:

1. What do you consider to be the reasons why students are truant from school?
    - Probe: What factors contribute to nonattendance?
    - Probe: What would improve student motivation to attend school?

2. What do you think about how truancy is handled at your school?
    - Probe: What do you like about the process?
    - Probe: What didn't you like about the process?
    - Probe: What do others in your school think about how truancy is handled?

3. How has your participation in the truancy intervention____(in-home counseling or court) impacted your attendance?

- Probe: Has your attendance improved?
- Probe: What do you contribute to the improvement?
- Probe: What was missing or needed that would have been helpful to you?

4. In what way has your participation in the truancy intervention impacted your grades?
    - Probe: Has your grades improved since the truancy intervention?
    - Probe: Has your grades declined since the truancy intervention? Why?

5. How has your participation in the truancy intervention impacted the number of disciplinary referrals you have received?

    - Probe: Has there been an increase/decrease in the number of disciplinary referrals since the truancy intervention?

CONCLUSION AND FOLLOW-UP

Thank participant for their assistance and insight. Remind them about confidentiality. Ask them if we can talk again if there is a need for follow-up. Conclude the interview.

Interview Questions

7. What do you consider to be the reasons why students are truant from school?

8. What do you think about how truancy is handled at your school?

9. How has your participation in the truancy intervention____(in-home counseling or court) impacted your attendance?

10. In what way has your participation in the truancy intervention impacted your grades?

11. How has your participation in the truancy intervention impacted the number of disciplinary referrals you have received?

Appendix E

Mean Rankings and Standard Deviation Scores of Survey Items

Survey Items Ranked by Mean

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I am aware of the School District's Truancy Policy	3.50	0.577
9. Improving relationships between school staff and students would help to improve student attendance	3.25	0.957
18. Teaching style (lack of respect and/or support of student needs)	3.25	0.957
19. Obligation to stay home (due to the need to care for younger siblings or due to financial expectations)	3.25	0.957
21. Disruptive events occurring at home	3.00	1.155
2. The truancy intervention was helpful in improving my school attendance	3.00	0.816
3. The truancy intervention was helpful in preventing me from further truancy	3.00	0.816
4. The truancy intervention was helpful in reducing the number of disciplinary referrals that I received	3.00	0.816
12. Lack of motivation to achieve	3.00	0.816
23. Student health concerns	3.00	0.816
26. Grade Retention	3.00	0.816
5. Having an assigned mentor at school would be helpful in encouraging student attendance	3.00	0.00
15. Negative peer role models	2.75	1.50

17. Teacher/student relationship	2.75	1.258
7. Having access to Credit Recovery programs would encourage student attendance at my school	2.75	0.957
10. Lack of preparedness to do school work (ie. Do not have school supplies/books, incomplete homework, not prepared for test)	2.75	0.50
11. Behavior and emotional problems	2.75	0.50
13. Drugs/alcohol use	2.75	0.50
14. Fear of not being safe at school	2.50	1.291
16. School bullying	2.50	1.291
8. Providing parent education regarding the importance of school attendance would reduce student absences at my school	2.50	0.577
22. Lack of effective and consistently applied school attendance policies	2.50	0.577
25. Frequent family moves	2.50	0.577
20. Out of school suspensions	2.25	0.957
6. Having tutoring programs at my school would encourage student attendance	2.25	0.50
24. Family health concerns (illness of parent, sibling or other family member)	2.25	0.50

VITA

Janice Parrish was born and .reared in Virginia. She attended Norfolk State University where she earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology. She attended Virginia Commonwealth University and earned her Masters of Social Work Degree in 1989. Janice worked in a private agency providing clinical services to children, adolescents and adults prior to entering the field of school social work in 1990. Janice has taught at the University level in the graduate social work program. Currently, Janice serves as the supervisor for school social work services for Henrico County Schools. Janice resides with her family in Chesterfield, Virginia.