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State Mandates, School Policies and Practices: What Schools Say They Are Doing to Address Chronic Absenteeism

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Author
Valencia, Tony Michael

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State Mandates, School Policies and Practices: What Schools Say They Are Doing to Address Chronic Absenteeism

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Tony Valencia

2018
State Mandates, School Policies and Practices: What Schools Say They Are Doing to Address Chronic Absenteeism

by

Tony Valencia

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Kathryn M. Anderson, Co-Chair

Professor Mark P. Hansen, Co-Chair

School attendance and chronic absenteeism have been at the forefront of state and federal mandates. Students who attend school every day have better school and life outcomes. On the other hand, students who are chronically absent are more likely to experience poor school results (lower grades, not reading at grade level) and future negative outcomes (unlikely to graduate from high school and college, more likely to engage in risky behavior).

This study looked at what schools are doing to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. A mixed methods approach was used. A total of 17 individuals were interviewed and a survey was created based on responses. A survey was then completed by 47 district representatives that identified practices they were using to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism.
The results of the interviews and surveys indicate the power of using a multi-tiered system of support to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. Those districts interviewed knew the needs of their schools and had proactive systems in place to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. Further the study also identified common barriers that are making it difficult for students to attend school daily.
The dissertation of Tony Valencia is approved.

Howard S. Adelman
Robert Cooper
Linda P. Rose

Kathryn M. Anderson, Committee Co-Chair
Mark P. Hansen, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2018
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my children Sofia (10), Stella (5), and John (4). UCLA was a school I always dreamed about graduating from, but never thought I truly would. One day when you read this, you will know that my dream became a reality. Let this dissertation be evidence to all three of you that life is what you make of it. Anything is possible if you are willing to put the work in. I want all three of you to do your best in life and ultimately make your dreams a reality.
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VITA

Cal Poly Pomona
Administrative Credential, 2009

Azusa Pacific University
Master of Arts/Education Specialist Credential, 2000

California State University, Fullerton
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, 1998

Little Lake City School District
Director, Special Education and Pupil Services
2013-Now

Little Lake City School District
Principal, Studebaker Elementary School
2009-2013

Little Lake City School District
District Instructional Specialist
2008-2009

Little Lake City School District
Teacher
1999-2008
CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A chronically absent student is a student who misses 10% of a school year regardless of
the reason (Harris, 2013). Every Student Succeeds Act (“ESSA”) was signed into law on
December 10, 2015, by President Obama. This new federal action took the place of No Child
Left Behind and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Currently, the
Every Student Succeeds Act allows states to consider district chronic absentee rates as a metric
of school quality and student success. Further, the California School Dashboard shares chronic
absentee rates for all districts and subgroups that is accessible to the public on the Internet.
Similarly in California, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) guides the Local Control
Accountability Plan (LCAP) ensure that school districts monitor and address chronic absentee
rates annually. The expectation by the federal government and the state of California is that
monitoring of chronic absentee rates will help school districts keep attendance in the forefront of
planning and ultimately improve school outcomes for students in a proactive and non-punitive
manner. Districts that monitor, implement, and maintain systems to improve attendance, in turn,
 improve educational and life outcomes for students (Chang, 2013).

National Impact

Research by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), concluded that the United States had an
estimated 5 to 7.5 million students who missed nearly a month of school yearly. In a similar
article, Chang (2014) found that 10-15% of all students are chronically absent and as a nation,
135 million days of instruction were lost during that school year. Absences are most prevalent in
early (Pre-school and Kindergarten) and later grades (11th and 12th grades). Research indicates
that academic achievement is negatively impacted by high rates of absences (Gottfried, 2009).
National student demographic data have shown that some subgroups are more likely to be chronically absent. Research has found that low-income students are more likely to be chronically absent (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012), students with language barriers (Nauer, White & Yerneni, 2008), and students with disabilities (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who are identified as socio-economically disadvantaged (Chang & Romero, 2008; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004) and students who were identified the previous year as chronically absent (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004) are also more likely to have excessive absences. Further, students living in poverty are a group that has been identified as being at risk for chronic absenteeism. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that for students living in poverty, school is a pathway out. Further, this research found that missing school negatively impacts reading levels and math understanding. Daily school attendance for our students living in poverty is one way to help lessen the academic achievement gap when compared to our non-poverty students.

Researchers have determined that chronic absenteeism is connected to many negative outcomes. It is known to have a negative impact on student achievement (Ginsburg, Jordan & Chang, 2014; Gottfried, 2009), feeling connected (Adelman & Taylor, 2008) and being identified as needing special education (Chang, 2014). Chronically absent kindergarten and 1st grade students are 83% less likely to be reading at grade level by 3rd grade. Chronic absenteeism also impacts outcomes later in life. Henry & Thornberry (2010) determined that students who are chronically absent are more likely to engage in risky behavior like alcohol and drug use. In similar research, Page, Petteruti, Walsh, & Ziedenberg (2007), identified that chronic absenteeism could increase the likelihood that a student is involved in the criminal justice system. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that three-fourths of juveniles in the judicial system
had been identified as chronic absentees. Lastly, students who have been chronic absentees are more likely to drop out of school (Chang, 2014; Adelman & Taylor, 2008).

**Conceptual Framework**

My conceptual framework drives my research questions and is driven by what I was curious about. I was interested in identifying what Los Angeles County school districts are doing to address chronic absenteeism. I was especially interested in those districts that have low chronic absentee rates based upon the California Department of Education data. I identified elementary and unified districts with lower chronic absentee rates to research practices, policies, and initiatives that were positively supporting attendance. I identified how state (LCAP) and federal (ESSA) mandates impacted the decision making and activities driving attendance. I identified the barriers that students are facing that are negatively impacting daily school attendance. I looked at how Socioeconomic Status and the size of the district impacts school attendance. Lastly, I researched how the California Dashboard, with chronic absenteeism as a target, is changing the way school district attendance administrators in Los Angeles County schools are addressing attendance.

**Local Need**

California Attorney General Harris (2016) identified a disproportionate rate of absenteeism for specific subgroups. Chronically absent students are more likely to be in special education, English learners, homeless, socioeconomically disadvantaged and or foster youth. African-American students have chronic absentee rates of 14%, which is twice the rate for all California students. Further, the rate for Native American and African American students who are also low-income is 16%.
The financial impact of absences are both immediate and also appear later in life. According to a report by Attorney General Harris (2013), schools in California lose 1.4 billion dollars per year due to student absences. During the 2010-2011 school year, Los Angeles County lost a total of $339,599,527 due to student absences. It is estimated that dropouts cost the state of California 46.4 billion per year once factors like incarceration, lost economic productivity, and tax revenues are accounted for. It is estimated that California has lost an estimated 7.3 billion dollars due to student absences (Harris, 2016).

The good news is that under California’s relatively new funding system called the Local Control Funding Formula (“LCFF”), established in 2013, one of the goals is to put chronic absenteeism in the forefront of educators. This system gives supplemental and concentration funds based upon unduplicated students and requires local educational agencies to monitor California’s eight state priorities, one of which incorporates chronic absenteeism, and is measured by their Local Control Accountability Plan (“LCAP”). From the federal government, the ESSA allows each state to choose one indicator to measure school quality and student success. As a result, some school districts will monitor and set improvement targets for chronic absentee rates via the LCAP and the ESSA annually.

---

1 Supplemental and Concentration grant amounts are calculated based on the percentage of "unduplicated pupils" enrolled in the LEA on Census Day (first Wednesday in October) as certified for Fall 1. The percentage equals:

- Unduplicated count of pupils who (1) are English learners, (2) meet income or categorical eligibility requirements for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program, or (3) are foster youth. “Unduplicated count” means that each pupil is counted only once even if the pupil meets more than one of these criteria (EC sections 2574(b)(2) and 42238.02(b)(1)).
- Divided by total enrollment in the LEA (EC sections 2574(b)(1) and 42238.02(b)(5)).
- [http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcfffaq.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcfffaq.asp)
At present, California school districts can make a positive change to attendance through each district’s Local Control Accountability Plan. This accountability system requires school districts to put supports and actions in place to improve attendance for all students. All LCAPs have a yearly metric that measures what the district’s chronic absentee rate is from year to year. The LCAP is a game changer that ensures money is being spent to address student needs and improve school outcomes, which includes chronic absenteeism. A focus was to collectively assess what activities and services are producing optimal outcomes as a result of implementing a Local Control Accountability Plan. Further, the California Dashboard has chronic absenteeism as one of five (along with suspension rates, English Learner progress, English Language Arts, and Mathematics standardized scores) state indicators that will be reported to the public via the state website. This will continue to be a growing motivator for all districts in California to make attendance a priority. According to the California Ed. Code, Section 60901(c) (1):

- a chronic absentee is defined as a pupil who is absent on 10 percent or more of the school days in the school year when the total number of days a pupil is absent is divided by the total number of days the pupil is enrolled and school was actually taught in regular day schools of the district, exclusive of Saturdays and Sundays.

California school districts have never been asked to share their attendance data with the public, and this will cause many districts to scramble to find systems and supports to increase attendance and decrease chronic absentee rates. The current research investigated attendance practices in Los Angeles County schools.

As a result of the LCAP and the California Dashboard, there is a clear need to investigate what systems are in place to proactively increase attendance and to decrease barriers for those students who are chronically absent. To date, there has not been a study that looks at funding
supports and the monitoring of chronic absenteeism (in Los Angeles County schools) using the Local Control Accountability Plan, and how the new California Dashboard is changing how district’s monitor, support, and address attendance. There is a clear need to investigate systems in school districts that are reducing chronic absenteeism and also identify what practices, if any are even in place. School districts that do not have systems in place to address chronic absenteeism may be scrambling to find effective practices to ensure attendance needs are being met for all students. My study identified the practices that are in place in Los Angeles County school districts designed to help school districts improve attendance.

In California, chronic absentee rates have been monitored by the Attorney General’s Office, and rates have slightly decreased. Attorney General Kamala Harris (2015) measured attendance rates in 2014-2015 and found 8% of elementary students, roughly 230,000, were chronically absent. Further, more than 31,000 missed 20% of the 2014-2015, which equates to more than 36 days of school missed. Similarly, Attorney General Harris (2016) measured attendance rates in 2015-2016 and found 7.3% of elementary students, roughly 210,000, were chronically absent.

**Gap in Research**

There is little data that shares what school districts in Los Angeles County are doing to combat and decrease chronic absenteeism. Similarly, there is little data that looks at how actions and services in the Local Control Accountability Plan have helped decrease chronic absenteeism in school districts within Los Angeles County. Further, there is no data on how the new California Dashboard system will put chronic absenteeism at the forefront of district accountability and how districts plan to respond to this new accountability metric. I am curious
to see what actions are taking place to address chronic absenteeism rates. This study looked at two major themes:

(1) What are districts in Los Angeles County doing to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism, and;

(2) What services and supports have state and federal mandates created to systematically increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism?

**Statement of Project**

The Local Control Accountability Plans have brought chronic absenteeism to the forefront of thinking and planning for local school districts. This project looked at how Los Angeles County districts are addressing chronic absenteeism through initiatives, policies, procedures, the Local Control Accountability Plans, and response to the Every Student Succeeds Act.

**Research Questions**

Due to policies like ESSA, LCAP, LCFF, and the California Dashboard, school districts have been expected to create or refine their policies, procedures, and initiatives to help improve attendance. The districts that were identified for one to one interviews are recognized as having success increasing attendance rates and decreasing chronic absenteeism based upon publicly available data from the California Department of Education. Further, the Local Control Funding Formula in California has increased funding by allocating hundreds of millions of dollars of supplemental and concentration funds to support local educational agencies in California’s eight state priorities. The supplemental and concentration funds are designated to target specific student subgroups, and are added on to the base funds that school districts receive for all
students. Supplemental and concentration dollars can add up to 15-20% to a district’s base funds allocation.

Also, my study looked at the Local Control Accountability Plans of Los Angeles County school districts to determine what they are actively doing to address, monitor and decrease chronic absenteeism and similarly, how the Every Student Succeed Act has impacted how districts address attendance. My study answered the following research questions:

1) What are school districts doing to increase attendance?

2) What are school districts doing to address chronic absenteeism?

3) What have state and federal mandates done to change the way districts are addressing attendance and chronic absenteeism?

Research Design

This study has an exploratory mixed methods research design. Using a mixed methods design was the most appropriate design to answer my three research questions. I believe it was important to identify districts that had chronic absentee rates lower than state and county rates. The reason for identifying these districts was the assumption that those districts would have more practices and activities in place to increase attendance.

The qualitative aspect was important to get a deep understanding of what is going on in school districts and schools to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. I identified eight school districts and went out to interview administrators. The data collected from the interviews, was then used to create a survey that allowed me to create targeted and relevant survey questions. Further, it was important to survey a large amount of district administrators to provide this study with a broader perspective of what districts are doing to address attendance.
Public Engagement

Once all data was collected, analyzed and the research is complete, the eight districts involved in the one to one interviews were given an executive summary of the research. The executive summary allows participants to read about attendance policies, procedures, initiatives, and actions that have been found to help increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. The districts may use bright spots identified in the executive summary to incorporate services and supports in their future Local Control Accountability Plan. Lastly, the executive summary was shared with the Los Angeles County Office of Education to assist with policy suggestions for local school districts that will help increase attendance.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chronically absent students miss more than 10% of a school year, which consists of a cumulative total of excused absences, unexcused absences, and suspensions (Harris, 2016; Mays, 2016). The nation’s chronic absenteeism rate is between 10-15% (Chang, 2014) and California’s chronic absentee rate is 8% (Harris, 2015), though Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) found that California did not have a systematic way to calculate chronic absentee rates or monitor needs appropriately. According to research by Balfanz & Byrnes (2012), students living in poverty need to attend school on a daily basis because education is viewed as a pathway out of poverty. Research has found that getting these students to school every day, will make a positive impact on their academic achievement, graduation, and college attendance rates. In further research, year after year, millions of students are missing school at high rates (Ginsburg, Jordan & Chang, 2014).

The goals of this chapter are to reflect on what past research has revealed about chronic absenteeism and what actions have done to increase attendance. The hope is that past research that has identified attendance improvement practices is being utilized at school districts in Los Angeles County. Further, for those districts that do not have systems in place to decrease chronic absenteeism, I hope that my research will help them not only reflect on the importance of daily school attendance but give them practical initiatives and practices that can be used to increase attendance for all students, regardless of the barrier. My research questions guided my research to understand current practices that have been effective in increasing attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism to ensure all kids have the best chance of school and life success.
Overview

This chapter provides background on the research that has addressed and measured the chronic absenteeism at school and beyond. First of all, the past and current policies and legislation that schools must adhere to are reviewed. Next, the research on chronic absenteeism was described and synthesized. Later, the reasons why students are absent from school were presented. The financial challenges that missing school creates with school district budgets in an already challenging fiscal time. Fourthly, California’s Local Control Accountability Plan was considered to see how this document helps ensure strategies are implemented to decrease chronic absentee rates in school districts. Last, research-based interventions were described that have been successful in decreasing chronic absenteeism. Also, data was discussed that reflects how absences affect different subgroups like the poor, English learners and Foster Youth throughout the literature review. The first section discusses the impact legislation and policies have had on chronic absenteeism in schools.

Background of Legislation and Policies Related to Chronic Absenteeism

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that only Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon and Rhode Island monitored and reported chronic absentee rates. These states reported chronic absentee rates ranging from 6% to 23%. The research found that the federal government did not require school districts to report chronic absenteeism rates, although chronic absenteeism leads to destructive habits that could impact later academic and future success.

In California, Attorney General Harris (2013) reported that the state had no means of reporting chronic absentee rates for schools, districts or counties. It was determined that elementary school districts in California monitor attendance in various increments that are not consistent. Harris (2014) reported that California is one of four states that are unable to track
absences statewide. Further, one in ten districts in California were unable to state their district’s chronic absentee rate for the 2013-2014 school year. It was found by Harris (2013) that 48% of school districts monitored attendance monthly, 22% weekly, 9% annually and 15% daily. In a review of LCAPs, Harris (2014) found 15.7% of 140 randomly selected school districts in California identified chronic absentee rates. In a similar review, 80 LCAPs were reviewed with 5% having chronic absentee goals by subgroup.

Chang & Leong (2014) found that addressing attendance concerns early on helps ensure that missing school does not become a habit for the child and parent. In California, Assembly Bill 1672 looks at using the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) as a tracking tool to identify successful interventions that lead to a decrease in absences. This tracking system will support many districts that do not have a means to track whether the SARB interventions were successful (Harris, 2014). AB 1643 is another bill that addresses chronic absenteeism. The bill ensures that county and district SARBs have representatives from the district attorney’s office and the public defender’s office to help identify barriers and supports to increase attendance.

Although there is a clear connection between academic achievement and daily school attendance (Chang & Leong, 2013; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Mays, 2016), No Child Left Behind did not require attendance monitoring. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, with a primary goal of improving English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science proficiency levels. Further, the law made decreasing the achievement gap between subgroups that have historically underachieved academically a priority. Schools were accountable for specific academic targets and were measured annually by the federal government with annually yearly progress (AYP) reports. Schools were given annual yearly progress reports that outlined how their total population of students performed in English
Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. The goal of all school districts was for students to score proficient on the state standardized test. The law expected all students to be proficient by the 2013-2014 school year. Research by Attorney General Harris (2015) reported that in 2014, districts collected and monitored student absences year over year. In 2015, 82%, of districts in California collected and monitor attendance year over year. Before 2015, federal law did not mandate local education agencies to measure and monitor school attendance for local educational agencies.

School attendance has not always been a topic at the forefront of education. According to Chang & Romero (2008), the United States of America does not have a way to monitor and report chronic absentee rates. During the No Child Left Behind era, schools were accountable for Science, English Language Arts, and Math. In California, the California Standards Test (CST) was the annual state standardized measure that assessed English Language Arts and Mathematics for students in second grade through high school. Schools spent an enormous amount of time ensuring students were prepared with test prep and testing taking strategies that helped improve the chances that students would do well on the multiple choice test in the Spring. With Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Local Control Accountability Plan, local educational agencies are expected to look at the whole child and consider areas that NCLB did not: including suspension rates, school connectedness rates, and attendance.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law on December 10, 2015, by President Obama. This new federal action took the place of No Child Left Behind and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Darling-Hammond, Bae, Cook-Harvey, Lam, Mercer, Podolsky & Stosich, 2016). Currently, the Every Student Succeeds Act allows states to consider district chronic absentee rates as a measure to monitor school quality.
and student success. The expectation by the federal government is that the monitoring of chronic absentee rates will help local educational agencies improve school attendance. As a result, ESSA will require local educational agencies to monitor and support health-related needs to ensure that all students attend daily (Hampton, Alikhani, Auld & White, 2017).

**Policies and Practices in California**

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is California’s educational funding system that allows base dollars to address the needs of all students. This funding system provides supplemental concentration dollars to school districts that are designed to meet the unique needs of subgroups that have historically had difficulty making educational gains. The supplemental concentration dollars address the needs of unduplicated students. Unduplicated students are those who qualify as one of the following: Free and Reduced Meals, English Language Learners and foster youth. Districts only count students once, regardless if the student qualifies for more than one of the three categories (Harris, 2014). The LCFF should be fully implemented by the 2020-2021 school year (Affeldt, 2015).

As the LCFF created a new funding formula, the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) required each school district to create an annual plan with observable and measurable goals to provide support for all students (Chang, 2013). School districts were required to create their plan during the 2013-2014 school year with the implementation of the plan beginning 2014-2015 (Chang, 2013). The LCAP is meant to address the whole student by being accountable to the eight state priorities. The eight state priorities are student achievement, implementation of Common Core state standards, core access, basic services, student engagement, school climate, parent involvement and student outcomes (Chang, 2013). Student engagement is the priority that ensures school districts are accountable for chronic absentee rates (Harris, 2014). There are
various negative outcomes for students missing school (Chang & Leong, 2013; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Harris, 2013).

**Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Children**

Research from Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), found an estimated 5 million to 7.5 million students in grades K-12 miss nearly one month of school in the United States. According to their research, there does not appear to be a link between socioeconomic status and absenteeism. Thus, chronic absenteeism appears to impact both rich and poor. However, absenteeism appears to make more of a negative impact on the poor than on the affluent (Romero & Lee, 2008; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Mays, 2016). The affluent have access to resources and supports to help chronically absent children catch-up academically. On the other hand, poor families lack instructional resources, and academic support needed to compensate for the lost instructional days. The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) has compared attendance with overall test scores to see if there is a relationship between attendance and test scores.

In the study, NAEP scores were compared to attendance rates for over 170,000 students in grades fourth and eight who took the test in 2013. Students who missed zero school days the month leading up to the test did the best in Reading and Math scores. Those students who missed three or more school days the month leading up to the test did the poorest. As grade levels went up, the academic gap between students who missed 0 days and those missing 3 or more days a month before the test, grew significantly. Data reflects that low-income students scored lower than their affluent peers and those students who were low-income and chronically absent, scored even lower than peers who were low-income only. Overall, lower scores were consistent with high rates of absenteeism, regardless of their racial or ethnic group. Ginsburg,
Jordan & Chang (2014) also found a clear connection between academic performance and school attendance.

Research suggests that it is critical to address chronic absenteeism in the early grades (Chang & Romero, 2008). According to data by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), 11 percent of kindergarten and nine percent of first-grade students nationwide are chronically absent. From the NCCP data, there appears to be a higher concentration of chronic absenteeism in the lower grades (kindergarten and first) and a steady decrease in chronic absenteeism up until the secondary grades where there is a clear increase in chronic absenteeism. Chronically absent kindergarten students were outperformed by their non-chronic absentee peers by a 4% margin in the areas of reading, math and general knowledge. According to the data from NCCP, chronic absenteeism was especially detrimental to reading performance for Latino students in first-grade who were chronically absent in kindergarten. Also according to the NCCP, poor children who were chronically absent in kindergarten were found to have the lowest reading and math scores as fifth graders.

In similar research, Gottfried (2009) looked at the impact of types of absences (excused versus unexcused) on elementary school academic achievement. The research suggests that unexcused absences have more of a negative impact on academic performance than excused absences. Students with excused absences are more likely to be out for legitimate reasons and are likely to have parents who are aware of the risks of truancy on academic achievement. On the other hand, students who have unexcused absences tend to have family environments that are unaware and uninvolved in the child’s schooling. As a result, students with unexcused absences are less likely to have the resources and home support to assist the student make-up lost instruction. The next section will address the various reasons students are chronically absent.
Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism

There are a variety of reasons why students do not attend school. Reasons for absences may include illness and lack of access to appropriate healthcare (Mays, 2016; Chang, 2014b; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that illnesses like the flu and colds negatively impact a child’s opportunity to attend school. Chronic absenteeism is made up of excused absences, unexcused absences and out of school suspensions (Chang, 2014a; Harris, 2016; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students may also have social-emotional barriers that restrict their ability to attend school daily (Chang, 2014b; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Adelman & Taylor, 2008). Schools may lack a positive and supportive culture, which may include discipline policies that exclude students from the school, rather than identifying alternate ways to address the root cause of behavior (Wilson, 2004; McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, (2002; Perry & Morris, 2014; Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen & Lenhart, 2010). The school may not be looked at as an extension of home and thus may alienate parental support and disconnect students (Blum, 2010; Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, Tabor, Beuhring, Sieving, Shew, Ireland, Bearinger & Udry, 1997). School and parent partnerships have also been identified as practices to improve school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Epstein 1995).

Illness is one of the largest reasons for student absences. Mays (2016) found that one way to address health needs in a community is to understand the community. The research found that once a school system identifies what the needs are of the community, the school system is more likely to be able to create partnerships to address health-related issues that are prohibiting students from attending school (i.e., asthma, oral health, behavioral needs and acute illness. Mays (2016) found that sustained partnerships along with building system capacity will help increase daily student attendance. In similar research, Chang (2014b) found that chronically
absent students are less likely to have access to sufficient health care and thus more likely to be absent from school.

Students may miss school because of social-emotional barriers. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that variables like homelessness, family obligations outside of school and students taking care of siblings were all factors in why students missed school. Students living in poverty were more likely to miss school due to social-emotional factors. Chang (2014b) found that students living in poverty may have “unsafe” paths to and from school and further, may not have adequate transportation to make it to school daily and on time. Adelman and Taylor (2008) found that a student who does not have their needs met is more likely not to want to attend school. These students, who continue to miss school, may disengage from the education process and their motivation to not attend school will continue to grow.

In a study by Wilson (2004), schools with positive climates characteristically emphasize academic achievement, positive relationships among students and teachers, respect for all members of the school community, fair and consistent discipline policies, attention to safety issues, and family and community involvement. This research found that welcoming school climates increase a student’s positive attachment and commitment to the school. The data reflected when the levels of climate and connectedness were measured; students who were highly connected were less likely to participate in physical aggression on campus.

Since the enactment of AB 1729 in January 2013, there has been a change to the suspension policies for the state of California, which in turn has given schools an opportunity to address school climate. This bill requires the principal of the school to implement alternative means of suspension that are age appropriate and designed to address and correct the pupil’s specific misbehavior. Teachers and administrators must address the social/emotional needs of
students on their site and implement alternatives to suspension, before the suspension, for most disciplinary offenses. Zero tolerance procedures are prohibited by this legislation.

In *Promoting School Connectedness: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*, McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum (2002) stated, “Students who attend schools with zero policy guidelines report feeling less safe as compared to students attending schools with more moderate discipline policies” (p. 145). The 127 schools surveyed were not consistent with discipline policies: 40% of school suspended for smoking, 4% suspended for cheating, and 25% had a lenient discipline policy. In the lenient schools, students receive suspensions of the most serious acts like fighting, alcohol, and drugs. The school climate can fall into the punitive school culture category if the behavior is being addressed solely through exclusionary practices like suspensions, but the purpose and function of the behavior are not being supported.

A punitive school culture negatively impacts all students. Perry and Morris (2014) found that school cultures that are punitive, rather than nurturing and flexible, could jeopardize feelings of trust and caring for students and school personnel. This study looked at 24,347 students in grades 6 - 10 from 2009 to 2010. The study found that high levels of suspension had an adverse impact on reading and math achievement. Moreover, math and reading percentiles reflect that the more suspensions at a school, the lower the percentile ranks for all students in the areas of math and reading. High levels of punitive environments are harmful to non-suspended students when the environment is safe and controlled.

In *Suspending Progress: Collateral Consequences of Exclusionary Punishment in Public Schools* (2014), the researchers found there are two explanations to address why high rates of suspension hinder the achievement of students who are not suspended. The first reason is that a
high suspension environment can create increased anxiety for all students. Secondly, communities are disrupted and so are school connections.

Further, there is evidence that zero policy practices unfairly target students of color at a disproportionate rate. According to Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen, and Lenhart (2010), used the data from the National Longitudinal Study to support their research. The research found stringent discipline policies are especially problematic for minority groups specifically African American, Hispanic, and Native American students who are subject to disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion when compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Students who are suspended were found to be less likely to feel connected to the school. With the passage of AB 1729 and the focus on alternates to suspension, schools are changing focus from what are we going to do to the student; to what are we going to do for the student?

Just as school climate impacts school connectedness, so does parental involvement. Thompson, Iachan, Overpeck, Ross and Gross, 2006 looked at 13,027 students in grades 6-10 in 340 schools. Students were given a 59-item questionnaire to see whether parental involvement in school can predict school connectedness. The results found that one way to increase school connectedness is to encourage greater parent participation. Similarly, Garcia-Reid, Reid and Peterson (2005) found that parent support could help offset the negative effects of challenging neighborhoods and schools. Children and adolescents who feel supported by important adults in their lives are likely to be more engaged in school and learning (Blum, 2010). In a similar study, the better students understood their parents’ expectations of them at school, the more connected and engaged the students felt at school (Murray, 2009).

Many adults at school interact with students for more hours in the day than actual parents. According to Blum (2010), children and adolescents’ beliefs about themselves and their abilities
are shaped by the extent to which they perceive that the adults in their lives care about them and are involved in their lives. Children and adolescents who feel supported by important adults in their lives are likely to be more engaged in school and learning. Research by Resnick et al. (1997) found that presence of parents during key times of the day like waking up and coming home from school, helped insulate children from challenging neighborhood and school environments. Also, those parents who show parental connectedness to their kids by being loving, warm and caring, are more likely to have students who can be successful in challenging environments. The impacts of chronic absenteeism not only affect students academically, but they also affect districts financially. The next section will examine the financial impact chronic absenteeism has in school districts.

**Financial Impact of Chronic Absenteeism**

School districts get Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding for students who attend school. The ADA is calculated by dividing the total amount of school days (generally 180) by the total days that students attended school. Using this in mind, a student with perfect attendance will have attended 180 school days of the possible 180. The ADA average for a school district is then multiplied by a specific dollar amount that varies from district to district. The product reflects how much money a school district will have for the school year.

The importance of daily attendance impacts student learning and also impacts the ability for the local educational agencies in California to generate funds for ADA that may be used to improve instruction through the purchase of instructional resources and decrease in class sizes. Research by Harris (2014), found that in 2011-2012 school year, California school districts lost approximately $1.11 billion in education funding due to absences. Similarly, California K-12 school districts lost approximately $1.06 billion in 2012-2013 school year due to absences.
Further, over 40% of the districts lost at least $100,000 in 2013-2014, 20% lost more than half a million dollars, and 59 school districts lost a combined $31,234,716 to absenteeism. School districts in Los Angeles County lost a total of $192,200,000 in 2011-2012 and $151,700,000 in 2012-2013 in school funding due to absences. Daily school attendance plays an important role in academic achievement and funding; the current funding system has gone through some significant changes since California began educating children in 1872. Chronic absenteeism can negatively impact districts financially, but the Local Control Accountability Plan has created a funding system that gives school districts supplemental and concentration funding for historically underperforming subgroups.

The Local Control Accountability Plan

The Local Control Accountability Plans began as a direct requirement from the Local Control Funding Formula, which is California’s school funding formula that has been in effect since 2013-2014 school year. The funding system allocates base funding and supplemental and concentration dollars to school districts (Chang, 2013). Every school district will get a base funding for all students and supplemental/concentration dollars for English learners, Foster Youth and low-income students (Taylor, 2015). The 2013-2014 school year was the first year that each district was required to turn in their 3-year plan, which is updated, monitored and reviewed annually (Chang, 2013). The Local Control Accountability Plans are required to be approved by the school district’s county office of education (Taylor, 2015). As a result, districts are required to use their Local Control Accountability Plans to address chronic absenteeism through interventions systematically.
The California School Dashboard

The California School Dashboard (Dashboard) is a public information system that is designed to give information about schools and TK-12 school districts. This new accountability system is aligned to the Local Control Funding Formula that originated in 2013 and allows the public to get a quick look at state and local indicators that have been adopted by the California State Board of Education. The Dashboard has five state indicators: Suspension Rate, English Learner Progress, English Language Arts, Mathematics and Chronic Absenteeism (see Table 1 below). The Dashboard went live in the spring of 2017 and can be found at the website: https://www.caschooldashboard.org/#/Home. All five state indicators have performance levels that have been agreed upon by the California State Board of Education. Blue is the highest performance level, then green, followed by yellow, then orange, and red is the lowest performance indicator possible.

TABLE 1: The California Dashboard (source: California Department of Education)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Indicators</th>
<th>All Students Performance</th>
<th>Total Student Groups</th>
<th>Student Groups in Red/Orange</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic Absenteeism</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
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<td>Suspension Rate (K-12)</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learner Progress (K-12)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts (3-8)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Green" /></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics (3-8)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Yellow" /></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proactive Interventions to Address Chronic Absenteeism

School Connection

Adelman and Taylor (2008) found that one factor that helps improve attendance is whether the child has a connection to the school. The key to a successful intervention is early identification, building school connections and combined efforts of all staff members to ensure all kids feel part of the school. One way to create a school connection is to establish a mentoring program. The impact of school-based mentoring programs has been used to measure its impact on school connectedness. Multidimensional school-based mentoring programs (King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002; Karcher 2008) have been measured to address school connectedness. Mentoring programs that offer safe environments, support and encouragement are more likely to have participants who can have a better attitude about school, practice fewer risky behaviors, have fewer absences and suspensions (King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan, 2002). Karcher’s (2008) study of 516 elementary through high school students across nine schools found that the all groups benefitted from mentoring, but the groups benefitting most from mentoring were elementary boys and high school girls.

School supports need to be established to ensure that students can have the necessary resources to be successful at school and that all students’ needs may be identified, developed, and addressed. Social support provided by school personnel was found to serve as a powerful impetus for increasing school connectedness, particularly among Latino middle school students from New Jersey (Garcia-Reid, Reid & Peterson, 2005). In this study, 1,600 middle school students from the 30 poorest districts in New Jersey were studied by gathering data using the School Success Profile (SSP) package of measurement instruments. The study found that social support from teachers was a strong predictor of student engagement. The students had more
positive attitudes and behaviors when teachers demonstrated higher school engagement scores. It was found that positive school support networks can mitigate the impact of challenging home environments resulting in positive school outcomes. The students worked harder for those whom they perceive care. Research by Birch & Ladd (1997) sampled 206 kindergarten students to measure the impact of the teacher-child relationship on adjustment to school. The study found that kindergarteners that felt supported by their teachers were more likely to comply with expectations and norms set by the instructor behaved respectfully and had higher academic gains. Further, Connolly and Olson (2012) found one major way to bridge that connection for new students who are transferring from a different school or from home to kindergarten is consistent communication. Schools need to be aware of family barriers that may be prohibiting consistent attendance and provide opportunities for parents to be actively involved.

**Extracurricular Activities**

Adults can help increase school connectedness by supporting extracurricular activities. According to Brown and Evans (2005), student participation in extracurricular activities has long been proposed as a primary way in which to encourage a greater attachment to school. Extracurricular activities are a formalized opportunity for youth to participate in classroom-based prosocial programming and some cases seen as a haven for students (Garcia-Reid, Reid & Peterson, 2005). A considerable amount of research, using both cross-sectional and longitudinal samples, has found important relationships between extracurricular activities and the decreased likelihood of dropping out of school and substance abuse, as well as an increased likelihood of academic achievement and prosocial behavior (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002; Faulkner, Adlaf, Irving, Allison & Dwyer, 2009; Thompson, Iachan, Overpeck, Ross & Gross, 2006; Daly,
Similarly, extracurricular activities provide opportunities for children to establish relationships within the community as a way to create a bridge of support from the home to school and the community. According to Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen and Lenhart (2010), extracurricular activities present opportunities for participation in formalized experiences within school and in the community; within school activities include options such as sports, fine arts, academics, clubs and student government, while out of school activities include options such as boys and girls clubs, youth groups, community services and scouts. Students who are involved in extracurricular activities demonstrate increased student engagement, academic achievement, and pro-social behavior. The opportunity for students to engage with community members who can help guide and mentor them has been beneficial for those students who may come from a challenging or unsupportive home life.

**Educational Experiences**

Another approach to improving attendance is creating a high caliber educational experience that meets and respects the unique learning needs of all students. Chang and Romero (2008) found by providing a high caliber learning experience that addresses the varying learning styles of students; there will be a decrease in student absences. The increase in school attendance will translate into a school going culture that is a routine to students and will play a positive role in later school grades and the workforce. The research by Chang and Romero also identified parents as partners in the education process. Schools should consistently monitor and communicate attendance concerns, while at the same time make sure educational resources are appropriate to meet the needs and interests of all learners.
Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is a systematic framework that promotes positive support that improves school climate, safety, and respect among all members of the school community. Swain-Bradway, Pinkney & Flannery (2015) identified three levels of behavioral support of the SWPBIS framework: (1) primary supports meant for 80-90% of all students on campus, (2) secondary interventions are designed for 10-13% of those students needing more support than is provided by primary supports and may come in the form of small group support, and (3) tertiary interventions are designed for 1-5% of the student population and is generally designed as a one-to-one intervention. SWPBIS relies on building a safe and nurturing environment where students feel safe and part of the school community. The five-to-one strategy requires all staff to provide five positive interactions to one correction. This strategy requires staff members to look at every situation through a positive lens.

Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports have shown to improve attendance. Research by Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young & E. Young (2011), used a quasi-experimental design to measure the effect of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and support on student outcomes at two middle schools; one school implemented SWPBIS, while the other served as a control group. Teachers and students were administered the PBS Supplemental Questionnaire and the Indicators of School Quality to measure school climate. Overall, the data consisted of more than 300 teacher responses and more than 10,000 student responses. The research found a statistically significant reduction in unexcused absences by the middle school that implemented SWPBIS and no change in unexcused absences for the middle school that did not implement SWPBIS. In similar research, Freeman, Simonsen, McCoach, Sugai, Lombardi & Horner (2015) measured the links between attendance and SWPBIS at 397 high schools in 12
different states. Results indicate a statistically significant relationship between attendance and whether a high school implemented SWPBIS with fidelity. The high schools that implemented SWPBIS with fidelity had an increase in attendance results than did high schools that did not implement SWPBIS with fidelity. As SWPBIS is important to building a positive school climate, educating the community on the importance of school attendance is necessary to build a school going culture.

**Educating the Community**

School attendance can also be improved by monitoring and educating the community about the importance of school attendance (Chang & Romero, 2008; Chang, 2014; Harris, 2016). Chang and Romero (2008) found that educating parents about the importance of attendance is needed throughout the school year and not simply once the child has excessive absences. Schools need to consistently inform parents about absences in a way that is most helpful for that community. According to the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services (2015), schools should utilize proactive strategies and refrain from punitive consequences to ensure families are working alongside schools to ensure daily attendance.

**School and Parent Partnerships**

Research by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) identified the importance of family and school partnerships for improving student attendance. The longitudinal study looked at 18 schools, which consisted of 12 elementary and 6 secondary schools. Surveys were used to measure relationships between school attendance practices, and policies designed to involve parents and improve student attendance. The results of the study were that attendance increased at schools and chronic absenteeism rates decreased when three strategies were implemented: (1) involving parents, students, and the community in comprehensive school attendance activities, (2) utilizing
positive reinforcement strategies, rather than punitive, and (3) having a long-term goal of improving attendance over time.

In similar research, Epstein (1995) identified a Parent Involvement Framework as a systematic practice to improve educational outcomes. The Framework is designed to create a stronger community, school, and parent partnership that results in improved educational outcomes for all. The framework goes further to build a bridge from school to home, and to build community resources and supports for students and families. Epstein’s Framework consists of fostering trust and respect through the following six elements and actions:

(1) **Parenting**: School staff helps families support students’ academics, health, and other related services. Examples include parent education and training, home visits during transition school years (elementary to middle, middle to high school, etc.).

(2) **Communicating**: School to home communication is designed to create a home-to-school bridge and partnership. Examples include weekly reports, translators, parent conferences, newsletters, etc.

(3) **Volunteering**: Parents volunteers at school to provide help and support. Examples include parents volunteering in the classrooms, assisting other parents, organizing parent groups for support, and traffic duty.

(4) **Learning at Home**: Provide support to parents and other community members to better assist students at home. Examples include training on grade level content, homework support, family academic support activities, and summer learning packets and training.

(5) **Decision Making**: Developing parent leaders and involving them in school-based decisions. Examples include school reform committees, district and site level
councils for family and community involvement, school and local elections, and PTA/PTO committees.

(6) **Collaboration with Community**: Identifying resources to support the school community. Examples include health, cultural, recreational and social support services.

**Monitoring**

Research by Chang (2016), identified the importance of using a multi-tiered system of support to monitor, address and systematically meet the needs of attendance. Tier 1 strategies are universal for all students in the school who have perfect attendance to those missing up to 9% of the school year. Strategies consist of recognizing good and improved attendance, educating and engaging students and families, setting attendance goals by school and classroom, establishing a positive school climate and identifying barriers to getting to school. Tier 2 strategies are addressing the attendance needs of students missing 10-19% of the school year. Students in Tier 2 are considered chronically absent. Strategies consist of school staff making personalized contact with families, tailoring an action plan and connecting a mentor to family and student. Tier 3 strategies are the most intensive and require coordination with public agencies and potential legal action. Families in tier 3 have students who have missed at least 20% or more of the school year and are considered severely chronically absent.

The study by Rogers & Feller (2016) found that recorded messages about school absences and text messages are not as effective as a standard letter that lists some excused and unexcused absences with a positive phrase about the importance of daily attendance. One problem is that parents tend to underestimate some absences their child has and overestimate some absences other students have. The research by Rogers & Feller (2016) found that a mailed
letter corrected parents’ misbeliefs about the total absences their child had. The goal is to create a school going culture where daily school attendance is the expectation that makes every day vital to the success of all students.

Incentives

Further, Chang (2014) found that monitoring attendance with data and providing incentives helps to develop a habit of attendance. Similarly, Chang & Romero (2012) found that emotional and material incentives help to increase daily attendance. Emotional incentives include an extra recess, acknowledgment at assemblies and being recognized in the school newspaper for perfect attendance or improved attendance. A material incentive would be items that are tangible like pencils, certificates, their name being placed in a weekly drawing and school celebrations like a pizza party. Schools need to create a balance of emotional and material incentives to ensure that all students respond to the incentives.

Purpose of the Current Study

The literature review identifies practices that have been successful in improving attendance in schools. However, little is known about what school districts in Los Angeles County are doing to combat and decrease chronic absenteeism, and very few of the studies cited originated in California, let alone Los Angeles County, specifically. Furthermore, it is unknown how actions and services in the Local Control Accountability Plan have helped decrease chronic absenteeism in school districts within Los Angeles County, and even in California, for that matter. Finally, there is no research on how the new California Dashboard system will put chronic absenteeism at the forefront of district accountability and how districts plan to respond to this new accountability metric.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chronic absenteeism has a negative impact (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012) on academics and feelings of connectedness to the school. In addition, chronically absent students are more likely to be identified as needing special education. Students who are chronically absent are more likely to take part in risky behavior like alcohol and drugs, to be in the criminal justice system and to drop out of school than students who are not chronically absent.

Research Questions

1) What are school districts doing to increase attendance?
2) What are school districts doing to address chronic absenteeism?
3) What have state and federal mandates done to change the way districts are addressing attendance and chronic absenteeism?

Research Design and Rationale

This study took on an exploratory mixed methods research design. According to Creswell (2015), an exploratory mixed methods design collects qualitative data first, and then a survey is create based on an analysis of the qualitative data. The exploratory mixed methods design was the most appropriate to answer my research questions. According to Creswell (2015), defines mixed methods research as:

an approach to research in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (close-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems (p.2).

The research started off using qualitative methods, specifically interviews. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2015), “Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is
constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p.23). For my study, it was important to use interviews to identify attendance practices at successful school districts and use that information to create a clear and focused survey. Quantitative tools, specifically a survey was utilized to identify school districts that have systematic procedures, policies, and initiatives in place to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. Quantitative methods were important for this study to get a broader perspective on how chronic absenteeism is being addressed in school districts in Los Angeles County and to identify other variables impacting chronic absenteeism in other school districts.

My mixed methods research design allowed me to identify school districts that have systems in place to address activities and policies improving attendance. By using a qualitative method of digging deeper in the attendance story and then through quantitative methods of getting a broader response from district level administrators, this study was able to get a first-hand account of what is going on to address attendance and chronic absenteeism. I got a deeper understanding of practices that districts were using as a result of using qualitative methods. I then used quantitative methods to get a broader understanding of what other districts are doing to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. The study identified how district and site leaders address attendance barriers for students and families. The information gathered from the interviews was used to create a survey that went out to 77 district level administrators.

The research began with an analysis of public data from the California Department of Education to identify districts within Los Angeles County that have chronic absentee rates that are lower than state and county rates. Once California Department of Education data was categorized, districts were identified as potential participants for a deeper analysis of attendance systems through interviews. Interviews were conducted with school and district staff members to learn
more about their district attendance policies, procedures and initiatives and LCAPs. Interview information was transcribed and coded. A survey was developed from the information gathered from the literature review and from the qualitative methods. A survey of all Los Angeles County administrators who are in charge of attendance was completed.

**Strategies of Inquiry**

**Site and Population**

Los Angeles County is one of the largest and most densely packed areas in the United States with over 1.5 million students educated by 79 school districts. There are very large districts like Los Angeles Unified School District that educates over 700,000 students and small districts like Los Nietos School District that educates under 2,000 students.

California Department of Education data was analyzed to identify districts that have chronic absentee rates lower than state and county rates. Eight school districts took part in one to one interviews. The eight districts were identified because of their chronic absentee rate that was lower than the Los Angeles County and California rates. The expectation was that these eight districts had targeted strategies and policies in place that resulted in lower chronic absentee rates. Four of the districts were TK-8 districts with less than 9,000 students. The demographics reflect that English Learners make up the following percentages for the four districts interviewed: 8%, 18%, 37%, and 42%. For those same districts, the socioeconomically disadvantaged percentages are as follows: 38%, 71%, 80%, and 91%. Four unified school districts with more than 9,000 students took part in this study. The demographics reflect that English Learners make up the following percentages for the four unified districts interviewed: 10%, 20%, 20%, and 21%. For those same unified districts, the socioeconomically disadvantaged percentages are as follows: 69%, 71%, 73%, and 76%.
A survey was distributed to 77 district level administrators in charge of attendance. District level administrators were identified by a list serve that was given to me by Vince Bravo, Project Director III, from the Los Angeles County Office of Education. There were six districts that were not surveyed due to this study not being able to identify the correct administrator in charge of attendance. The survey was sent to districts in Los Angeles County to identify systems in place to address and decrease chronic absenteeism through district attendance policies, procedures, initiatives, state and federal mandates.

**Data Collection Methods**

**California Department of Education Analysis**

The research began by analyzing chronic absentee rates for all Los Angeles County school districts using data from the California Department of Education. The data was categorized and put into categories based upon chronic absentee rates. All 79 school districts were placed into one of the twelve categories based strictly on chronic absentee rates from the data acquired from the California Department of Education. The following categories of chronic absentee rates were created: 0-0.99% chronic absentee rate, 1.0-1.99% chronic absentee rate, 2.0-2.99% chronic absentee rate, 3.0-3.99% chronic absentee rate, 4.0-4.99% chronic absentee rate, 5.0-5.99% chronic absentee rate, 6.0-6.99% chronic absentee rate, 7.0-7.99% chronic absentee rate, 8.0-8.99% chronic absentee rate, 9.0-9.99% chronic absentee rate, 10.0-14.99% chronic absentee rate and above 15%.

All 79 school districts’ data were categorized in a binder along with school district name, chronic absentee rate, and sub-group data. Based upon the district’s chronic absentee rate, school districts were manually identified when they had chronic absentee rates that were lower than state and county chronic absentee rates. A total of ten districts were identified as eligible for
the interview/qualitative portion research based on that criteria: five were elementary school districts and five were unified school districts, though only eight were used. Due to time constraints, only eight districts were used for the qualitative portion of this research.

School districts were further vetted by the size of the district. Elementary school districts that participated in this study had a chronic absentee rate below 5% and less than 9,000 total students in the district. Unified school districts had a chronic absentee rate lower than the state chronic absentee rate of 10.8% and had more than 9,000 students in the district. From the ten eligible school districts, four elementary and four unified school districts were identified to take part in deeper research. I made contact with the district level attendance administrator by phone, shared the purpose of the study and how they were selected. The district level administrator was then asked whether they would be interested in being interviewed for this study. All district level administrators contacted agreed to take part in the one to one interview.

Document Reviews

Once all eight school district attendance administrators agreed to be interviewed, I then did a document analysis. The first document I look at for each district was the LCAP. I reviewed each LCAP from the 2016-2017 school year and pulled out any information that had to do with attendance and chronic absenteeism. All documents were securely stored in a binder that was specific for each of the eight school districts and was securely placed in my locked file cabinet at home.

Interviews

Next, all eight school district administrators were contacted via email with various dates and times for one to one interviews. I used a semi-structure interview format with all district participants (see protocol in Appendix section). District level administrator interviews ranged
from forty-five minutes to ninety minutes. All meetings with district level administrators took place in their office with the exception of one that took place at a local Starbucks because the district office was closed due to winter break. All interviews were recorded with my iPhone and an iPad. At the end of the district level administrator interviews, I shared with them their chronic absentee data from the California Department of Education. All district level administrators gave me contact information to the site principals that I identified as having the lowest chronic absentee rate in the district and contact was made. A total of nine district level administrators were interviewed (one district had two administrators interviewed at the same time).

Site level principals were contacted and interviewed. I used a semi-structure interview format with all principals. Site principal interviews ranged from twenty to eighty minutes. All meetings with site principals took place in their office. All interviews were recorded with my iPhone and an iPad. Unfortunately, there were two districts that I was unable to secure principals to interview. A total of eight site administrators were interviewed.

**Survey**

The data from the interviews with all 17 administrators was transcribed and coded. I created a 22 question survey that was sent out to 73 Los Angeles County and four Orange County administrators in charge of attendance for their local educational agency to identify districts that report success in reducing chronic absenteeism. Contact information from Los Angeles County district level administrators was obtained from Vince Bravo who oversees the Student Support Services Department at the Los Angeles County Office of Education. The survey was emailed to all administrators via Google Forms for a three week period. There were three emails that went out. The first email was sent to all 77 administrators inviting them to take part in the attached survey. The following two emails were sent only to those administrators who
had not already completed the survey. The total amount of completed surveys was 47 out of 77 surveys for 61%. All participants who completed the survey received a thank you card and a $10 gift card, except one who declined the gift card, but was sent a thank you card.

**Data Analysis Methods**

All of my interviews were recorded using two different devices. I used my iPhone’s microphone feature to record the one to one interviews. I also used an iPad’s Voice Recorder feature to have a second device to ensure all interviews were recorded simultaneously. I then used the iPad to transcribe all interviews. I began transcribing interviews once I got home from my location. By transcribing the interviews, it allowed me to get a deeper understanding and perspective of the interviewee and pick-up on conversations that may have not have been thought about at the time. It also allowed me to hear the themes that the interviewees expressed and the attendance philosophy that came out of their interview.

Once document reviews were completed, notes reviewed, and transcriptions done, I put information into three major themes based upon my three research questions. The first theme was identifying district practices that increase attendance. The second theme looked at how districts are addressing the needs of students who are chronically absentees. The last theme looked at how the Local Control Accountability Plan and federal mandates helped improve attendance rates and address chronic absenteeism.

The surveys were done using Google forms. Google forms is an efficient and effective way of getting the online survey to 77 administrators. All Los Angeles County administrators in charge of attendance were emailed the survey. I worked with Vicente Bravo, Project Director III of the Los Angeles County Office of Education to acquire contact names and contact information of attendance administrators. Mr. Bravo holds informational meetings with all attendance
administrators in Los Angeles County. The survey asked participants about activities and practices in their district that are contributing to increase attendance, decreased chronic absenteeism and the impact of state (LCAP) and federal mandates (ESSA). The full survey is located in the Appendix. There was a three-week window, and I checked whether surveys were completed multiple times a day. Once I stopped getting responses from potential participants, I sent out an additional email and three days later, when I once again stopped getting surveys submitted, I sent out an additional email. Sending out additional emails once I stopped getting completed emails, really helped increase the amount of surveys completed. There was usually a bump of about a dozen respondents each time I sent out an additional email. Survey results were printed out and analyzed. The results of the survey are stored in a locked closet at my house.

**Ethical Issues**

The study provided confidentiality to the administrators who took part in this study and their school district. Pseudonyms in the fashion of 11-digit codes were used for the school districts and the administrators. Further, participants have little to no connection to me and most were meeting me for the first time. Participants did not have to worry about me telling their friends, or co-workers, as all information is confidential. Each participant was given an eleven-digit code to ensure that they are not identified and to ensure confidentiality for the participants.

All narrative information was saved on my computer and a Google cloud. The names of the school districts are saved as pseudonyms to protect all participants. All notes and documents are stored safely on a password-protected computer. Pseudonyms were used for the districts and schools to ensure all participants are protected. All data was locked in a secure location many miles away from participants and once transcribed, analyzed, and the study completed,
information was destroyed. Interview recordings were stored on a password protected iPad and a password protected iPhone that are both securely stored. Recordings have since been destroyed. 

**Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Triangulation was used to measure district and school activities to ensure trustworthiness and validity in the study. The district level administrator interview served as the baseline expectation for the school district. I used the information from the district level interviews to site principals. The use of the surveys, interviews (district and site), and document reviews like the LCAP and board policies were used to triangulate the results and compared to research from Chapter 2.

**Summary**

The current research used a mixed methods research design to identify systems that actively increase attendance and improve chronic absenteeism. The goals of the study were to identify successful practices and systems in Los Angeles County Districts that can be generalized to similar school districts with similar needs. Once the systems and interventions were synthesized, local school district leaders can determine whether identified interventions and actions can assist their district with chronic absenteeism at their school district. The next chapter will review what systems were identified at Los Angeles County school districts that have been used to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. It will also look at what state and federal mandates have done to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study investigated what school districts are doing to increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism in Southern California. The investigation went further to identify how state and federal mandates are supporting districts in increasing attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism, either financially, politically, or both.

Research Questions

1) What are school districts doing to increase attendance?

2) What are school districts doing to address chronic absenteeism?

3) What have state and federal mandates done to change the way districts are addressing attendance and chronic absenteeism?

Overview of the research

This research looked at many aspects of school attendance. There was an analysis of California Department of Education data identifying chronic absentee subgroup data in relationship to California’s overall chronic absentee rate. Next, district size and socioeconomic status was connected to chronic absentee rate to see if a relationship exists. Then, strategies that have been reported to increase attendance were discussed and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative data. Further, barriers were identified and measured using qualitative and quantitative data.

Chronic Absentee Rates in Districts

This chapter begins with an overview of chronic absentee rates for school districts in Southern California. The data utilized was obtained from the California Department of Education. Table 2 reflects sub-group data for the state of California. I identified all subgroups and the state’s chronic absentee rate of 10.8%. Further, I identified whether the difference
between the subgroup was higher than the state rate using a “+” more than the state rate or whether the difference was lower using a “-” to symbolize below the state rate. Similar to research by Harris (2016), African American and American Indian or Alaska Native students are almost two times as likely to be identified chronically absent than students overall.

Table 2: Subgroup Data with Chronic Absentee Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>State Chronic Absenteeism Rate</th>
<th>Chronic Absenteeism Rate for Ethnicity</th>
<th>Difference from State Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>+8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>+10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>-7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>-5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>+1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>+4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the California Department of Education data, the next chart reflects the chronic absentee rate by subgroup and ethnicity (Table 3) that had a large difference from the state chronic absentee rate for the specific population. The data reflects the subgroups and ethnicity that had the biggest difference between the state rates. Consistently, African American and American Indian/Alaska Native students had the highest chronic absentee rate when compared with the state rate. Consistent with research by Harris (2016), the two ethnicities that are more likely to be chronically absent are African American and American Indian or Alaska Native students. Similar to research findings by Chang (2014) and Chang and Romero (2008),
kindergarten students are more likely to be chronically absent. Another finding consistent with findings from Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) was students with disabilities more likely to be chronically absent. Lastly, consistent with the research by Sheldon and Epstein (2004), students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are more likely to be chronically absent.

Table 3: Significant Absences by Subgroup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup</th>
<th>Subgroup Absenteeism Rate</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Chronic Absenteeism Rate</th>
<th>Difference from Subgroup Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>+11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>+11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>+7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>+9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Youth</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>+4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Youth</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>+1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>+8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>+11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>+13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>+17.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 1 and 2 show chronic absentee rates from districts in Los Angeles County. Two variables were compared to see whether a relationship exists. The goal was to examine the
relationship between the chronic absenteeism rate and the number of students in district (Figure 1) or the proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged students (Figure 2).

**Is there a relationship between district chronic absentee rates and the number of students in the school district?** Figure 1 shows a scatterplot for the number of students in a school district and the district’s chronic absentee rate using California Department of Education data. Although variables are positively related, the correlation (r=0.34) is fairly weak, suggesting that differences in district chronic absentee rates cannot be fully explained by the size of the district alone.

Figure 1: Chronic Absentee Rates and District Enrollment

![Graph showing the relationship between students enrolled in the district and chronic absentee rates. The equation of the linear regression line is given as y = 0.0002x + 6.8362 with R² = 0.1174.]

**Is there a relationship between district chronic absentee rates and the socio-economic status of students?** Figure 2 shows a scatterplot for the percentage of students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged in a school district and the district’s chronic absentee rate using California Department of Education data. Although the variables are positively related, the
correlation ($r=0.37$) is fairly weak suggesting that differences in district chronic absentee rates cannot be fully explained by looking at the percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged students alone. Thus, if a district has a high socioeconomically disadvantaged population, it is not reasonable to expect a high chronic absentee rates. Conversely, if a district has a low socioeconomic disadvantaged population, it is equally not reasonable to expect a low chronic absentee rate. Chronic absenteeism is a variable that needs to be looked at in its entirety and not tagged to one variable like socioeconomic disadvantaged rates.

Figure 2: Chronic Absentee Rates and Socioeconomically Disadvantaged

![Graph showing the relationship between chronic absentee rates and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.]

$y = 2.2675x + 38.658$

$R^2 = 0.1367$

**Interviews**

There were a total of 17 people interviewed covering eight different school districts. Based upon the California Department of Education information, this research identified the four elementary and four unified school districts to conduct in-depth interviews had two characteristics in common: (1) They all had a chronic absentee rate lower than state average and;
(2) They all had a similar amount of students enrolled in the district. Elementary school districts that participated in this study had a chronic absentee rate below 5% and less than 9,000 total students in the district. Unified school districts had a chronic absentee rate lower than the state average and had more than 9,000 students in the district. A total of nine district level administrators were interviewed representing eight school districts. One of the school districts interviewed had two district level attendance administrators present. The study was able to interview 8 school principals. Principals were selected based upon chronic absentee rates. The two schools in each of the four districts were identified as having the lowest chronic absentee rate in their district and they were asked to take part in further research. Based upon the California Department of Education data, the chronic absentee rates of the schools interviewed ranged from 0% to 5.1%.

**Findings**

Table 4 is a breakdown of the administrators who were interviewed. The interviews began on December 20, 2017 and completed on February 1, 2018.

**Table 4: Interviewees by Job Title**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director, Child Welfare and Attendance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator, Child Welfare and Attendance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Principal</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher on Special Assignment at School Site</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director, Student Support Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent, Educational Services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director, Special Education and Student Support Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor, Child Welfare and Attendance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17
Surveys

There were a total of 47 respondents out of a total of 77 surveys sent out. The response rate for the survey was 61%. The respondents represented 47 different school districts in Southern California. All participants were identified due to their primary responsibility of being in charge of district level attendance. A majority of the districts were spread out in Los Angeles County (43) and the other four were from Orange County. From the 47 districts surveyed, there was a good mix of small and big districts. All eight districts that participated in one to one interviews also completed a survey. Each participant, from the survey and one to one interviews, received a $10 gift card and a thank you note from the researcher thanking them for participating. One participant only received a thank you card as he declined the gift card.

Findings

Table 5 below is a breakdown of the administrators who responded. The survey began on February 23, 2018 and was completed on March 14, 2018.

Table 5: Survey Respondents by Job Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coordinators:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare and Attendance,</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attendance Review Board,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Student Services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directors:</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare and Attendance,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity and Access,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services and Special</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, and Educational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Executive Directors</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assistant Superintendents:</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services and Educational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Superintendent</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 reflects the chronic absentee rates for California, Los Angeles County, the 47 respondents, and the eight districts that took part in one to one interviews. The purpose of Table 6 is to see how closely aligned the interview and survey samples are with state and county averages. It appears that the survey and interview groups had a higher SED (socioeconomically disadvantaged) rate than state and county averages. The amount of districts is listed under each header. The state of California has 1,181 districts, Los Angeles County has 80 districts, my survey had 47 responses, and I interviewed eight districts. By design, the chronic absentee rate of the eight districts interviewed is the lowest of the four categories because I interviewed those districts that had some of the lowest chronic absentee rates in Los Angeles County.

Table 6: Chronic Absentee Comparison Rates and Subgroups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>California (1,181)</th>
<th>LA County (80)</th>
<th>Surveys (47)</th>
<th>Interviews (8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Absentee Rate</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Disadvantaged</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learner</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What are school districts doing to increase attendance?**

There have been many strategies, supports, policies and practices designed to increase student attendance. This research is designed to identify the most successful ways school districts are increasing attendance through the qualitative and quantitative research methods. The
actions described in this section are those activities that have been identified as being successful in increasing school attendance by administrators. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of actions and activities, but rather a framework of successful practices that have been implemented in school districts. One common element in all eight districts studied of the successful districts studied was a multi-tiered system of support to improve attendance, which addressed the school-wide attendance activities available to all students and more targeted activities for those few students who needed extra support and resources. The varying activities reflects the needs and priorities that may be specific to a community based on closely monitoring of student and community information.

**Policies**

Based upon survey results from 47 school districts, Figure 3 shows the frequency of six specific strategies that were identified from the one to one interviews with eight different school district representatives that were discussed the most. Also, these six strategies were also discussed in the literature review chapter of this dissertation. The survey highlights the use of the six policies that were reported to be successful in the eight successful school districts that took part in the one to one interviews. The x-axis represents the policies that districts are using to increase attendance and y-axis represents the percentage of the 47 school districts surveyed using specified policies.
Awards and Incentives

There is plenty of research on how rewards and incentives have been used to increase attendance. Survey data reflects 89.4% (42 out of 47) of school administrators use awards and incentives to help improve attendance. Similarly, interviewees from the more successful districts all identified using incentives and awards to help improve attendance. Mr. Rogers discussed the high value that district places in rewarding students for attending and using various activities to reward and recognize attendance:

Once we offered all these incentives and whatever we could, and we offered a lot of incentives, bingo attendance, perfect class attendance, perfect attendance trophy, ice cream, popcorn shows, all that good stuff to get kids to come to school, recognition but there was definitely a lot of incentives to go along with the outreach. We were able to link the families to and it’s really about getting to know the families.
According to Mr. Ritchie, although incentives and awards are used, the driver to getting kids to school is an expectation of the community and school that all kids must attend school every day, which then becomes the incentive for the parent and the reward for the student:

There are incentives for students. Ice cream parties, attendance bracelets, attendance tags so they can see growth. I’ve seen classroom when they have 100% there’s a flag or a poster on the window so it’s building pride. I’ve seen where they do trophies and it’s passed from one class to another. The best incentive for a parent is knowing what their students gain by being there and what they miss by not being there.

For those districts identified in my study as districts with successful attendance practices, it is evident that they all use incentives and rewards, but increasing attendance is more than that. As a result of rewards, families are more likely to get connected to the school as evidenced by Mr. Rogers’ comments. Further, even though Mr. Ritchie uses incentives, he believes that the bigger incentive is parents recognizing the amount of work that is missed when they are not there and the knowledge they gain when they are. The incentives appear to be the starting point to get the attention of the children by being tangible. The hope is that reward helps shape and mold a habit of consistent school attendance for the student, helps make school feel more rewarding and (at times) helps create the connection (to school) for the parent.

**Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

The literature of Chapter 2 consistently describes how students are more likely to attend schools that have a positive school climate. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is a systematic framework that promotes positive support that improves school climate, safety, and respect among all members of the school community. For the current research, the survey of 47 school districts indicated that 36 (76.6%) of the school districts have used positive behavioral
interventions and supports as a policy in their school district (see Figure 3). Similarly, during one to one interviews, a positive school climate was identified as a means to increase attendance by all eight out of eight district level administrators (100%). According to Mrs. Rose, the byproduct of creating a positive culture is increased attendance. She states, “So, about 10 years ago, we began the trajectory on PBIS, we began incentivizing, whether it was behavior, conduct, discipline, achievement, and then attendance came into that.”

Similarly, Mrs. Tiffany identified the how important a positive school climate and support system is to increase the likelihood that the students will want to be at school and will also increase safety of all:

We thought, what can we provide here, that’s going to keep kids here, that will keep kids feeling safe and so we try to build a culture of, a positive culture. So we are not officially a PBIS school, but all of our teachers have a positive intervention plan in their classroom versus constantly having that harsh discipline versus identifying kids being good like hey you are doing this (good), you are doing that (good). That aligns with our LCAP goals. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports have been identified in research and this study as a systematic way to enhance the understanding of daily school interactions. As a result, PBIS has been a variable to help improve connectedness and school attendance as identified by Mrs. Tiffany and Mrs. Rose.

**Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement and engagement has been cited in research to increase student attendance. The research has found that students who have parents who are involved in school have an increased school connectedness. Based upon my survey of 47 school districts, 76.6% of districts use parent involvement as a means to increase student attendance (see Figure 3). Parent
involvement was discussed in all districts that were interviewed and all interviewees (17 out of 17) felt that parent involvement was an important component to increasing attendance and increasing school connectedness. Mrs. Ross identified how opening up a school to allow parents to volunteer helps to improve many other school variables. This creates a positive school going culture appears to help drive not only the academics and parents wanting to part of the school community, but also the expectation that all kids are at school all the time:

We have a very, very high parent involvement rate. Parents have to fill out an application to come volunteer at this school. We probably have 125 parents out of 500 kids who volunteer on a regular basis and come and help out. We have parents here all the time. All the time. Tons of parents. And it is not just the teachers pushing it, it is not just me pushing it, it is the culture of the school and the parents. This is an open enrollment district, and so the parents choose the school. The reason they choose this school is because they know it is going to be very, very rigorous academically and they know what they are going to have to put forth to make sure their child is successful here and that is coming to school every day. No, I am sorry I don’t have any more tricks, but I want you to know that it is mostly it is a culture of the school and the expectations of the school. So, it is kind of when you get a high achieving school that the parents and kids are there for a reason and they want to make sure their child gets a good education and they know part of that is making sure their children are there every day. Just like a value, they value their child’s education.

Further, school districts have identified activities designed to bring parents on campus for fun and engaging activities that are meant to make parents active participants. The time invested in parent engagement and involvement helps increase the connection for all families to see school
as a place that is welcoming and exciting. According to Mr. Green, one driver to getting students to school is to make it a place everyone wants to be:

This year we started a Welcome Back Pancake breakfast and we are also doing a Welcome Back pancake breakfast from winter break. It’s free for families, they get pancakes, we also do a Sweetheart Dance, we did a Dad’s Day, and we are going to do a Papas for Papas (baked potatoes). We are going to do another STEM activity (pasta car races), so the more activities we do like that, the stronger connection they have with the school and the barriers start to come down and they’re like, I want you to come to that school, look at all the fun things they do, school is great!

Parent involvement can come in various activities, practices, and supports. As districts, everything cannot be done at the same time due to financial, emotional, and physical resources. However, successful districts that were interviewed all identified the importance of bringing in the parents to better connect them and their children to school. Parent involvement approaches are varied, but the successful districts identified what practices and activities are most successful to bring about the most positive outcome for their specific community.

Alternate Means of Suspension

Another variable to increase school attendance is the use of alternate means of suspension. Students who are suspended from school are less likely to feel connected and are more likely to be absent. According to Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen, & Lenhart (2010), found stringent discipline policies are especially problematic for minority groups specifically African American, Hispanic, and Native American students who are subject to disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion when compared to other racial and ethnic groups. For the current research, survey data of school district attendance administrators found 74.5% of districts have
used alternates to suspension to increase in school attendance. Alternates to suspension is used to find ways to address behavioral infractions that support the behavior of the student, rather than simply providing punishment. All districts in the research discussed the importance of addressing behaviors with systematic in house practices meant to decrease the likelihood of the infraction occurring again. According to Mrs. Selena, the importance of supporting student needs by providing training to staff, rather than expecting staff to know how to react to students. Relationships are built by understanding students, rather than being judgmental and dismissive to students who may be suffering traumatic events that staff members may be unaware of:

Then we have people come in and talk about trauma informed practices and behavioral issues the signs, what you can expect and then what you should do to help. I think our staff was lacking the appropriate education about how to work with our students and when they are on campus and had these traumatic episodes what they do and when they are not coming to school how to reach them and when they do come back to school how to approach them and how to teach them without being judgmental and being open hearted and making these relationships. I notice for us, it’s never forcing things on teachers everyone knows teachers have contracts that are very specific and they aren’t going to do anything else but what I’m contractually obligated to do but what we saw in the four schools was that teachers wanted to do more and they built attendance teams and they built mentoring.

One administrator briefly discussed the value that is placed on ensuring that students are kept in school so that their needs are met and not simply sent home without helping addressing the underlying need. The goal appears to address their needs through school based interventions in support now, so that the students are not set up for future failure. According to Mrs. Rose, the
importance of supporting student needs and keeping them in school should supersede any suspension of a student:

We are here to keep kids in school. We are here to provide a service. And if they still don’t get it, I get on my soap box and then it becomes an economic issue for the state. Do we want to spend 9 or 10 thousand dollars to educate a kid or do we want to spend $60,000 to provide a bed in prison for them?

Research is clear that students who feel connected to school are more likely to attend school. The act of excluding students from school, suspension, is likely to disconnect students from school. The survey data and one to one interview data reflects the importance for addressing the student needs in school and avoiding exclusion. The goal appears to be finding resources for the student to ensure a negative behavior is addressed, supported, and as a result, less likely to repeat.

**Before and After School Care**

The availability of having daily before and after school care has consistently been shown in research to increase attendance. Before and after school care allows parents to drop their children off and go to work. Through the After School Education and Safety Program (ASES) program, all the districts I met with are able to offer after school care free of charge to the parents. Of those school districts responding to the survey, 59.6% (28 out of 47) used before and after school childcare and tutoring as a means to increase attendance. For the one to one interviews, all interviewees (17 out of 17) used a form of after school or before school care to help families get their children to school and also to provide a place for the children to be (after school) while the parents are at work. According to Mrs. Houston, the importance of after school and before school care makes the difference for the parents to be free to go to work or not:
I have 170 kids here after school only 80 of those are free through the ACES Program. The rest are all paid. So they pay for the after school and they're here until six. There are easily 50 kids here and parents and I have parents who say to me, you need to open till seven, and I say, we can't open till 7 PM. I have parents that drop off in the morning, at seven in the morning. They are here. It is a dollar to come in at seven in the morning. I have an afterschool person, well she is a before school person, and she comes in and collects the money. I have got easily 10, 15, or 20 kids here. So I think it's the working population that's one of the issues, but I also think that school wise, I think they, they, they know that if they don't come, but there is, there are consequences, there are things that they miss here.

Other reasons for after school support is to provide targeted interventions and activities for students, and also support and activities to support parents. According to Mrs. Tiffany, both parents and students benefit greatly from before and after school activities:

After school, we enrich it with an after school mariachi program on Tues/Friday. We also have a REACH program that also provides childcare but they enrich them with other things like dance, visual arts, homework help but these are for parents who can’t pick up their kids. Parents pick them up at 6 pm. So it’s like an enrichment but also a childcare in need. We also have after school tutoring, our targeted intervention program for kids who need extra help. We also have auditions today for our first theater production. We are going to see if we can get 30 kids to be a part of the production so that’s also after school. We will start an after school Folklorico program. So after school we have mariachi, theater production, REACH, tutoring, and Folklorico, so those are the things we are trying to work on. For parents we have PTA School Smarts so that’s
going to be after school. It’s going to be a series of 7 sessions with workshops on how to empower them as parents. We also do some arts lessons. They can bring their kids if they want. It’s more for parents.

The After School Education and Safety Program (ASES) was common in all districts that were interviewed. The ASES program is state funded and is designed to give school districts the funds to implement safe and educationally enriching alternatives for children and youth during non-school hours. Further, ASES provides an avenue for students to not only have access to more educational support in a safe and nurturing setting, but also allows parents the opportunity to have their child’s after school care needs met at no cost to them. According to Mrs. Rose, the various activities that ASES supports is up to 10, which increases the opportunity for a child to find an activity that is of interest to them:

ACES after school. She does up to 10 different kinds of activities if your child is there. Sports, cooking, theater, singing, they have their own winter program. The middle school after school program organizes competitions. There will be different sports during the year like basketball that will compete with the other after school programs and same thing, they have soccer, basketball and volleyball, kickball and they have a cheerleading squad that goes over there. So, the after program is an entity of itself.

Before and after school activities were found to help increase attendance by both the survey and one on one interviews. Similar to extra-curricular activities, before and after school care allow students to stay at school longer, which gives them more of an opportunity to feel connected to school and staff. The one difference between extra-curricular activities and after school care is
that the ASES grant covers all the after school activities costs, where extra-curricular activities may have a financial component to it.

**Extra-Curricular Activities**

For this research, an extra-curricular is not a required activity for the school district. Extra-curricular activities go beyond the general subjects (like math, English language arts, science, PE, etc.) that are required by school districts to have. Unlike the After School Education and Safety Program (ASES) program, there is generally a cost to extra-curricular activities. The survey of 47 school district attendance administrators found that 44.7% (21 out of 47) of respondents have used extra-curricular activities to increase attendance (see Figure 3). Extra-curricular activities were discussed throughout all one to one interviews.

Although 44.7% of survey responders indicated their district uses extra-curricular activities to increase attendance, there was a large difference with successful districts in this study almost doubling the response at 88%. Thus, the principals and district administrators interviewed responded that extra-curricular activities helped improve attendance in their district and school sites at a higher rate than survey responders. Interviewees shared the goal of using extra-curricular activities to address the needs of all children and at the same time, give them a reason for them to want to be at school and feel connected to the school community. According to Mr. Rodgers, it is important to identify students who have experienced trauma to help them connect, support any need, and ultimately help ensure that they are attending school:

> We do have after school programs here. One is called ASPIRE and that’s at all of our sites and they do a number of activities. We started “Beat the Odds” and it is a trauma informed arts programs for kids who have gone through trauma and teaches kids how to express their feeling rather than acting on them.
and they use drums, it’s an art therapy, drama type program.

Some of the extra-curricular activities that were identified as increasing attendance were Science Olympiad, talent shows, Christian Club, Young Rembrandts, Lego class, intramural after school sports, Friday Night Live, mentor leadership programs, after school field trips, robotics, dance, wrestling, arts programs, mariachi programs, theater, Folklorico, music, and knitting. According to Mrs. Lauper, the big piece is about connecting the children to school by creating an interest that is engaging to them:

Each school gets a pocket of money to provide enrichment opportunities, not necessarily focusing on the enrichment piece but on the connectedness piece. One of our goals is to make sure our students feel connected. Some of the ways is before, after and some lunch activities that different types of kids can feel connected to. Not all kids are interested in sports so it’s a variety of ways to get kids connected. In the spring the elementary kids are doing STEM a couple days of week. The middle school also has it. Some schools have ping-pong, chess, book clubs, science clubs, additional staff for intramural sports (middle schools) so it’s different avenues to reach different types of students. It’s finding a reason other than what they are learning in class to come to school. It’s looking at school as their second home.

Overall, the frequency of extra-curricular activities was identified at a higher rate (88%) by the district level administrators than the survey rate of 44.7%. The districts that have successfully addressed attendance needs have identified extra-curricular activities as a variable that helps improve attendance. The various activities that the interviewees described, reminds us all that activities must be systematic and strategic to meet the various needs and interests of the community. Students who see school as a place they love to be at, because of academics or in
this case, extra-curricular activities, will be more likely to attend school and improve academically.

**Attendance Campaigns**

In addition to the six practices described in literature and in Chart 3, attendance campaigns have been another explicit way that is connected to improved attendance by putting daily school attendance in the forefront of stakeholder thinking. An attendance campaign is a systematic way that school districts purposely address attendance. Examples of attendance campaigns are using an outside vendor or having a school or district-wide campaign with an explicit goal of increasing attendance. Survey results found that 66% (31 out of 47) of the districts surveyed have used an attendance campaign to increase attendance. Similarly, five out of the eight school districts (62.5%) interviewed are using or have used a campaign in the past to increase attendance. According to Mrs. Selena, daily attendance is a community issue that must extend beyond the month of September and become an expectation for the entire community:

So I thought about what if we bring attendance back as a community approach. When you look at attendance it’s not squarely on the shoulders of schools, districts, parents, it is a community issue. I start meeting with a good friend of mine from the city who works over at development services and I had this great idea of this campaign, why are we just focused on September? September is the month that our kids are going to come to school. It’s our first month and you’re going to have your highest attendance in that month. Why are we not focusing on October, November and through the holidays and through June? So I wanted a campaign that focused on attendance year round and focused on certain things to help our students.
Mrs. Bazil found school attendance campaigns should have a school long objective that focuses on providing incentives to students and also identifying students who have not registered to go to school or were not attending. The plan is a year-long plan that needs to be constantly assessed and adjusted to meet the changing needs of the community:

So, the idea we came up with was that instead of just a month long campaign focusing on attendance, we would do it all year, but really hit in hard in September so that all of the schools would be aware of what is going on. As well as rewarding kids for being on time and going out to the community for kids that we were missing or had not come to school to register yet.

September is attendance month for all districts in the state of California. What this research tells us is that to make a systematic improvement in attendance, attendance should be a focus for the entire school year. Mrs. Bazil and Mrs. Selena have made attendance a priority in their district every month and every day. As a result, using an explicit and well discussed campaign all year long will bring about systemic change in a school system and district.

Educating Parents

Educating parents about the importance of daily school attendance was a variable that was consistently reflected in survey data and also in one to one interviews. Respondents were asked to identify how useful educating parents was as a means to increase attendance. Participants had to pick from the following four choices: extremely useful, moderately useful, slightly useful, or not useful. According to survey data, 85% (40 out of 47) respondents agreed that educating parents about the importance of attendance was either extremely or moderately useful way of increasing attendance (see Figure 4).
All eight district level administrators discussed the importance of educating parents of the consequences associated with students not attending school. Further, district administrators identified the importance of not only involving parents and students as way of increasing attendance, but also involving the community. Mrs. Swift identified the importance of involving all stakeholders in order to provide solutions to increase attendance:

Our goal was to increase attendance by certain percentage by doing outreach to the community, meeting and seeking out local businesses, letting them know we're trying to attempt to do and why we’re attempting to get kids to come to school. I would be the doing home visits, along with the community liaison who was there. And just go out and talk to some of the families because we understood that early point that the reason that excessive absenteeism is a trigger and tells you that something is not right, that something is not working in the family. So we knew that. So we didn't go out in any threatening manner, we went out there is a way to find out what is behind the absenteeism. So we offered a number resources to those families, initially.
Further, Mrs. Lauper focused the parent discussion on what is missed by a student when they are absent and the challenges that result of the missed instructional time:

It’s talking to parents and being proactive and letting them know how important it is to be in school, not to be late and giving them specific examples as to what the students are missing if they are out and if they are late. What happens if they miss a half hour of instruction, what happens in class when they miss an entire day, so we try to give them concrete examples so parents understand how difficult it is for them to catch up every time they are not in school.

Educating parents about the importance of missing school appears to play a positive impact on daily school attendance. For this research, it appears that district administrators who participated in the survey (85%) and one to one interview district administrators (100%) believe there is high value in educating parents about the importance of daily school attendance.

**Monitoring Attendance**

Monitoring attendance is a strategy that has consistently been found to increase attendance in existing literature. Survey data reflects 87% (41 out of 47) of administrators identified monitoring student absences by school staff has been an extremely or moderately useful activity to increase attendance. All 17 participants interviewed identified the use of monitoring student attendance by staff as a means to increase attendance. There were various ways attendance was monitored as described by district administrators and site principals in one to one interviews. According to Mrs. Joel, the school site is monitoring and distributing attendance letters based upon student absences regularly:

At the school sites there's a principal, an attendance clerk, and an office manager and so the (attendance) letters are actually generated automatically through Aries (student
information system) and so we have Aries set up about two years ago. We created a kind of a template for each of the sites and it has their school name on it, but that the base of the letter is the same and I am so it's automatically generated when a student hits three, five, and seven absences. The letter gets automatically generated and then it sits so that the principal, or the office manager, will print them out and give them to the principal and then between the principal and the attendance clerk, they are mailed out.

A neighboring district has attendance clerks, specifically, monitoring student attendance, and then sharing findings with the school principal. They also find it necessary to keep and monitor attendance records for up to three years. According to Mrs. Lauper, documentation is utilized to monitor and address the needs of students:

Our two middle schools have attendance clerks who monitor it (student attendance) very carefully. For the elementary level, we hired an attendance clerk at the district office to monitor the elementary. We are very diligent at sending letter when they get 3 absences and sending emails so that parents can’t say, “How come I didn’t know my kid had so many absences?” We keep a great deal of documentation. So when the attendance clerks meet with the district attorney (and the parent), we have all the backup documentation we need in order to meet with them. We have two or three years-worth of attendance so that they can see the pattern as well.

Mrs. Rose uses teachers on special assignment (TOSAs) to monitor, support, and improve student attendance. The TOSAs are able to create positive connections with students and families to help foster a bridge between school and home, especially for those students who have historically had a hard time attending school consistently:
Four years ago, we instituted the student support TOSAs. And so those are teachers on special assignment. And there purpose was two-fold. Number one, assist with monitoring attendance at our elementary schools. And so there job is to number assist with monitoring of attendance and building that staff development for parent education, making positive connections, being on the front end on that intervention piece.

Districts and schools sites have also created yearly attendance goals as a driver to increase attendance. Attendance goals are consistently seen as a tool to guide and reflect on improving attendance. This study found seven out of eight school districts (87.5%) had a district-wide attendance goal. The goals are similar, but goals are also modified to meet the needs of the district and the progress of each school site. According to Mrs. Bazil, “Our attendance goal right now is to go up ½ percent because we are at 97% right now. We were really high, so it makes it really difficult to go higher. When I started this job, we were at 94 or 95%, so we are really high district-wide, but I think always setting a goal to increase ½ a percent is doable.” Similarly, Mrs. Lauper said, “We’ve been averaging about 97% and above in our ADA percentage. The district goal is 98%.” Lastly, according to Mrs. Rose, “My attendance goal is 98%. This is just personally. The actual district goal is 96%.”

The data reflects the positive impact a goal can have to the priority of a school and a district. The data also reflects that goals must be reasonable, attainable, and designed to meet the unique needs of the district and each individual school site. Simply having a goal will not increase attendance, but rather the systematic focus, monitoring, and appropriateness of the goal will yield the most optimal results.
Mentoring

Mentoring is an activity utilized to increase attendance by increasing school connections for students. In the current study, 72% (34 out of 47) have identified mentoring as extremely or moderately useful activity to improve student attendance (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Mentoring Usefulness to Increase Attendance

Although survey results yielded fairly positive results with 72% of respondents identified mentoring as either extremely or moderately useful to increases attendance, interviewees did not see mentoring as important. Mentoring was the least reported activity by district administrators in one to one interviews (25%). Further, Mrs. Selena believes that mentoring is important and is most successful when the mentor, whether it is a school or community member, is able to commit as a long-term mentor to the student:

I notice for us, it’s never forcing things on teachers. Everyone knows teachers have contracts that are very specific and they aren’t going to do anything else but what I’m contractually obligated to do, but what we saw was that teachers wanted to do more and
they built attendance teams and they built mentoring. We had mentoring, our mayor approved for city employees to serve as mentors so we did that at one of our middle schools and those mentors came twice a month and had a lasting mentor/mentee relationship with those students. We had church organizations, the Church of Latter Day Saints adopt one of our middle schools (they’re still there) with their volunteers we got them all finger printed (district paid) they help with PTA, field trips, tutoring, whatever the schools need they help with. Whenever we have a group who wants to help I have like 5 meetings with them before I introduce them to my superintendent and they get really excited about doing their work and mentoring. The data is clear on just how well mentoring works, it’s just lasting. You can’t do spray and pray mentoring. We need someone who is going to come in and commit to mentoring the students.

Another district uses high school students as mentors for students. Mrs. Rose identifies the use of Friday Night Lights (FNL) to help connect students to school and increase attendance through this engaging after school activity:

Students who participate in the student mentor leadership program through FNL are also part of the ASES (After School Education and Safety) program at high school and then go on to our middle school and elementary schools to be mentors for students. We are constantly looking at how we kill two birds with one stone. We do a lot of the training for it. ASES has field trips, sports tournaments, music, they cycle through their enrichment activities, they have robotics, dance, and is a robust program that is offered to students for free.

Mentoring has been shown to increase connections for students by providing social-emotional support to them. The survey data does reflect a higher use of mentoring than does the eight
successful districts interviewed. One reason that mentoring may be used and not may have to do with the age level of the students. The two districts that are utilizing mentoring are also those districts that have high schools in their district. Those successful districts that are not using mentoring may benefit from it in the future.

**Barriers**

There have been many barriers to attendance that have been identified in past research. The current research saw many similarities to past studies along with a few new barriers. The survey of the 47 school districts reported on the four most common barriers identified by the 17 administrators in charge of attendance during one on one interviews. See Table 7 below for a summary of survey results. One of the findings from the survey research was family challenges are viewed as a huge or big barrier to attendance for the population of district level attendance administrators who completed the survey. Through the one to one interviews, this study identified family challenges as more likely to occur for students living in single family homes, homes that have gang involvement, homelessness, poverty, divorce, and mental and health concerns.

**Table 7: Common Barriers to Attendance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Huge</th>
<th>Big</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Not a barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health needs of student</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation to school</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students not wanting to attend</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family challenges</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another element of the survey asked respondents, “What other barriers are there to student attendance?” This open-ended question followed four closed ended questions asking about the impact of the barrier (huge, big, medium, small) listed in Table 7. The goal of the question was to account for any other barrier that the district level administrator felt was a barrier to daily student attendance. The results of the open-ended question by the 47 district level administrators and eight district level administrators are listed below in Table 8. Note, of the 47 district level administrators who completed survey, some had more than one barrier, while five respondents could not think of any other barriers.

Table 8: Survey and Interview Responses Regarding Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Survey Responses</th>
<th>Interview Responses</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School refusal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalized behaviors (mental health, anxiety, depression)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned patterns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults/Parents not being responsible</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students not engaged</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of supervision</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration concerns</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School calendars different for elementary and high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of Table 8 include both survey and interview data. The survey data brought out four important barriers that were not as prominent from the eight school district administrators that were interviewed. The respondents identified internalized behaviors, adults/parents not being responsible, students not engaged, and homelessness as major barriers to students not attending
school consistently. One barrier identified by three respondents (two via survey and one district level administrator) was immigration concerns. Although there were only three respondents who identified this, I believe that with the increase activity of ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) in California, the immigration concerns barrier will continue to grow over the next few years.

Interestingly, internalized behaviors had 15 survey responses and three district level responses. The current research on attendance barriers has very little discussion of internalized behaviors like depression, mental health, depression, as areas that have been studied or identified as a major barrier to attendance. Although this did come up from three out of the eight district level administrators, it appeared more in the survey data.

Another finding that was identified through the survey was adults/parents not being responsible. Examples of this finding were: parents going on long vacations during the school year, parents not making their kids go to school, students don’t have parents ensuring they attend school, parent not making school a priority, adults making unfounded excuses for absences, and parents’ inability to set limits. The focus on parent behavior and their perception of the importance of school may be an area that needs further research.

My research focused primarily on successful districts, which may have skewed my data and hid those parents who may not be invested in sending their children to school. For those districts with the lower chronic absentee rates, the conversations with parents are fewer and thus the one to one conversations are more likely to occur than those schools with a high chronic absentee rate and a large number of parents to talk to.

Lastly, homelessness was also identified as a major barrier by both the survey and one to one interviews. Once again, there is little deep data researching the impact homelessness has on
daily school attendance. It makes sense that students who are homeless and lack a stable home life are more likely to miss school and even at school, maintain any focus on school work when they are more likely thinking about where they are going to sleep and what they are going to eat once school lets out.

**What are school districts doing to address chronic absenteeism?**

A chronic absentee is a student who misses 10% of the school year. Southern California district administrators were interviewed and surveyed about their work addressing the needs of chronically absent students. The goal of attendance is to not have any chronic absentee students, based upon all the strategies previously mentioned. However, the reality is that there are students missing 10% or more of the school year and there are more systematic and targeted activities to meet this group’s needs. There are various activities districts utilize to decrease chronic absenteeism. The following activities have been identified by interviewees and respondents to decrease chronic absenteeism.

**Board Policies**

A board policy is an agreement that is approved by a governing board that describes the actions and activities that happen in school districts. Board policies drive the direction of the school district and ensure that priorities are being addressed. A survey of 47 district administrators found that 68% (32 out of 47) of the school districts have board policies focused on decreasing chronic absenteeism. All board policies are available on district websites. One example of board policy regarding chronic absenteeism focuses on prevention, intervention, and awards:

To encourage school attendance, the Superintendent or designee shall develop
strategies that focus on prevention and early intervention of attendance problems. Preventive Strategies may include efforts to provide a safe and positive school environment, relevant and engaging learning experiences, and school activities that help develop students’ feelings of connectedness with the schools. The Superintendent or designee also may provide incentives and rewards to recognize students who achieve excellent attendance or demonstrate significant improvement in attendance.

Similarly, a neighboring school district focuses on the activities above, as well as looks at avenues to collaborate with community resources to ensure all student and family barriers are addressed, supported, and resolved:

The Superintendent or designee shall work with students, parents/guardians, school staff, and community agencies, as appropriate, to identify factors contributing to chronic absence and truancy. He/she also may collaborate with child welfare services, law enforcement, courts, public health care agencies, other government agencies, and/or medical, mental health, and oral health care providers to ensure that alternative educational programs and nutrition, health care, and other support services are available for students and families and to intervene as necessary when students have serious attendance problems.

Board policies are practices that are adopted by a governing board to ensure that everyone in a local education agency has the same practices that result in student improvement. The board policies identifying systematic actions to improve attendance are important and are drivers to ensure student attendance is at the forefront of planning for district and site level administrators. Although the language is very similar in many board policies addressing chronic absenteeism, it
is understandable that districts must use language that addresses local need, is appropriately
calculated, and attainable.

**School Attendance Review Team (SART)**

The School Attendance Review Team (SART) consists of the parent, principal and
chairperson, and sometimes the student. The goal of a SART is to brainstorm a plan to improve
school attendance. The SART is the step before a student is referred to a Student Attendance
Review Board (SARB). A total of 89% (42 out of 47) of administrators responded that using
SART was extremely or moderately useful. Similarly, 75% (6 out of 8) administrators
interviewed reported using SART to help increase attendance. One administrator describes what
the SART process looks and feels like in her district:

I think it is scary for a lot of parents. I explain to them at the SART meeting when I meet
with them at the district office. I go over the law and consequences and ask them what do
they need from us? At that point, I also have them sign a SART contract which explains
that your child needs to be at school daily and on time. And if, these agreements are not
met, we will be taking legal action through SARB.

The SART process is meant to be collaborative and gives the school site an opportunity to
identify barriers and brainstorm solutions with parents. For the parents, it may initially be seen as
a punitive process where the school is questioning their decisions and citing the law that governs
daily school attendance. SARTs may frontload parents what will be discussed prior to the
meeting to help decrease some of the scariness of the meeting.

**School Attendance Review Board (SARB)**

If the SART process is not effective a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) is
convened. The SARB is a substantially bigger committee than the SART. The SARB consists of
the parent, principal, chairperson, sometimes the student, and community resources such as
Department of Family Children Services, the District Attorney, law enforcement, and social
workers. The goal is to discuss and brainstorm activities to increase school attendance for each
specific student that they are meeting for. According to survey results, 83% (39 out of 47)
agreed that using SARB to increase attendance was extremely or moderately useful. Similarly,
seven out of eight (87.5%) districts interviewed use SARB. However, according to Mrs. Joel,
SARB can be seen as negative experience because of the lack of understanding and may push a
family further away from the school:

Parents get really angry at me if they have to go to SARB. In fact, I have to tell you, yes,
just recently, two days ago, a parent checked her son out of the district and is going to
home school him. It is a process trying to educate our parents. And it was all because
she received a SARB summons. So, yes that is a negative impact. I’m hoping with the
help of the assistant principal and me, I have been trying to encourage her to look at the
SARB process. It isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It will encourage your son to come back
to school. We will give him information. We can get him counseling, and emotional
support. SARB can help. It can give the parent strategies to work with her son. It is
more of a resource than a punishment. She does not want any of it, but hopefully, once
she sees what the home schooling process is all about, she will reconsider. That was a
negative.

On the other hand, according to Mrs. Selena, the SARB process can be powerful and life-
changing. Students and parents, given the correct resources to address barriers, can make a
positive change that will impact their life and habits:
At our SARB meeting we have students who are back on track and we bring them back and recognize them and their parents for their hard work and buy them a nice card and tell them “Job Well Done” and we hope you continue. We are still going to watch them but we are proud. We have them talk about what really changed them to make them want to come to school more frequently. Most will share the community agencies, the shop merchants program, counseling with their parents or sometimes it was just knowing it was me making bad choices and I want to do better. Seeing those students return back to regular attendance is always amazing and not just for myself but to see the excitement of the SARB board too. When you actually hear the stories, if students are willing to divulge what’s going on with them, and they are facing some crazy things. They are resilient. If you provide them with the right resources so that they can see that they can make a difference and then make a difference, they can do amazing things.

Administrators give up on kids way too easy. I know we are busy but we have to find ways to make connections and develop relationships because once we do that we have the hearts and minds of kids and from there the sky is the limit. That’s what’s good about our work.

Although surveys reflect that 83% of respondents use SARB to help increase attendance, it appears that the district level administrators view the process differently. The first response reflects an angry parent and the goal of the SARB team to work through the anger to get to a positive resolution and provide support. On the other hand, Mrs. Selena uses SARB to not only provide supports and resources, but also to recognize those students and parents who have been successful despite challenging home lives. The take away is that one size does not fit all, and the
needs and tactics of a SARB team need to be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of the community.

**Systematic and Consistent Monitoring**

Just as the case with monitoring attendance, all district level administrators identified chronic absentee monitoring as an activity to decrease chronic absenteeism. A consistent and systematic process of addressing needs and providing supports for chronic absenteeism has been found to be effective in decreasing chronic absenteeism. The activities may depend on the needs of the district and activities effectiveness may vary from situation to situation. Further, using a systematic and proactive approach to identifying chronic absentee students early on as opposed to waiting until a school year is over. Mrs. Swift described the way interns are used to connect with and monitor students:

First we connect them with, of course, an adult that they can communicate with and feel comfortable with. Then we have that adult help them connect with a peer. We have pride program with the Sheriff’s department. We also meet with them here so we've provided opportunities for those kids that are at risk and sometimes don't show up to school. We have about 20 interns from different universities that come in to assist. They follow up with students. When it was just me alone, occasionally administration or school site personnel would go out and do those home visits to go talk to families, to go see the environment, to connect with the student, now I have a team of individuals that will assist me and going out to home visits and establish personal connection is important to help them get to school.

Mrs. Rose found the value in putting systems in place to identify chronic absenteeism and provide support to students. She shared that the genesis of addressing chronic absenteeism was
based upon need of the students and schools, not a directive from the state or federal government.

So, the idea of chronic absenteeism, we started educating principals so we already had an automatic system through, at that time, SMART, which was a home-grown information system and now we use Aeries on just truancies and creating those cusps throughout the school year. You are going to get your list of students who are considered truant, then monitoring the attendance and notes to clear the attendance issues, so then it became an education piece on the school office managers. And in order to do that, I had to work with fiscal to make sure that we were monitoring the ADA that they wanted. So everything had to coincide. So we laid that groundwork. Then in the next couple of years, we once again started educating the parents on what is chronic absentees, you might not go to SARB, it is excused and unexcused, and kind of pushed that issue. Then it became creating the cut scores for chronic absenteeism and when were we going to start SARBing. So as we were doing all of this on one plate, we started spinning and educating the SARB Board on using it more as a resource. We started creating more solid MOU’s with our agencies (to support students and families’ needs).

Monitoring students with staff is shown to be an activity to help create a system that ensures student attendance is at the forefront of planning and support. The vision for Mrs. Swift and Mrs. Rose to establish specific systems in place that are based on school and community needs provides a system that is supportive and responsive of family needs. The two school districts did not simply bring in resources for the sake of bringing in resources; rather, the support that is provided is directly targeted to address specific community needs.
Negative Impact of Focusing on Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is a topic that may not be new to educators, but can be challenging for parents of chronically absent students. According to administrators surveyed for this study, there can be challenges (initially) for parents when they are being called by school site and district level administrators due to attendance concerns. For Mrs. Bazil, once she began calling parents in to meetings to discuss attendance concerns, there was an initial shock and push back from parents. As the meetings continued, the outrage became less and the resources to support student attendance became greater and so did student achievement:

Yes!!! The first year, because we hadn’t communicated this in a long time, or the conversation hadn’t been there, we had massive parent complaints. Every time there was an ACT (Abolish Chronic Truancy) meeting, we got 100 phone calls. Every time there was a SARB, one of the very first years, we had parents yelling, why has no one talked to me about this? But, turning the page, 3, 4, 5 years later, but because the secretaries are messaging it, the teachers are messaging it, the administrators are messaging it, everyone is hearing the exact same message, we don’t get those phone call complaints from the parents anymore. At first, it was a huge culture shift for the parents especially when everyone is messaging the same way, but now that it is a consistent message, district-wide, we don’t really get those complaints anymore. But, we have seen an increase in test scores, and increase in students with perfect attendance and increases in API. One school had an increase in perfect attendance and a 30-point API increase. She was very happy the correlation. Even the kids who are sitting there trying not to retain anything, will.
Mrs. Selena shared the emotional toll that focusing on chronic absenteeism can create for those working on addressing needs and utilizing resources to ensure students attend school. She makes it a point to express that attendance is a lot more complicated than just sending home letters and making some phone calls:

I don’t want to say that there has been a negative impact but I know at times it can be a little deflating or depressing to hear of the circumstances that the families face. I think that maybe the only negative thing of course sometimes you take that home with you. It can get to you sometimes based on the circumstances the kids deal with. It’s a lot of work but you put systems in place and hope to see great results within three to four years and other goals are to build upon this. If people think this work is easy by just sending attendance letters and SARB hearings, they aren’t realists. This work is hard, it’s very difficult.

Relationships are a very important component to addressing and increasing attendance. For Mrs. Bazil, parents were outraged that they were being called out and the new expectation for that community became focused on attendance accountability. Similarly, Mrs. Selena described how some barriers can be taxing emotionally to the team trying to help support families that are facing troubling home and community conditions. The two examples remind us about the importance of continuing to work with parents, building trust, providing resources and support. The goal is to support families and decrease barriers to achieve the goal of greater school attendance for students.

**Chronic Absentee Rates**

Just like school districts, the California Department of Education is deeply interested in attendance. The state released chronic absentee rates for all districts in California via California
Department of Education. The data was first available to district level administrators in the beginning of December, 2017. This was the first time that California has been able to utilize a system to categorize and store chronic absentee data.

As part of the survey data, district level administrators were asked what their district’s chronic absentee rate was. There were a total of 47 administrators surveyed. The multiple choice question had seven answers to choose from: 0-2%, 2.1-4.0%, 4.1-6.0%, 6.1-8.0%, 8.1-10.0%, above 10.1%, and not sure. If the administrator had the right range, there actual chronic absentee rate was identified and used for both the X and Y axis. For example, if the respondent marked 4.1-6.0% range and their district was 5.1, then 5.1 was charted on the X and Y axis. Even though 47 administrators were surveyed, due to two administrators marking “don’t know”, there are only 45 responses (as “don’t know” was not a chartable answer). Figure 6 represents the results of the 45 administrators responding to their district’s chronic absentee rate (survey rate) versus the actual rate (CDE rate) from the California Department of Education.

Figure 6: Administrators Knowledge of Chronic Absentee Rate
Further, Table 9 reflects the responses from the 45 administrators about their district’s chronic absentee rate. The overall data reflects that 15 district administrators were able to identify their correct chronic absentee range, 24 district administrators identified a chronic absentee range that was lower than their actual chronic absentee rate, and six district administrators marked a chronic absentee range that was higher than their district’s actual chronic absentee rate. This is the first year that district chronic absentee data has been available for everyone to see. That may play a role in the familiarity that staff may have with their chronic absentee rate. With the easy access to the Dashboard data, I believe that district level administrators will continue to increase their ability to accurately state their district’s chronic absentee rate.

Table 9: Knowledge of District Chronic Absentee Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct Range of Chronic Absentee Rate.</th>
<th>Actual Chronic Absentee Rate is Higher Than Disclosed on Survey.</th>
<th>Actual Chronic Absentee Rate is Lower Than Disclosed on Survey.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**State and Federal Mandates and Chronic Absenteeism**

Chronic absenteeism has garnered both state and federal attention. As a state, California has voiced its concern in regards to increasing attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism through mandates likes the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), and most recently, the introduction of the California School Dashboard. Similarly, the federal government identified chronic absenteeism as a potential metric for school districts through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). One of the biggest financial impacts to most districts has been the Local Control Accountability Plan.
The Local Control Accountability Plans

The Local Control Accountability Plan is a three-year plan with goals and metrics to improve educational outcomes for all students. The Plan is designed to meet both state priorities and district level priorities. The focus of the Plan is to use data to identify needs and services as a means to improve educational, social, and emotional outcomes for all students. The survey of 47 administrators found that 85% (40 out of 47) of school districts have actions in Local Control Accountability Plans designed to decrease chronic absenteeism. According to Mrs. Rose, the LCFF/LCAP has really helped bring chronic absenteeism to the forefront of district stakeholders like never before:

When LCFF came, was born, prior to that it was always, it always felt as if the work that we do in CWA (Child Welfare and Attendance) is backburner stuff, is it important, but it is never the shiny penny. It’s not instruction. It is not textbook adoption. It is stuff of the heart, I call it. It is heart data, not hard data. So I remember coming back from the initial LCAP meetings going like, oh, ladies, we are coming to the party! All of a sudden, it is important because we knew, I knew right away that the whole school climate, school culture, attendance, suspensions, discipline, expulsions, all of that will suddenly matter and sure enough, now we have pies. Now I have my own little pie that I have some teeth to the information and the staff development and really the philosophy and belief system. It is very easy for me because I believe in it to say, LCAP says, you know, we have to spend money on it or to present information to parent when they take their parent surveys on LCAP.

According to Mrs. Swift, the political buy-in from stakeholders has been born from the requirements and expectations of the LCFF and LCAP. The changes that are being made in the
district due to the requirements of the LCAP has really made a change in one of the districts interviewed. Where in the past, there was a need from the district attendance administrators to beg and plead, the LCAP has created a state mandate to address attendance:

- Built into LCAP, absolutely, definitely it's assisted. I mean it's always been important, absolutely, but now the focus on attendance and you know, all the subgroups has allowed for more support for this department and our efforts. So definitely I have more support from the Board, from the superintendent, that you know really see that what we're doing here in terms of programs and services to improve those areas that they are necessary to improve attendance.

For Mrs. Bazil, her district was already working on chronic absenteeism and had a plan already in place. She states that once the LCAP came around, the system to address chronic absenteeism was already in place. The goal of the school district was simply to explain the process in a way that outsiders can understand and that there was not a big change for them:

- No, because we had started the program before LCAP. It was funny, when we were filling out the LCAP, because we just kept putting the name of our attendance program on it, but it was our comprehensive plan and we didn’t explain well enough to them, so they sent it back saying, what are you talking about, this doesn’t work! We knew what it means, but we had to go and explain it to them. And once we made those adjustments, and explained the process and what we were doing, it met all the needs of the LCAP. We had already put something in place, before it needed to be put in place. So, we really haven’t made adjustments based on LCAP. We make adjustments to our attendance program every year, small, simple things to make it better for the kids and for the staff,
but we haven’t had to make any adjustments because we were like a year and a half to
years ahead of the curve.

For districts in California, as evidenced by the survey and one to one interviews, districts have
put attendance at the forefront, due in part, to the Local Control Accountability Plan. There are
many districts that worked on attendance prior LCAP, and most districts interviewed fall in that
category. However, for those districts that have not focused on attendance in the past, the LCAP
provides the driver for financial, political, and human resources to ensure students are attending
school daily.

The California School Dashboard

The California Department of Education has created the California School Dashboard.
The Dashboard https://www.caschooldashboard.org/#/Home was created to help the public
identify school outcomes like test scores, graduation rates, and other measures of student success
for schools and districts. The Dashboard has five state priorities as part of the Equity Report.
Chronic Absenteeism, Suspension Rate (K-12), English Learner Progress (1-12), English
Language Arts (3-8), and Mathematics (3-8). A survey was given to 47 administrators about how
important the five indicators were in their district. The first question read, Based upon your
district’s priorities, please answer the following questions based upon the degree of importance
(see Table 10).
### Table 10: The Importance of the 5 California State Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Moderately Important</th>
<th>Slightly Important</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How important are mathematics scores on SBAC?</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important are English Language Arts scores on SBAC?</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is having a low chronic absentee rate?</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is English Learner Progress?</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is having a low suspension rate?</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data from Table 10 reflects, based on district priorities, how 47 school districts view the five state indicators on the California School Dashboard’s Equity Report. The range from the respondents indicating extremely and very important is 98% high (English Language Arts scores) and 92% low (suspension rate). Overall, all five state indicators were identified as being important by respondents as no one marked “not at all important” for any of the state indicators. The results indicate that for the 47 districts surveyed, they believe that attendance is about as important as mathematics and English Language Arts SBAC scores. The data reflects that California has turned the corner to start looking at the needs of the whole child, rather than simply two academic subjects.
Every Student Succeeds Act

The federal government’s Every Student Succeeds Act is an amendment of the earlier mandate of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The state must submit a state plan for approval and California has chosen to use chronic absenteeism as one metric to be measured. The eight school district administrators I spoke to, shared that LCAP is so closely aligned to ESSA, that they are essentially one in the same. That said, the LCAP does have more local control decision making with a collective focus on addressing local need.

The Local Control Accountability Plan and the Every Student Succeeds Act

The Local Control Accountability Plans and Every Student Succeeds Act are mandates from the state and federal governments, respectively. Given that California will monitor chronic absenteeism for both LCAP and ESSA, this study surveyed district level administrators what the fiscal impact of ESSA and LCAP was on their district. The results below show that LCAP is perceived by a larger percentage of district administrators as having a high impact ESSA (36% vs. 19%).

Table 11: Impact of State and Federal Mandates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What fiscal impact has LCAP had on the way your district addresses attendance and chronic absenteeism?</th>
<th>High Impact</th>
<th>Medium Impact</th>
<th>Low Impact</th>
<th>No Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What fiscal impact has ESSA had on the way your district addresses attendance and chronic absenteeism?</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What fiscal impact has ESSA had on the way your district addresses attendance and chronic absenteeism?</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

School attendance needs to be at the forefront of planning for all school employees to support the well-being and success for all students. There have been many districts that have been fighting and scratching to make attendance a subject that should be discussed along with subjects that are annually tested like mathematics and English Language Arts. The good news is that because of mandates like the Local Control Accountability Plan, districts must now annually monitor attendance rates and create plans for improvement.

The research identified eight districts with successful attendance practices and those districts were then interviewed. From the results of the interviews a survey was created. The survey found similarities from the one to one interviews like consistent use of incentives and rewards, the use of PBIS, and involving parents, along with other practices.

My research studied successful districts, but what about districts that are not successful? A deeper question is why are the results different for districts that are using the same strategies? And for others who are not using specific strategies that I have identified, what would happen if they did? A closer look also needs to be done on the impact of classroom climate and teacher connectedness on attendance rates.

Further, there were discrepancies between the district interview data and the survey data. For example, extra-curricular activities were used in 88% for the successful districts, but only 44.7% districts represented in the survey. Further, after school/before school care was used at all successful districts interviewed but only 59.6% of districts surveyed identified school care as helping improve attendance. Are those two strategies the reason for the high chronic absentee rates in other districts? Or, did the survey participants not make a connection to the impact that extra-curricular activities can have on engagement and attendance.
Chapter 5 will go into more detail about the findings and discuss four barriers identified as a result of the surveys that were not prominent in the literature review and did not come out as loudly during one to one interviews. In Chapter 5, I discuss how consistent attendance is impacted by the following barriers: internalized behaviors, parenting concerns, and homelessness. Immigration concerns, although only three respondents identified this, I believe is a topic that must be studied. There appears to be increased activity of ICE in California, and as a result, the immigration concerns barrier will continue to grow over the next couple of years.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify successful practices to increase school attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism. The work of decreasing attendance barriers and increasing school attendance is a challenging task. There are many factors to consider, and it reminds me of a puzzle that needs to be completed with calculation, understanding, patience and vision. As I reflect on the final chapter of this dissertation, the power of having a low chronic absentee rate lies in the ability for a school system to have proactive attendance activities. Daily school attendance is about creating a habit, an expectation and a culture, in which all stakeholders view attendance as a critical component to increasing student outcomes. The school system needs to be proactive, targeted, and systematic to make sure barriers and district attendance needs are considered. The road to increasing attendance at schools is not easy, but it is important and achievable for all students.

Summary of Primary Findings

The findings support previous research concerning activities that can increase attendance like incentives, implementation of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), parent involvement, and alternate means to suspension. Increasing school connectedness was common throughout the findings. There needs to be a deeper look at classroom connectedness to see if that helps improve student attendance and classroom climate. Further, barriers like health needs of students, transportation, students not wanting to attend school, and family challenges were all identified. However, there were four barriers that were not prominent in the literature review nor interviews, but spoke loudly during survey results. Those four barriers to attendance were internalized behaviors, parenting concerns, homelessness and immigration concerns.
Strategies to Increase Attendance

There are many strategies and practices that have been identified to increase school attendance. The goal of this study was to identify what is currently in place that is motivating students to attend school and what is not. Strategies utilized to motivate students to attend school need to be purposeful and interconnected to meet the school and individual families’ needs. One common element found in the current research was the idea of a multi-tiered system of support to improve attendance and also address chronic absenteeism. Research by Chang (2016), identified the importance of using a multi-tiered system of support to monitor, address and systematically meet the needs of attendance. The following paragraphs will describe examples of multi-tiered systems of support that were identified during this dissertation. Tier 1 supports are those that are universal and involve all students. The goal is to capture and motivate many students in this tier to make school a motivating place they want to be. Tier 2 support are more targeted to meet student needs and are focused on students who are chronic absentees. This tier is all about building connections, and providing resources to address barriers to daily attendance. Lastly, tier 3 supports are for those students who are chronically absentees and still have not responded to school supports. Tier 3 students and families may require legal intervention. In this tier, supports like monitoring and mentoring may occur daily for students to ensure needs are addressed timely.

Tier 1

Universal Interventions

Swain-Bradway, Pinkney & Flannery (2015), Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) is a systematic framework that promotes positive support that improves school climate, safety, and respect among all members of the school community.
Similarly, my research found the importance of creating a positive school environment through the use of positive support. The importance of a positive school climate improves relationships among all stakeholders and helps motivate students to return daily to a welcoming and nurturing setting. Students who attend a school with a positive school climate are more likely to attend and establish a bond with at least one caring adult. Further, how schools use behavior infractions can impact not only out of school suspension, but also whether students want to attend school when not suspended. Schools that suspend students out of school, rather than addressing the purpose of the behavior, are more likely to have lower attendance (Wilson, 2004; McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002; Perry & Morris, 2014; Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen & Lenhart, 2010).

Along with SWPBIS, incentives and rewards have been effective in creating a supporting environment that helps improve community. Chang (2014) found that providing incentives helps to develop a habit of school attendance for students. My research found 89% of survey responders and 100% of districts interviewed acknowledged the impact that rewards and incentives can have on attendance. The power behind using incentives lies not in the reward itself, but rather in the habit. If a school has a systematic way to reward and incentivize attendance early on, then the school going expectation becomes a habit. The research also is clear that habits like being responsible and attending school daily, can then make someone more likely to hold and maintain a job, and graduate from high school. On the other hand, those students who do not have those school going habits in place, are more likely to carry that habit later in life.

Similar to using incentives to build community, parents have been identified as vital players to help build that school-to-home pipeline. Chang and Romero (2008) found that parents are vital components to the education process. Attendance concerns need to be shared with
parents on a consistent basis and the negative impacts of missing school needs to be consistently shared by the principal, teacher, school and district staff. In my research parent involvement was identified as an important variable to increasing attendance. All districts in the qualitative piece believed in the power of parent involvement and 76.6% of the 47 districts surveyed felt that parent involvement activities helped improve attendance. Parents are important. They are the heroes of children. In order to help improve attendance, the school system, from the teachers, to the bus driver, to the gardener, to the principal must create an inviting environment that welcomes all and sends the message to the children that school is their second home and a place that they want to be at.

Another element is ensuring that attendance data is monitored on a consistent and systematic basis. Consistent monitoring of attendance data helps to catch absences sooner and helps to improve attendance (Chang & Romero, 2008; Chang, 2014; Harris, 2016). There is no question about the importance of monitoring attendance. Those schools and districts that have systematic ways to monitor attendance are very likely able to identify students who are experiencing attendance difficulties, identify specific needs, and ultimately provide the resources needed to increase attendance. For my research, 87% of survey respondents stated that monitoring attendance was extremely or moderately useful to increasing attendance. Similarly, all interviewees agreed that monitoring of attendance plays a big role in identifying attendance needs and increasing attendance. It is clear and simple: if we monitor sooner, and more systematically, attendance needs are able to be identified and supports are able to be put in place. The goal is to be proactive and catch the absences early on, before they become a habit which is more challenging to change.
Another factor to increasing a positive school community is identifying barriers that may be specific to the school site or district. Once barriers are identified, schools and districts must act to address barriers with resources and support as soon as possible. As I analyzed the data of my 17 interviews, barriers to attendance were identified and the top four barriers were used to survey 47 district level administrators. My findings were consistent with previous research that was discussed in Chapter 2.

One of the major barriers identified was health related absences. These absences may include lack of access to appropriate healthcare (Mays, 2016; Chang, 2014b; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). For schools and districts, systems need to be in place that are able to support health needs through Medi-Cal referrals or medical clinics that can proactively meet medical needs. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that illnesses like the flu and colds are reasons students miss school. Once again, schools need systems in place that support students who may not have health care readily available to families. It is vital that districts create partnerships with medical supports like clinics, hospitals, social workers, or any other community resource that can assist families. Even though research is consistently identifying health needs as a variable negatively impacting attendance, the survey of 46.8% of administrators identified health needs of the student a medium barrier to school attendance. For the site administrator, he needs to know his students and families. The site principal needs to make it a point to address barriers that families are facing. It is a big job, but the quicker we can address needs, like health, the quicker the student can get back to school.
Tier 2

Chronically Absent Interventions

Tier 2 interventions are designed to be more targeted to students’ individual needs to better improve school attendance. Students who need Tier 2 interventions, have usually missed around 10% of the school year. The expectation is attendance will improve using the universal interventions under Tier 1, but for those students who may not respond to the universal interventions, Tier 2 is more targeted to meet individual needs.

The School Attendance Review Team (SART) is a Tier 2 intervention and was a big part of my qualitative and quantitative research. The SART is a goal oriented group that is able to brainstorm, plan, and provide interventions to reengage students and families to improve school attendance. My research found 89% of administrators believe SART is extremely or moderately useful. Similarly, 75% of district administrators interviewed reported using SART to help increase attendance.

SART is a systematic way to add supports such as mentors, for those students who need Tier 2 interventions to improve attendance. Research by King, Vidourek, Davis & McClellan (2002) found school-based mentoring programs have been used to address school connectedness. Mentoring programs have been used to improve student attitudes about school and increase school attendance. Mentoring is a way to keep a close eye and provide immediate supports for students. A mentor can become the liaison between the family and school so that supports and resources are identified much sooner. Survey results of the 47 districts surveyed, reflect 72% of participants identified mentoring as either extremely or moderately useful to increases attendance.
Tier 3

Severely Chronically Absent Students

If students do not respond to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions, then the push is for the most targeted type interventions needed to get students back in school. Tier 3 students are not responding to universal interventions (Tier 1), nor are they responding to Tier 2 interventions through mentoring or SART recommendations. There may be an increase in mentoring and also an increase in monitoring of the student and family. Tier 3 students have missed roughly 20% of the school year and need an extra push to attend school. The goal of Tier 3 interventions is to find a solution to increase attendance through partnerships with school and community stakeholders and if needed, the legal system.

The School Attendance Review Board (SARB) is more common in literature as a means to address major attendance concerns. The SARB team is a much bigger team than the SART and is made up of school and districts officials, as well as community resources such as Department of Family Children Services, the District Attorney, law enforcement, the public defender’s office and social workers. California has embraced the SARB process as a means to improve attendance. According to Harris (2014), AB 1672 successful interventions that lead to a decrease in absences are able to be identified and shared. The ability to share successful interventions will help all district combat chronically absent students and families.

My research indicated that district and school administrators had very positive views of SARB. Survey results reflect that 83% (39 out of 47) of respondents agreed that using SARB to increase attendance was extremely or moderately useful. Similarly, seven out of eight (87.5%) districts level administrators interviewed use SARB. SARB is clearly the go to when students and families are not responding to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions. It would be interesting to see
whether the aspect of having legal officials at the meeting is the tipping point for families (and students) to get back to school or whether it is something else. And further, it would be interesting to measure the impact of school attendance once legal action is taken. According to interviewees, some of the negative effects of SARB are upset parents, families leaving the district, and negatively impacts school/family relationship.

**Significant Findings**

Family challenges, although not in my literature review, was a concern for both the groups who were interviewed and the 47 district level administrators who were surveyed. Family challenges meant that there was something going on in the house that may be making the house unstable. Survey results reflect that almost half of respondents (48.9%) believe that family challenges are a huge or big barrier to students attending school daily. Some of the examples were students living in single family homes, homes that have gang involvement or may live in a gang infested neighborhood, homelessness, poverty, divorce, and mental health concerns of someone living in the house. Similarly, all interviewees discussed some type of family challenge that their students are dealing with that is impacting daily and consistent attendance.

Another concern that developed through the survey had to do with parents not being responsible for their child attending school. There were a total of 12 respondents from the survey and six interviewees who believed that parents are more responsible for the absence than are the students. Some of the comments reflected that parents need to set limits with their students and get them to school. Some interviewees discussed the challenge for families to balance work, sometimes more than one job, and getting their students to school. At times, the task of getting one to school would fall on the older sibling, which at times does not work out so well. Future research may want to measure parent perceptions of school attendance at the
various levels of schooling to see if there is a difference. Are kindergarten parents more likely to keep their child home than middle school parents?

Internalized behaviors such as mental health, anxiety and depression were shared as major concerns for survey respondents. Interestingly, there was not a big discussion during one to one interviews about internalized behaviors, nor did Chapter 2’s literature review mention this. Internalized behaviors can be supported through any of the tiers of support, but for that to happen, the student and parent must share this and historically people have been reluctant to share such needs.

Similar to internalized behaviors, homelessness may also impact students’ ability to attend school. Students who are homeless may be living in a car or on the streets, or bouncing from home to home. The needs of a homeless student are many, and learning is undoubtedly not in the forefront of their thinking. It is all about survival. Once again, the tiered systems of support could help, as long as the school knows the family’s situation. Homelessness is another topic that may be very hard for families to share, but resources are readily available to meet student and family needs, once they are identified as homeless. Some of the resources that are available to homeless students can be transportation support like bus tokens or bussing to school.

Although not significant and not mentioned in my literature review, I believe the topic of immigration will have a growing impact, especially in California. Future research may look to measure how immigrant families may not being sending their children to school in fear that their child may be taken away or students may be fearful of their parent being picked up and taken away while they are at school. This psychological dilemma can negatively impact a child’s motivation to attend school daily.
As schools and districts work on adding policies and practices as a means to increase attendance, there should also be a reflection and focus on the human component of connections with students that foster healthy relationships. Incentives and rewards are great, but a student who wants to be at school every day because their teacher understands them, respects them, and cares, is worth more than any incentive a school can afford. It might be time to spend a little less time on math facts and a little more time getting to know students to foster a positive and healthy relationship.

There are many variables needed to address attendance. From my research, the most salient actions that districts can focus on are challenging, but will bring systematic and ongoing attendance improvement. The following strategies will bring about positive outcomes for school attendance.

- Data should be used to drive needs of the district.
- Purposeful district supported activities can help improve attendance.
- Barriers to attendance need to be acknowledged, supported, and collectively decreased by all stakeholders.
- Mandates have helped improve the attention districts pay to attendance.
- School and classroom connectedness are important to help drive students to want to be at school daily.
- Relationships with students are important and need to be developed, fostered, and nurtured daily.

Research Limitations

My research started off by identifying districts that have successfully addressed attendance. The eight districts I identified had some of the lowest chronic absentee rates in Los
Angeles County and the schools within in those districts had even lower chronic absentee rates. The schools and districts were not struggling with attendance; therefore, I may not have exhausted all variables connected to attendance because the successful districts I looked at may not be experiencing them.

For the districts that I interviewed, the goal of increasing attendance started before state and federal mandates were introduced. The driver, for the districts interviewed, was based on an identified need to improve attendance and they all knew that if kids were not in school, academic achievement is unlikely to be happening. According to my findings, the state and federal mandates do serve as political and financial supports. In the past, English Language Arts and Mathematics scores were the two targets that all schools and districts were focused on and discussions of attendance may have not seemed as important. However, with the high accountability of both LCAP and ESSA, school district administrators and school board members know that attendance is just as important as academics to not only the state and federal government, but also to parents, teachers, and students. As a result of state and federal mandates, attendance will be in the forefront of planning and support, which is music to the ears of district administrators in charge of attendance.

Another limitation of my study was that it is strictly based on reporting and not observation. The qualitative and quantitative methods were all based on how district and school leaders responded to questions regarding attendance. There was not any observation of an actual intervention in place to truly measure the impact. Future studies may want to include looking at implementing specific interventions and using observation to measure effectiveness.

Student perspectives were not heard in my study. I interviewed district and site administrators who discussed how students react to activities and not attending school, but I did
not hear from the students. I would like to hear from the students why they want to come to school and why they don’t. I would like to know how connected they feel to the school, teachers, and other staff members. I believe a lot of valuable information would be gained by hearing from students.

The impact of the classroom is another piece of the puzzle that needs to be considered when trying to improve attendance rates by assessing classroom climate. The future researcher needs to look at what is going on in the classroom. How can a researcher determine whether curriculum and instruction is engaging to the students? Is the classroom supportive of all learners and students? Does the teacher have a positive connection with all students? Is there bullying or intimidation happening during class? What is the overall climate of the classroom and does that climate motivate students to want to return the next day? All these variables are subjective and may be challenging to objectively quantify.

Future research may want to look at what districts with high chronic absentee rates do to see what interventions have been used and to identify why interventions are not being successful. Why are some districts doing the same practices as neighboring districts, but are having different results? What is the impact of the historical attendance expectations of the school? Furthermore, future research should include an examination of student/teacher relationships and its impact on school attendance.

The California Dashboard is a new and an evolving accountability resource for schools and districts. The Dashboard’s five state indicators, which include chronic absenteeism, are accountability areas for all schools and districts. Interventions that address chronic absenteeism have the potential to also improve school performance with respect to the other four state
indicators. Future research will likely need to examine how the evolvement of this resource effects how school attendance is reported.

**Implications**

There are a couple of implications that are clear from this research that answer my first research question. In order to improve attendance, school districts and schools need to have clear universal supports to engage and motivate students to attend school. Schools need to be proactive and have a three-tiered system of support identified and used. The main goal should be utilizing the proactive Tier 1 strategies that are effective, systematic, and meets the motivational needs of students. The goal is to not have any students who are chronically absent. However, schools and districts should have systematic supports to address, support, and decrease chronically absent students.

School leaders need to know the needs of students and families. The needs of families who have chronically absentee students will not be met unless school leaders know their families. School leaders need to create partnerships with community resources that are readily available to meet the immediate needs of families. Schools need to ensure that staff is able to connect to students and understand family and cultural needs. Attendance is not easy to solve, but it becomes less overwhelming when schools and community resources are working together to meet the needs of families who are in need of support.

**Conclusion**

It is vital that students attend school every day. There are many negative outcomes if students are not at school. The goal of this research was to identify practices that have been successful in increasing attendance, decreasing chronic absenteeism, and measuring how both are affected by state and federal mandates. Schools needs to have proactive systems to get
students motivated to attend school and implement a multi-tiered system of support to increase attendance to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to make the most of their educational experience and become successful in life. Further, it is important to look at how classroom interactions and connectedness help improve attendance. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) is an important element to improve the overall climate of the school. Further, another challenge to schools is to identify the pieces of the puzzle that are needed to ensure that ALL students are able to attend school on a daily basis.

My first two research questions looked at how schools are increasing student attendance, which I thought would be fairly easy to answer. One big take away for me is that fixing attendance is not easy, but it is possible anywhere. According to this research, we can say that neither district size nor socioeconomic status alone predict chronic absentee rates. The goal of this research was to find strategies that districts and schools are implementing in order to address absenteeism, so that all students will attend school at high rates. The districts interviewed and surveyed for this study have lots of shared activities meant to increase attendance, so why are the rates not the same if we can also cancel out size of district and socioeconomic status? Why are reported activities that are consistent with increasing attendance not working everywhere? I think a missing piece of the puzzle is located in the classroom. I think measuring how connected students feel to their classroom teacher plays a big role in whether children are motivated to attend school daily and this area needs to be studied.

My third question looked at state and federal mandates and how they impact attendance and chronic absenteeism. What I found was that state and federal mandates have helped to put greater focus on absenteeism than ever before and have provided both political power by making it a topic that elected officials and other school stakeholders are looking at. The mandates have
also provided financial power with LCAP dollars being spent to support attendance through activities like mentoring, counselors, training like PBIS for schools, and also attendance incentives for students. That said, I also found that the drive for those districts that have sophisticated attendance systems in place was not a state or federal mandate, but rather a genuine desire to help students come to school every day because they are aware of the challenges students face when they do not attend school daily.

The pieces of the puzzle may not be immediately available and understood. However, with comprehensive supports in place, efforts to address family needs, and a focus on improving school and classroom climate, all students can attend at a high rate. This, in turn, will improve academic and life outcomes for kids. California is major player to increase attendance due in part to the innovative work of school leaders, the Local Control Accountability Plan and organizations like Attendance Works which together, have helped put a spotlight on attendance. There is still a lot more we all can do to improve attendance for kids and ensure that all the pieces of the puzzle are in place for all kids to attend school at high rates.
APPENDIX A: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM SURVEY

For this survey, chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of the school year, regardless of the reason.

1. Email address (automatically collected from survey system)

Based upon your district's priorities, please answer the following state priorities by degree of importance.

2. How important are mathematics scores on SBAC? Pick one.
   - Extremely important
   - Very important
   - Moderately important
   - Slightly important
   - Not at all important

3. How important are English Language Arts scores on SBAC? Pick one.
   - Extremely important
   - Very important
   - Moderately important
   - Slightly important
   - Not at all important

4. How important is having a low chronic absentee rate? Pick one.
   - Extremely important
   - Very important
5. How important is English Learner Progress? Pick one.
   - Moderately important
   - Slightly important
   - Not at all important

6. How important is having a low suspension rate? Pick one.
   - Extremely important
   - Very important
   - Moderately important
   - Slightly important
   - Not at all important

In your district, what are the barriers to students attending school?

7. The health needs of students. Pick one.
   - Huge barrier
   - Big barrier
   - Medium barrier
   - Small barrier
   - Not a barrier

8. Transportation to school. Pick one.
9. Students not wanting to attend. Pick one.
   - Huge barrier
   - Big barrier
   - Medium barrier
   - Small barrier
   - Not a barrier

10. Family Challenges. Pick one.
    - Huge barrier
    - Big barrier
    - Medium barrier
    - Small barrier
    - Not a barrier

11. What other barriers are there to student attendance?
    ______________________________________________________
    ______________________________________________________

12. Does your school district have a board policy that focuses on decreasing chronic absenteeism? Pick one.
    - Yes
How useful have the following strategies been at improving attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism?

13. Mentoring students to attend school. Pick one.
   - Extremely useful
   - Moderately useful
   - Slightly useful
   - Not useful

   - Extremely useful
   - Moderately useful
   - Slightly useful
   - Not useful

15. Educating parents about the importance of daily attendance. Pick one.
   - Extremely useful
   - Moderately useful
   - Slightly useful
   - Not useful

16. Using the School Attendance Review Team (SART) to increase attendance. Pick one.
   - Extremely useful
   - Moderately useful
   - Slightly useful
17. Using the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) to increase attendance. Pick one.
   - Extremely useful
   - Moderately useful
   - Slightly useful
   - Not useful

18. Have you ever used an attendance campaign to increase attendance? Pick one.
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not Sure

19. What type of policies and initiatives have you used to increase attendance? Mark all that apply.
   - Extra-Curricular Activities
   - Before/After School Tutoring or Child Care
   - Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports
   - Parent Involvement
   - Alternate Means of Suspension
   - Awards and Incentives

20. What fiscal impact has state mandates (LCFF, LCAP) had on the way your district helps increase attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism? Pick one.
   - High impact
   - Medium impact
   - Low impact
21. What fiscal impact has ESSA had on the way your district increases attendance and decreases chronic absenteeism? Pick one.
   - High impact
   - Medium impact
   - Low impact
   - No impact

22. Does your Local Control Accountability Plan have actions designated to decrease chronic absenteeism? Pick one.
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not sure

23. What is your district’s chronic absentee rate? Pick one.
   - 0-2%
   - 2.1-4%
   - 4.1-6%
   - 6.1-8%
   - 8.1-10%
   - Above 10.1%
   - Not sure
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS

Research Question #1

1. How often is the chronic absentee rate reviewed and communicated with stakeholders like district admin., site administrators, teachers, and parents?
   a. How is data used to measure the successes of initiatives, strategies, supports, resources, and policies?
2. What initiatives, strategies, supports, resources, and policies are used to improve attendance?
3. What are the common reasons or barriers for students are chronically absent?
   a. Are there proactive strategies, policies, supports or resources in place to address these common reasons?
   b. Are parents of chronically absent students part of the decision-making process?
4. Is there a systemic way that students’ who were chronically absent the previous school year are identified?
   a. What supports, resources, strategies are used to support students

Research Question #2

5. At the district level, who monitors chronic absentee rates?
   a. How often chronic absentee rates are measured using data?
6. As a district, what strategies, resources, and supports have been most successful reducing chronic absentee rates?
   a. What evidence do you have that strategies, resources, and supports are working?
7. Is there a specific subgroup (English Learners, Students with Disabilities, Homeless, etc.) that have been identified (now or in the past) as disproportionately chronic absentees?
   a. If yes, what has been done to support the group?
8. As a district, what initiatives, strategies, supports, resources, and policies are used to reduce chronic absentee rates?
   a. How many were developed proactively?
   b. How many were developed retroactively?
   c. What evidence to you have that initiatives and policies are working?
9. At the district level, what incentives are there to increase attendance?
   a. For principals?
   b. For teachers?
   c. For parents?
   d. For students?
Research Question #3

1. In your Local Control Accountability Plan, what services are designed to address chronic absenteeism?
2. In your Local Control Accountability Plan, what services have been most successful in your district in increasing attendance?
   a. Why do you think those services have been successful? How has data been used to improve student attendance?
3. In your Local Control Accountability Plan, which services designed to decrease chronic absenteeism have been most challenging to implement?
   a. Once implemented, were those services effective in decreasing chronic absenteeism?
   b. What services (if any) haven’t you been able to implement?
4. Has there been a negative impact on other services or resources as a result of the Local Control Accountability Plan requiring districts to focus on Chronic Absenteeism?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SITE PRINCIPALS

Research Question #1

1. How long have you been a principal at this school
2. How often is the chronic absentee rate reviewed and communicated with stakeholders like district admin., site administrators, teachers, and parents?
   a. How is data used to measure the successes of initiatives, strategies, supports, resources, and policies?
3. What initiatives, strategies, supports, resources, and policies are used to improve attendance?
4. What are the common reasons or barriers for students are chronically absent?
   a. Are there proactive strategies, policies, supports or resources in place to address these common reasons?
   b. Are parents of chronically absent students’ part of the decision-making process?
5. Is there a systemic way that students who were chronically absent the previous school year are identified?
   a. What supports, resources, strategies are used to support students

Research Question #2

6. At your school site who monitors chronic absentee rates?
   a. How often chronic absentee rates are measured using data?
7. At your school site, what strategies, resources, and supports have been most successful reducing chronic absentee rates?
   a. What evidence do you have that strategies, resources, and supports are working?
8. Is there a specific subgroup (English Learners, Students with Disabilities, Homeless, etc.) that have been identified (now or in the past) as disproportionately chronic absentees?
   a. If yes, what has been done to support the group?
9. At your school site, what initiatives, strategies, supports, resources, and policies are used to reduce chronic absentee rates?
   a. How many were developed proactively?
   b. How many were developed retroactively?
   c. What evidence to you have that initiatives and policies are working?
10. At your school site, what incentives are there to increase attendance?
    a. For teachers?
    b. For parents?
    c. For students?
Research Question #3

11. In your Local Control Accountability Plan, what services are designed to address chronic absenteeism?
12. In your Local Control Accountability Plan, what services have been most successful in improving attendance at your school?
   a. Why do you think those services have been successful? Has data been used to identify needs and improve student attendance?
13. In your Local Control Accountability Plan, which services designed to decrease chronic absenteeism have been most challenging to implement?
   a. Once implemented, were those services effective in decreasing chronic absenteeism?
   b. What services (if any) haven’t you been able to implement?
14. Has there been a negative impact on other services or resources as a result of the Local Control Accountability Plan requiring districts to focus on Chronic Absenteeism?
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