

Principals' Perceptions of the Implementation of Interventions and Strategies to  
Decrease Chronic Absenteeism in one Virginia Urban School Division

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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April 30, 2020

Hampton, Virginia

*Keywords:* Chronic absenteeism, dropout, school quality indicator, interventions,  
strategies

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**Abstract**

Chronic absenteeism is a growing concern nationwide. Millions of students are absent from school, with the number summing to one month's worth of absences per student per year. As a result of Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA), many states have included chronic absenteeism as part of their school quality indicator. For the 2018-2019 school year, attendance was included in standards of accreditation. Reducing chronic absenteeism has long been a goal for many public principals at each grade level nationwide. The purpose of this study was to identify what interventions and strategies principals were implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism. This study further identified principals' perceptions of the interventions and strategies with the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism. A qualitative research design was used with semi-structured interviews to determine principals' perceptions of interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism. Participants were principals from secondary schools in one urban school district, located in the Southeastern region of Virginia.

Findings from the research revealed that principals in this district are implementing interventions and strategies that include: positive behavioral interventions and supports, parent contacts, community partnerships, district supports, and professional development to decrease chronic absenteeism. The findings also suggested that interventions and strategies that help build relationships between the school, students, and parents are being most effective in decreasing chronic absenteeism in this district. Implications for continued decrease in chronic absenteeism at all level of practice are recommended and suggestions for future research.

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**General Audience Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to identify what interventions and strategies principals were implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism. This study further identified principals' perceptions of the interventions and strategies with the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism. The study included principals from secondary schools in one urban school district, located in the Southeastern region of Virginia. Principals were interviewed using interview questions designed by the researcher (see Appendix E).

The research findings identified principals are implementing positive behavior interventions and supports in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism. They are also implementing parent contacts, community partnerships, district supports, and professional development. The interventions and strategies principals find most effective in decreasing chronic absenteeism are interventions and strategies that help build relationships with students and parents. Future interventions and strategies should include additional efforts to contact parents, an increase in staff to make home visits and students being able to recover or buy back time lost from school due to absenteeism. Implications for practice in the continued decrease of chronic absenteeism are recommended, as well as suggestions for future research.

## **Dedication**

Getting to this point in this dissertation journey brings much joy. I have thought long about what I would say and who I would dedicate this dissertation to. Before starting this process, I prayed about whether or not I should embark on this journey. Years ago, I thought about working towards my doctorate, but didn't pursue it. Now that time has come and gone. Lord, I thank you! During this journey you have shown me that your Word is real. I have learned to depend on you and trust your Word daily, like never before. My ability, confidence, and peace are all wrapped up in your Word. Proverbs 3:6, Philippians 4:19, Isaiah 41:13, Isaiah 41:10, Proverbs 16:3, Philippians 4:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Philippians 4:6-7, Romans 8:28, and Psalms 143:8 have carried me from the fall of 2017 to the spring of 2020. These scriptures will continue to keep me throughout my lifetime. There is no doubt in my heart that without God's living Word, I would not have made it through, again, thank you, Lord!

Thanks to my family for giving me the space to work. Thank you for keeping me focused and for praying for me. To my husband Donald, thank you for your support and allowing me the time I needed to write. Thank you for maintaining the house, cleaning, washing the clothes, popping popcorn when I needed a snack, and for your understanding, I love you. To my dad, Harvey Sherrod Jr., our conversations have meant more to me than you know. God has given you so much wisdom. Your words of encouragement helped to keep me moving forward. To my mom, Velma Sherrod, thank you for instilling in me the importance of education at a very young age. You always made us believe that we could do anything. I can still hear you say over the phone, "Don't you have work to do?" when I was procrastinating. I love you both. To my sisters Denise and Anita Sherrod, thank you for your prayers, support, encouragement and making me laugh. I pray that completing this dissertation proves to you that with God, all things are possible. Know that whatever God has spoken to you to do, he will see you through. Trust him and take that first step. It's time to celebrate!!

To my church family, thanks for all your prayers. Before I wrote a word, you expressed how proud you were of me. Special thanks to Deborah James and Linwood Hoskie, you went out of your way to ask how things were going and to offer words of encouragement.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my professional family, Woodrow Wilson High School (Presidents). This journey started while I was an assistant principal under the leadership of Dr. Timothy Erskine Johnson. Thank you for setting the example of leadership. I have

learned so much from you over the years. Always the professional, a leader of leaders. If it wasn't for you completing your doctorate, I would not be completing mine. To my colleagues over in presidential territory, thanks for your continued support even though I am no longer with you. We will always be family.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would first like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Ted Price, Dr. Carol Cash, Dr. Timothy Johnson and Dr. Carol Mullen for your work in helping me to get to the end of this journey. Dr. Price for your words of encouragement and for helping all of us not to take things too seriously. Your tips on how to relax were valuable. Dr. Cash, thank you for your valuable feedback and for making me laugh with your great sense of humor. Dr. Johnson, there is so much I would like to say that words cannot express. You have been there for me since day one. You said it first, “2020, it’s your turn” I will never forget. The hours you took out of your busy schedule to speak with me in person or via phone meant the world to me. When I was frustrated you would say, “Take a break and come back strong!” Thank you for everything! Dr. Mullen, I didn’t get to meet you until the end. Thanks for being on my committee.

I want to acknowledge some of the members of our Hampton Roads cohort. A special acknowledgement to Dr. Sonji Hairston, my accountability buddy. You received your doctorate “wings” weeks before I finished. I am so proud of you for “representing”. Thanks for checking on me and your words of encouragement. I would like to acknowledge Taiia Clark and Karen Settles for your support during this journey. I will remember the fun week at OTR and working together. I hope we all stay in touch.

I acknowledge my new professional family at Churchland High School under the leadership of Mr. Shawn Millaci. I couldn’t have asked for a better place to land. Thanks for your support and understanding. It was rough in the beginning but you allowed me to find my way. “Go Truckers!

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## **Chapter One**

### **Background**

In 1647 a compulsory education law was passed when Massachusetts was still a British colony, in 1852 “Massachusetts became the first state in the United States to enact a compulsory education law similar to the 1647 law, and in 1857 the law required towns and cities to provide primary schools with a focus on grammar and fundamental arithmetic” (“Compulsory education laws,” n.d., p. 1). According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), students needed to attend school every day in order to succeed. Schools have been attempting to address truancy since the start of compulsory school attendance (O’Connor, Peterson, & Strawhun, 2014). Some children were taken away from their parents and made to work for others when their parents failed to send them to school (“Compulsory education laws,” n.d.). For some time, schools were privatized institutions run by the church, who charged tuition for students to attend. A push was made for schools to become public in order for poorer children whose family couldn’t afford tuition, to receive a formal education (“Compulsory education laws,” n.d.).

On October 7, 2015, President Obama’s administration launched the Every Student Every Day (ESED) initiative in an effort to combat the issue of chronic absenteeism and ensure that students attended school on a regular basis (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], n.d.). The ESED initiative included the following elements:

- “The first-ever data on absenteeism in the Civil Rights data collection.”
- “A Nationwide Summit, held in the spring of 2016, following the release of the new absenteeism data.”
- “New technical assistance for states and local school districts to implement early warning systems.”
- “A Public awareness campaign.”
- “Mentoring as a solution to chronic absenteeism.”
- “A Virtual summit to help states and communities to identify and support chronically absent students” (Ed Gov, 2015, p. 3).

This initiative emerged from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a U.S. law adopted in December 2015 to govern the K-12 public education policy of the United States (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a federal

law that provided money for extra educational assistance for poor children to improvement their academic progress (Education Week, 2015).

A module produced by the VDOE entitled “Understanding Chronic Absenteeism” states that when schools offer instruction that engages students in the learning process, students attend school on a more regular basis and consider dropping out of school less (VDOE, n.d.). The compulsory education law of Virginia requires individuals ages five-18 to attend school (“Compulsory education laws,” n.d.). According to research by Balfanz and Byrnes, (2013), 95% of students can be attending school on any given day, while 25% of students remain chronically absent.

According to the VDOE, a variety of attendance measures exist. In a keynote address to the VDOE, Chang, the founder and director of Attendance Works, a national and state initiative aiming to advance student success by addressing chronic absenteeism, referred to these measures as average daily attendance (ADA) which determine how many students on average attend school on a regular basis. The next measure is truancy, which refers to absences that are considered unexcused and which could lead to some legal action against the parent or child (O’Connor, 2014; VDOE, n.d.). A student is considered truant from school except in the case of sickness or another excuse (Patel, 2009). “Chronic absenteeism is defined as being absent 10% of school days in a school year, whether excused, unexcused or the result of a suspension” (Ed Gov, 2015 p.1).

Both truancy and chronic absenteeism must be considered when looking at early warning indicators for purposes of early intervention (VDOE, n.d.). According to Chang, if early excused absences go uninterrupted, they may develop into habits that become difficult to break in later years (VDOE, n.d.). “Regardless of the definition, chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among students of color, students with disabilities, students enrolled in urban school districts, and students in high poverty schools regardless of jurisdiction” (Lara, Noble, Pelika, & Coons, 2018, p. 1).

## **Overview of the Study**

In this basic qualitative research study, four secondary schools were investigated in terms of principals’ perceptions of interventions and strategies implemented in their schools for decreasing chronic absenteeism. “Basic research is motivated by intellectual interest in a

phenomenon and has as its goal the extension of knowledge” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2010, p. 3). Basic research seeks to understand more about the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data were collected using face-to-face semi-structured interviews with principals from secondary schools in one urban district, located in the southeastern region of Virginia. The district consists of three middle schools and three high schools. The selection criteria for participation in this study included predominately African-American secondary schools having a large population of students classified as economically disadvantaged and an overall chronic absenteeism rate of 15% or higher. Five of the six schools met the criteria. Schools were closed on March 13, 2020 after a mandate from the Governor of Virginia, due to the threat of the Coronavirus (Covid 19). Only four schools were able to participate in the study.

### **Problem Statement**

Over a million high school students drop out of school each year without having developed the language and learning skills necessary to be successful as adults (Balfanz & Chang, 2013). Chronic absenteeism is a growing concern nationwide, with 5-7.5 million students or 10-15% of the country’s student population absent 10% of the total school days. These numbers can total nearly a month of school missed per student per year. (Altman & Meis, 2012-2013; Balfanz & Chang, 2013; Jordan, 2017; The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.). Given this trend, chronically absent students could be absent an entire school year by the time they reach the fifth grade (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.).

Black students have an increased risk of being chronically absent than other students, according to data obtained by the United States Education Department (2019). “Students with disabilities are almost 1.5 times more likely than peers to be chronically absent” (Jacob & Lovett, 2017, p. 4). Jacob and Lovett (2017) “conducted a national study and found that 21% of poor children were chronically absent, compared to only eight percent of non-poor peers” (p.4). Chronic absenteeism was also found to be higher in kindergarten, and while absenteeism reached its lowest rate between fourth and fifth grade, before gradually increasing between middle and high school to peak in twelfth grade (Jacob & Lovett, 2017).

According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) “America’s education system is based upon the assumption that barring illness or an extraordinary event, students are in class every weekday” (p. 3). Attendance impacts student performance on standardized tests, graduation and dropout rates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). If students do not come to school regularly, their likelihood of

graduating is threatened (Rogers et al., 2017), and students who do not graduate end up dropping out of school, which leads to homelessness, drug use, or involvement in other criminal activities that continue into adult life (Walls, 2003).

According to Bauer, Jordan, Chang, and Balfanz 2018, “As part of ESSA, states are required to add a measure of school quality and student success to their statewide accountability system” (p. 7). The District of Columbia and 36 other states hold schools accountable for decreasing chronic absenteeism rates as part of their school accountability under ESSA (Bauer et al., 2018). The aim of schools and school districts across the nation is to improve or maintain student participation (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Effective with the 2018-19 school year, the Virginia State Board of Education evaluated and add performance ratings on school dropout rate and chronic absenteeism to high school accreditation rating (Measurement of School Quality for Accreditation, 2018).

### **Significance of the Study**

**National perspective.** This study was significant because of the increased concern of those in the education field and policy makers regarding chronic absenteeism (Lara et al., 2018). “The U.S. Department of Education identifies chronic absenteeism as a hidden educational crisis” (Jacob & Lovett, 2017, p. 1), in response to which the “Obama administration launched (ESED): A National initiative to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism through the My Brother’s Keeper Initiative” (Ed Gov, 2015, p. 1). Approximately 800 school districts reported that more than 30% of their students were absent at least three weeks of school in 2015-16. This data equates to about one out of every three students and translates to more than 100 million school days lost across the country (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The ESSA requires all states to report chronic absenteeism and states have made a decision to include chronic absenteeism as part of their school quality indicator (Chang & Jordan, 2017). Chronic absenteeism is linked to a series of adverse educational outcomes (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). National initiatives are partnering with communities to provide resources to help students attend school every day, which is important because school attendance provides students with the experience and intelligence needed to successful in careers, and life (Ed Gov, 2015).

**State and local perspective.** **Virginia** revised its standards of accreditation (SOA) to include a school quality indicator that holds schools accountable for how successful they are at reducing absenteeism in elementary, middle and high school and at lowering dropout rates in

high school ("Virginia Department of Education," 2018). Every school quality indicator's performance is classified as one of three levels:

- level one (meets or exceeds the state standard for the indicator or makes acceptable improvements)
- level two (near the standard or making sufficient progress)
- level three (below the standard) (VDOE, n.d.).

The revised SOA states that schools and divisions across the country should conduct a thorough needs assessment and develop a multiyear plan that is reviewed annually, to include actions that support continuous improvement of school quality indicators ("Virginia Department of Education," 2018).

### **Justification of the Study**

For the 2018-19 school year, attendance was included as a standard for accreditation (Measurement of School Quality for Accreditation, 2018), getting students to come to school in an effort to reduce absenteeism and truancy is a target of principals across the country (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism and decrease dropout rates are part of the greater attempt to elevate success and put a clamp on performance gaps across student subgroups (VDOE, n.d.). Chronic absenteeism increases academic gaps at the elementary, middle and high school levels (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). When students are not present in school, they suffer academically and socially, and gaps are only compounded when absences become chronic (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.). According to Epstein and Sheldon (2002), students who drop out of school tend to have a long background of not attending school dating back to early childhood. Being in school impacts students living in poverty in a positive manner by providing a pathway out of poverty (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who are chronically absent have a negative effect on themselves and on the learning environment for those who teach and students who want to learn (The Federation of Community Schools, n.d.).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify what interventions and strategies principals were implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism. This study further identified principals' perceptions of the interventions and strategies with the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism. This research included secondary schools in a school district located in

Southeastern Virginia. According to research by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), attendance impacts students' performance on standardized test and their graduation and dropout rates, and students of color are especially impacted according to Walls (2003).

### **Research Questions**

A semi-structured interview was created to answer the following research questions:

1. What interventions and strategies are principals implementing within their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism?
2. What are principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions and strategies they use to decrease chronic absenteeism?
3. What interventions and strategies do principals plan to use in the future?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Chronic absenteeism is a problem for schools and communities across the United States (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.), and between 10 and 15 percent of students miss around a month of school each year ("Attendance and Truancy." 2016). This habit of not attending school can generally be traced back to elementary school, and, if not corrected, attendance issues will continue to follow the students throughout their school career (VDOE, n.d.). In an article by the Youth Justice Board (2013) "A high school dropout makes on average almost \$10,000 less per year than a high school graduate. On average, each high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost taxes, social programs, and crime-related costs over his or her lifetime" (p. 6).

Several factors are identified as the reason that students become disengaged from school. These factors include lack of social connections, mental and physical health issues, homelessness, unaddressed learning disabilities, student employment, gangs, bullying, and drug and alcohol use (VDOE, n.d.; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Levin-Epstein, 2017; Patel, 2009; Strand, 2014; Walls, 2003; Youth Justice Board, 2013). Research by Epstein and Sheldon has found that if schools want to see an increase in student attendance on a daily basis, they must reach out to parents and address their needs (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). "Students learn more and succeed at a higher level when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development" (Epstein & Sanders, 2016, p. 87).

Now that attendance has become a school quality indicator, it is the role of the principal to implement interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism. These could involve, among others, parents, social services, the juvenile justice system, faith-based organizations, housing authorities, and behavioral health agencies (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; PTA, 2009; Roekel, 2008; Federation for Community Schools, n.d.). See figure 1 for the conceptual framework developed for this study. With the implementation of interventions and strategies, chronic absenteeism should decrease leading to student graduation. Without the implementation of interventions and strategies, chronic absenteeism will lead to student dropout.

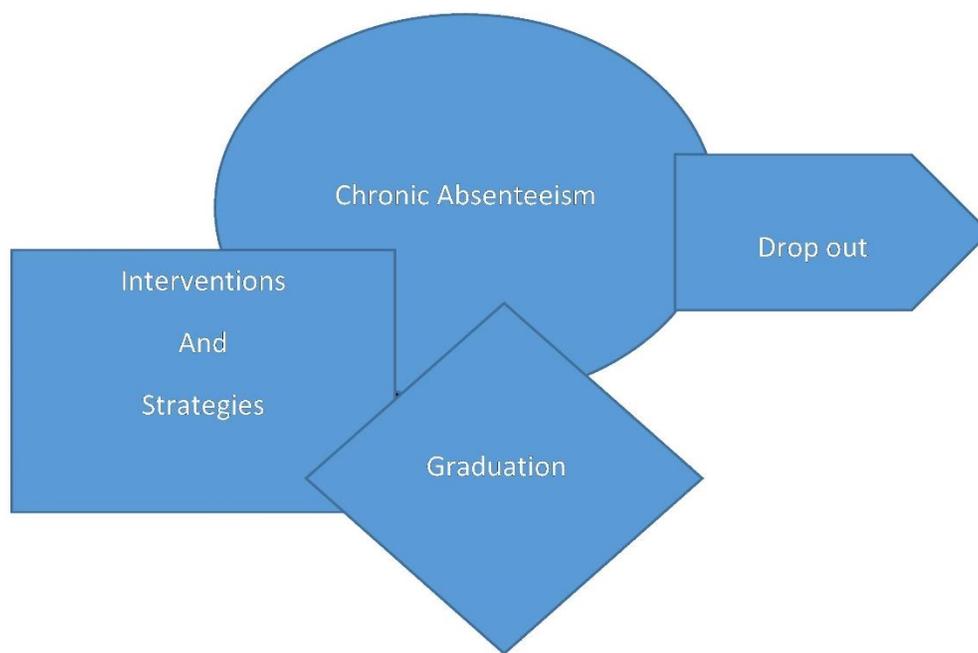


Figure 1. Impact of interventions and strategies on chronic absenteeism.

### Definition of Terms

**Chronic Absenteeism:** “Students who are absent 10% or more of school days, whether absences are excused or unexcused or the result of a suspension” (Jacob & Lovett, 2017, p. 1).

**Community Partnership:** Connections made between schools and outside organizations that can include; universities, corporations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, cultural institutions, hospitals and others (Nathan, 2015)

***Economically Disadvantaged:*** students receiving a free or reduced priced lunch (“Virginia Department of Education,” 2018).

***Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):*** An act requiring states to include five indicators to measure school performance: four focused on academic achievement and a fifth, non-academic measure of school quality (Jordan & Miller, 2017).

***Interventions:*** Actions taken on behalf of students who are at risk. (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

***School-Quality Indicators:*** The revised standards include measurement of student achievement accordingly not only on state tests but also overall student achievement, achievement gaps and student engagement (“Virginia Department of Education,” 2018).

***Strategies:*** Specific plans of action designed to improve chronic absenteeism (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

***Students of Color:*** includes students who are non-white (Virginia Department of Education,” 2018).

***Truancy:*** All unexcused absences (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

## **Limitations**

Limitations are those areas over which a researcher has no control, which can include sample size, methodology constraints, length of the study, and response rate (Roberts, 2010).

1. Absenteeism was a new school quality indicator that impacts school accreditation for the 2018-2019 school year and principals may not yet have formed perceptions as to the effectiveness of interventions and strategies.
2. This study does not include any knowledge of the actual interventions and strategies that schools are using.
3. The findings from the study may not be generalizable to other cities

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are those elements that are controlled by the researcher, which can include the time, location, sample, and selection criteria of the study (Roberts, 2010)

1. The research included only secondary schools.
2. The research is limited to an urban school district in southeastern Virginia.
3. The research focused on urban schools.

4. The research considered the perspectives of only principals.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study was organized into five chapters as well as references and appendixes. Chapter one provides a brief introduction and an overview of the study, including a historical perspective, a statement of the problem; significance of the study from a national, state and local perspective; the purpose and justification of study; and the research questions, conceptual framework, definition of terms, limitations and delimitations, and organization of the study.

Chapter two reviews the literature, providing background data to familiarize the reader with the topic, the search process, and the literature pertaining to interventions and strategies used to reduce chronic absenteeism and truancy. These include community partnerships, leadership, parental involvement, teacher involvement, school strategies.

Chapter three provides an explanation of the qualitative methodology used in the study. It provides a purpose for the study, research justification, research questions and an explanation of the research site and sample selection, data collection procedure, instrument design, instrument validation, data treatment, data management, data analysis technique, and methodology.

Chapter four presents and analyses the data, including a brief restatement of the purpose. Raw data is reported and described, the data is explained to the reader, and finally, it is summarized.

Chapter five provides a summary of the findings and their implications, as well as providing recommendations for further research. The study concludes with references and appendixes.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This literature review's purpose was to provide an overview of the literature that would look at interventions and strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism. The literature review examined factors outside of and inside of schools that had an impact on student attendance. This research revealed the obstacles that impacted student attendance, and the interventions and strategies principals implemented and the perceptions of the principals regarding the effectiveness of those interventions and strategies. The review of literature focused on secondary students in urban school settings, to determine what worked to decrease the rate of chronic absenteeism.

#### **Search Process**

For this literature review, hundreds of documents were reviewed of which 46 were used as sources. The research was conducted through the Virginia Tech library, Google Scholar, the Education Research Information Center (ERIC), the Virginia Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Education and peer-reviewed journal articles. Search terms such as truancy, community partnerships in urban schools, principals as community leaders, school and community partnerships, parental involvement, chronic absenteeism, teacher impact on student attendance, and urban high school attendance were used to search online resources, and several additional articles and sources were also found as a result of reviewing dissertation research by researchers in the area of school chronic absenteeism. The search parameters were limited as much as possible to sources published after 2000.

#### **Background Data**

The law of compulsory education dates back to ancient Judea, even before the concept of compulsory education was popularized by Plato's *Republic* ("Compulsory education laws," n.d.). In Judea, the parents of school-aged children were required to ensure that their children received some form of education to meet the requirements in the Jewish community ("Compulsory education laws," n.d.). Parents were encouraged to have children attend school at six years of age. According to "the Aztec Triple Alliance (which ruled modern-day central Mexico in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries) Mexico is widely credited as being the first nation to make education mandatory for all children" ("Compulsory education laws," n.d.).

Starting with the 2018-19 school year chronic absenteeism had an impact on school accreditation. According to the code of Virginia, a level one school (meets or exceeds state standards or demonstrates sufficient improvement) demonstrates no more than 15% chronic absenteeism, annually or a three-year average, this also includes 10% of all absences, regardless of the reason (Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, 2017). If schools show a 10% decrease in chronic absenteeism for the school year or three-year average, that school will meet accreditation for attendance (Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, 2017).

**Chronic absenteeism and truancy.** Chang and Jordan stated that, although schools have long taken attendance, attendance has not always been taken seriously (Chang & Jordan, 2017). While some reasons for absenteeism are out of the control of the student, including homelessness, abuse, and frequent moves (Hanover Research, 2016), by reaching out to parents, schools can prompt parents to send their children to school and provide helpful supports to ensure absences are reduced (Lara et al., 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education, Every Student Every Day was a nationwide program to tackle eradicate chronic absenteeism through the My Brother's Keeper Program in response to the effort of former President Obama to improve the lives of all young people (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Research conducted by Patel (2009), demonstrates that when schools offer instruction that engages students in the learning process, students become interested in attending school and are less likely to drop-out. The compulsory education law of Virginia requires individuals five years old to 18 to attend school ("Compulsory education laws," n.d.). Students are considered truant from school when they have accrued a specific number of consecutive absences over a grading period or academic (Patel, 2009). This number can vary by state and district, but "One out of ten schools in the nation has extreme chronic absences, across the states. The percentage of all schools with extreme chronic absences varied from two percent to 29 percent" (Attendance Works, 2017, p. 2). Patel (2009) suggested that schools are the first to report when students are not in school and should inform parents via phone when students are absent. Family and juvenile courts may be involved when alerting parents of truant students to improve the behavior, and the result can be detention for students or fines and possible jail time for parents (Patel, 2009). In several states including Virginia, students who miss 18 or more unexcused days from school or 10% or more days from school within a semester or school year are considered to be

habitually truant (Lara et al., 2018). In such cases, the juvenile court system usually becomes involved (McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004). Students who are truant from school have an increased likelihood of dropping out of school (Lara et al., 2018) and engaging in behaviors such as drug use, gang activity, and other illegal behaviors (McCluskey et al., 2004), which usually continue into adulthood (Walls, 2003). Students of color experience higher dropout rates, particularly African Americans and Latinos (Walls, 2003). In an article entitled “Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement”, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) stated that before students drop-out of school, staff needs to think about their behaviors and experiences. Their study shows that students who fail to complete school tend to have a long school career of high absenteeism dating back to early childhood (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). This early pattern of absenteeism can go back as far as first grade and can impact dropping out in later years (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

In the article “New approaches to truancy prevention in urban schools” Walls (2003) stated that students with weak academic skills and achievement tend to be truant from school but even students with high academic achievement can be labeled truant because they cut class.

Walls (2003) listed the following factors that impact student absences:

- “Family, including a lack of guidance or parental supervision, drug or alcohol abuse, lack of awareness of attendance law, and differing views about education.”
- “School, including factors such as school environment (school size, attitudes of teachers, students, and administrators), an inability to engage the diverse cultural and learning styles of minority students, inconsistent attendance policies, and a lack of meaningful consequences.”
- “Economics, including the fact that students may be employed, in single-parent homes, lacking affordable transportation and childcare, experiencing high levels of mobility, and living with parents with multiple jobs.”
- “Students, including drug and alcohol abuse, misunderstanding or ignorance of attendance laws, poor physical and emotional health, a lack of incentive, a lack of school-engaged friends, and lack of proficiency in English” (pp. 2-3).

**Community partnerships.** A longitudinal study “Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism,” conducted by Sheldon and Epstein (2004), collected information from 39 schools on how specific family and

community involvement activities help to improve the rate of chronic absenteeism to help improve student learning. Sheldon and Epstein's research sample included "29 elementary and 10 secondary schools. 10 schools were located in large urban areas, nine smaller urban areas, 11 in suburban communities, and nine in rural areas" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 42-43). According to Sheldon and Epstein, the sample included students from various socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Just over half of the students in the study received free or reduced lunches, and about 20% came from homes in which English was not the first language spoken (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Findings from their study indicate that school, family and community partnerships greatly reduce chronic absenteeism, even after grade level and history of absenteeism are taken into consideration (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Their study found that a comprehensive approach taking into account school and classroom factors, as well as environmental factors, is required to increase student attendance (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). These findings involved rewarding students, speaking with families about their student's attendance, and giving families school contact information (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). They also found that holding attendance workshops and providing programs after school also helped encourage students to come to school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

The three main conclusions from Sheldon and Epstein's study are as follows:

- "Schools need to take a comprehensive approach to involve families and the community in ways that help students reduce chronic absenteeism."
- "Frequent and positive communication with parents about attendance is needed to reduce chronic absenteeism."
- "Future studies need larger and comparative samples to improve knowledge on school practices for family and community involvement to reduce chronic absenteeism" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 52-53).

According to Sheldon and Epstein, "future research should compare a matched sample of schools that are and are not investing resources in developing school, family or community partnerships to improve student attendance" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 53). "Using this methodology as well as collecting additional data on other types of practices schools are implementing to improve student attendance and achievement, should increase the variation in the use of partnership practices and produce stronger evidence of the effects of partnership activities on student attendance" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 53).

Epstein and Sheldon's study, "Necessary but Not Sufficient: The Role of Policy for Advancing Programs of School, Family and Community Partnership" suggested that "family involvement is not a prescribed or fixed behavior, but a matter of school and district organization to promote equitable connections between the home, the school and the community that benefits more or all students" (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016, p. 215). The communities understand that students need a variety of academic supports and nonacademic supports to help them learn (Jacobson, Villarreal, Munoz, & Mahaffey, 2018). Research by Carnegie Foundation President Anthony Bryk concluded that successful schools had strong parent-community ties, a learning climate centered on students, and instructional guidance, and "Trust among school leaders, teachers, families, and community members was also an important predictor of school success" (Blank & Villarreal, 2015, p. 8). By creating an active school, family and community, partnerships have become more widespread as policies in schools and school districts seek aid in improving attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Roekel's (2008) study, "Parent, family, community involvement in education", compiled the following data:

- "Seventeen states have directed all districts or schools to implement parental involvement policies."
- "Seven states, namely, Alaska, California, Indiana, Minnesota, Nevada, South Carolina, and Texas have obligated schools or districts to develop policies linking parent-community partnerships to school improvement plans."
- "Delaware schools applying for school improvement grants must include parental involvement strategies in grant applications" (p. 1).

Poor attendance can have a negative effect on individual students and also a negative impact on the entire classroom (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.), and furthermore, school funding is often at least partially dependent on the number of students who regularly attend. "One troubled high school in Baltimore increased student attendance when the school portioned itself into smaller academies, thereby increasing student-teacher interactions and decreasing the anonymity of students at the school" (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p. 309). Epstein's study "Framework of six types of involvement" proposed that active school-community programs use six types of involvement to connect partnership activities with important school objectives:

- “Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.”
- “Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress.”
- “Volunteering: Recruit and organize parent help and support.”
- “Learning at home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.”
- “Decision making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.”
- “Collaborating with the community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development” (Epstein, 1992, p. 11-14).

In a report titled “Community and Family Engagement”, principals reported that “community engagement is a two-way street where the school, families and the community actively work together, creating networks of shared responsibility for student success” (Berg, Melaville, & Blank, 2006, p. 2). Building relationships is critical to supporting students with chronic attendance problems requiring both prevention and intervention strategies (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.). These strategies should help keep students in school in order to improve attendance, and to this end, they include relationship building in the form of community-school relationships and partnerships with community agencies (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.).

**Leadership.** “Leadership in School-Community Partnerships,” a research paper by Valli, Stefanski and Jacobson, examined four partnership styles and the role leadership has in the implementation of these partnerships within their schools (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014). They identified school and community partnerships as current popular reform initiatives to improve school and student outcomes. Their research theorized that the underlying principle of this success was that “students educational prospects will improve if family and community members are more involved in the life of the school and if the school can attend to an array of student and family needs” (Valli et al., 2014, p. 110). School and district leadership were found to be important elements in the performance and longevity of school partnerships, as was the

willingness of the principal to set a supportive tone, build positive working relationships, and bring the partnership to a common leadership style (Valli et al., 2014). The findings indicate that leadership is an investment, both individually and collectively that “bridges the gap in culture and power between parents and educators” (Valli et al., 2014, p. 112). Valli et al., (2014) concluded that defining boundaries and responsibilities and recognizing that more extensive forms of collaboration require a conversion of traditional school structure and norms is the key to school and community partnership building.

Green (2018), describes the principal as a community leader. Principals are responsible for bridging the gap in creating school and community relationships (Green, 2018). In his article published in *Education and Urban Society*, Green suggested that “principals consider ways to draw on the resources of the community to influence school culture in positive ways” (Green, 2018, p. 131).

Khalifa (2012), conducted an ethnographic study, “A re-new-ed Paradigm in Successful Urban School Leadership: Principal as Community Leader” over a two-year period at an urban alternative high school. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of the school principals’ leadership style on school-community relations and student achievement using observations, interviews, and descriptive and interpretive recordings. Khalifa found the role of the principal as community leader including elevated community visibility and community advocacy, which resulted in trust and relationships between school and community (Khalifa, 2012). According to Khalifa (2012), principals are familiar with their community and the unique challenges that it faces, and as a result of principals’ familiarity, parent's attitudes about school and how their students were being dealt with changed. Parents became more trusting of school staff and began to support principals and how they dealt with their children. As parents and principals began to develop trust, student’s academic futures improved (Khalifa, 2012).

In their article, “Improve attendance: Increase success” Balfanz and Chang (2013) note that principals of secondary schools must address the three R’s if they want to provide the leadership needed to decrease chronic absenteeism: “Reach down, Reach out and Reach up.” Balfanz and Chang stated that data should be reviewed before students arrive on the first day of school.

- Data should come from the elementary schools that feed into middle schools and from middle schools that feed into high schools. Data collected in this way is part of reaching down.
- Principals need to make communities aware of the perpetual and predominant importance of attendance as part of reaching out.
- Principals need to involve district leaders as part of reaching up to them.

The superintendent can make it easier and more effective to address chronic absenteeism when it is discussed as a priority for all schools in the district (Balfanz & Chang, 2013, p. 23)

**Parent involvement.** In the article “Forging parental partnerships,” published in *Principal Leadership*, in 2017, Levin-Epstein stated that parental engagement is one of the most crucial issues for any secondary school principal and that principals need to reach out to parents and approach the relationship as a partnership (Levin-Epstein, 2017). Parents have come to be viewed as important participants in their children’s education (Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2012). Parents add value to the educational development of students, regardless of the child’s age or population group (Watson et al., 2012). Strategies that help parents make decisions about their involvement in school thus help increase parental participation (Watson et al., 2012).

Harris and Goodall conducted a qualitative study in the United Kingdom to explore the school-parent relationship and parental impact on student achievement. They found that parents who become engaged in their child’s learning in the home most likely results in positive differences in student learning outcomes and concluded that “involving parents in school-based activities had little if any impact on learning and achievement, but parental engagement in children’s learning in the home, made the greatest difference in student achievement” (Harris & Goodall, 2008, p. 277).

In an independent research study “The differential effects of parental involvement on high school completion and postsecondary attendance” Ross (2016), replicated and extended a previous study by Fan and Williams (2010). This follow-up showed that parents’ educational hopes for their children played a major role in whether students from various backgrounds complete high school and go on to postsecondary education. This study, contrary to the study by Harris and Goodall (2008), “found parents involvement in school events was found to be a strong positive predictor of both completion of high school and postsecondary enrollment, while

communication between parent and school about children's school problems was adversely associated with both outcomes" (Ross, 2016, p. 1).

Teachers stated that there were eight roadblocks to parent involvement in school (Sedory, 2014).

- Teachers felt that parents had unrealistic expectations of the school's role.
- Parent attitudes about missing work to come to meet with teachers at school was another roadblock.
- Another problem was the parents' inability to help their children with their homework.
- Parents felt resentment toward teachers' upward mobility.
- The indifference of tenured teachers was another factor.
- The schools' lack of being open to parents was seen as a roadblock.
- Parent's interest was not engaged to excite them about getting involved.
- Finally, teachers demonstrated a lack of trust in parents (p. 21).

In his article "Parental involvement in education: Possibilities and limitation," Khan (1996), demonstrate that the literature reveals that researchers have identified various ways in which the barriers to parental involvement could be removed and better home-school relationships could be established. Barriers can be removed as follows:

- Empowerment of parents: Compulsory parental involvement in education enables them to be equal partners in decision making.
- Administrators' support: Administrators can take the lead in creating and distributing efficient home-school manuals, newsletters, and community public relations attempts in the language most familiar to parents.
- Home-school interdependency: Focusing on involving at-risk families, defining different methods of involving parents.
- Awareness of current research on parental involvement: Administrators and policymakers must be conscious of present studies demonstrating the benefits of working closely with families and how school strategies and attitudes can impact children's school accomplishments.
- Need for structure: Schools can develop and organize partnerships.
- Reaching out to newcomers: Leaders must reach out to minorities and those who have felt powerless and build lines of communication. (Khan, 1996, p. 64-65).

Levine-Epstein (2017) noted that successful engagement involves making parents feel like a part of the school by asking them to invest their time and talents. Some examples include: using parents to help with school beautification projects, reaching out to parents to assist with career fairs, sponsoring fun activities and events such as family trivia night, and organizing a parent camp (Levine-Epstein, 2017). When parents are used in a way that honors their time, expertise, and their contributions to the school, they exceed expectations of school involvement (Levine-Epstein, 2017).

**Teacher involvement.** Gershenson (2016) conducted a longitudinal study of teachers and students in North Carolina to determine the effect teachers on student absences and academic achievement. According to his research, teachers have a statistically significant impact on student attendance and that there is no correlation between teacher effects on attendance and teacher effects on academic achievement (Gershenson, 2016). Gershenson (2016) also found that teachers had a long-term effect on student attendance into the following school year, suggesting that student's attitudes and preferences were affected. This study also found that teachers with more experience had a greater effect on student attendance (Gershenson, 2016).

In the article "Teacher and teaching effects on students' attitudes and behaviors," Blazar & Kraft (2017) considered the effects of teachers on student outcomes over and above test scores, and their findings aligned with those from past research that also identified teacher effects on learners' attitudes and behaviors, as well as weak relationships among distinct teacher efficacy measures. Their research found that teachers help create attitudes and behaviors among students that are essential to success in life, and that overall teaching practices predicted attitudes and behaviors among students (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Like Gershenson, Blazar and Kraft found "correlations between teacher effects on student outcomes that aim to capture different underlying constructs are weaker than correlations between teacher effects on two outcomes that are much more closely related (e.g., math and achievement)" (Blazar & Kraft, 2017, p. 28). Because measuring students' attitudes and behaviors was relatively new, Blazer and Kraft warned against rushing to include measures in accountability systems in high-stakes matters (Blazar & Kraft, 2017).

In the study, "Engaging teachers: Measuring the impact of teachers on student attendance in secondary school", Liu and Loeb (2017), examined the effect of teachers on student attendance at the secondary level in what, according to them, was the first study to look at both

middle and high school students. Their results were consistent with the findings of Gershenson (2016) and Blazar and Kraft (2017) who conducted their research at the elementary level. This research by Liu and Loeb (2017) measured the relationship between teacher effectiveness to student engagement on a class-by-class level instead of looking at full-day absences. Their study found that teacher ability contributed to students' likelihood of completing high school and that English teachers had more of an effect on students' staying in school than math teachers (Liu & Loeb, 2017). They confirmed that the effects of high-quality teachers on student attendance, boosted student long-term outcomes (Liu & Loeb, 2017).

**School strategies.** For students to be successful at all academic levels, school attendance is critical (Hanover Research, 2016). In an article published in Wisconsin's *Research to Practice* series, the authors note that because the attendance problem is so complex, there is no "evidence-based programs" that can be adopted to solve it (Eastman, Cooney, O'Connor, & Small, 2007, p. 1). When students are truant, there is usually a family history of the same behavior among siblings. This behavior can be observed as early as kindergarten and continues into high school if not corrected (Ekstrand, 2015). "A key aspect of truancy intervention is to employ a collaborative effort that takes advantage of a combination of community stakeholders: schools, juvenile courts, and law enforcement agencies, as well as parents, community organizations, and social services agencies" (Walls, 2003, p. 3). Integrated Student Supports (ISS) is a type of community collaboration that brings together school, district and community resources to identify and assess challenges to student attendance and coordinate the necessary supports to meet student needs (Lara et al., 2018). In Ohio, a mediation was held with parents, for whom letters regarding their child's attendance had not resulted in improvement, and during the mediation session, a plan was adopted after stakeholders identified why students were truant (Walls, 2003).

Kinvolved is a computer software program that empowers parents and families by using electronic devices to track student attendance and notify parents in real-time when students are absent or late for school (Altman & Meis, 2012-2013). A computer tracking system used in Broward County, Florida, informed parents when students fail to show up at school, with the result being meetings with parents and, if necessary, misdemeanor charges (Walls, 2003). According to Lara et al., (2018) "early warning systems had been instrumental in producing positive outcomes to reduce chronic absenteeism" p.2. In cities such as Louisville, Baltimore,

and Phoenix, courts are brought into the schools to engage in regular contact with parents and kept students in the school (Walls, 2003). The courts also treat the underlying cause of truancy and use positive reinforcement to recognize the efforts demonstrated by students and parents, thus using non-punitive measures to help families (Walls, 2003).

Evidence-based school strategies to create a culture of attendance include recognizing students for excellent and improved attendance, involving students and parents, continually examining attendance data and practices, and seeking out those students who are absent as early as possible and developing systems to respond to barriers (Balfanz & Chang, 2013) According to research by Balfanz and Chang (2013), “partnerships that connect a school with businesses, hospitals, colleges, service clubs, social services agencies, youth organizations, public housing projects, labor unions, tenant groups, churches, other faith-based organizations, and other community groups can turn a neighborhood into a thriving place to live, work in and raise a family.” Schools are establishing what is being labeled “full-service community schools” which provide resources for local residents in one-stop and open the doors of the school to allow communities to use their facilities. The doors of the school are being opened to allow communities to use their facilities: (Amazonaws, 2009).

According to Roekel (2008), the following are ways that educational institutions can involve an increased number of parents, families, and communities in the learning process:

- Get ideas about what volunteering looks like from stakeholders.
- Develop policies that encourage parent participation by being flexible in scheduling events.
- Provide faculty with professional development that makes them aware of community and family engagement.
- Instruct stakeholders on positive communication and partnering skills.
- Ensure that stakeholders are given information about school and school district policies and procedures.
- When providing information about schools to parents, ensure that the language is not full of educational jargon and that information is given to parents in a timely manner (Roekel, 2008, p. 3).

Principals should develop materials and appropriate training to ensure that the entire staff is on board. In-service training to discuss the importance of reducing chronic absenteeism and

what can be done is critical. Principals should spell out the effects of missing too much school and share data with teachers about patterns in their schools. Tools should be shared with teachers about messaging parents at the beginning of the school year.

## **Summary**

According to research between five and 7.5 million students across the nation miss close to a month of school each year. Because of this nationwide crisis, for the 2018-19 school year, attendance will impact school accreditation, and schools with 15% or more absenteeism will fail to meet accreditation standards. The literature indicates that attendance impacts student performance on standardized test and that it impacts graduation and dropout rates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012), especially for students of color (Walls, 2003). It is critical that principals find a way to prevent students from dropping out of school.

Schools can encourage parents to send their children to school through outreach and can provide valuable assistance to supports to reduce absences (Lara et al., 2018). A study by Sheldon and Epstein (2004) indicated that school, family and community partnerships greatly reduce chronic absenteeism, even after school level and history of absenteeism are taken into consideration. School and district leaders are important factors in the quality of school partnerships (Valli et al., 2014). Because parents are seen as critical partners in the education of their children, principals must approach the relationship as a partnership between the school and home (Levin-Epstein, 2017). The literature review also examined the role of teachers and their effect on attendance. Several studies arrived at the same conclusion, namely, that teachers quality has an effect on student attendance and has long-term outcomes.

Whether through early warning systems that alert parents when students miss school, teacher effects on student attendance, community partnerships or parent engagement, school leaders must develop behaviors and attitudes that lead to reduced drop-out rates, closing achievement gaps, increasing graduation rates and decreased chronic absenteeism. Through this dissertation, the researcher hopes to learn from school leaders the interventions and strategies that they have implemented to address student chronic absenteeism and determine what interventions and strategies has the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify what interventions and strategies principals are implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism. This study further identified principals' perceptions of interventions and strategies with the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism. This study included secondary schools in a southeastern Virginia school district that consists of three high schools and three middle schools. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of school days through any kind of absences, whether excused, unexcused or due to suspension. When absences are consecutive and sporadic they become chronic. (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.).

#### **Research Design and Justification**

This study used a qualitative research design to answer the research questions. A qualitative study is "based on the philosophical orientation called phenomenology, which focuses on people's experience from their perspective" (Roberts, 2010, p. 143). Qualitative studies are intended to comprehend interpretations and meanings that individuals offer to activities and environmental contexts, and they naturally emphasize behavioral knowledge, collect information directly from participants or records, and seek to comprehend how and why behavior takes place (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). The use of an interview or survey instrument to gather information from school administrators in the implementation of strategies and interventions and their interpretation of the impact of these on decreasing chronic absenteeism warranted a qualitative study. "Interviews may be open ended, with few predetermined questions, or the interview may have a more structured format, such as a focus group" (McMillan & Wergin, 2010, p. 91). In qualitative research, data are collected and analyzed by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to McMillan & Wergin, 2010, a quantitative study relies on the control of variables, numerical calculations, and experiments to summarize, describe and investigate relationships among traits. However, in a quantitative study, the perceptions of the participants could not be measured. Therefore, the researcher used a qualitative study that allowed for the perceptions of the participants from their personal experience (Roberts, 2010). Researchers in

qualitative studies are more or less interested in understanding the significance that individuals have constructed that is, how individuals make sense of their environment and their experiences in it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There are four types of qualitative research design: ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology and case study (Astalin, 2013). Phenomenological research focuses on the perspectives of the participants who are selected based on their experience with the phenomena under study (McMillan & Wergin, 2010). According to McMillan and Wergin (2010), case studies, for the most part, are stories about the phenomenon under study. In addition to these categories, Merriam and Tisdell discussed basic qualitative research, which is “probably the most common form of qualitative research found in education” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Data analysis involves identifying recurring patterns or themes that are supported by the data from which they were derived. The basic qualitative study’s primary objective is to uncover and interpret these meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative research that was phenomenological in nature was selected for this study to present the experiences of principals as to the strategies and interventions they are implementing in their schools and their perspective on which interventions and strategies have the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism (Astalin, 2013).

### **Research and Interview Questions**

In table one the three research questions that drove this study are listed on the left. On the right are the interview questions that correspond with each research questions. There are seven interview questions corresponding to research question one. Two interview questions correspond to research question two and one interview question correspond to research question three.

Table 1

*Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. What interventions and strategies are principals implementing within their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism?	1. What professional development has been offered to teachers at the building and/or district level to help decrease chronic absenteeism? 2. What supports do you have from the district level to help decrease chronic absenteeism? ex. (Parent and community liaisons, therapeutic day treatment providers, other) 3. What interventions and strategies involve community partnerships? 4. What interventions and strategies involve parents? 5. What interventions and strategies involve the use of technology? 6. How long have you implemented interventions and strategies aimed at decreasing chronic absenteeism? 9. What is your attendance rate after implementation of interventions and strategies?
2. What are principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions and strategies they use to decrease chronic absenteeism?	7. What interventions and strategies would you say has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism? 8. What interventions and strategies would you say has had the least impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism?
3. What interventions and strategies do principals plan to implement in the future?	10. What interventions and strategies would you like to implement in the future to reduce chronic absenteeism?

## Site and Sample Selection

The following criteria was used to choose the site:

- Urban school
- Secondary schools
- A large percentage 50% or higher of student population classified as African American
- A large percentage 40% or higher of the student population classified as economically disadvantage
- An overall chronic absenteeism rate of 15% or more per school

These criteria were chosen for the following reasons: According to the literature review, students of color are more likely to be chronically absent, as are students who are economically disadvantaged, and both these groups are more likely to be found in urban school districts. An absenteeism rate of 15% or more is the cut off for accreditation, and according to the literature, chronic absenteeism increases from middle school to high school (Jacob & Lovett, 2017).

The site chosen for this purposeful sample was a school district in southeastern Virginia that includes three middle and three high schools. According to Roberts (2010), qualitative research uses smaller samples than quantitative research, Creswell (2013) suggested a sample size of three to ten for phenomenology research, while Morse (1994) suggested six. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), there is no answer to how many people to interview, how many sites to visit or how many documents to read. “What is needed is an adequate number of participants, sites, or activities to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 101).

Purposive techniques of sampling focus primarily on saturation (Etikan et al., 2015). The methods for reaching data saturation are not the same for all studies, because research designs are not universal. Depending on the sample size of the population, data saturation can be achieved by as few as six interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Attaining a saturation or redundancy point means you start hearing the same answers to your interview questions or seeing the same behaviors in observations; there is no fresh insight. Where saturation may happen, it is difficult to understand in advance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The school district selected had a total student population of 14,006 for the 2018-19 school year, and the chronic absenteeism rate for all students was 19%. According to the

district's profile, listed on the Virginia Department of Education website (VDOE), for the 2018-19 school year, the district was defined as urban, the enrollment of African American students was 72.7% and White students 18.9%, economically disadvantaged students made up 62.2% of the population, and students with disabilities made up 11.7% of the student population.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This research involved person to person interviews with secondary school principals. According to Merriam and Tidell (2016), this is the most common form of interview. Research interviews are based on three basic types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Gill et al., 2008). A structured interview is an oral form of a written survey, in which the researcher adheres to rigidly predetermined questions that do not allow for probing of participants' perspectives and understanding of the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A semi-structured interview is a controlled conversation between the interviewer and researcher using open-ended questions. It retains some structure, but it also allows the investigator to probe the participant for further data (Choosing and Interview Type for Qualitative Research, 2017). An unstructured interview is more versatile because, based on the responses of the participants, questions can be modified and adjusted. Unstructured interviews allow the respondent to talk in detail, allowing the interviewer to gain a deeper understanding, ask for clarification, and allow the interviewee to steer the course of the interview (McLeod, 2014). The use of a semi-structured interview type allows for the control of the interviewees of a structured interview while allowing the interviewer the flexibility to probe for details.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

The researcher completed the training in human subject's protection on June 26, 2018 (see Appendix A). The following topics were included: a historical basis for regulations human subjects research, the Belmont Report and Federal and Virginia Tech regulator entities, and policies and procedures. After receiving Virginia Tech's IRB approval to conduct the study, letters were sent to school district's chief of schools for permission to conduct the study that included a brief summary of the researcher's dissertation topic, the confidentiality of the schools and administrators to be included in the study was ensured and a timeline for completion of the data collection was provided (see Appendix B). Once permission was granted from the school division to conduct the study, building administrators were contacted individually by phone or

email (see Appendix C). A copy of the interview questions was shared with building administrators before the actual interview, and the building administrators were given a timeframe to conduct the interview in a setting of their choice.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the most common way to record interview data is through audio recording. Consent was obtained from participants granting permission to record the interview, (see Appendix D). After recording the interview, the data was transcribed. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), transcribing the data familiarizes the researcher with the data to help improve questioning techniques. To help with transcribing, voice-recognition software was used to make sure data were not missed during transcribing.

### **Instrument Design and Validation**

An interview instrument was designed by the researcher (see Appendix E). Mammon, (n.d.) suggested the following guidelines to develop semi-structured interview questions:

- “Style: Use open-ended questions to obtain lengthy and descriptive answers.”
- “Biases: Avoid leading questions.”
- “Language: Use terms that participants can understand. Be mindful of the social or cultural contexts of questions.”
- “Concise: Keep the questions as short and specific as possible.”
- “Frame: Avoid questions with a strong positive or negative association.” (p. 2)

The semi-structured interview questions were validated by the Virginia Tech 2020 doctorate cohort, who critiqued the questions. As a result of the critique, principal was added to question one. It was suggested the principals be made aware in advance about the demographics they would be asked to share. The following questions were suggested as a guide for this assessment (McIntosh & Morse, 2015):

- “Has the researcher included all of the questions necessary?”
- “Do the questions elicit the types of response that were anticipated?”
- “Is the language of the research instrument meaningful to the respondents?”
- “Are there other problems with the questions, such as double meaning or multiple issues embedded in a single question?”
- “Are the questions in a logical order?”

- “Does the interview guide help motivate respondents to participate in the study?” (p. 6)

### **Data Treatment and Management**

Pseudonyms were used to identify interviewees to protect their identity. The researcher also used coding and themes to relate the responses of the interviewees to the research questions. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), coding could be single words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or combinations of these. A computer software program designed for qualitative studies was used to help manage data. Data were stored on a password-protected computer and any hard copies of data were stored in a locked file cabinet.

### **Data Analysis and Time Line**

Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is a program that has been used by researchers for decades. Unlike statistical software, CAQDAS aids in the analysis process and not the analyzing of data (Zamawe, 2015). With this type of software comes the ability to organize massive amounts of data, promote analysis, and help research team members communicate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once the interview questions were analyzed against the research questions, the researcher transcribed the interviews with NVivo, a type of CAQDAS. The researcher organized, managed, and coded the data which were be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Merriam and Tisdell suggested considering the following elements in the process of data analysis:

- What is the purpose of the study?
- Focus on how people experience the phenomenon.
- Code data focusing on patterns and insights related to the studies' purpose.
- What are the main themes that emerge and what are the answers to the research questions?
- Do the data support what you think you see?
- Combine codes into fewer more comprehensive categories. (pp. 207-208)

### **Methodology Summary**

This research utilized a qualitative phenomenology design that allowed the perspective of the research participants to be assessed. An interview instrument was designed and validated by

a group of doctoral candidates. Data were gathered from school administrators regarding the implementation of interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism and their interpretation of the interventions and strategies with the greatest and least impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism. Data were collected from secondary schools in an urban school district in southeastern Virginia that consisted of three high schools and three middle schools, with a predominately African American, economically disadvantaged, urban population with an overall chronic absenteeism rate of 15% or higher. Five of the six schools in the district met the criteria.

Each interview was audio-recorded and computer software used to transcribe the recordings. The use of a computer software program assisted with the process of transcribing, after which, the data was coded. The researcher looked for common themes within the data. Once the interview questions had been analyzed against the research questions, the data were organized, managed, coded and stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. The results of the data received are analyzed and discussed in chapter four.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Analysis of Data**

#### **Introduction**

Over a million high school students drop out of school each year without developing the language and learning skills needed to be successful as adults (Balfanz & Chang, 2013). Chronic absenteeism is a growing concern nationwide, with 10-15% of the country's student population, that is five-7.5 million students, being absent 10% of school days, a number which totals at nearly a month of school missed per student per year (Altman & Meis, 2012-2013; Balfanz & Chang, 2013; Jordan, 2017; The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.). With this trend, chronically absent students may be absent an entire school year by the time they reach fifth grade (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.).

The purpose of this study was to identify what interventions and strategies principals are implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism. This study further identified principals' perceptions of interventions and strategies with the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism. This study included secondary schools in a southeastern Virginia school district that consisted of three high schools and three middle schools. Chronic absenteeism was defined as students who missed 10% of school days through any kind of absence, whether excused, unexcused or due to suspension. Absences can be consecutive or sporadic (The Federation for Community Schools, n.d.).

#### **Study Results**

This study used a qualitative research design to answer the research questions. A qualitative study is "based on the philosophical orientation called phenomenology, which focuses on people's experiences from their perspectives" (Roberts, 2010, p. 143). A semi-structured face-to-face interview was conducted with four secondary principals in a location and time of their choice. A fifth principal was to be interviewed, but schools were closed for the remainder of the school year on March 13, 2020 due to the threat of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Attempts were made to conduct the interview via telephone with no success. The researcher developed interview questions to answer the following research questions:

1. What interventions and strategies are principals implementing within their schools to decrease student absenteeism?

2. What are principals’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the intervention and strategies they use to decrease chronic absenteeism?
3. What interventions and strategies do principals plan to use in the future?

The interview instrument was divided into two categories, background questions, and interview questions. The background questions included demographic data questions regarding the principal and his or her school. The second section of the interview asked questions pertaining to the implementation of interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism and principals’ perspective of the effectiveness of the interventions and strategies.

### **Demographic Data**

Background question one: *How many years have you been the principal at your current school?* Principal A was in year five at their current school. Principal B recorded being in their first year while principal C was in their second year and principal D recorded being in their fifteenth year at the current school.

Background question two: *How many students are enrolled in your school?* According to principal A, there are approximately 880 students enrolled. Principal B recorded 501 students, while principal C recorded 543. Principal D has a total enrollment of 1257.

Table two gives the number of years each principal has been at their current school along with student enrollment for the 2019-2020 school year. Principal D has the highest number of years at the current school with 15, while principal B is in the first year at the current school. Principals B and D also have the lowest and highest enrollment. Principal B’s student enrollment for the 2019-2020 school year is 501 and Principal D’s student enrollment is 1257.

Table 2

*Principals Number of Years at Current School and Current Student Enrollment by School*

School	Principals’ Number of Years at Current School	Student Enrollment
A	5	880
B	First year	501
C	2	543
D	15	1257

Background questions three and five: *What percentage of your student population is, African American, Hispanic and White? What is the percentage of students receiving free or*

*reduced lunch?* Table three displays the percentages of African American, Hispanic and White students along with the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. All schools have over 50% of their student population identified as African-American. Schools B and D have under 1% of their student population identified as Hispanic. School B also has the lowest population of students identified as White. Both schools B and C have 100% of their student population receiving free or reduced lunch. For the purpose of the study, free and reduced lunch is associated with those students who are economically disadvantaged.

Table 3

*Percentage of Students by Race and Percentage Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch.*

School	African-American	Hispanic	White	Free or Reduced Lunch
A	75%	4%	18%	68%
B	95%	< 1%	3.5%	100%
C	85%	5%	10%	100%
D	58%	<1%	22%	44%

Background question four: *What was your attendance rate before the implementation of interventions and strategies?* This question provided a foundation to the problems principals faced before the implementation of interventions and strategies. Schools with no more than 15% of chronic absenteeism according to the code of Virginia, are classified as a level one school (meets or exceeds state standards). Table 3 gives the percentage of chronic absenteeism by each principal before the implementation of interventions and strategies. Each school is over 15%. According to the Commonwealth of Virginia 15% or lower is needed to meet or exceed standards.

Table 4

*Chronic Absenteeism Rate Pre-Implementation of Interventions and Strategies*

School	Chronic Absenteeism Rate By %
A	24%
B	24.3%
C	25%
D	22.41%

**Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the interview questions against the research questions. The interviews were transcribed using NVivo. The data were organized, managed, coded and stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested considering the following elements in the process of data analysis:

- What is the purpose of the study?
- Focus on how people experience the phenomenon.
- Code data focusing on patterns and insights related to the studies' purpose.
- What are the main themes that emerge and what are the answers to the research questions?
- Do the data support what you think you see?
- Combine codes into fewer more comprehensive categories (pp. 207-208).

**Research Question One**

What interventions and strategies are principals implementing within their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism? The following interview questions correspond to research question one:

1. What professional development has been offered to teachers at the building and/or district level to help decrease chronic absenteeism?
2. What supports do you have from the district level to help decrease chronic absenteeism? Ex. (Parent and community liaison, therapeutic day treatment providers, other)
3. What interventions and strategies involve community partnerships?
4. What interventions and strategies involve parents?

5. What interventions and strategies involve the use of technology?
6. How long have you implemented interventions and strategies aimed at decreasing chronic absenteeism?
7. What is your attendance rate after the implementation of interventions and strategies?

Data were analyzed by the researcher after each interview, the following codes were assigned to the data: mentoring, incentives or rewards, behavioral intervention meetings, check-in and check-out, Virginia tiered systems of supports and building relationships with students. According to the researcher, these codes demonstrated positive approaches to decreasing chronic absenteeism. According to the VDOE, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are techniques used to reduce negative behaviors and increase instructional time for students. PBIS uses a positive approach to discipline. The researcher assigned these codes under theme one, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).

These seven interview questions produced a second set of codes which included: Home visits, rewarding parents, live phone calls, parent career day, weekly meeting with parents, letters mailed to parents, PTA, and robocalls. In analyzing these codes, they were all recognized as strategies used to contact or connect with parents. The researcher listed these codes under theme two, parental contacts.

The third set of codes produced from these seven interview questions included: Sororities and fraternities, Solution Tree Consultants, shipyard tutorial program, local churches and girl scouts. The researcher recognized these codes as businesses or organizations the principals reached out to in order to provide services to students in an attempt to decrease chronic absenteeism. These codes were listed under theme three, community partnerships.

Attendance clerk, parent community liaison and therapeutic day treatment provider were the fourth set of codes recognized by the researcher. These codes were identified as interventions provided by the district to schools. Principals decide how these interventions would be used. The researcher listed these codes under the fourth theme, district supports.

The final set of codes identified as a result of the seven interview questions: Consistency, teacher recognizing the signs of displacement, decrease teacher absenteeism and review of policies and procedures. According to the principals interviewed, they met with teachers at the beginning of the school year to discuss chronic absenteeism. Information discussed at these meetings included a review of policies and procedures surrounding chronic absenteeism, being

consistent in following these policies and procedures, recognizing signs when students are displaced and improving teacher absenteeism. The researcher listed these codes under theme five, professional development. The following are the major themes that emerged after an analysis of data:

Theme one, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Theme two, Parental contacts

Theme three, Community partnerships

Theme four, District support

Theme five, Professional Development

Table 5 depicts the five major themes emerging from research question one and the codes contributing to the themes.

Table 5

*Major Themes Emerging from Research Question One and Codes Contributing to the Themes.*

Major Themes	Codes Contributing to Themes
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Virginia tier systems and supports</li> <li>• Check-in-check-out</li> <li>• Building relationships with students</li> <li>• Incentives</li> <li>• Behavior intervention meetings</li> </ul>
Parental Contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live phone calls</li> <li>• Home visits</li> <li>• Rewarding parents</li> <li>• Parent career day</li> <li>• PTA</li> <li>• Weekly meetings with parents</li> <li>• Robocalls</li> <li>• Letters mailed to parents</li> </ul>
Community Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sororities and fraternities</li> <li>• Solution Tree Consultants</li> <li>• Shipyard tutorial program</li> <li>• Local churches</li> <li>• Girl Scouts</li> </ul>
District Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance clerk</li> <li>• Parent community liaison</li> <li>• Therapeutic day treatment providers</li> </ul>
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistency</li> <li>• Teachers recognizing signs of displacement</li> <li>• Decrease teacher absenteeism</li> <li>• Policy, and procedures</li> </ul>

**Major theme one: Principals are implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.** Principals A, B, C, and D responses to interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9 that contributed to major theme 1: (See Appendix E)

Principal A shared that the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) is part of the professional development offered to teachers at the start of the school year. “VTSS systemic approach allows divisions, schools and communities to provide multiple levels of supports to students in a more effective and efficient, clearly defined process” (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). This includes intervening with students holistically. For students needing tier two and tier three supports, a female and male mentoring group has been established. Funding to support these groups is sought from outside community partnerships.

Principal A also has intervention meetings that are a part of the schools holistic approach to meeting the needs of the students. Beginning with the 2019-2020 school year they have really focused on attendance. Principal A created an intervention plan template to be used during the intervention meetings. According to Principal A, because attendance relates to other things, the template is holistic. It covers attendance, behavior, and suspensions, “if you are suspended you are out of school and that can make you chronically absent” (PA, 1 82). The template also includes assessment scores, if a student has school anxiety, what they like to do in the community and if the student is a member of a church. As a result of the intervention meetings, according to Principal A, strategies are designed for students based on their overall needs. One of those strategies is ‘check-in and check-out’. Check-in and check-out, is used for behavior, and it’s being utilized for attendance. According to Principal A, “I had a student last year that I put on check-in and check-out personally for attendance. And she went from like being absent about 35% of the time to, she only missed one day all school year, and it was because of the connection. She got to come in and talk to me every morning and that made such a huge difference” (PA, 1 184-190). Principal A has also implemented a point system that rewards students for good behavior and attendance. They have also developed a school motto. Principal A’s school motto is to **Give** respect, **P**rioritize responsibility and **S**afety first (GPS). According to Principal A, “we have a point system that is connected to our school bucks and other incentives. Students can earn other things too. Each block students follow our G.P.S, **Give** respect, **P**rioritize responsibility and **S**afety first. Every block they can get one point for the **G**, the **P** and the **S**. So with attendance, that’s **P**rioritize responsibilities, being in class, being on time all of those are the **P**” (PA, 1 206-210). Principal A described how the point system has worked. “So like a little girl I just put on it on Friday. Today when she checked in with me, I circled the **P** and I said, “ I know you’re gonna get your points here, but today I want you to

focus on this right here because part of her thing is the whole reason she tends to not come to school is that it gives her a stomachache. The stomachache is because she gets anxiety because she is very behind and it's stressful for her. She doesn't want to be embarrassed when she can't read or she can't do the math or all that kind of stuff. So we've put some supports in place for that" (PA, 1 206-226).

Principal B has also implemented a PBIS system that directly affects absenteeism and discipline within the building. School bucks are given to students when they are "caught doing good" (PB, 1 27). According to principal B, they recently had an award banquet for the honor roll and the perfect attendance students. The award banquet was tied into their PBIS system. They also had a pep rally and the pep rally cost school bucks for students to attend. A male mentorship program was started by some "guys in the building" (PB, 1 21). "We created programs that kids want. We asked kids what they wanted and we try to provide those things. In order to participate, they have to be in school" (PB, 1 63-65). Teachers reward students for good behavior by giving out school bucks. Students can use their bucks to purchase items in the school store which is opened once a week.

Principal C has been able to get incentives for student attendance. Through the help of their parent liaison and community partners, they are able to provide gifts to students during their monthly attendance recognition.

Principal D has what is called a tier-three meeting. They meet with all of their parents and students who are not doing well academically but also who have chronic issues with absenteeism. Part of that tier three meeting is the behavioral intervention team. One of the responsibilities of this team is to identify students who have chronic absenteeism issues. An awards ceremony is also used to recognize students with perfect attendance.

**Major theme two: Principals are implementing parental contacts in their schools to decrease student chronic absenteeism.** Principal A, B, C, and D responses to interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9 that contributed to major theme two: (See Appendix E)

Principal A has intervention planning meetings that has really focused on attendance beginning this year 2019-2020. Parents are included in these meetings. Principal A believes parents appreciate their holistic approach used to support students. "When parents see you really trying to be holistic, instead of just having a check the box kind of meeting, which is what was happening before, parents become much more invested in the process" (PA, 1 99-101). Principal

A created a Google form that the attendance clerk completes every day. The attendance clerk makes a daily live phone call to every child who's not in school. According to principal A "not just the little robocall that doesn't do you any good, but a live phone call" (PA, 1 109-110).

According to principal B, during Christmas, the school made food donations to parents. During the month of February, they had a career day for parents. Before the actual career day, they did an interview workshop to help assist parents on how to interview, how to go through the process of obtaining a job. Afterward, they held the career day, "We did walk away with a few parents, actually we probably had about 70 parents that had second calls. We did walk away with a few parents that actually had jobs from the career fair" (PB, 1 73-75). Every week principal B tries to provide some activity that draws parents into the school. The parents hear from principal B in a robocall that encourages attendance and how critical it is to accreditation. In every conversation, attendance is stressed. Principal B states to the parents, "We need your kids to come to the building, we need your kids to show up, show up and show out" (PB, 1 78).

Principal C meet with parents once a student accumulates five days of absences. They have meetings every Wednesday. They are constantly meeting with parents in order to stress the importance of attendance. Their parent liaison has scheduled a number of different workshops for parents where they talk about attendance, they also have PTA every month. According to principal C, they probably have about 20% of their parents attending workshops. Their Wednesday meetings for attendance issues, "those parents have been coming out regularly. So if they don't come out, we have been going to their homes or they'll call" (PC, 1 49-51).

According to principal C, they are getting about 50% of their parents really trying to work with them to improve attendance.

Principal D parents are being notified of student absences by sending out letters every three, five and seven days. Teachers are logging the information that they receive from parents and making sure that they contact them on a regular basis. Parents are notified of student absences as well as tardiness. They have tier 3 meeting with parents of students who have chronic issues with attendance. They meet with parents to develop a plan to get students back on track. Parents are included in their perfect attendance recognition. They realize that if the student is coming to school it's because of the parent, so parents are given a perfect attendance t-shirt and recognized at their awards ceremony. Parents are automatically notified during second block when their student is not in school. According to principal D, "we are more diligent about

notifying parents of student absences on a regular basis and documenting the contacts that we've made with parents” (PD, 1 53).

**Major theme three: Principals are implementing Community Partnerships in their schools to decrease student chronic absenteeism.** Principals A, B, C, and D response to interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9 that contribute to major theme three: (see Appendix E).

Principal A has partnered with the Joe Hensley Foundation which has helped to provide funding for some of their mentoring groups. They have also reached out to some sororities and fraternities to establish partnerships. According to principal A, with their holistic approach they like to find out what kinds of things students like to do in the community, are they members of a church group? By seeking assistance from community partners, “sometimes you can enlist them to help you with the student” (PA, 1 87).

Principal B has had a Solution Tree Consultant come in to talk to team members about student engagement. They have completed several professional developments on changing the culture of the building. They have partnered with the Girl Scouts to work with the young women groups in the building. At Christmas, they partnered with a few churches in the area. The churches donated food items to families along with headphones and I-pods for kids. According to principal B, they are looking to bring more community people in. They have the shipyard tutoring program, some of the guys in the building just started another male mentorship program where they bring in outside influences into the building.

Principal C’s community partners provide gifts that are given to students during monthly perfect attendance meeting.

Principal D stated that community sessions are provided to parents regarding attendance through their Parent Community Liaison.

**Major theme four: Principals are implementing district support in their schools to decrease student chronic absenteeism.** Principals A, B, C, and D response to interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9 that contribute to major theme four: (see Appendix E).

According to principal A, the district mandates that the social worker goes around to schools at the beginning of the school year to give a brief overview of attendance. This involves policies and procedures to follow when teachers suspect students are in need of their services. The attendance liaison usually “pops in and does a little five-minute thing at a faculty meeting” (PA, 1 28-29). Principal A expressed being thankful for the addition of a Parent Community

Liaison to the staff for the school year. This added position made a huge difference for the school. The district has also provided Therapeutic Day Treatment providers. Principal A has two different companies that support their students and they have relatively large caseloads. Principal A also advocated for a change in one staff position. The change in position was from a library clerk to an attendance clerk. Professional development has come from the office of Youth Risk. The division allowed Principal A to hire another counselor, after 4 years of asking for one.

Principal B also noted a parent community liaison added this year, who works extremely well with the school. They also have Day Treatment Providers. According to principal B, their behavior intervention team is from the district and professional development is provided to teachers from the district.

Principal C like the previously mentioned schools received a parent and community liaison person this school year. They have therapeutic day treatment in the building. They also have a process where their attendance clerk monitors the attendance daily, sends out the letters and then meets with the district attendance person.

Principal D stated the parent community liaison provided by the district notifies parents of student absences as well as their tardiness to class. Their therapeutic day treatment provider works with students who may have issues with attendance. They also have an attendance person that is assigned to their school that specifically works with chronically absent students. They make visits and follow up with students regarding attendance.

**Major theme five: Principals are implementing Professional Development in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.** Principals A, B, C, and D responses to interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 that correspond to theme five. (see Appendix E).

During the pre-service week, teachers with principal A receive professional development from the district and school level. At the school level, the focus is to get teachers to recognize the signs when students may be struggling to get to school. Through the office of Youth Risk, teachers are provided with professional development that helps them to recognize the signs of displacement.

Principal B provided professional development to help change the culture of the building. A consultant group helped teachers with how to engage more with students. Professional development was also held to look at the attendance of teachers and how their absences impact

student academics, behavior and attendance. According to principal B, professional development is also provided by the district during teacher planning time.

Principal C’s professional development is held in August. It is geared towards the impact of chronic absenteeism on accreditation and overall instruction.

Principal D provides professional development to teachers’ pertaining to when and how to contact parents when students are absent. Procedures are reviewed with teachers about notifying parents on a regular basis and documenting those notifications.

Table 6 depicts the specific interventions and strategies implemented by principals. It gives the frequency of use by principals and the percentage of frequency. Incentives and rewards, intervention meetings, parent community liaison, parents included in meetings, a renewed focus being given to chronic absenteeism, therapeutic day treatment providers and some form of professional development is being implemented by 100% of participants. Three of the four participants, 75% were implementing home visits, robocalls, sending letters home to parents, and community partnerships. Half of participants 50% were implementing the use of the school attendance clerk or district attendance liaison, attendance recovery and mentoring programs.

Table 6

*Number and Percentage of Specific Interventions and Strategies Implemented to Decrease Chronic Absenteeism.*

Specific Interventions and Strategies	No. of Frequencies (N=4)	% of Frequencies
Attendance Clerk (school)	2	50%
Attendance Liaison	2	50%
Attendance Recovery	2	50%
Career Day for Parents	1	25%
Changing the Culture of the Building	1	25%
Check-in and Check-out	1	25%
Consistency	2	50%
Daily Live Phone Calls	1	25%

(continued)

Table 6 (cont.)

Specific Interventions and Strategies	No. of Frequencies (N=4)	% of Frequencies
Decreasing Teacher Absenteeism	1	25%
Holistic Approach	1	25%
Home Visits	3	75%
Incentives/Rewards	4	100%
Intervention meetings	4	100%
Mentoring	2	50%
Outside Consultant	1	25%
Parent Community Liaison	4	100%
Parents included in meetings	4	100%
Parents recognized for student Perfect Attendance	1	25%
Partnership with Girl Scouts	1	25%
Partnership with Local Churches	2	50%
PD, providing engaging and fun lessons	1	25%
PD, recognizing the signs of displacement	1	25%
PD, review of policies and procedures	2	50%
Remediation/tutoring program	2	50%
Renewed Focus	4	100%
Robocalls	3	75%
Sending letters home to parents	3	75%
Sororities/Fraternities	1	25%
Student Perfect Attendance Recognition	3	75%
Therapeutic Day Treatment	4	100%

### Research Question Two

What are principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions and strategies they implemented to decrease chronic absenteeism?

Principals A, B, C, and D response to interview questions 7 and 8. What interventions and strategies would you say has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism?

What interventions and strategies would you say has had the least impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism?

**Emerging theme six: Principals are building relationships with students and parents in an attempt to decrease chronic absenteeism.**

According to principal A, the daily live phone call has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism. Those interventions and strategies that help to “build relationships” (PA, l 153). Intervention meetings where you're making that “real connection” with the parent. “It’s not a check the box meeting, but it's a we want to support your child kind of meeting” (PA, l 149-150). According to principal A, the interventions with the least impact are those established policies that say you have to send a letter at a specific number of absences and put it in Power School. “Those don't change behavior at all” (PA, l 158).

For principal B, changing the culture of the building from the inside out has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism. Getting kids, teachers, and adults to believe in the system. Making positive changes. Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) initiatives have also helped to decrease chronic absenteeism. The intervention with the least impact is staff initiatives. According to principal B, reward systems aimed at teachers can backfire and turn into greed. Everybody wants to win and staff members start to do some questionable things to win.

Interventions and strategies with the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism for principal C, has been providing professional development that incorporates more engaging activities for students, as a result, students want to be in school because learning is fun. The use of technology has also helped. Interventions with the least impact are those students with a history of chronic absenteeism dating back to elementary school. Parents of these students refuse to engage with the school no matter what interventions and strategies are implemented.

According to principal D, teacher contact with parents immediately and sending out notifications consistently to make parents aware that their students are not in school has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism. Interventions with the least impact are the letters that are sent to parents. According to principal D, sometimes there’s an issue with the letters actually reaching the parents.

Table 7 Depicts intervention and strategies principals perceive as having the greatest the least impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism. The interventions and strategies with the

greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism included making live phone calls, connecting with parents and students, and PBIS to name a few. Interventions and strategies with the least impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism include, letters home to parents, incentives for staff and parents who refused to engage with the school despite efforts from the school to reach out to parents.

Table 7

*Principals' Perception of Interventions and Strategies with the Greatest and Least Impact on Decreasing Chronic Absenteeism*

Impact	Intervention and Strategy
Greatest	Daily live phone calls, making connections with students and parents, changing school culture, PBIS, Professional Development, immediate contact with parents
Least	Sending letters home, incentives for staff, parents who refuse to engage

Table 8 depicts the attendance rate after the implementation of interventions and strategies. Each principal reported a decrease in chronic attendance rates after the implementation of interventions and strategies as seen in table 8 below.

Table 8

*Post Interventions and Strategies*

Principal	%
A	17%
B	17%
C	16.5%
D	15%

Table nine depicts data that represents chronic absenteeism rates before the implementation of effective interventions and strategies. The data also represents chronic absenteeism rates after the implementation of effective interventions and strategies and the percentage of change as a result of effective interventions and strategies. Three of the four schools reduced chronic absenteeism by 7%, while one school reduced their chronic absenteeism rate by 8.5%.

Table 9

*Pre and Post Chronic Absenteeism Rates and Percentage of Change*

School	Pre rates	Post-Rates	Change
A	24%	17%	7%
B	24.3%	17%	7%
C	25%	16.5%	8.5%
D	22.41%	15%	7%

**Research Question Three**

What interventions and strategies do principals plan to use in the future? Interview question 10 directly corresponds with research question 3.

Principal A would like to add administrative ‘Remind’ accounts. With ‘Remind’, administrators can send text messages to families without them seeing the administrators’ phone number. The family member can then answer back. ‘Remind’ would be used for students within the target range, those students not at 10% absences. The attendance clerk for principal A would pull the attendance list around 9:30. ‘Remind’ would be used for those students in the ‘yellow’. An administrator would send a text message to the family saying, “Hey, what’s going on? Do you need a ride? Can we come get you? (PA, l 149). That list would go to the parent community liaison to then immediately go to the house.

Principals B and C would like to implement attendance recovery/buyback programs earlier in the school year. They would like to see students recapture lost time before January. Principal C said specifically that “some students can have 30-40 absences by January” (PC, l 84). Principal B stated, “If a student is able to access work while they are home through Google classroom, they should be able to recapture that time” (PB, l 188). According to principal B, students who stay after school for remediation should have that time credited back to them.

Principal D would like to have more hands-on personnel to go and visit students and parents of students who are chronically absent. According to principal D, they only have one attendance person that is assigned to their school. Because of the number of students enrolled this person can’t cover the amount of students who need assistance. Principal D thinks that if they could get additional assistance in actually going to houses and knocking on doors, they would increase the awareness of parents about how important it is for students to come to school.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify what interventions and strategies principals were implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism. This study further identified principals' perceptions of the interventions and strategies with the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism. The researcher collected data using face-to-face semi-structured interviews with principals in schools with a chronic absenteeism rate above 15%. There were five principals scheduled to be interviewed. The fifth principal was not interviewed because schools were ordered to close by the Governor of Virginia in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Several attempts were made to conduct the interview via telephone without any success. Three research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What interventions and strategies are principals implementing within their schools to decrease student chronic absenteeism?
2. What are principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions and strategies they use to decrease chronic absenteeism?
3. What interventions and strategies do principals plan to use in the future?

Six themes emerged from the analysis of the data:

Theme one: Principals are implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.

Theme two: Principals are implementing parental contacts in their schools to decrease student chronic absenteeism.

Theme three: Principals are implementing Community Partnerships in their schools to decrease student chronic absenteeism.

Theme four: Principals are implementing district support in their schools to decrease student chronic absenteeism.

Theme five: Principals are implementing Professional Development in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.

Theme six: Principals are building relationships with students and parents in an attempt to decrease chronic absenteeism.

Research question one asked principals about the interventions and strategies they are implementing in their schools to decrease student absenteeism. After coding and analyzing the data, five themes emerged. Principals are using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

(PBIS), Parent contacts, community partnerships, district supports and professional development in their efforts to decrease chronic absenteeism. As part of PBIS, principals are including mentoring programs, incentives and rewards, intervention meetings for attendance, students earning school bucks for attendance and good behavior, attendance recognition, and tiered system of supports for students. Parent contacts include live phone calls, home visits, rewarding parents for student attendance, parent career day, PTA, weekly meetings, robocalls and letters mailed home. Community partnerships involve sororities and fraternities, consultant companies, local businesses, churches, and Girl Scouts. According to the principals interviewed, the district supported their efforts to decrease chronic absenteeism by providing a parent community liaison to their staff. Therapeutic day treatment providers were also added and in some instances, principals advocated for positions to be added to their staff to assist with absenteeism. Professional development was used by principals to reinforce consistency in reaching out to parents and following district policies and procedures pertaining to student absenteeism.

Principals also used professional development to educate teachers on how to recognize the signs of displacement, what to look for and what to listen for. One principal used professional development to discuss teacher absenteeism and its impact on student attendance and achievement.

Research question two asked principals to give their perspective on the effectiveness of interventions and strategies used to decrease chronic absenteeism. One theme emerged, building relationships. Those interventions and strategies involved daily live phone calls to parents, making connections with students and parents, changing the school culture, Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), professional development and immediate contact with parents. The things they found least impactful were letters home to parents, incentives for staff and parents who refused to engage despite efforts from the school.

Research question three asked principals about the interventions and strategies they plan to use in the future. Principal B and C would like to offer attendance recovery or buyback options for students earlier in the school year. While principal A plans to implement administrative 'Reach' accounts that allow administrators to text parents when students are absent and provide options for getting students to school. Principal D would like to add additional staff in order to make more home visits.

Chapter five will include findings, conclusions, implications for practice, suggestions for future studies and personal reflections.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Finding, Implications and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

In this qualitative study, the researcher explored the perceptions of four secondary principals regarding the implementation of intervention and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism. Data were collected using in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews that occurred in an urban school setting in southeastern Virginia. Three out of the five schools received accreditation for the 2018-2019 school year. All five of the schools had chronic absenteeism rates over 15%. Five principals were scheduled to be interviewed, however because of the threat of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), schools were closed for the school year on March 13, 2020 before the fifth interview could be conducted. Several attempts were made to conduct the last interview via telephone with no success. The principals were chosen based the VDOE chronic absenteeism rate for school districts during the 2018-2019 school year. The district was chosen based on the accessibility to the researcher. For principal eligibility in this study, each school had to have a chronic absenteeism rate over 15%. The study was designed to answer three research questions.

1. What interventions and strategies are principals implementing within their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism?
2. What are principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions and strategies they use to decrease chronic absenteeism?
3. What interventions and strategies do principals recommend for future use?

This chapter will state the findings, implications, summary, conclusions and recommendation for additional studies.

#### **Summary of Findings**

After analysis of the data, several findings were identified. Those findings, their associated data, and research support follow.

#### **Finding one: Principals implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.**

During a face to face interview, principals revealed they are implementing a variety of positive supports to encourage student attendance. 100% of principals discussed implementing

intervention meetings to discuss student chronic absenteeism. For one principal this was part of a holistic approach to meeting the needs of students. The responsibility of this team is to identify students who have chronic absenteeism. The student and the parent along with school staff members familiar with the student, meet to come up with strategies to assist the student and parent in getting the student to school.

Incentives and rewards are being implemented by 100% of the principals interviewed. These incentives and rewards come in the form of school bucks being earned by students for improved attendance and following school rules. Students are able to spend these school bucks in the school store or use them for events being offered by the school, such as a pep rally. Students are also being rewarded for perfect attendance at award ceremonies.

Mentoring programs are being implemented by 50% of principals interviewed. These mentoring groups are being sponsored by staff members within the building or partnerships formed outside the building with community partners. Mentoring groups are being held for both male and female students. One principal gave an example of a strategy being implemented called 'check-in/check-out' and its impact on a student's attendance. A student went from being absent 35% of the school year to only missing one day after the implementation of 'check-in/check-out'. With this strategy, students with behavior or attendance problems are assigned to an adult within the building. The student checks in with that adult in the morning before heading to class and checks out at the end of the day. This strategy provides the student with a person to connect with and to be accountable to each day.

Sheldon and Epstein (2004), conducted a study in which they found that a comprehensive approach taking into account school and classroom factors, as well as environmental factors is required to increase student attendance. Their findings involved rewarding students, speaking with families about their student's attendance, and giving families school contact information. According to Balfanz and Chang (2013), evidence-based school strategies to create a culture of attendance include recognizing students for excellent and improved attendance, involving students and parents, continually examining attendance data and practices, and seeking out those students who are absent as early as possible and developing systems to respond to barriers. The findings are consistent with the research. Schools in this district are recognizing students for excellent attendance, one school is even recognizing parents for excellent student attendance.

**Finding two: Principals implemented parent contacts in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.**

Principals were including parents in the implementation of strategies to assist students who are chronically absent. Of the principals interviewed, 100% were including parents in their intervention meetings. These meetings are not only implementing strategies to assist students but also providing supports to help parents. One principal states that when parents are included, they become more invested in the process.

Home visits were being implemented by 75% of principals. According to one principal, parents are starting to call when they can't get students to come to school. In response the principal is able at times to send the parent community liaison to the home to retrieve the student. Another principal stated when parents fail to show up to intervention meetings, someone is sent to the home. Principals are requesting the help of the attendance liaison in some instances to go out to homes when student absences become a concern.

Robocalls were being implemented by 75% of principals. This is a daily call alerting parents when students were not in school. In some instances, parents were able to get their student to school before the end of the day. One principal prefers a live call to the robocalls. According to this principal, the live call gives more insight into what is going on with the student and what is happening in the home, which then allows you to meet the needs.

Letters are being sent home when student absences reach three, five and seven days. 75% of principals interviewed are implementing this strategy. In doing so, parents are alerted when students have reach a certain amount of absences.

By reaching out to parents, schools can prompt parents to send their children to school and provide helpful supports to ensure that absences are reduced (Lara et al., 2018). Patel (2009) suggested that schools are the first to report when students are not in school and should inform parents via phone when students are absent. According to Sheldon and Epstein, 2004, to reduce chronic absenteeism, frequent and positive communication with parents about attendance is needed. Levin-Epstein (2017) stated that parental engagement is the most important issues for any secondary school principal and that principals need to reach out to parents and approach the relationship as a partnership. The findings in this study are consistent with the research. Principals in this district are inviting parents to be part of intervention meetings to come up with

strategies to help students come to school on a regular basis. Parents are being contacted on a consistent basis by phone, letters and home visits when students fail to report to school.

**Finding three: Principals Implemented Community Partnerships in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.**

Of the four principals interviewed, three or 75% are implementing community partnerships to some degree. Two of the three principals are implementing community partnerships to establish mentoring programs. They have reached out to sororities, fraternities, Girl Scouts and local foundations. In some cases, the mentoring program is being funded by the community partnership.

One principal during the Christmas holiday reached out to local churches in the area to provide support to families in the form of food and gifts for students. This principal also has a company to offer a tutoring program to students and a consultant company to provide professional development for teachers. Another principal uses community partners to provide gifts for students at monthly perfect attendance meetings.

According to Sheldon and Epstein, 2004 schools need to take a comprehensive approach to involve communities in ways that help students decrease chronic absenteeism. Their study also found that school, family and community partnerships greatly reduce chronic absenteeism, even after school level and history of absenteeism are taken into account. Research by Carnegie Foundation President Anthony Bryk concluded that successful schools had robust parent-community ties. Epstein's study "Framework of six types of involvement" suggested that effective school-community programs link partnership activities with important school goals using six types of involvement. One of those involvements include collaborating with the community by identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development. The findings are consistent with the research. Principals are utilizing community partnerships in this district to provide mentoring programs for students and tutoring programs. One school held a career fair for parents along with other resources to assist parents.

**Finding four: Principals utilized district supports in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.**

The district has provided a parent community liaison for the first time this school year 2019-2020, therefore 100% of the principals interviewed are implementing a parent community

liaison. Each school is able to utilize this new staff member in ways that best meet the needs of their student population. One principal expressed being thankful for the added position because it has made a huge difference for the school. The parent community liaison is being used to make phone calls to parents when students fail to report to school and are being sent out to make home visits.

The district has also partnered with therapeutic day treatment providers and according to principals, they have up to three providers within their buildings with large caseloads.

The district also has attendance liaison signed to several schools. They are sometimes members of the intervention team and are assigned the task of making home visits when students fail to report to school. According to one principal, there are not enough attendance liaisons to handle the workload required to meet the needs of the school.

Roekel, 2008 study compiled the following data:

1. Seventeen states have directed all districts or schools to implement parental involvement policies.
2. Seven states; Alaska, California, Indiana, Minnesota, Nevada, South Carolina, and Texas have obligated schools and districts to develop policies linking parent-community partnerships to school improvement plans.
3. Delaware schools applying for school improvement grants must include parental involvement strategies in grant applications.

According to Balfanz and Chang, 2013, principals need to involve district leaders as part of reaching up to them for assistance. The superintendent can make it easier and more effective to address chronic absenteeism when it is discussed as a priority for all schools in the district. Khan, 1996 states, administrators and policymakers must be conscious of present studies demonstrating the benefits of working closely with families and how school strategies and attitudes can impact children's school accomplishments. The findings was consistent with the research. Principals expressed reaching out to district leaders for additional staff to support them in their efforts to decrease chronic absenteeism. District leaders also provided therapeutic day treatment providers along with a parent community liaison to assist in the effort to decrease chronic absenteeism.

**Finding five: Principals implemented Professional Development in their schools to decrease chronic absenteeism.** Principals are implementing professional development during

pre-service week at the beginning of the school year. 100% of principals interviewed are providing some form of PD to teachers regarding chronic absenteeism. The district is also providing PD through the department of Youth Risk. PD is focused on refreshing teacher's memory of policies and procedures already in place and emphasizing consistency in implementing those policies and procedures. Teachers are being provided with PD that helps them recognize the signs of displacement.

According to Roekel, 2008, professional development should make faculty aware of community and family engagement. In an article from 'Attendance Works', it is suggested that principals develop materials and appropriate training to ensure that the entire staff is on board when dealing with chronic absenteeism. In-service training to discuss the importance of reducing chronic absenteeism and what can be done is critical. Tools should be shared with teachers about messaging parents at the beginning of the school year. The findings were consistent with the research. Each principal interviewed discussed providing professional development to staff that focused on policies and procedures to combat chronic absenteeism along with being consistent in reporting student absenteeism and contacting parents.

**Findings six: Principals indicated that the implementation of interventions and strategies that foster the building of relationships between students, parents and the school are most effective in decreasing chronic absenteeism.** According to principal A, the daily live phone call has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism. Principal A, states that interventions and strategies that 'build relationships and making real connections with parents helps to decrease chronic absenteeism.

According to principal B, changing the culture of the building has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism along with making positive changes and using positive behavioral intervention supports.

Principal C noted that professional development that incorporates how to provide engaging activities for students and how to make learning fun, has resulted in a decrease in chronic absenteeism. For principal D, making connections with parents consistently to notify them when students are absent, has made the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism.

Interventions and strategies with the least impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism include robocalls, letters mailed at the third, fifth and seventh absence, incentives aimed at teachers and parents who refuse to engage despite efforts from the school.

According to the Federation of schools, building relationships is critical to supporting students with chronic absenteeism. Green 2018, described principals as community leaders responsible for bridging the gap in creating school and community relationships. Levine-Epstein noted successful engagement involves making parents feel like a part of the school by asking them to invest their time and talents.

### **Implications of Findings**

**Implication one: Principals should implement positive behavior interventions and supports in their efforts to decrease chronic absenteeism.** The data suggests, positive behavior interventions and supports included intervention meetings with students and parents to discuss strategies to help get students to school. They also included systems of incentives and rewards for students for perfect and improved attendance. Strategies also included, mentoring programs that connect students to adults that would hold them accountable for their behavior and attendance. As one principal stated, it's the connection and the building of relationships that encourage students to come to school.

**Implication two: Principals should continue to include parents in meetings involving their student.** The data indicates that including parents allows them to become more invested in the process and partner with the school. Schools should continue to invest in staff such as parent community liaisons and attendance liaison who can provide home visits to help support families struggling to get students to school. Contacts via phone and or mail should continue as a way of reaching out to parents and keeping them informed of student absences.

**Implication three: Principals should consider the implementation of community partnerships to help schools struggling with chronic absenteeism.** The data suggest that principals should seek to utilize community partnerships to provide more than just gifts for students. These partnerships should be used in creative ways to assist schools, students and parents. Schools can use these partnerships to make needed home visits and live phone calls. Schools who complain about not having needed resources to help decrease chronic absenteeism should reach out to form more community partnerships.

**Implication four: Districts leaders should continue to provide supports for principals in their efforts to decrease chronic absenteeism.** Additional staff like parent community liaisons and therapeutic day treatment providers help to provide services that connect

parents and students to school. When parents and students feel connected, the results are positive school accomplishments.

**Implication five: Principals should continue to provide professional development at the beginning of the school year to ensure teachers are aware of patterns of absenteeism within their schools.** Policies and procedures should be reviewed with an emphasis on consistency. Professional development aimed at teaching teachers how to recognize the signs of displacement could help direct services early.

**Implication six: If principals want to decrease chronic absenteeism, they should consider interventions and strategies that connect and build relationships among students, parents and the school.** Principals are implementing robocalls to alert parents when students fail to attend school, and although this can be an effective strategy, it does not lead to relationship building between the parent and the school. When live phone calls are implemented schools are able to learn more about the reason students are not attending school and in some cases can provide services needed to assist the family and get the student back in school.

Research question three asked principals, “What interventions and strategies do principals plan to use in the future?” Principals plan to or would like to use additional staff to provide more home visits. With the amount of students not attending school additional staff is needed to connect with parents through home visits. The implementation of an administrative ‘Reach’ program will be implemented in the near future in one school. This strategy will allow administrators to text parents when students fail to attend school. In return parent will be able to respond to the administrator through text and come up with an immediate plan to get the student to school. This is another strategy that allows the parent and school to form a partnership that works to benefit the student, parent, and school.

Two administrators would like to implement attendance recovery programs early in the school year. The idea is, when students are absent from school, there should be an intervention that allows them to recover the time they have lost from school. As stated by one principal, “if students are able to access assignments from home using Google classroom, then way does that day need to count against them?” The implication is for this school district and principals to further explore the use of alternative forms of instruction when students are absent from school in an attempt to decrease chronic absenteeism.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to identify what interventions and strategies principals were implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism. This study further identified principals' perceptions of the interventions and strategies with the greatest and least effect on decreasing chronic absenteeism. Study findings suggest a variety of interventions and strategies were implemented by principals in this school district to decrease chronic absenteeism. Principals reported a decrease in chronic absenteeism after the implementation of interventions and strategies that included; positive behavioral interventions and supports, parent contacts, community partnerships, district supports, and professional development to decrease chronic absenteeism. Principals along with faculty and staff are working together to implement these interventions and strategies. It was surprising to see the variety of interventions and strategies that were being implemented by each school. The findings also suggested that interventions and strategies that help build relationships between the school, students, and parents are being most effective in decreasing chronic absenteeism in this district. This study included a very small sample size. Findings may not be generalized to other school districts. Principals in this Southeastern district, plan to continue to implement interventions and strategies that connect with parents and students in an attempt to continue building relationships in the future. Principals would also like to implement a program that will allow students to recover absences earlier in the year before absences become chronic.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

The role of the principal and the need to implement interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism is expressed throughout the literature. Considering the findings and implications of this study, it would be beneficial to conduct research in the following areas:

1. Researcher could consider a study on the impact of teacher absenteeism on student chronic absenteeism rate. A lot of research has been completed on student chronic absenteeism and the impact it has on school success. It would be interesting to look at data to determine how teacher absenteeism impacts student academic success, attendance and achievement, and how principals and district leaders respond.
2. Researcher could consider examining secondary schools with very low chronic absenteeism rates 10% and lower, to determine what factors influence those students

to come to school when other secondary schools within the same district have chronic absenteeism rates 20% and above. One secondary school in the targeted district did not qualify to participate in the research study because the chronic absenteeism rate was eight percent for the 2018-2019 school year. As a researcher my curiosity would want to know what is happening in this school. As stated in the research, chronic absenteeism rates increase in middle school and peaks in high school. Examining what is happening in schools such as these could help surrounding schools better implement interventions and strategies.

3. Researcher could consider what impact alternative instruction might have on chronic absenteeism? This would be an interesting study considering the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). As of March 13, 2020, schools across Virginia were closed at the mandate of the Governor in an attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19. Teachers were forced to provide instruction using Google classroom, Zoom, Apex and other digital applications that students could access from home. How and will online instruction impact how schools handle chronic absenteeism following COVID-19?

### **Personal Reflections**

Growing up, school and school attendance were very important in my family. Education was a way out of poverty and in order to get the education, you had to attend school. I received perfect attendance awards throughout my K-12 school years. When I became an educator, students not coming to school was shocking to me. It was even more shocking, when I discovered parents knew and kept students home. This research journey has really helped me to understand that there are many factors that impact student absenteeism. As a result of this research study I have discovered that this school district has renewed their focus on chronic absenteeism. It was exciting to discover that principals are implementing a variety of interventions and strategies to combat chronic absenteeism. This renewed focus has caused them to ‘step up their game’, and as a result, principals are looking to connect with parents and students in an attempt to decrease chronic absenteeism and increase attendance.

In his book titled *Lord, Teach us to Pray*, Dr. Gideon Thompson stated, “Have you ever noticed that most ticket stubs with a perforated section have a warning printed near the perforation: Void if detached. It always reminds me of the importance of staying connected to

maintain value” (Thompson, 2018, p. 168). I think this also pertains to our parents and students. When schools reach out and connect with parents and students, I believe a sense of value is created in parents and students. When parents and students feel valued, parents are most likely to send their children to school and children are mostly likely to attend. **Let’s keep connecting!**

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Protection Certificate of Completion



## Appendix B

### Letter to School District for Permission to Conduct Study

Sherri Sherrod-Wilson Your Name

Recipient Name

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Recipient Name,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). I am currently undertaking a dissertation study entitled: "Principals' perception in the implementation of interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism in one Virginia urban school division." The purpose of the study is to examine principals' perceptions of the most effective interventions and strategies used to reduce chronic absenteeism.

I am requesting the participation of secondary middle and high school principals in your division in my dissertation study. I would like to send a letter requesting a face to face interview with principals pending your approval.

The principals will be informed that all identifying information such as name, school, school division, etc., will be kept confidential. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

I am confident that the conclusions and recommendations from the study will be beneficial to me as well as to school divisions around the state and perhaps the nation. I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration regarding the participation of the principals in your district in this study. You may respond directly to me by email at [j131961@vt.edu](mailto:j131961@vt.edu) or by phone at 757-636-1268.

If I do not hear from you within two weeks of receiving this correspondence, I will assume that you are comfortable with your secondary middle and high school principals participating in this dissertation study.

Respectfully,

Sherri Sherrod-Wilson  
Doctoral Candidate

**Appendix C**  
**Letter to Participants**

My name is Sherri Sherrod-Wilson, I am a Doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). I am conducting a research study to examine the perceptions of principals regarding interventions and strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism. The title of my study is “Principals’ perceptions of the implementation of interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism in one Virginia urban school division.”

I am requesting your participation in my dissertation study. This study involves a face to face semi-structured interview consisting of 16 questions. The interview will be recorded for accuracy of transcribing. The interview will take about 45 minutes to complete. You will need the percentage of African American, Hispanic and White students in your building. You will need the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. You will also need your attendance rate before and after the implementation of interventions and strategies.

There is no risk to participants in this study. Records of information that you provide for the research study and your personal identifying information will not be linked in any way.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at 757-636-1268 or email me at [j131961@vt.edu](mailto:j131961@vt.edu). This research has been approved by The Institutional Review Board of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, 540-231-4991. Thank you

Sincerely,

Sherri Sherrod-Wilson  
Doctoral Candidate

## **Appendix D**

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sherri Sherrod-Wilson from Virginia Tech University. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of principals' in the implementation of interventions and strategies to decrease chronic absenteeism.

#### **Research Procedures**

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants in a mutually agreed upon site. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions pertaining to your perspective on interventions and strategies you have implemented to decrease chronic absenteeism and the effectiveness of them. The interview will be audio recorded for transcription, accuracy and analysis.

#### **Time Required**

Participation in this study will require approximately 60 minutes of your time.

#### **Risks**

The researcher does not perceive more than minimal risks as associated with everyday life from your involvement in this study.

#### **Benefits**

Potential benefits to your participation in this study include an opportunity to reflect on the interventions and strategies that are used to decrease chronic absenteeism and how effective they are. Your participation will also contribute to a better understanding of the most effective interventions and strategies used to decrease chronic absenteeism.

#### **Confidentiality**

The results of this research will be coded in a way that no respondent's identity will be attached to the final study. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, information will be kept up to five years, after which all data will be destroyed.

#### **Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

**Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or concerns about this study during your participation or after its completion, please contact:

Sherri Sherrod-Wilson  
[J131961@vt.edu](mailto:J131961@vt.edu)  
757-636-1268

**Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject**

Trudy Riley  
Vice President of Research and Innovations  
Steger Hall  
1015 Life Science Circle  
Blacksburg, VA 24061  
540-231-6077

**Giving of Consent**

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being asked of me as a participant. I give consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The Researcher provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.  
I give consent to be audio recorded during my interview. \_\_\_\_\_ (initial)

Name of Participant (printed)\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (signed) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher (signed) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### The Study of Principals' Perspective on Chronic Absenteeism Interview Question Guide

#### Introduction

- Welcome participant and introduce myself.
- Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.
- Discuss the purpose and process of the interview.
- Explain the presence and purpose of the recording equipment.
- Outline general ground rules and interview guidelines such as being prepared for the interviewer to interrupt to assure all topics can be covered.
- Address the assurance of confidentiality.
- Inform the participant that their name will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

#### Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify the strategies and interventions principals are implementing to decrease chronic absenteeism and the perceptions principals have in determining which interventions and strategies are most effective.

#### Discussion Guidelines

Please respond directly to the questions and if you do not understand the question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you might have. If we get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you. I will keep your identity, participation and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This session will be recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

#### General Instructions

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in the interview, please exclude all identifying information, such as your name and names of teachers, administrators, name of the school or other parties. Your identity will be kept confidential and any information that will permit identification will be removed from the analysis.

#### Possible Probes

- Could you elaborate more on that?
- That was helpful, but could you provide more detail?
- Your example was helpful, but can you give me another example to help me understand further?

**Research Questions:** Data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted to answer the following questions.

1. What interventions and strategies are principals implementing within their schools to decrease student absenteeism?
2. What are principal's perceptions of the effectiveness of the interventions and strategies they use to decrease chronic absenteeism?
3. What interventions and strategies do principals plan to use in the future?

## **Interview**

### **Background Questions**

1. How many years have you been the principal at your current school?
2. How many students are enrolled in your school?
3. What percentage of your student population is, African American, Hispanic and White?
4. What was your attendance rate before the implementation of interventions and strategies?
5. What is the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What professional development has been offered to principal and teachers at the building and/or district level to help decrease chronic absenteeism?
2. Which supports do you have from the district level to help decrease chronic absenteeism? ex. (Parent and community liaisons, therapeutic day treatment providers, other)
3. Which interventions and strategies involve community partnerships?
4. Which interventions and strategies involve parents?
5. Which interventions and strategies involve the use of technology?
6. How long have you implemented interventions and strategies aimed at decreasing chronic absenteeism?
7. Which interventions and strategies would you say has had the greatest impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism?
8. Which interventions and strategies would you say has had the least impact on decreasing chronic absenteeism?
9. Which is your attendance rate after implementation of interventions and strategies?
10. Which interventions and strategies would you like to implement in the future to reduce chronic absenteeism?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked?

### **Conclusion**

Ask and answer any questions and thank the participant for his or her time.

## Appendix F

### IRB Approval Letter



**Division of Scholarly Integrity and  
Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-3732  
irb@vt.edu  
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 20, 2020  
**TO:** Ted S Price, Sherri Teresa Sherrod-Wilson  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Principals perspective of the implementation of interventions and strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism  
**IRB NUMBER:** 19-1132

Effective February 20, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**  
Protocol Determination Date: **February 20, 2020**

#### ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

**Appendix G**

**Permission to Conduct Research Study from School District**

March 4, 2020

Sherri Sherrod-Wilson  
sherri.wilson@[REDACTED]k12.com

Dear Mrs. Sherrod Wilson:

I am pleased to inform you that your request to conduct the study entitled "*Principals' Perceptions of the Implementation of Interventions and Strategies to Decrease Chronic Absenteeism*" has been given conditional approval. This study should be conducted on a voluntary basis only and administered to five principals of your choosing.

A copy of the results of your interview must be forwarded to the Office of Research and Evaluation, [REDACTED] Public Schools upon completion.

Best wishes for continued success.

Sincerely,



[REDACTED], Director

cc: [REDACTED]

Office of Research and Evaluation • 3651 Hartford Street • Portsmouth, VA 23707 • Phone (757) 393-8840 • Fax (757) 393-8233

[www.ppsk12.us](http://www.ppsk12.us)