

1-1-2019

# Policies And Procedures Perceived By School Leaders To Reduce Truancy In A Public Charter School

Alix Desulme  
*University of New England*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dune.une.edu/theses>

 Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), and the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

© 2019 Alix Desulme

---

## Preferred Citation

Desulme, Alix, "Policies And Procedures Perceived By School Leaders To Reduce Truancy In A Public Charter School" (2019). *All Theses And Dissertations*. 196.  
<https://dune.une.edu/theses/196>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at DUNE: DigitalUNE. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses And Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DUNE: DigitalUNE. For more information, please contact [bkenyon@une.edu](mailto:bkenyon@une.edu).

Policies and Procedures Perceived by School Leaders  
to Reduce Truancy in a Public Charter School

By

Alix Desulme

BA (St. Thomas University) 2003

MS (St. Thomas University) 2005

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

August 2018

Copyright by  
Alix Desulme  
2018

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES PERCEIVED BY SCHOOL LEADERS TO REDUCE  
TRUANCY IN A PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the causes of student truancy and the policies and procedures established by one public charter school to reduce truancy. Eight participants were asked to discuss the policies and procedures of their school, CSS, and how they as school leaders contributed to the success of the school regarding low truancy rates. Student truancy has become a major concern in the United States with some states and some counties experiencing higher truancy rates than others. This study aimed to understand leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of truancy policies at their school.

To understand what factors affected truancy at CSS, participants were asked to reflect on past experiences, current policies in the school, and how school staff promote an environment that remains conducive for low truancy rate. Three main research questions guided the study: (1) How do school leaders characterize the policies and procedures intended to improve strong attendance rates? (2) What is the role of families and caregivers in implementing high levels of attendance? (3) What theoretical framework serves as the foundation for policies at CSS? Data from interviews were collected, recorded and analyzed, and responses are presented as topics.

A conceptual framework was applied to understand the scope of the problem of truancy. They were incentive theory of motivation and family systems theory. From the interview, five topics emerged: (1) Perceptions of participants regarding student truancy and the policies and procedures in place at the charter school, (2) Truancy rates versus good attendance, (3) Effects of

truancy policies and procedures on students, (4) Analysis of external factors motivating student truancy, and (5) Identification of factors leading to decreased truancy. This study confirmed that non-punitive measures like rewards improves motivation for students to attend school. School leaders, including positional leaders, teachers, and parents play an important role in encouraging attendance and discouraging truancy. Discipline tracking, or ongoing monitoring and assessment of the status of students, leads to lower rates of truancy.

University of New England

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented

by

Alix Desulme

It was presented on

August 1, 2018

and approved by:

Michelle Collay, Ph.D.

Lead Advisor

University of New England

Brianna Parsons, Ed.D.

Secondary Advisor

University of New England

Steve Gallon, III, Ed.D.

Affiliate Committee Member

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first give thanks and glory to God for allowing me the opportunity to get through this process. Secondly, I give thanks to my mother who is one of my greatest supporters and my sister Marie who is always there for me. I also give thanks to the rest of my family; thank you is not enough, I am so grateful to my family for their patience and everlasting inspiration along the way.

To my constituents I thank you. You have enabled me to grow as an individual, and as a public servant and to my students who have shown me that the journey of learning is a continuing process.

Thank you to my team at the University of New England, especially Dr. Collay, Chair of my Dissertation Committee, for her ongoing support, knowledge, and expertise throughout this research process. You always took my calls, replied to my text messages and emails. Without your guidance, this would not have been possible. Dr. Parsons, Thank you for your time and expertise.

Finally, Dr. Steve Gallon III, a faithful public servant, and transformative leader. Thank you for your tremendous guidance and expertise. It was a fantastic committee, the best of mentors, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Next my friends; Rose, Estomene, Michelle, and Katsia that keep my spirits up and help me see the world differently, thank you for your love and support. To my best friend Tray, thank you for pushing me to be my best, your ongoing support, love, and words of encouragement mean a lot.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my two classmates; Julia and Gizelle. Julia, you showed me to look on the bright side of everything, a special thank you for your time and support throughout this program. I would be remiss if I failed to mention my good friend and teammate

Gizelle. Words do not express enough my thanks to you. I could not imagine a more beautiful person to work with on this journey. Without your support, encouragement, and always there to listen, this dissertation would not have been possible.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alix Desulme". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alix Desulme

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Understanding Reasons for Truancy.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	9
Assumptions .....	10
Limitations .....	10
Scope of the Study .....	11
Significance .....	12
Definition of Terms .....	13
Conclusion .....	13
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Addressing School Truancy.....	15
School-based Programs .....	16
Punitive Measures.....	17
Non-Punitive Measures .....	18
Student Characteristics .....	19
Family Characteristics .....	21
Parental Engagement .....	23

Wholistic Programs .....	25
Types of Programs .....	27
Problems with Current Truancy Programs .....	28
Characteristics of Successful Programs.....	31
Conceptual Framework.....	32
Incentive Theory of Motivation.....	33
Family Systems Theory .....	36
Conclusion .....	38
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Research Design and Approach.....	41
Setting .....	42
Sample .....	43
Ethical Protection of Participants .....	43
Data.....	44
Data Analysis.....	45
Role of the Researcher.....	46
Potential Limitations of the Study .....	46
Assumptions .....	47
Conclusion .....	47
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>49</b>
Interview process .....	51
Topics and Responses.....	52

Topic 1: Perceptions of participants regarding student truancy and the policies and procedures in place at the charter school .....	52
Summary Statement .....	55
Topic 2: Truancy rates versus good attendance .....	55
Summary Statement .....	57
Topic 3: Effects of truancy policies and procedures on students .....	57
Summary Statement .....	59
Topic 4: Analysis of external factors motivating student truancy .....	59
Summary Statement .....	61
Topic 5: Identification of factors leading to decreased truancy .....	61
Summary Statement .....	64
Conclusion .....	64
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Interpretation of Findings .....	66
RQ1: How do school leaders characterize the policies and procedures intended to improve strong attendance rates? .....	66
RQ2: What is the role of families and caregivers in implementing high levels of attendance? .....	69
RQ3: What theoretical framework serves as the foundation for policies at CSS? .....	71
Implications .....	73
Recommendations for Practice .....	73
Conclusion .....	76
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>78</b>

Appendix A- IRB Permission.....	85
Appendix B- Permission Letter to Site Director Request.....	86
Appendix C- Participant Consent .....	88
Participant’s Statement .....	91
Researcher’s Statement.....	91
Appendix-D-Questions .....	92

TABLE

Table 1: Study participants ..... 51

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Student truancy is a growing problem in the United States. Over the last twenty years the truancy rates have grown nationwide with the highest rates in inner cities (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). Research indicates that student truancy leads to potential socially deviant behavior in adulthood (Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017). Many students absent for prolonged periods are more likely to perform poorly academically, risking failure in classes and facing disciplinary action. Characteristics of some schools with high truancy rates are punitive truancy programs, lack of alternative study options for suspended students, and lack of counseling and tutoring (Bye, 2010). While high truancy is an issue, other schools maintain low truancy rates. Those schools give students the option for tutoring, allow distance learning for suspended students, and take on a mixture of punitive and non-punitive measures (Duarte & Hatch, 2014).

With a national ranking of 764 and a Florida ranking of 66 and called by a pseudonym for the purposes of anonymity: “Charter Secondary School” (CSS), CSS is considered one of the best high schools in the state regarding student attendance rates and overall school participation (Great Schools!, 2017). The school has low truancy among minority students, which is a notable and distinctive quality, making it an anomaly in the surrounding area (Great Schools!, 2017). First established in 2005, Charter Secondary School is a public charter school built on a suburban University Campus (Great Schools!, 2017). The current enrollment number stands at over 500 (Great Schools!, 2017). As an ‘A’ rated school, it serves students from grades 6-12 (Charter Secondary School website, 2007).

In its early history, CSS was originally a middle school (Charter Secondary School, 2007). The portable structures that comprised the school served as an alternative for students within the area (Charter Secondary School, 2007). In 2005, the school gained a permanent

structure thanks to donations. The school has several full-time teachers for a moderate student population reflecting a ratio of less than 20 students per teacher (19:1) (USNEWS, 2017). The percentage of economically disadvantaged students lies at 33% with minority enrollment of 83%. Although class attendance is high and the percentage of students who tested for AP exams is at 81%, the percentage of students who pass the AP exams is 47%, or less than half. English and Mathematic proficiency levels lie at 70% and 68% respectively, which is above the district and nationwide average (USNEWS, 2017). With a College Readiness Index over 48, the school has room for improvement.

While students earn average test scores overall, students who attend CSS perform better than students at other schools in the same district (USNEWS, 2017). The district average for English proficiency is 50% and Mathematics proficiency at 37%. The district average for college readiness is at 44.7. This data represents assessments conducted at 113 schools for 113, 242 students (USNEWS, 2017). With a graduation rate of 98%, Charter Secondary School provides a case worthy of further study.

### **Understanding Reasons for Truancy**

There are several reasons for truancy and they are often complex and varied. Research on truancy suggests that a negative school environment, student behavior, family economic status, and mental health problems are key contributors (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, & Winters, 2014; Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017). A negative school environment can cause problems for students wishing to learn. Schools in this region often have large classrooms, making it difficult for students to focus in class and receive attention necessary for understanding the curriculum (Losen, 2015). If for example, a student has questions or needs examples for a specific assignment in class, the teacher may not have had the time or patience to

attend to that student when he or she dealt with 29 other students that needed the same level of attention.

Many schools across the country have strict policies regarding disruptive student behavior that could lead to suspension or even expulsion. Several factors could cause disruptive behavior among students (Losen, 2015). One common reason is poverty, as "...high levels of poverty have a negative effect on school behavior. This is attributed largely to the chronic and acute stress experienced by students living in poverty. The exposure is associated with externalizing behaviors that are disruptive in school settings" (Hutcheson, 2014, p. 1). Students that face poverty are often part of an unstable household. They may endure problematic and abusive parents and lack basic resources. Students who exhibit poor behavior need opportunities to learn from their mistakes. Research suggests that if they receive the help and resources that make a positive difference in their lives, they may have better outcomes. Instead, they are often suspended or expelled and not given a chance to improve. High rates of suspension lead to a higher rate of truancy. "The bifactor structure reflected a general factor of Problems in Behavioral Engagement and two group factors: Problems in Social Engagement and Problems in Academic Engagement" (Barghaus et al., 2016, p. 154). Researchers noted students may not have had academic problems, but instead presented a-social or anti-social behaviors. They may have not felt comfortable engaging with other students due to fear of judgement or an inability to properly socialize. Providing students with the tools to both engage socially and academically allow for a higher percentage of academic-based positive outcomes. Student disinterest in academics may also play a key role in truancy (Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017). They may not engage in school-based learning because suspensions and expulsions may negatively impact their willingness to participate in school. When students receive suspensions, they have no access to the schoolwork. When the suspension ends, depending on how long their time out of

school is, students may have increased difficulty catching up with classwork (Reid, 2014) (Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017).

Re-entry after suspension or expulsion sets up a pattern of “no options” to complete school work. Students cannot go to school or contact the teacher for assignments, and are placed at a disadvantage (Reid, 2014). This was especially the case if they were not strong academically. To fall behind in schoolwork when students have experienced little success and low grades could further set them back, and at times, leads to failures in classes (Reid, 2014). The problems of negative school environment, student behavior, family economic status, and mental health problems (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, & Winters, 2014; Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017) must be addressed for truancy programs to be effective. Suspension/expulsion and the associated re-entry problems can be further understood through a theoretical framework that considers motivation and school retention.

By exploring incentive theory of motivation and research showing the connection between expulsion/suspension, interest, and truancy, the literature offers clarity about why truancy rates are high and what can be done to counteract it. Incentive theory of motivation and Family Systems Theory offer a robust theoretical framework from which to understand motive and environment. The questions about complexity of truancy are ones that cannot be answered through one avenue or reasoning. The scope of the problems associated with truancy is large. When students are suspended or expelled for their behavior, they may have a tougher time catching up in school and succeeding in their academic endeavors. This can lead to other problems down the line as students mature and become adults.

For this study, the specific focus was school-based policies and procedures that may mitigate or reduce truancy. An examination of the existing research provides some background and describes factors that lead to truancy, approaches used by school leaders to address truancy,

and identified successful structures and strategies. After having undertaken a proper synthesis of the reasons surrounding the problem, there was a greater understanding about how to approach the study. Therefore, it was important to state the scope of the problem and to define the focus, to therefore address the purpose of the study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Truancy rates in the United States have grown (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014). Whether a student is absent due to a suspension or because they willingly choose to be absent, the problem has remained worthy of research and continues to require intervention. The problem addressed by the study is the following: Educational leaders may have implemented policies and procedures in public charter schools, but documentation about school leaders' beliefs about which are most effective and why, is largely absent from the literature.

One policy associated with higher rates of truancy is known as "zero-tolerance." Such a disciplinary policy enabled harsher and stricter punishment of student behavior. "Since the 1990's, implementation of zero tolerance policies in schools has led to increased use of school suspension and expulsion as disciplinary techniques for students with varying degrees of infractions" (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014, p. 1110). When students are targeted for punitive measures rather than having opportunities to receive help, they are exposed to a negative culture that may lead to continued truancy (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014).

For example, research suggested the experience of suspension or expulsion could lead to illegal behavior associated with a criminal record. "Being suspended or expelled from school increased the likelihood of arrest in that same month and this effect was stronger among youth who did not have a history of behavior problems and when youth associated with less delinquent peers" (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014, p. 1110). When schools expel and

suspend students, school leaders add to the truancy rates of the school. This is not to say that expulsion and suspension were not necessary in a school setting. However, negative behaviors associated with truancy may increase when punitive measures outweigh non-punitive measures. The zero tolerance policies of schools became the main cause for concern in these growing cases of suspension and expulsion because they were considered punitive measures (Schargel, 2014). Therefore, policies needed to change to address this problem. Although truancy does not directly lead to crime, it often has had a high correlation (Schargel, 2014). To enable change and investigation, researchers must examine schools like Charter Secondary School to determine what approaches leaders use and then identify those that improve retention.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Effective school policies and procedures that improve attendance and reduce truancy may contain processes and options that provide support and variability like additional study hours and counseling. Without understanding the influence of such actions, little help could be generated and implemented to help students avoid high truancy rates. The purpose of the study was to document school leaders' perspectives about how policies and procedures reduce truancy and improve student attendance. By interviewing key staff in Charter Secondary School, a public charter school with low truancy levels, school leaders' perspectives about effective policies and procedures were gathered. These findings informed recommendations that may be useful to school leaders who strive to improve retention and reduce truancy.

Attendance plays a large part in students performing well academically. Research about truancy reduction suggested students with more attendance options were able to overcome difficulties that contributed to truancy (Reid, 2014; Schargel, 2014). Effective school policies where attendance was improved contain processes and options that provided a structure to

address truancy and improve retention. Without understanding such approaches, school leaders can't help students in need, improve retention, and avoid high truancy rates.

The topic of school leaders' perspectives on student attendance and retention was explored by way of interviews at a school with high rates of attendance. Charter Secondary School (CSS) has better attendance and better academic performance compared to all other schools in the district (on average). Furthermore, most of the students are students of color. This school was a starting point for investigation into effective school policies. Studies examined in the literature review and assessment of those policies in the findings sections offered recommendations about effective strategies to improve attendance. These studies also demonstrated how other school leaders address their status as "minority majority" schools and how the location of school (urban, rural, or suburban) influences their practices.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions drawn from the literature informed the direction of the study. The questions below offered potential avenues of research and examination regarding truancy rates for CSS and student truancy in general. How do school leaders at a diverse, urban secondary charter school describe the factors that contribute to a high attendance rate and a low truancy rate? Sub-questions that inform the study were:

1. How do school leaders characterize the policies and procedures intended to improve strong attendance rates?
2. What is the role of families and caregivers in implementing high levels of attendance?
3. What theoretical framework serves as the foundation for policies at CSS?

The study was qualitative and focused on the use of interviews to collect leaders' perspectives on the topic of attendance and truancy. "The interview has today become one of the most widespread knowledge-producing practices across the human and social sciences in general

and in critical psychology more specifically” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 1008). Interviews were semi-structured and provided flexibility for participants. The majority were done face-to-face, with one conducted over the phone. Formal interviews have a structure to them where the researcher asks a question and the participant answers. However, in informal interviews, there can be discussion and the interviewer may use follow up questions in a more conversational approach (Brinkmann, 2014). All qualitative interviews have structure to them. “Most qualitative interviews, however, are semi-structured. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher provides some structure based on her research interests and interview guide but works flexibly with the guide and allows room for the respondent’s more spontaneous descriptions and narratives” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 1008).

There was a need to understand from the Charter Secondary School staff or school leaders’ perspectives what policies and procedures were in place, what improvements and changes have been made to improve attendance, and what kind of school environment such policies promote. These findings can inform school leaders and others striving to reduce truancy. Findings reflected school leaders’ beliefs about what is being done to achieve positive outcomes for the student population. Similar studies have gathered a significant amount of insightful information addressing important questions about truancy.

Using fixed effects regressions and controlling for truancy peer group effects, we observe that truancy (measured as both a discrete dummy variable and a continuous count measure) positively correlates to early school leaving. A truant has a 3.4 percentage points higher risk of leaving school without a qualification (De Witte & Csillag, 2012, p. 549).

This study examined policies surrounding truancy programs and perceptions of academic staff about their effectiveness. It was important to allow students and staffers to give their

opinions and enable discussions of what led to their positive or negative opinions about policies. Their responses were documented and organized under topic headings. Five topics emerged through the interview process and are used to present participant perceptions. They align with topics in the literature review and universal themes or concepts that lead to successful academic performance by students and good attendance records are recommended.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Truancy is a complex problem and theories presented recognize the various influences on truancy. The method chosen allowed for a focus on various narratives that were analyzed to understand and describe the problem. While different researchers point to potential solutions, experiences of school leaders note negative or positive outcomes of school-based policies. The leaders' vision of a successful truancy program within the selected school presents concepts of what actions may be valuable towards reduction of student truancy rates. Within the conceptual framework is the theoretical framework: incentive and motivation, and family systems theory.

An important theory explored in this study was the incentive theory of motivation. One author states "...people are pulled towards behaviors that offer positive incentives and pushed away from behaviors associated with negative incentives. The incentive theory suggests that people are motivated to do things because of external rewards" (Rehman & Haider, 2013, p. 141). Incentivizing students to attend class by receiving a reward may be a crucial element missing in schools with high truancy rates and lack of incentive may explain the downward spiral of some students when they are punished severely for being absent.

Family systems theory is a systems-level framework that allows exploration of a person's life through the context of the family and portrays the individual's family as an emotional unit contributing to the emotional wellbeing of the person (Breda, 2014). A theory introduced by Dr. Murray Bowen, the theory posits families exist as interdependent and interconnected individuals

that cannot be understood in isolation from the system (Breda, 2014). In the case of truancy, if a student is performing poorly in school and is truant, this absence could be due to family responsibilities at home such as working to provide for the family, childcare responsibilities, or taking care of an ill parent. Family systems theory allows for identification of potential connections and expectations within the family that could be causing stress for the student and lead to truant behavior (Breda, 2014).

### **Assumptions**

The main assumption guiding this study was how effective attendance policies and procedures became the cornerstone for school leaders striving to reduce truancy rates. Other assumptions included the understanding that higher rates of truancy lead to poorer academic performance. When students fail to attend class voluntarily, they put themselves at greater risk of performing poorly in school. Poor academic performance reflects their inability to keep up in school and a lack of motivation to complete assignments (Rollnick, 2016). They may have been unwilling to attend school due to mental health problems, an unstable home life, or physical health conditions. Another assumption was that students living in poverty and minority students may have a more difficult time managing school due to a turbulent home life. Some research addressed the prevalence of school-based institutionalized racism which may influence students' willingness to attend school (Rollnick, 2016). Although this was not a topic that was covered in-depth in this study, it is important to recognize the relationship of truancy to lack of resources, family-based problems, and being a minority member of the larger society.

### **Limitations**

The study was limited to one public charter school that served as the case to explore leaders' perceptions of how their school maintains a low truancy rate. Another limitation was the number of people to interview for the study. Interviews were conducted with representatives of

administration and staff. The findings were not generalizable to all schools, although the findings may inform leaders at other, similar schools. The literature review only examined how American schools handle truancy and policies that either decrease or increase truancy rates. No other limitations were noted.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study was qualitative and used interviews with school leaders to collect data. Interview transcripts contained perceptions of respondents about the Charter Secondary School's policies and approaches to attendance and truancy. By asking questions of school leaders and parent leaders, the researcher developed greater understanding about what policies were in place that support better attendance rates than other schools in the district. Interestingly, the school fared better regarding academic scores and has a high graduation rate.

The literature review provided a foundation for the study, and the interviews provided the data. The literature review served as a comparative guide to not only establish the research questions, but also analyze the data garnered from the interviews. If other successful schools have similar policies in place, they could serve as a potential standard to apply nationally to decrease truancy in all schools throughout the country. The literature review also provided examples of policies in schools with high truancy rates to see what should not be done. The results were discussed within the context of potential modifications that can be made to help improve attendance rates and raise academic success of students.

Ultimately, it was important to acknowledge what Charter Secondary School has to offer students and see whether attendance policies can serve as a model for other schools in the district and beyond. Although the qualitative study was small, including seven staff members from the school and one parent, it provides the kind of insight that cannot be gathered elsewhere.

## Significance

The study was an important step in learning what works for a school staff seeking to reduce truancy among students. Furthermore, findings may lead this school and others like it to adopt and implement effective programs and policies (Zyromski & Mariani, 2016). Both charter and public school leaders across the United States need the knowledge to improve their students' attendance and academic progress. First, however, they need to see findings that demonstrate how certain policy implementation works and decide whether they are worth the time, money, and effort. Like evidence-based practice in nursing, staff need to see evidence of policies that have already been implemented that have led to improved rates of attendance and greater academic success of students (Zyromski & Mariani, 2016).

While it helped seeing the statistics of a successful school like Charter Secondary School, it was even more significant to document the steps leaders took to reach that level of success. Collected information can be compared to other schools to identify what core principles and actions have been used to achieve such positive results. Growth and positive outcomes come from tested and approved practices.

Researchers need to continue their pursuit of finding and documenting policies and procedures that work and offer guidelines and direction for school staffs that seek to improve attendance and reduce truancy. The growing problem of truancy in the United States requires a thoughtful and considerate assessment of those schools that have reduced truancy. These factors that have led to truancy will remain prevalent. School leaders cannot rectify many of those factors, but they can take actions at their sites. Actions cannot be taken unless there is sound research and evidence behind them (Zyromski & Mariani, 2016).

Lastly, studies like the one here offer an anchor point to investigate other aspects of school life, school environment, and student behavioral problems. If students have problems due

to struggles with sexuality, gender identity, or even political affiliation, their experiences matter regarding understanding truancy-related behaviors. These social dynamics could also be investigated in future studies. The results could then be used to spearhead changes in policies and lead to continue progression towards a safe and positive school environment.

### **Definition of Terms**

The terms utilized in this study are detailed below.

Truancy	When a student stays away from school without a sufficient reason; can be also labeled as absenteeism. Days suspended may be included in truancy rates.
Charter School	(in the United States) a publicly funded independent school established by community groups, parents, or teachers under the terms of a charter with national/local authority.
Expulsion	Meaning permanent withdrawing/exclusion, when a student is banned or removed from a school system/university due to consistent violations of an institution's rules. However, it can also be for a single offense of fitting harshness in extreme cases.
Suspension	Regarding schools, suspension (a.k.a. temporary exclusion) is an obligatory leave given to a student as a method of penalty that can last anywhere from a single day to as long as several weeks, where a student cannot attend school or step foot inside the school (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2013)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, truancy rates are a growing problem in United States schools. Charter Secondary School is one school focused on reducing truancy rates. CSS has done so, according

to recent statistics. By exploring Charter Secondary School's school policies and procedures that increase or decrease truancy rates in Florida, the researcher hoped to understand school leaders' perspectives on how their approaches to school discipline have improved attendance.

The next section is a literature review. The literature review focused on causes of truancy, important policies already in place in other schools to improve attendance, and how these policies could be similar to or different from CSS. The recent literature documents the significance of truancy and how school approaches influence student behavioral outcomes. Some schools took punitive measures towards truancy, others took non-punitive measures, and still more used a mixture of both. Why were such measures adopted? The aim of the study was to establish the many factors that lead to truancy and then to document whether and how school-based attendance policies were perceived as successful. There were several factors at play from family situations, community, environment, mental health, and poverty. The literature review addressed these topics. With so many schools throughout the country experiencing high truancy rates, what does Charter Secondary School do that enables high attendance among its student population? What policies has the school adopted to support a positive environment that motivates students to attend school and learn?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focused on several topics because many factors contribute to truancy. The topics addressed are: school truancy, school-based programs, punitive/non-punitive truancy programs, student and family characteristics, parental engagement, tackling the school truancy problem, school-based programs, problems with current truancy programs, characteristics of successful truancy programs, and theoretical framework: Incentive Theory of Motivation and Family Systems Theory. The research provided illuminates some ways to understand the problem of school truancy and approaches to reduce it.

#### **Addressing School Truancy**

Student truancy has become a major concern for school leaders and their communities (Rollnick, 2016). Therefore, to reduce truancy there is a need to research and cultivate worthwhile strategies to reduce negative behaviors leading to truancy. However, there is also a need to understand why students are truant in the first place. Poverty and negative school environment are concerns that raise the likelihood of truancy in students (Reid, 2014). This section illuminated the problems that cause student truancy. It became difficult to identify the costs or benefits of various approaches to the problem. Traditionalists believe that the punitive discipline approach is necessary because adherence to rules should lead to positive outcomes. Those in the camp of nonpunitive discipline desire to demonstrate how giving students options could lead to better results not just in lower truancy rates, but to the personal growth of the student (Rollnick, 2016). With all the strategies and methods available, it was difficult for school leaders to determine what mixture of punitive and nonpunitive discipline works. The research presented shows the success of programs and/or schools that have enabled a reduction in truancy

rates and describes the policies in effect that increased truancy rates to demonstrate how to reduce student truancy.

### **School-based Programs**

While educators realize truancy is primarily a reflection of students' personal situations, school staffs continue to address the problem within the school. One approach to decreasing truancy rates is through truancy reporting. Truancy reporting allows students to be assessed to see if they are high-risk (De Witte & Csillag, 2012). Because truancy can have a profoundly negative effect on students in the long term, schools have become more stringent on truancy reporting. "A truant has a 3.4 percentage points higher risk of leaving school without a qualification" (De Witte & Csillag, 2012, p. 549). Truancy reporting allows for better assessment of at-risk youth and offers a means of identifying potential problems with students early on (De Witte & Csillag, 2012). This outcome makes truancy reporting an effective preventative measure. Such a preventative measure appeared to have positive effects on students at risk. "The idea is straightforward: if students are better monitored with respect to truancy, schools can more easily identify students at risk. The results indicate that improved truancy reporting significantly reduces school dropout by 5 percentage points" (De Witte & Csillag, 2012, p. 549).

To jumpstart the process of retaining students, school staffs figured out ways to help students connect to their community. One preventative measure used is to identify at-risk youth and set up interventions leading to positive educational outcomes (De Witte & Csillag, 2012). Schools like CSS already have in place a robust truancy reporting protocol. The rules within the protocol explained students cannot be absent more than a few days or the school staff contacts the student's household (De Witte & Csillag, 2012).

More research should address how preventative measures can expand to include ways to assess at-risk behavior. Potential sub-topics include: lateness for class, missed homework

assignments, and so forth (Reid, 2017). This kind of research can lead to recommendations for better assessment of students with potential truancy problems. Healthcare professionals are examining ways to apply research to practice in community settings, perhaps those applications can be used to improve educators' responses to important topics like student truancy (Reid, 2017).

### **Punitive Measures**

Nitschke, Mazerolle, & Bennett (2014), demonstrated punitive measures for truancy through the introduction of third-party policing in schools. "Third-party policing is an approach to crime prevention and control involving the police partnering with organizations or individuals to prevent or reduce crime problems" (Nitschke, Mazerolle, & Bennett, 2014, p. 5211). Relying on available criminal, regulatory, or civil laws and rules (legal levers) that allow third parties to take accountability, partially, for control of crime, has created an environment where apprehension of problem students is feasible (Nitschke, Mazerolle, & Bennett, 2014). This strategy may help schools deal with the growing problem of delinquent students but may also lead to students becoming part of the criminal justice system at an early age.

Punitive measures can also be costlier (Nitschke, Mazerolle, & Bennett, 2014). Punitive measures like expulsion or suspension further increase the likelihood of students being truant and performing poorly academically (Shelton, 2014). Students must be guided towards a positive outcome and that means disrupting the belief that punitive measures have kept students from being truant. Although short-term results may lead to a reduction in truancy, the long-term effects were shown to be more negative and long-lasting (Shelton, 2014). Shelton found that students who face punitive measures have a higher chance of committing crimes versus those who faced non-punitive measures.

While some research suggests that police-intervention regarding truancy helped students in that parents were more aware of their children's behaviors, there are still many factors to consider in relation to efficacy. For example, police-intervention has led to higher parental awareness, but also increased potential for truant students to end up in the juvenile criminal justice system (Mazerolle, Bennett, Antrobus, & Eggins, 2017). A mixture of both punitive and non-punitive measures may be most beneficial in tackling the problem of truancy.

### **Non-Punitive Measures**

Punitive measures for truancy have their place in schools and communities. However, non-punitive measures are also useful and offer a chance for students to improve attendance, complete academic work, and remove some of the stigma attached to past mistakes (Reid, 2017). Successful protocols integrate flexibility into standard methods to help the school, family, and the student. Such programs respond to individual student's needs and did whatever was essential to assist the family and student involved in truancy (Mallett, 2015).

One study in Australia aimed to understand truancy and the effects of truancy to generate programs that allowed for effective measures at reducing truancy rates among students (Taylor, Gray, & Stanton, 2016). Mallett (2015) demonstrated that with proper research, non-punitive options are feasible. However, they must be done in conjunction with significant research allowing a better understanding of the needs of students who are truant (Mallett, 2015). The expectation was that non-punitive measures would be more effective than punitive measures. However, if there was no significant difference, non-punitive measures must be assessed for efficacy. Haight, Chapman, Hendron, Loftis, & Kearney (2014) highlighted how non-punitive measures like a truancy program may not work if a key process was not implemented. This means that, if there was no skill-building aspect to the program like tutoring or other proactive measures, the outcome of truancy reduction is reduced.

### **Student Characteristics**

Truancy can have a lasting impact on the life of a student. “School dropout has been extensively studied in the literature as a correlate of negative life outcomes. A precursor to school dropout is truancy, the unexcused or illegitimate student absence from school” (Rocque, Jennings, Piquero, Ozkan, & Farrington, 2016, p. 592). Students may be absent or truant for multitude of reasons. Researchers identified that students who were often more truant than others might be more involved in crime (Shelton, 2014; Shute & Cooper, 2014; Virtanen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, & Kuorelahti, 2014).

Such involvement pointed to the negative correlation of truancy and later life outcomes like delinquency and crime (Rocque, Jennings, Piquero, Ozkan, & Farrington, 2016). Rocque et al. (2016) also stated truancy led to problem drinking. “Results indicate that truancy has long-lasting associations with negative life outcomes, especially for non-violent crime and problem drinking” (Rocque, Jennings, Piquero, Ozkan, & Farrington, 2016, p. 592). If addictive or criminal behavior leads to truancy and truancy can lead to further addictive or criminal behavior, as in the case of this study, the addiction generated a negative cycle of behavior. This finding is important because students experiencing addiction problems or who become involved in delinquent behavior need to receive professional support. Focused support may keep students from engaging in risky actions while also positively contributing to reduction in truancy rates (Rocque, Jennings, Piquero, Ozkan, & Farrington, 2016).

Negative behaviors could be an outcome of negative experiences. From bullying to poor academic performance, students often experience stress that could be detrimental to their academic success. Birkett, Russell, & Corliss (2014) observed the role sexual-orientation disparities had on students in relation to academic achievement and truancy. Through the utilization of pool information, they identified that being part of the LGBT group affected rates

of truancy and academic performance. “LGBT-identified youths reported significantly elevated odds of truancy and low grades (odds ratios = 1.6–3.2; all  $P < .05$ ). Additionally, both genders noting uncertainty about their sexual identity showed increased odds of truancy” (Birkett, Russell, & Corliss, 2014, p. 1124).

Their study found higher truancy rates and poor academic performance with confusion or identification of gender by LGBT youth. The researchers also examined victimization indicators and the struggle with identifying with a sexual minority (Birkett, Russell, & Corliss, 2014). They made the connection between being victimized at school and a lifetime of behavioral risks that lead to truancy and negative behaviors and may further contribute to a prolonged state of negative outcomes. “As early disparities in academic achievement and school engagement have indicated a lifetime of increased health and behavioral risk factors, early intervention targeting school victimization is necessary” (Birkett, Russell, & Corliss, 2014, p. 1124). For there to be any kind of improvement in the lives of these students, the first step would be to recognize their experiences as victims and help them collect the resources necessary to combat these stressors and the feelings that come from being a targeted minority or having limited access to resources.

Additional research identified related causes of truancy. This next point has been shown in the literature. For example, transgendered students were more prone to mental health issues according to Birkett, Russell, & Corliss (2014). Mental health problems in general lead to negative behaviors such as absenteeism in school (Reid, 2017). Exploring these factors would lessen the gap in literature and expand the field’s knowledge base about other causes of truancy amongst students.

Referring to victimization and how being a victim can have a profoundly negative impact on a student’s academic performance and truancy, Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig (2014) aimed to see the education outcomes for students who identified as part of LGBTQ and those

who did not and how that status influenced their academic outcomes. Through a survey involving participation of over eleven thousand students, Aragon et al. (2014) identified that LGBTQ students experienced academic disparities and were more likely to be victims than those who were not LGBTQ. “Victimization partially mediated these differences between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth. These results highlight the role of victimization in partially accounting for academic disparities between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth” (Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2014, p. 1). This class of student is vulnerable to being marginalized in school and their exclusion from mainstream education is part of a more complex picture of social exclusion.

Victimization can come from people outside of the family, but internal family dynamics also lead to truancy. For example, if a student experienced physical abuse in his or her home, this may have had a negative impact on the student’s mental wellbeing. Poor mental health is then expressed through negative behaviors like truancy (Aragon et al., 2014). Therefore, family characteristics are also pertinent in understanding truancy among students.

### **Family Characteristics**

Possible reasons for why students engage in truant behaviors include family environmental factors such as household income and number of parents in the home (Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017). Students with high truancy rates often come from impoverished backgrounds. These impoverished backgrounds may include single parent households. Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong (2017) identified that single parent households may contribute to poor math performance. “...individual truancy of pupils fully explains the relationship between living in a single-mother family and math performance (after controlling for confounding factors, such as parental socioeconomic status)” (p. 1). As research has moved forward towards identifying the causes of truancy, more is being revealed concerning family characteristics and school performance and truancy.

If a student comes from a single parent household, the stress of having limited or no access to financial resources hindered academic performance according to Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong (2017). Poor academic performance led to decreased motivation to perform in school, leading to negative behaviors in an outside of school, that could then lead to higher truancy rates. When attempting to cope with the problems students have in relation to why they were absent from school, it may be important to adopt nonpunitive measures aimed at helping these affected students perform better in school. Positive academic performance increased motivation for students to attend school regularly and reduces truancy rates (Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017; Reid, 2014).

What was identified thus far is that sexuality disparities and income disparities seem to be of keen interest in recent literature (Reid, 2017). These could be the central causes of some of the mental health problems experienced by students who engage in negative behaviors like truancy (Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2014). If this is the case, it begs consideration of how schools can alleviate the burden these students have and address the school-based experiences of their victimization. As school staffs aim to reduce truancy rates, they would have to acknowledge these disparities in a meaningful and effective way.

Nonpunitive measures must be aimed towards helping students deal with these disparities. Further attention could be placed on implementing effective skill building and using resources to improve academic performance. For example, a potential avenue could be providing these at-risk students with extra study time after school (Shute & Cooper, 2014). Yet, to properly support students it is necessary to determine what the other effects of disparities among students can produce. Another factor in poor academic performance is the presence of learning disabilities.

In an urban middle school it was discovered that students demonstrated increased risk due to emotional disturbances and/or learning disabilities. “Students with serious emotional disturbance and learning disabilities demonstrated amplified risks of being classified in the Chronic or Rising subgroups, which show chronic or incremental upward truant trajectories over time” (Chen, Culhane, Metraux, Park, & Venable, 2015, p. 1066). The effect of learning disabilities has been researched across several disciplines. However, when it comes to truancy, the effects of learning disabilities should be further investigated because they can have a negative effect on a student’s academic performance and truancy rates overall. Although some learning disabilities are easier to identify, others like dyslexia can be difficult to recognize, and undiagnosed learning problems contribute to a student’s lack of motivation to attend school (Chen et al., 2015).

It seemed daunting to take into consideration these potential causes and identify a comprehensive solution that could help students stay in school and reduce truancy rates. However, more and more school staffs are taking the steps necessary to pursue positive outcomes for their students (Dronkers, Veerman, & Pong, 2017). From increased after-school time to programs aimed at skill-building, schools and researchers have in place or are suggesting solutions that could deliver and potentially provides ways for students to handle disparities regardless of what they are, so they can have better educational outcomes (Reid, 2017). This next section addresses the ways schools and researchers try to combat truancy by tackling the problems that cause it.

### **Parental Engagement**

Parental involvement or parental engagement play a key role in causing or reducing truancy behaviors in students according to McNeal (2017). In a recent study, the researcher found parent engagement affected student achievement not just with their children, but

influenced the school outcomes in an indirect manner. “Findings confirm that parent-child and parent-school involvement practices differentially influence student attitudes and behaviors, thereby indirectly affecting student achievement – to varying degrees” (McNeal, 2017, p. 564). According to McNeal (2017), when students engaged in truancy behaviors and parents were not there to assist them, they did not regard their actions with a sufficient level of concern. The results showed truancy may not be seen as a major problem by some parents, and thus students engaging in truancy may not assume responsibility for their actions, increasing the likelihood of ongoing truancy.

Parental engagement can also come in the form of emotional bonds according to Kim & Page (2013). Emotional bonding leads to the enhanced capacity of the children to develop proper emotional regulation. “Implications for truancy intervention programs for high-risk elementary school children include more focused attention to the importance of children’s developing capacities for emotion regulation and the child-parent bond” (Kim & Page, 2013, p. 869). The researchers provide data that support the finding that improved emotional regulation is a positive response to parental engagement. The correlation emphasizes how negative behaviors like truancy arise from lack of parental engagement. This research suggests school staffs should aim to provide avenues for parental engagement to occur to improve student retention and to raise achievement.

Programs focused on enabling positive academic outcomes among students are at times wholistic in nature (Taylor, Gray, & Stanton, 2016). These programs use a combination of approaches to address the behaviors and consider internal and external factors that cause truancy. They can also be simple in their focus. Implementing more comprehensive programs can decrease potential disparities and improve specific outcomes like a measurable reduction in truancy (Shmueli, 2017).

### **Wholistic Programs**

Researchers and schools staffs have assessed the truancy problem and discovered ways of effectively handling and reducing truancy rates (Virtanen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, & Kuorelahti, 2014). One study involved 821 Finnish junior high school students. They discovered family and teacher support played an important role in reducing truancy among students. “Teacher and family support were positively associated with student behavioral engagement, which in turn was negatively associated with truancy. Behavioral engagement mediated the associations between teacher and family emotional support and truancy” (Virtanen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, & Kuorelahti, 2014, p. 201). When students felt attachment to their family or their teachers, researchers found this attachment played a positive role in reducing truancy rates. Attachment was labeled as ‘behavioral engagement’.

If a student felt a connection to his or her family, they were more willing to follow the rules set in place for them. Researchers believed this outcome was because they had greater awareness of the expectations placed on them through the communication that comes from attachment. Their research also suggested that students who experience disparities could be placed in the role of the victim. Victims may not feel attached to anyone or anything and that could lead to risky behavior (Virtanen, Lerkkanen, Poikkeus, & Kuorelahti, 2014).

When risky behavior continues, it can perpetuate the cycle that leads to higher rates of truancy (Schargel, 2014). The first step to reducing truancy among students is to provide them with the chance to reconnect with their community (Rollnick, 2016). Whether that is connecting with their family, teachers, or peers, connections support the process of creating positive outcomes for students that can then lead to reduced rates of truancy. This is an important initial step schools can take to improve student academic performance and truancy.

In a book about closing the educational gap, Losen (2015) explained how schools can produce positive results in reducing truancy by adopting methods that promote better recognition of at-risk behavior and addressing those behaviors in a positive, non-punitive way. Like the previous research, Losen (2015) posited that investing in dropout-prevention programs may prove not only cost-effective but allows tracking of students' discipline events.

One approach that might prove cost-effective is investing in dropout-prevention programs that are linked to tracking discipline. To do this, educational administrators would need to identify students who are at risk for receiving frequent disciplinary sanctions by monitoring the number of classroom and office discipline referrals these students receive. Students who receive several discipline referrals should be included in two distinct types of dropout-prevention programs adopted by the school: a drop-out prevention program that focuses on gaining the academic scores needed for school success and a dropout-prevention program that fosters school engagement by building positive relationships with meaningful adults in the student's school. (Losen, 2015, p. 70)

If school staffs implement these guidelines, they will need to develop skill-building and track discipline actions, along with encouraging students to form attachments. The approaches allow for overall improvement among students experiencing challenges outside of school and becoming more and more truant (Losen, 2015). Prevention and connection are key themes in the fight to reduce truancy rates in schools. Students cannot improve academically if they do not feel connected. They cannot be helped if they are not recognized as at-risk, and they cannot succeed if they do not have the skills necessary to perform well academically.

Programs designed to implement one or more of these strategies can greatly reduce truancy rates (Duarte & Hatch, 2014). These researchers conducted a case study that documented the positive effects a federally funded program had on truancy rates. "Sixty-four federal

Elementary and Secondary School Counseling (ESSC) program grants were awarded in 2009. One awarded school district implemented a comprehensive school counseling program based on the ASCA National Model at three high-needs elementary school” (Duarte & Hatch, 2014, p. 71). These grants allowed for additional counseling-based programs that created a positive environment for students who were truant before participation in the program. The counselors were able to help the students and the truancy rates of those schools decreased.

Federal funding of such programs may not be a realistic option for many schools throughout the United States (Duarte & Hatch, 2014). Even if these measures prove to be more cost-effective in the long run, the unstable economic climate of the United States in the last decade has reduced funding schools need to enact these kinds of programs. Research towards improving truancy should also include ways to improve truancy that are low to no-cost (Reid, 2017). From the current information available, schools have adopted various kinds of programs to help decrease student truancy rates (Duarte & Hatch, 2014). Wellness programs for example, are gaining popularity in business (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2013). It is interesting to see the shift of inclusion of these programs in schools. Wellness initiatives could become the new way of addressing student truancy.

### **Types of Programs**

While counseling services can help students at-risk, there are other ways to promote connectivity and skill-building among students. One such method is wellness. Research presented in an article on the San Francisco’s Wellness Initiative demonstrated how focus on wellness improved truancy, expulsion and suspension rates (Hutcheson, 2017). Literature presented in the previous section suggest educational disparities also include limited access to resources. If students receive increased access to resources in the form of wellness programs, such programs could greatly improve their motivation and desire to attend school.

Hutcheson explained that impoverished students experienced short-term and long-term stress due to their limited access to resources and the hard conditions they face due to poverty.

“The exposure to these types of stress is associated with externalizing behaviors that are disruptive in school settings. Because of this negative behavior, many times, these students are subject to disciplinary action such as suspension or expulsion” (Hutcheson, 2017, p. 1).

Hutcheson also stated punitive measures fail to address the root problem or the cause of the truancy. Therefore, a different method was adopted by the San Francisco Unified School District in 2000. The wellness initiative took the form of a school mental health program and was named the ‘Wellness Center’. The main objective of the program was to help students deal with stress. Although the changes to truancy were not major, the district did have a 20% reduction in suspension rates (Hutcheson, 2017). Such results showed programs can work towards reducing troubled outcomes in at-risk students but may need to be modified to reduce truancy rates.

This section provided a basis to show how and why truancy initiatives can be effective. When students receive help to address the causes of their truancy, truancy rates may be reduced. These causes are varied, but often follow the same themes. These themes are attachment, prevention, and skill-building. The next section of the literature review focuses on what schools are doing wrong in relation to truancy in schools.

### **Problems with Current Truancy Programs**

Some of the reasons why truancy measures in schools fail to reduce truancy and do not promote positive outcomes is the complexity behind the reasons and the inability to respond to these root causes of truancy (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, & Winters, 2014). The battle at-risk youth have with emotional and psychological challenges is constant and ongoing. Often, youths’ mental health problems are not adequately researched. “Young people who are often truant from school represent a group of at-risk youth, but one for which mental

health issues are understudied” (Dembo, et al., 2014, p. 402). If school staffs can identify the most common mental health problems students experience, they may be able to provide these students with the appropriate services like a social worker, a therapist, and so forth.

Dembo et al. (2014) highlighted findings that suggested many of the students observed suffered from depression. “LCA indicated the sample of truants was best represented by four latent subgroups of youth with low mental health problems; high depression, low mania; high mania, low depression; and high depression and mania” (p. 402). Depression is a common mental health problem that is unique to the individual (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). Meaning, students have their specific reasons why they may feel depressed. Therefore, if depression is a common mental health problem among truants and truancy programs fail to consider the need to address it, this could explain why truancy problems in general fail to provide the adequate responses to high truancy rates (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). While it may seem impossible to help students with complex problems, at least identifying the potentially most common mental health concerns can assist in guiding the process of developing a solution. As earlier stated in the solutions section, attachment, discipline tracking, and skills-building may be used to help truant students (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, & Winters, 2014).

When programs are implemented, there is a need to assess them. Therefore, some aimed to evaluate truancy programs like at-risk schools (Haight, Chapman, Hendron, Loftis, & Kearney, 2014). While the program’s graduates did well and reduced their truancy behavior, the nongraduates had a more difficult time. The main reason for this disparity was a lack of academic tutoring. “In addition, participants and their parents expressed high levels of perceived improvement in academic performance. Academic tutoring was found to differentiate program graduates from nongraduates” (Haight et al., 2014, p. 779). Academic tutoring allows students to build their skills in education. As previous research stated, some truant students underperform in

areas like mathematics. This can affect student confidence and reduce their desire to attend school. If tutors are available to instruct these students, they may improve and increase their desire and motivation to go to school (Jacob & Lovett, 2017).

Such outcomes revealed that specific actions had a profoundly positive effect on truancy and reinforced the need to help students in relation to skill-building (Haight, Chapman, Hendron, Loftis, & Kearney, 2014). By offering tutoring services, the truant students improved and were able to successfully graduate from the program. Truancy rates declined with these graduates and provided a sound framework to help other schools dealing with truancy (Haight, Chapman, Hendron, Loftis, & Kearney, 2014). Schools having trouble decreasing truancy rates should consider the idea of offering truancy programs with tutoring or at least schedule extra time for students to work on their school assignments.

In another study, researchers interviewed youths about family and school. Their experiences demonstrated they needed support from their parents and more engagement from the school to motivate them to come to school more and learn. “Youths’ experiences and recommendations illustrate the multiple factors that influence school truancy and suggest potential leverage points for reducing truancy, including modifications to the school environment to increase student engagement; a more effective school response to address truancy” (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016, p. 299). Motivation was identified as an integral aspect of reducing truancy among students (Reid, 2017).

School staffs should evaluate punitive and non-punitive measures they adopt to handle truancy (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016). The study’s results stated there was no major difference in truancy recidivism from using punitive or non-punitive measures. Although the results seemed like they may lean towards adoption of punitive measures, Shelton explained non-punitive measures may help in terms of social change and should be adopted because of the

minimal difference in efficacy. Findings "...revealed no statistically significant differences between punitive and nonpunitive programs in truancy recidivism. Based on the study results, a professional development program for teachers on the implementation of a nonpunitive truancy program was created outlining the benefits of nonpunitive approaches" (Shelton, 2014, p. 1).

Thanks to assessment of programs and a review of the characteristics of programs that have been implemented, one can see what approaches reduce truancy of students. By knowing what works, school staffs can then develop programs with greater potential. Some schools have already implemented successful programs (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016; Reid, 2017). It then becomes imperative to understand what characteristics these successful programs have.

### **Characteristics of Successful Programs**

Research on characteristics of successful truancy reduction programs is mixed. For example, some successful truancy programs have a practice among them known as discipline tracking. Discipline tracking is preventative and allows students to see and understand their actions have consequences (Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2012). A review examining the efficacy of truancy programs for chronically truant students suggested that discipline tracking in the form of targeting attendance behaviors proved effective over other techniques. "Chronic truant students benefit from interventions targeting attendance behaviors; however, no program stood out as being more effective than others. Mean rates of absenteeism at posttest in most studies remained above acceptable levels, indicating a need for more effective interventions" (Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2012, p. 1). The lack of effectiveness in truancy programs generally was also noted.

These findings could reflect a lack of other measures that would have addressed the proper handling and greater understanding of the root causes of truancy. Discipline tracking, although effective, may not be enough to improve the truancy rates of students (Iyamu, 2016).

The other approaches, such as attachment and skill-building, are still needed. When truancy programs only offered one part of a three-part strategy, data showed how ineffective truancy programs are and have been since their implementation (Iyamu, 2016).

While some programs have been somewhat effective, it is worth noting how the efforts of schools to reduce truancy rates still fail (Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2014). Two reasons may explain why they do. The first is the lack of options regarding truancy. Expulsions and suspensions may 'scare' students into avoiding truancy but may also promote the response in those who are truant to continue being truant and progress into other negative behaviors. The second reason is that non-punitive measures are ineffective because, while they avoid disciplining students, they may not provide resources towards helping truant students deal with the root causes of their truancy.

Ultimately, the solutions required are those that increase the motivation of the student (Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2014). Motivational/solution-focused intervention allows for effective reduction of school truancy among at-risk youth. Motivation plays a pivotal role in how students behave (Iyamu, 2016). If they have increased motivation because of attachment or academic success, they have more at stake, they'll have more confidence, and they'll be more willing to continue the work that it takes to succeed in school. This can mean reduced number of absences and in overall reduction in truancy (Iyamu, 2016). So many students stand to benefit from measures aimed at increasing their motivation in school.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study draws from motivation theory with a focus on incentive and family systems theory. Problems that lead to student truancy are difficult and multi-faceted, but the research presented in this review suggests school leaders need to be more aware of and understand what approaches are truly effective and which are not in relation to

decreasing truancy rates. The next section focuses on incentive theory of motivation because motivation may be a key factor in truancy reduction.

### **Incentive Theory of Motivation**

Incentive theory of motivation posits that people do things based on the reward they may receive, that there are forces behind actions (Bernstein, 2011). For example, a person rises in the morning and goes to the gym. This is because for the past 6 months, that person has lost weight and seen an increase in energy, well-being, and muscle. The results serve as an incentive to continue going to the gym because the person will continue to see the benefits that include looking and feeling good. Some people may not have such results and may be less motivated to go to the gym. This is considered extrinsic reinforcement.

Incentive theory acts as one of the major theories of motivation, suggesting behavior can be motivated via a desire for incentives or reinforcements (Bernstein, 2011). What began as an idea during the 1940's and 1950's soon took shape thanks to the work of psychologists like Clark Hull. Hull and others built on the previous drive theories to develop incentive theory. Instead of focusing on intrinsic forces believed to be behind motivation, incentive theory posits that individuals are pulled to behaviors leading to rewards, and actions that have the possibility of leading to negative consequences push them away (Bernstein, 2011). This can be seen in truant students who may underperform in school (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016).

Students that underperform in school may experience negative consequences in the form of bad grades and stress (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016). They may be more motivated to be absent because they avoid that stress and instead may take part in other behaviors like drinking and drug abuse because it makes them feel better, even if it is short-term. This could explain why students did not respond well to intervention efforts regarding truancy (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo, 2016). If this core mechanism was not switched, making school a

rewarding experience, or at least not produces negative consequence, there is little chance of seeing a marked improvement in attendance rates in schools.

Going back to the gym example, going to the gym is often regarded as a chore. If person A goes to the gym and feels exhausted immediately afterwards and sore for the rest of week, that person will see going to the gym as a negative consequence. If person B goes to the gym has an increase in energy, is less stressed, and does not feel as sore, that person will most likely keep going to the gym. The result if both people were to continue going to the gym is a fitter body. However, because there may be factors at play like diet and age that could negatively or positively impact the outcomes, this can lead to problems either for person A or person B.

A fitter body can be likened to graduating from high school. This is a desirable effect that people strive for and continue to aim for as they continue their schooling. However, down the line some things may go wrong for some students leading to seeing school and the processes of getting to graduation, as a negative experience. For instance, if a student continually does poorly in math and has no help to improve, that person will begin to see going to school as producing negative consequences because that student will continue to receive negative grades. However, if a tutor steps in and teaches the student how to succeed in math, that student will see that aspect of school as a positive experience and may become more motivated.

The aim for truancy reduction programs should be to make school a more positive environment (Iyamu, 2016). By removing the stigma of learning and providing resources to those students that need it, a school staff can be effective in curbing the desire of students to leave school to pursue more seemingly 'enjoyable' activities (Iyamu, 2016). It was the responsibility of school leaders to understand how to do that. Skill-building was one thing, another was attachment. By increasing attachment to people and to interests, the likelihood of seeing school as an enjoyable experience increases (Reid, 2014). Incentives can sometimes have

disadvantages, as they may be costly and have not been shown to be effective without other supports in place.

Shmueli (2017) examined the possibility of hybrid incentives and allowing for the benefits of incentives without the disadvantages through a mixture of part punitive and nonpunitive measures.

...the use of a multi-part vertical incentives mechanism increases efficiency at minimal additional cost; it overcomes a moral problem of “rewarding the sinner” by giving him a carrot and combines in optimal fashion the advantages entailed by activating the sticks and the carrots, and at the same time – insofar as possible – nullifies most of the disadvantages of each of them. (Shmueli, 2017, p. 1)

This approach can be explained through another example. The somewhat punitive measure of tracking attendance and calling parents if students are absent is somewhat effective (Duarte & Hatch, 2014). However, if students are absent and have been marked so in the system, they can be assigned to a counselor who can then assess whether the student needs assistance. It can be through therapy or tutoring (Duarte & Hatch, 2014). That way there is positive nonpunitive measure combined with a punitive measure and can possibly produce a better result.

Incentives are an important part of reducing truancy (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, & Winters, 2014). A way to increase incentives according to Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, & Winters (2014), was with good attendance or improved attendance leading to rewards. It offered students a chance to feel a connection to their school via an award system. Firm sanctions must be in place should students remain truant (Shute & Cooper, 2014). However, including a non-punitive measure ensured the student had a chance to improve and thus helped reduce the problem of truancy. “Schools should address the unique needs of each child and consider developing initiatives to combat the root causes of

truancy, including tutoring programs, added security measures, drug prevention initiatives, mentorship efforts... and referrals to social service agencies” (Shute & Cooper, 2014, p. 18).

Because motivation plays a key role in academic improvement, school staffs must find ways to increase motivation in the student. Because the incentive theory of motivation relies on extrinsic factors, it is up to the school leaders to decide which approach to take in relation to the ability to positively influence students. The staff that creates a positive environment can promote confidence within the student. Such effort could potentially circumvent some of the root causes associated with truancy.

### **Family Systems Theory**

Family systems theory, or contextual theory, is most beneficial in offering a framework for dealing with the context of truancy. “Family systems theory is a useful approach in the school setting because the concepts can be applied when working with students or in understanding the organizational context” (Maschi & Leibowitz, 2017, p. 86). Students may experience different events in their lives related to family and having a theory to help understand what they might go through is often the piece necessary to provide the level of assistance needed to combat negative behaviors like truancy (Maschi & Leibowitz, 2017). It is the basis for much of current family therapy practices.

Initially known as the Bowen Family Systems Theory, family systems theory offers a broad conceptual model to help guide understanding the effects of actions within the family dynamic. It was created psychiatrist Murray Bowen as a means of identifying key issues for determination of effective treatment modalities in therapy (Titelman, 2014). There are four phases of therapy when using family systems theory. When an individual enters therapy, there is an assumed degree of anxiety, reactivity, fixed-focus motivation, as well as a belief (or lack thereof) in a capacity to gain control over problems in life (Titelman, 2014).

Families are at the center of many challenges and supports for students. Therefore, phase one involved observation of family of origin. This meant recognizing family history and presence of family stories. It helped the therapist see the general picture of problems within the family that affect the student. The next phase involved identifying functional patterns of the individual (Titelman, 2014). By recognizing family patterns manifesting in the student, one can understand why some actions like truancy occur.

The third phase was: the formulation of a strategy for personal change. Here was when an individual began embarking on a strategy to improve and solve problems within the person's life like addressing truancy. "Strategy is a plan of action based on life principles that guide an individual to think, decide, and act. These principles can provide guidelines throughout an individual's life" (Titelman, 2014, p. 80). From there, the final phase, the work of changing self, initiated and allowed the student to guide his or her own changes. These phases provided a mode of thinking that promoted an abstract and wholistic view of what occurs in the lives of students and why students may be truant.

This section provided the framework from which most of the study relies and that is motivation. By motivating students through a mixture of punitive and non-punitive measures, schools had a chance to help the student, but also set a firm foundation that enabled less occurrence of rule-breaking and truancy. While the means of increasing motivation in students can be difficult, it is not impossible and merits further research. Tutoring and discipline tracking seemed to be the most effective of the already establish truancy protocol programs.

Family systems is the other important theory underlying the study. This section offered the potential influences of the various environmental factors leading to student truancy. Family and community environment can play a big role in a student's ability to handle school work and

stressors. Parental influence and access to resources were important factors to consider regarding assistance with truant students.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the literature review covered the need for truancy interventions, what makes truancy efforts effective, what makes existing truancy programs ineffective and what may be at the core of how to decrease truancy rates (motivation). The literature review revealed that motivation is difficult to increase in students who are truant. There were many reasons observed for why students are truant. Some of them stemmed from mental health problems like depression. Other reasons for truancy stem from socially constructed disparities and poor academic performance.

A simple attempt to curb truancy such as discipline tracking may be partially effective, but it will not address the multifaceted aspect of truancy. Truancy itself is a symptom of a deeper and underlying problem. This problem can at times affect the motivation of the marginalized students and can lead to negative behaviors. By simply punishing the truant student or responding with one, simple solution, schools do not address the root causes of truancy properly.

Attachment was another part of the comprehensive solution to decrease truancy and increase motivation. Attachment to teachers, to family, to the community has inspired students to do more and work towards their goals because of increased investment. Skill-building was the final part considered for the solution allowing students to gain confidence in themselves. If they themselves improve, they may increase their desire to succeed and decrease their desire to skip school and be truant.

The next section is the methodology. The methodology focused on the interviews with students and teachers of CSS and provided a basis from which to compare with the results from the literature review.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to understand school leaders' perspectives about how policies and procedures reduce truancy and improve student attendance. By interviewing key school leaders from Charter Secondary School (CSS), a public charter school with low truancy levels, information on effective policies and procedures was gathered (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The research method used for this study was a qualitative case study. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) stated, a case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit. In a case study, the researcher focuses on the exploration of an activity, event, process, or individuals (Creswell, 2014). The following general research question guided the study:

How do school leaders at a diverse, urban secondary charter school describe the factors that contribute to a high attendance rate and a low truancy rate? Sub-questions that guided the study are:

1. How do school leaders characterize the policies and procedures intended to improve strong attendance rates?
2. What is the role of families and caregivers in implementing high levels of attendance?
3. What theoretical framework serves as the foundation for policies at CSS?

The researcher used interviews to collect qualitative data. "The interview has today become one of the most widespread knowledge-producing practices across the human and social sciences in general and in critical psychology more specifically" (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 1008). Interviews can range from formal interviews to informal interviews. They can be done face-to-face, over the phone, or over the internet. These interviews were semi-structured so the researcher asked the initial question and the participant answered it. Participants were asked follow up questions where relevant (Brinkmann, 2014). Qualitative researchers use interviews

that range in structure, with many labeled, 'semi-structured' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). "Most qualitative interviews, however, are semi-structured. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher provides some structure based on her research interests and interview guide but works flexibly with the guide and allows room for the respondent's more spontaneous descriptions and narratives" (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 1008).

The study emerged when the researcher determined there was value in understanding from the staff and school leaders at Charter Secondary School (CSS) their beliefs about the ways they strive to reduce truancy, and how current policies promote strong attendance. Their responses to interview questions gave a good picture of what is being done to achieve positive outcomes for the student population attending. Similar studies using interviews have gathered a significant amount of insightful information, which allow the researcher to explore important questions (De Witte & Csillag, 2012)

Face to face interviews were conducted with 7 school leaders at CSS and the one parent was interviewed on the phone. Interviews were conducted to gain an understanding of their perceptions and beliefs about why CSS has low truancy rate. While the sample size was small, the participants were representative of the staff and one parent. In qualitative studies, the experiences of the participants and the meaning derived from their responses can be a valuable tool for understanding the complex situations in education and the world (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

Some researchers set a number on the amount deemed acceptable for sample sizes even in qualitative studies. "The quota of contexts, circumstances, and social relations will start with a number for practical reasons. It is asserted that a particular size of sample is adequate to investigate a research question" (Emmel, Seaman, & Kenney, 2013, p. 185). Many qualitative methodologists aimed for a large number sample because of a seemingly 'allure' of number.

However, there exists no tests of adequacy, power calculations, or guidelines to establish the proper sample size for qualitative research (Emmel et al., 2013). Therefore, it was important to choose a sample group whose members could describe what was needed and provide meaningful dialogue for analysis. Eight participants were a practical number for this study.

### **Research Design and Approach**

For this case study, qualitative data was collected to gain insight, meaning, and understanding of leaders' perceptions and beliefs about Secondary Charter School's low truancy rate. The aim was to gain an understanding of leaders' perceptions and beliefs about why CSS has low truancy rate as opposed to similar public charter schools. There was focus on specific scenarios, so the case study was defined as particularistic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data are responses to open-ended questions that were asked of each school leader being interviewed. Each participant had the opportunity to conduct a member check of his or her own transcript. Once member checks were completed, each transcript was entered to the program Atlas.ti for coding, organization, and interpretation.

The questions were ten in total. They reflect the research questions, the literature reviewed, and guided discussion with participants.

The questions were:

1. Are you familiar with the written policies and procedures at your school that is designed to encourage attendance? (provided a one-page version at the interview)
2. Are you familiar with the written policies and procedures about attendance at other public charter schools? If so, can you compare and contrast them?
3. In what ways do you (teachers, administrators, Board) strive to adhere to the written policies and procedures?
4. How would you describe perfect attendance? Anti-truancy? Policies and procedures?

5. How do you characterize the effectiveness of good attendance policies and procedures at your school? (teacher, administrator, Board member)
6. What role do you see yourself taking as staff (teachers, administrators and Board member) to improve student attendance?
7. What role do you see yourself taking as a parent to encourage improving your student's attendance at school?
8. Do you have any external stakeholder that supports improving student attendance? If so, please explain.
9. Please tell me a story without using a child's name where attendance policies and procedures are/were beneficial to improving attendance.
10. What are your recommendations for improving attendance rates at the school?

The invitation to interview indicated it was not mandatory but required informed consent. By having provided participants with information leaflets and having them sign a consent form or accept to consent verbally at the interview or written via email, the participants were aware of their right to privacy, anonymity, and developed a better understanding of the questions developed for the study (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Without informed consent, interviews were not deemed acceptable regarding response validity (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

### **Setting**

The setting was Charter Secondary School (CSS). CSS is a public charter school built on small area of property (Great Schools!, 2017). It is in an urban region of the Southeast. The current enrollment number stands at over 500 and the campus type is suburban (Great Schools!, 2017). The school serves students from grades 6-12 (CSS, 2007). The school has over 30 full-time teachers for a student population of over 500 students that reflects a ratio of less than 20

students per teacher (19:1) (USNEWS, 2017). The school is part of a large, public urban district, among the ten largest school districts in the nation.

### **Sample**

Research participants were eight (8) in total, 7 school leaders and 1 parent. The school leaders represent different leadership roles at the school. These include one administrator, four teachers, a parent, a registrar, and a member of the board of directors. The parent leader is an advocate for students and families at the school. The teachers provide leadership to their students and are recognized as exemplary in their profession by members of the school community. The other administrator and board member have experience handling problems regarding school policy. For the participants to qualify for the study, they must have been part of the CSS “family” for at least one year prior to being selected. Through interviews, the participants shared their perceptions and beliefs regarding the low truancy at CSS. The participants ranged from veteran to novice teachers, to a board of director member, and a parent. The diverse roles aided the researcher in gaining and documenting a wider perspective. Although there was an inclusion of novice teachers, all participants had sufficient experience at the site to provide a perspective about why CSS staff does so well limiting truancy and supporting attendance and retention.

### **Ethical Protection of Participants**

Several measures were taken to ensure the protection of the rights of the participants. Creswell (2012) described three basic principles of federal guidelines for protecting participants. These principles include (a) maximizing good outcomes and minimizing risk; (b) protecting autonomy and ensuring well-informed, voluntary participation; and (c) fair distribution of risk and benefits (Creswell, 2014, p. 22). Prior to conducting data collection, an institutional review board (IRB) request was submitted to University of New England for

approval to conduct the study. The lead administrator of the school was asked to provide a letter of cooperation. Once approval was granted, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who could adequately respond to the interview questions.

Measures for ethical protection of participants included informing participants of the purpose of the study (informed consent), sharing information with participants, de-identifying the research site, using ethical interview practices, maintaining confidentiality, and collaborating with participants (Creswell, 2012). The interview format allowed participants to be candid about their perceptions and beliefs about their roles in supporting student attendance and reducing truancy. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance; therefore, participants were protected by providing minimal demographic information and assigning pseudonyms as a means of protecting their privacy (Brinkmann, 2014). The researcher ensured all participants that they were in full control of the interview and they could stop the interview at any time.

### **Data**

Selected study participants were interviewed for 30 minutes. The interview questions were used to help the researcher understand the participant's perceptions about the low truancy rates at CSS. According to Stake (2010), interviews are used to fill in the blanks of what researchers cannot observe. Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask meaningful questions and maintain flexibility so the conversation could take its natural course. The researcher asked participants probing questions to delve further into detail to clarify a point or explain a comment further (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) noted that audio recording an interview was common practice among researchers to capture all the audio data while allowing the researcher to jot down key ideas. With consent of all participants, the researcher audio-recorded interviews to ensure accuracy of the responses by creating verbatim transcription. Open-ended questions

were included in the interview so that participants were able to “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher of past research findings” (Creswell, 2014, p. 218). Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) suggested using an interview guide to serve as the base of the interview. Interviews were conducted during a time that was convenient for the participants, yet outside of school instructional time.

A schedule for face to face interviews was designed based on participant availability. Once each participant’s schedule was available, a calendar invitation was sent to all participants with their scheduled interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In the event the participants were unable to meet in person for the interview, they had the option of a phone interview. All but one of the participants chose to be interviewed face to face.

### **Data Analysis**

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the audio files using Rev.com. After the transcription of the interview, a check was conducted. During this process, the participants had an opportunity to review the transcription prior to data analysis and provided clarification if needed. As previously mentioned, once member checks were completed, each transcript was entered into Atlas.ti for coding, organization, and interpretation.

Conducting a literature review offered a comprehensive understanding of the targeted population as well as anchored the idea of how to organize the data collection processes and findings. The qualitative approach benefited from use of semi-structured interview questions, and the responses were coded with a priori and in vivo coding. “A priori nodes may be defined as those that are linked specifically to the theoretical framework within which a particular study is located” (Parkin, 2016, p. 98). Information was subjected to interpretive and deductive analysis. For instance, some information could be organized in a framework that contained tree nodes reflective of family systems theory or theory of motivation

constructs underlying the study (Parkin, 2016). “In vivo nodes however, represent codes from interview data that may be regarded as ‘indigenous’ terms of reference. In vivo codes therefore reflect the ‘living voice’ of the data as they connect directly to terms used by interview respondents” (Parkin, 2016, p. 98). The researcher used both forms of coding as he sought to consolidate methodological principles part of the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As a former classroom teacher, the researcher understood the importance of protecting the identity of each participant and to limit bias arising from teaching experiences. One reason the researcher chose CSS is because of the lack of relationships with anyone in the school, allowing him to maintain professionalism and formality. Regarding qualifications, the researcher serves an elected official in a city less than a mile from the selected setting. Therefore, it was imperative to define the role of researcher rather than as a former colleague. The researcher had no authority or evaluative power over the potential participants as a former teacher in the district and had no supervisory role at any of the schools. Lack of association or relationship provided the foundation for an effective and professional study (Brinkmann, 2014). The researcher has worked in the same school district as the participants for over 15 years in various capacities including paraprofessional, secretary, Instructional Coach, and teacher. Care was taken not to engage in small talk about the district or community.

It was imperative to enter the interview process without any preconceived notions or assumptions about individual responses or strategies. The need to stay focused during the interviews and assure participants that they were not judged based on their responses was key, especially regarding any privacy concerns participants may have had (Brinkmann, 2014).

### **Potential Limitations of the Study**

A potential limitation of this study was personal bias. As a former classroom teacher, the

researcher was very concerned about the problem of school truancy. Additionally, the study focused on a public charter high school rather than an elementary school, with focus on teen truancy. So the experiences of younger students are not captured. Concerning participant selection, the pool of school leaders was limited because CSS is a small school within a large school district. Therefore, the number of participants available was limited. Additionally, as an elected official in a nearby city from CSS, the researcher was mindful of the dual role of being an elected official and a doctoral candidate and strived to not allow them to conflict in a way that could compromise the study.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher assumed that all participants would candidly convey personal thoughts and beliefs during the interview. The researcher also assumed that each participant clearly understood all instructions for answering the questions. Due to the sensitive nature of the information being gathered by participants, participants were assumed to feel sufficiently secure regarding the assurances of confidentiality. Participants were expected to answer the questions honestly and candidly without any hesitation or reluctance. Finally, it was assumed that the participants would trust the researcher to carry out the study with “integrity and competence” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 228).

### **Conclusion**

There are several, complex reasons for truancy and they were often divergent and varied. To better understand why CSS has a low truancy rate and what strategies school leaders deemed to work, a qualitative case study was used to collect the necessary data and answer the research questions. This case study examined the perceptions and perspectives of 8 school leaders about why CSS has good attendance and limited truancy. The case study used interview questions and

provided informed consent during the interview process. In the next chapter, the findings are discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research was to study the perspectives of school leaders regarding rates of attendance and truancy in the case of a charter school identified as CSS. School leaders included: administrator, registrar, board member, teachers and parent. These individuals were included because they represent effective leadership in and outside of the school. The results obtained from individual interviews uncovered school leaders' perspectives on the factors influencing school attendance. The study addressed this main research question: How do school leaders at a diverse, urban secondary charter school describe the factors that contribute to a high attendance rate and a low truancy rate? This question was explored through three sub-questions. Research Question 1: How do school leaders characterize the policies and procedures intended to improve strong attendance rates? Research Question 2: What is the role of families and caregivers in implementing high levels of attendance? Research Question 3: What theoretical/ philosophical framework serves as the foundation for policies at CSS?

The results emerged from reporting and synthesizing the interview data collected from the participants of the study who were school leaders responsible for adherence and communication of school policy and one parent. The guide used for the collection of qualitative data was an interview protocol that included 10 open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted face to face in a school setting. Each participant was scheduled for a minimum time of twenty minutes. Each of the interviews was recorded with the permission from the participants granted prior to the start of each interview session. After collection of the data from the participants, REV.com was used to transcribe each recording. Each participant had the opportunity to conduct a member check of his or her transcript. Once member checks were completed, then Atlas.ti was used for coding, organization, and interpretation.

The goal of the analysis was to explore school leaders' perceptions about the influence of school structures and policies on improving attendance and reducing truancy of students at this charter school. The data revealed a range of responses and were somewhat dependent on their roles, personal experiences, and relationships with the students. Their responses were organized into topics that were common across the responses.

Topics explored in interviews with the 8 selected participants are as follows:

1. Perceptions of participants regarding student truancy and the policies and procedures in place at the charter school.
2. Truancy rates versus good attendance.
3. Effects of truancy policies and procedures on students.
4. Analysis of external factors motivating student truancy.
5. Identification of factors leading to decreased truancy.

These topics align with the interview questions and the responses provide clarity and direction regarding the effectiveness of the charter's schools policies and procedures regarding student truancy.

The next section offers a brief overview of the participants regarding their code name, position in the school, and gender. The participants' names have been changed for protection of their identity and they have been classified by their role in the school and their gender. Potential participants were asked if they were willing to be interviewed about the research topic. Some potential respondents declined. A total of 20 people was asked and 8 participated. Seven of 8 interviews were administered face to face, and one via phone.

All participants provided important perspectives on student attendance and truancy. Positional leaders were important to interview because of the level of responsibility they had regarding truancy. Teachers are essential school leaders and important participants for a study

that examines staff beliefs about school policies and procedures concerning student truancy. They work closely with students and assess the status of students. Of the 8 participants, 6 are female and 2 are male. The roles included in the study were: One administrator, one board member, one school registrar, one parent, and four teachers.

Table 1 presents the designation of the participants and gender involved in the interview.

Table 1: Study participants

Participants	Designation	Gender
Participant A	Administrator	Female
Participant B	Board Member	Female
Participant P	Parent	Female
Participant R	Registrar	Female
Participant T1	Teacher #1	Male
Participant T2	Teacher #2	Male
Participant T3	Teacher #3	Female
Participant T4	Teacher #4	Female

### Interview process

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol. The study participants in the school scheduled specific times to answer questions in a face to face interview. Eight participants agreed to an interview out of a possible 20 staff, so the answers collected represent a sub-group of school leaders. The responses to ten questions are presented below, organized under 5 topic headings. The interview responses provide a useful overview and

offer an understanding of school leaders' perceptions of the effect of school policy on student truancy. To engage in behavior is to think of actions and then perform them. By examining information in this way, the reader can interpret the findings that emerged during the process of data collection.

The interview responses documented school leaders' understanding of what factors may be at the forefront of student truancy and how school-based structures and procedures may respond to the desires, thought, and motivation of the students. In the literature review, motivation theory was covered to provide a framework or lens through which to examine why students may be truant. Topics addressed below show that student motivation and family systems play an essential role in attendance, retention, and truancy.

### **Topics and Responses**

This section offers verbatim responses and summarized answers. Excerpts of responses are presented along with the participant's context and some interpretation and comparison to the literature. All information such as the participants names were altered using one or two-letters to signify their names.

#### **Topic 1: Perceptions of participants regarding student truancy and the policies and procedures in place at the charter school**

Truancy is a problem that exists in every school. Student truancy means when students decide to skip school or come late to class. School policy allows students and families to understand what is expected of them in an academic environment. Improving the student dynamic involves providing the means with which students can interact with staff and know and understand what is expected of them regarding rules and school policy. These answers therefore, address the presence of informative materials to educate students on the importance of avoiding truancy and school and staff expectations.

**1. Are you familiar with the written policies and procedures at your school that are designed to encourage attendance?**

Participant A stated she helped write school policy by grouping and organizing together several policies. By using a state charter school template, she could design a kind of framework around it. She also became acclimated to the policies and understood what kinds of policies were written and are maintained presently. Another participant, Participant B, stated she knows of the policies and realizes it is part of the student code of conduct package. The student code of conduct was explained as an information package aimed at educating parents and students on the attendance policies of that year.

Participants T4 and R were familiar with the attendance policy, however unfamiliar with the written policy along with participants T1, T2, T3. Participant T4 gave the best detail regarding attendance policy as the charter school studied only allows ten unexcused absences for the year. Participant P noted that the parent's handbook details the attendance policy however, not in a way that is memorable to the participant. With the answers overwhelmingly indicating at least some familiarity with the school's procedures and policies, it demonstrates that use of a parent handbook given to the students to give to parents, is an important part of examining the various ways that policy and procedure can be introduced. Everyone within the school and the parents are responsible for creating a healthy student dynamic, so they need to have and be familiar with the basic information.

Participant B stated they were familiar with the student code of conduct package and made a note of stating that parents also had to sign it along with the student at the beginning of every year. Participant P shared that attendance policies are outlined in the student or the parent handbook. Participant R answered in a similar way.

**2. Are you familiar with the written policies and procedures about attendance at other public charter schools? If so, can you compare and contrast them?**

Most respondents stated they were not acquainted with attendance policies and practices for the state. Participant A stated that parents and students are held legally accountable for truancy. Falling under Florida statute 1003.21, there is some general information understood regarding truancy, but not specific information from other schools. For example, Participant A mentioned parental recording, the definition of makeup and tardy, what is an excused absence and so forth. Participants B, P, T1, and R all replied with no or they intend to follow school policy. With all the other participants stating they did not know, it shows that their knowledge about truancy is only within the charter school where they work or have their child attend.

**3. In what ways do you (teachers, administrators, Board) strive to adhere to the written policies and procedures?**

Participant A stated the need to put procedures in place and ensure everyone follows school policies that are based on state mandates. *So, for instance, when students come to school in the morning, they go directly to homeroom. Every teacher takes attendance and they report that electronically to our registrar who then runs a bulletin. Our goal is to run it before 10 o'clock every morning and she's pretty good about getting it done by nine.* Participant R shared they document attendance each day by making sure that if a student is absent that they bring a note, allowing staff to make the correction if the student meets the school's 'three-day window' that's required for them to provide an excuse.

Participant P makes sure that their child goes to school every day. If he misses a day of school, Participant P provides the staff with an excuse, for example, for a doctor's appointment. This follows the guidelines for excused absences. Participant T1 noted that the policy is, if students do not follow the rules, teachers will find out where that student is, and check the

attendance record to see if that student is absent or wandering about (a rare occurrence there). When a student is not in a classroom, there is an APB sent out via email, so teachers know where that student is, and added: *or if the teacher is holding a student, they call the other classrooms and say, "I'm holding this student," so they're not marked absent in the classroom. So those are the kind of things that we do to adhere to the policies.*

Participant T2 always tries to take attendance first thing in class. T2 feels the need to keep track of who comes in tardy. Once students reach the fourth tardy threshold, T2 always tries to send a referral to avoid automatic unexcused absences. Participant T3 strives to keep accurate records of absences. From teachers' point of view, the one flaw in the system is *that students may have many, many unlimited or excused absences. I think students abuse the system. It's not many, but there are always a few who seem to rack up many absences.* Participant T4 has always been a very present employee in every place they have ever worked. T4 stated they have only missed 3 out of 180 school days, aiming for almost perfect attendance.

### **Summary Statement**

The staff at CSS care about attendance policies and procedures. They aim to strive for perfect attendance and expect that from their students. While they try to give chances to their students regarding absences, there is a set tone of awareness and goal towards perfect attendance for everyone in the school. The parent participant noticed this emphasis and acts accordingly to avoid collecting unexcused absences for their child.

### **Topic 2: Truancy rates versus good attendance**

CSS has a relatively low rate of student truancy, which led to further investigation as to why. Do the leaders in the school play an active role in how policy and procedures are respected? What is the impact school leaders have in not just discouraging absenteeism, but also in the motivation of students to adhere to policy? This section addresses some of these questions.

#### 4. How would you describe perfect attendance? Anti-truancy? Policies and procedures?

Participants who were not teachers made the following statements: Participant A said: *Interesting to note that stricter policy is in place at the school versus statewide, continuing by providing an example of state mandates and policy creation. Students come in the morning to school and proceed directly to homeroom. Each teacher takes attendance, reporting electronically to the school's registrar who then runs a bulletin. The aim is to accomplish the task before 10:00 am each morning. However, most of the time it is done by 9:00 am.*

Furthermore, the secretary downstairs gets the bulletin allowing Participant A (Administrator) to receive a copy of that bulletin and checking to see who is absent. Any student who is absent receives a phone call.

The school enlisted the help of a program called One Call Now. One Call Now as detailed in the company website, allows transfer of databases and spreadsheets so multiple households can be called relatively quickly and easily.

- Choose who you want to receive the message
- Pick the channel: voice message, text message or email (or all 3)
- Hit “send” for immediate delivery, or schedule to deliver later” (One Call Now, 2018).

The One Call Now allows people working in the school to initiate follow up without making personal phone calls. However, as Participant A states, the change to One Call Now is a slow process because they like to add a personal touch to the student absence calls.

To have school staff highlight the process of immediately acknowledging a student absence coupled with the stricter unexcused absence policy, shows that school leaders take truancy seriously. They take steps to curb truancy every day. They show through example how to effectively carry out tasks. Furthermore, school staff provide stability through consistency.

## **Summary Statement**

One Call Now is something schools have begun using because it allows staff check on students with just one action. Staff readiness is an important part of reducing truancy and One Call Now may be a step forward regarding assessment of student absences. Although the technology is not widely used, individual phone calls may lead to widespread use. Outreach is achieved because of minimizing the time and attention needed to call every student.

### **Topic 3: Effects of truancy policies and procedures on students**

The next two questions asked participants to describe the effectiveness of their school's policies and procedures.

#### **5. How do you characterize the effectiveness of good attendance policies and procedures at your school? (Teacher, Administrator & Board Member)**

Students only respond to truancy policies when they see the benefit of adhering to such policies and/or are can handle the consequences of going against such policies. The views of school leaders may play a role in how students improve their academic performance and reduce their individual truancy rate through good attendance. As the answers of participants demonstrate, school absence is not just about documenting physical absence. Rather, it is about providing the framework for enabling a synthesis of information in relation to the consequences of truancy and what options students have should they fall into truant behavior.

Participant A stated that when students have good attendance, they are in school every day, leading to higher achievement throughout the school year. Participation leads to better grades because students are not missing important information and homework assignments. Participant A feels there is no replacement for missed face time with the teacher. Participant T1 believes good attendance generally translates to good performance when it comes to student

learning. However, T1 noted that sometimes perfect attendance is not a good thing in the case of a sick student coming to school to maintain perfect attendance.

Participant T2 believes CSS is very effective with attendance by sticking to the rules and being consistent with enforcement, and stated: *My partner teaches at another school in (name) County and their attendance policy is not good. Kids skip a lot. That rarely ever happens at our school.* Participant T3 said there is a value on education instilled early on. Students want to see themselves succeed because they see others succeed. Participant T4 believes the current system works very well, in the sense that when students are absent at CSS, they have someone downstairs, a secretary handle the phone calls to the parents adding: *I think that by making those phone calls to the parents, the kids are discouraged from skipping, or from not coming to school, because they know that they're going to get a phone call.*

Participant B shared that CSS has a 97% attendance rate leading Participant B to believe the policies are working. Furthermore, teachers and students encourage each other to be on time. With the gates opening at 7:30 in the morning, they are then welcomed into the courtyard and go into the cafeteria for breakfast. Participant P enjoys the overall positive school environment and the added effort placed on school attendance.

## **6. What role do you see yourself taking as staff member to improve student attendance?**

Participant A answered by stating they receive the attendance bulletin board each morning to look for who is absent. Although there is mention of a director of student services that follows up with students, Participant A asks questions personally to students who demonstrate double-digit absences. If a student is truant and has several unexcused absences (5 in one semester), the student may not receive credit for their classes. Participant R and B stated that absences are the start of academic problems. If there are absences, there is room for improvement. However, Participant B made a point to highlight the desire for both teacher and

student to want to come to school each day. When there is a motivation to come to school, the desire to be truant diminishes, according to the participant responses.

Participant B prefers students to have perfect attendance. For T4 perfect attendance falls under the realm of 2 or 3 days of absences within the 180-school day cycle. If they miss class, they may miss important material. While the other participants had similar answers, Participant P shared their child wants to have perfect attendance and not be tardy. The effect of the truancy policies and procedures on these children and school staff is a stated desire for maintaining perfect attendance. Interestingly, perfect attendance is not a concept to them where everyone must never be absent, but overall should want to come to school. When such punitive measures are formalized for the state of Florida, it is no wonder the participants of the interview aim for perfect attendance for their students. The consequences of too many unexcused absences can be detrimental not just for the student, but for the parent. This kind of measure can permanently affect the lives of a household.

### **Summary Statement**

The State of Florida has a punitive measure for students that are absent frequently. Parents may be arrested if students are absent a certain amount of days. Perfect attendance is thus enforced in schools like the charter school selected because it prompts students to aim for no or few absences. With no or few absences, students will not be afraid of potential punitive measures.

### **Topic 4: Analysis of external factors motivating student truancy**

This topic is an integral aspect to further explaining the role of motivation in truancy. Students illustrate a wide array of reasons for being truant. Some of these reasons are complex and involve their parents or the environment in both the school and the household. Participants offered additional insights into why students may seek to go to school every day or may become

truant. The policies in place at CSS encourage students to come to school and avoid truant behaviors. For example, CSS offers awards ceremonies for students that have perfect attendance. These awards offer motivation for students to continue their perfect attendance and potentially even motivate them to have better academic outcomes due to their continued positive patterns of attendance. Some other rewards can be offered to entire classrooms for example, participants noted the use of pizza and donut parties to increase student motivational levels to attend school on a regular basis. For participants of the interviews, it seems a mixture of reward and punishment leads to positive outcomes regarding truancy. Question 7 was only answered by the parent.

**7. What role do you see yourself taking as a parent to encourage improving your student's attendance at school? (parent only)**

Participant P shared that as a parent, their role, first and primarily is to ensure their child attends school, adding: *I want to make sure that he's there every day or only have very few absences which are excused. And, one time and not tardy. I think, if anything, I don't know that my role extends that much to other students as far as otherwise that maybe my son is being a role model as far as what's expected and other students hopefully try to follow suit or parents that I know.* Participant P is an active member of CSS's PTA.

**8. Do you have any external stakeholder that supports improving student attendance? If so, please explain.**

Participant A began with stating that each quarter the school celebrates school attendance. Additionally, in the past, the director of student services held contests in homerooms. For every 10 days they had perfect attendance for each student in the class, they would have a donut party. For the end of each quarter in present policy, students with perfect attendance receive outstanding attendance certificates. With the certificates are coupons (Winner Circle) for use at

local fast food restaurants or stores. Participants R and B mentioned the awards ceremony and the support from the community they receive regarding student outcomes like truancy.

Participant T4, T3, T2 and T1 are aware of the external factors however, they do not know the details of whether they play a role in motivation. They are aware that there are rewards in place to promote perfect attendance within the school.

The parent perspective is perhaps the most interesting one, although there was only one parent included in the study. Participant P noted that she could not identify external stakeholders but was aware of the donut parties. She also stated that the classroom that raises the most money from Box Tops for Education can receive rewards as well. That extra bit of information shows that rewards are in place for various aspects of school processes. These rewards may motivate students in different ways.

### **Summary Statement**

Rewards are a non-punitive measure to reduce truancy. Things like pizza & donut parties reward students that avoid being absent. They also provide recognition and appreciation for their actions. When students see that their efforts can lead to worthwhile activities, they may be more willing to continue the positive behavior. Such a non-punitive measure provides extrinsic motivation and adherence to school policies.

### **Topic 5: Identification of factors leading to decreased truancy**

The last topic to emerge from the data is perhaps the most important. The answers to the questions for this section may lead to a potential solution to reduce truancy. Discussion of future policies may be shaped by how successful schools such as the charter school are towards diminishing of specific negative behaviors like truancy. For instance, the idea of overburden and how it can negatively impact students by limiting their motivation to attend school and place them on a path toward truancy.

**9. Please tell me a story without using a child's name where attendance policies and procedures are/were beneficial to improving attendance?**

Participant A explained the school has had students who state they don't want to attend school. Whether it was a 'I'm just bored with school' or 'I don't see the purpose in school', there is always something that leads to the cultivation of negative behavior patterns and thus, truancy. It is notable that sometimes it is avoidance due to social reasons. Participant A noted: *there are social situations that cause kids to want to avoid or sometimes their lack of success points them toward giving up.* What CSS tries to do is hold parent meetings with the student and at this level, the school staff can get to the route of the problem.

Participant R stated there was one student that was absent a lot. However, there was an intervention performed. They discussed options, but it got to the point where the student wanted to leave school. Participant P did not really know of any stories involving any other students. But they did add, should their own child have issues with attendance: *we're more likely to make sure that our arrangements accommodate our child being in school.*

Participant T1 could not find a specific instance because of the effort done by school staff to get students to school each day. However, Participant T1 did intervene for a few students and worked with parents making sure they understood that their student may not feel well that day emotionally but must attend school regardless. Participant T2 only heard of one story where there was a child that was always out and the administrator and the teachers became involved, resulting in the child receiving a clock to help them come to school. Participants T3 and T4 shared that there is always an open line of communication and Participant T4 added they had two students with chronic absences.

## **10. What are your recommendations for improving attendance rates at the school?**

Participant A stated students may become truant due to social reasons. Specifically, students may wish to avoid social situations like public speaking or group work. Participant A shared the school tries to hold parent meeting with the student to understand the root problem of the absences and provide options. When it comes to neglectful or busy parents, Participant A noted one option can be bus passes to allow students to take public transportation to school rather than have their parents take them.

Participants R, B, and T4 focused on parental involvement. Participant T4 specifically shared the need to continue the phone calls. Part of the policy to improve and reduce truancy rates is to continue the call for active communication with parents. School staff are encouraged and they themselves believe there is a need to communicate with parents of absent students as much as possible. Participant T4 even noted there should be at least some effort in calling the parents after 5 unexcused absences to avoid the potential problems that students may experience with further unexcused absences.

Participant T3 believes in the punitive standard for excessive absences. However, they also stated a need to understand the reason for such absences and how those reasons may be tied to mental health issues. Sometimes students may experience a trauma and can go from normal behavior, attending school, getting good grades, and then suddenly, present a sharp contrast with truancy behaviors exhibited out of the blue. These are patterns to examine when implementing new and improved truancy policies and procedures. Sometimes mental health concerns can come from students that seem normal but may face some unexpected turn of events.

Participant T2 offered a novel idea of starting school a bit later to decrease the issue of tardiness among students. Participant noted that most kids within the school are picked up at 3:30 pm and not the 2:40 pm time. If classes began around 10:00 am and ended at 4:00 this may help

some students cope with attending class and being on time. Participant T1 did not provide a specific instance but shared the desire to continue aiding students and identifying what could be a problem for them. Participant P did not discuss this topic but instead offered additional rewards for students that did not achieve perfect attendance but were close to it. Ultimately, the importance of identifying problems before they become major difficulties is a major focus in this school. This proactive strategy should be applied to other schools attempting to reduce truancy rates.

### **Summary Statement**

Students may experience a wide array of traumatic events that keep them from attending school. While it is important for staff to enforce rules, it is also important for them to properly assess problems students may have that lead to truancy. Proper assessment like parent-teacher meetings and phone calls, allows school staff to gauge what may be happening outside of school and lead to better outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the interviews conducted with the school leaders of CSS allowed for better understanding and clarity of the specific situation within that school that documents lower student truancy than the state and national average (Education.com, 2016). Having school staff make same day phone calls to the households of absent students promotes increased responsibility for parents to make sure their kids attend school. School staff may start these tasks as early as 9:00 am. CSS adheres to specific policy stricter than the state average. For example, only 10 unexcused absences are allowed versus the state's allowed 15 (FLDOE, 2014).

Furthermore, there is a passion within the staff of the school to enable adherence to school policies and procedures and it can be seen through the effective leadership demonstrated by the teachers and administration of the school. There are various mechanisms in place to

ensure that students receive a quality education and that is where the difference lies. When staff care, parents care. There is an overall mood and climate of significance when it comes to being absent for school and the various consequences for these absences.

The interviews and the range of responses from participants highlights the need to not only improve school policies by raising them above the state/national standard, but by also having staff in place to provide the mechanisms so adherence is feasible. Without such procedures in place it can be difficult to create an environment of efficacy. Interviews like these are important in providing the analysis of innerworkings of schools that have proven school truancy can be reduced. More studies should focus on what can be done to reduce school truancy through already proven effective means to ensure a potential standardization of policy and procedure.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The study provided several discoveries and revealed insight into one school's approach to improving attendance and how leadership plays a role in reducing student truancy. The interviews, although brief, confirmed some of the concepts garnered from the literature review. For example, rewards are an integral and effective part of non-punitive options for dealing with school truancy. The participants acknowledged that emphasis on rewarding good behavior like perfect attendance brought with it improved outcomes for students. Students aimed to avoid absences and looked forward to the rewards.

Additionally, ongoing assessment, a topic discussed throughout the study, was key in reducing the potential for student truancy at CSS. Teachers commented how people within the school tried to spot potential problems students may encounter and then handle it accordingly. For example, the administrator of CSS took a hands-on approach by identifying excessive absences in students and personally contacting parents. This level of dedication from staff at CSS showed how important attentiveness and assessment are.

This chapter will discuss the findings and recommendations, and how they inform further implications about student truancy, then concludes with final thoughts. This section is a review and interpretation of all that was learned from the interviews. The answers were both informative and answered questions that were not fully answered in the literature review.

#### **Interpretation of Findings**

The three research questions are presented in this section, drawing from summary statements in chapter 4 and interpreting the findings in relation to the literature.

**RQ1: How do school leaders characterize the policies and procedures intended to improve strong attendance rates?**

According to the key findings in interview answers, literature like student handbooks allows parents, teachers, and other school staff to understand school policy. Although they have their own perceptions of what school policy means to them, overall, they understand the main goal which is to reduce student absences and aim for perfect attendance. The responses by the participants align with the research on perception and implementation of policies. Ahtola et al (2015), detailed how teachers' and parents' perceptions of practices played a role in student familiarization with the school and school policy. "On average, familiarization with the school was most important, whereas teacher co-operation and joint writing of curricula were considered to be least important. The perceptions of the participant groups differed from each other significantly in almost all practices" (Ahtola et al., 2015, p. 168).

Such an outcome combined with the responses of the participants provides insight into the lack of policy and procedure awareness (specificity) that impacts adherence by students. Ultimately, students must learn through the material distributed to them what will allow them to advance in school and avoid problems created by not adhering to school policy and procedure. The answers by the participants demonstrate there is a common general knowledge, however, the specifics and details are something not discussed. Because of the success of the charter school regarding student truancy, it may not be important to know the details, rather than simply have general knowledge.

General knowledge is important regarding any attempt at improving practices within an institution. Schools often provide complex rules and information that students do not want to read and may not understand. If there can be a simpler way to offer general information to students, school staff, and parents, that approach can provide an easier means of implementing

school policy. Such implementation may lead to the kind of results seen in CSS. CSS characterizes ‘perfect attendance’ not by having zero absences, but by having as few absences as possible. By doing that, they provide the means for students to achieve high attendance rates.

A hypothetical example of this is School Blue. School Blue is one that has a high truancy rate. Students at School Blue receive each year a lengthy packet of various materials. Often these materials are loose, not stapled to anything and have extensive, big blocks of text. The text is all black on white paper and does little to maintain the interest of the students.

When students receive the packet, they put in their lockers, toss it in the trash, or perhaps give it to their parents. While some parents may read what is in the packet, others do not and store it or toss it. Teachers may browse through the packet, but also put it away. Ultimately what the behavior leads to is most people in School Blue not understanding school policy because they did not readily absorb the information in the packet. They did not read the information for several reasons, one of which may be the lack of clarity and cohesion in the packet’s materials.

In this hypothetical situation, the student packet represents what schools should not do regarding implementation of school policy. For anyone within the school to follow and adhere to the rules of the school, they must be made known to everyone. To do this, one can generate a packet and distribute to teachers, students, and ask the students to distribute to parents. These packets should be easy to read and preferably be presented in a book or pamphlet with varying colors, sizing in text, and the most important rules placed at the beginning with larger than average text in bold. Although this is a minor suggestion, it may improve participating parties’ rate of interest in the reading materials.

The participants in the interview stated the handbook was one book that most if not all parties within the school knew of and understood regarding school policy. Having something

well put together, easy to read, and easy to interpret makes knowledge of school policies easier. Thus, implementation and enforcement of school policy would be made easier.

**RQ2: What is the role of families and caregivers in implementing high levels of attendance?**

Positive learning environments are crucial in determining the motivation of students to come to school. Florida is a state that has a mixture of positive and negative learning environments. The learning environment in CSS is positive. The respondents of the interview detailed how they have pizza and donut parties along with awards each semester to provide students with a reward of sorts for a job well done. To them, a job well done means doing well academically, and having perfect attendance.

Emphasis on perfect attendance is a critical component of the success of Charter Secondary School. School staff, students, and parents aim to have perfect attendance be part of each student's life. While perfect attendance may not mean zero absences, it is a positive goal that is reinforced each day with rewards. Parents, teachers, and other school leaders like administration and board members strive to connect with students, reward them for their hard work, and if they have problems, work with them towards attaining positive outcomes. Some other areas in Florida where the school environment is more negative, shows that other school staff may not understand proactive solutions, but try to enforce attendance using punitive measures. These punitive measures include possible jail time for the parents of students who have missed more than 15 days of school and are comprised of unexcused absences.

A new truancy court in Palm Beach, Florida aims to cut down on the state's absentee rate for young children by punishing parents who don't take their kids to school. Florida law says parents of children under 16 who let their kids miss 15 days of school within three months can be sent to jail for up to two months as punishment. The Florida Sun-Sentinel reports that Palm Beach prosecutors say the two-month jail sentence will be a last resort, after government and

nonprofit workers try to address problems that are keeping parents from getting their kids to school (Goodwin, 2011).

The first thing they do regarding the efficacy of school leadership and sound policy and procedure is make sure rules are created based on state mandates and followed. According to the Florida Department of Education website, state law specifies that “all children who have attained the age of six years or who will have attained the age of six years by February 1 of any school year are required to attend school regularly during the entire school term (Section 1003.21(1)(a)1, Florida Statutes)” (FLDOE, 2014). They also defined truancy as “Florida law defines "habitual truant" as a student who has 15 or more unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge or consent of the student's parent or guardian, and who is subject to compulsory school attendance” (FLDOE, 2014). Earlier it was mentioned that 10 or more unexcused absences qualify as tardies in CSS. That is 5 less than the state average.

When there is such a narrow approach using punitive measures like arrests of parents with truant students, the fear of these outcomes may motivate some schools to decide to approach things in a way that leads to better adherence to school policy. It can be a child’s worst nightmare to be separated from their parent due to their unexcused absences. Such measures are something that could have been further expounded upon in the interview. It is important to understand the significant impact punitive measures can have on both students and parents.

For example, if a parent is arrested and must appear in court because of student truancy, the parent could face court fees, a criminal record, and the loss of their jobs or future jobs. One study highlights the need to increase awareness of the many challenges plaguing parents and how solutions may be generated to help both student and parent. Many parents had elevated scores on the standardized measures, and significant differences between the sample means and population or referent group means were found. Prevention and intervention strategies for truancy must

address youth context, including the needs of parents. More research on parents of truant and other at-risk youth is needed (Staudt, 2014, p. 47).

Motivation can be increased or decreased based on several factors. Parents or guardians are the leaders of households. If they are not strong leaders, if they do not demonstrate strong leadership by committing to attendance, it can be difficult for students to really gain the support and direction to have a positive academic outlook. Leaders need to show through example what to do in times of stress, depression, and so forth. When a parent, teacher, or administrator is not a strong leader, students may learn negative coping behaviors (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016).

Strong leadership takes many forms. Some argue transformational leadership is a key means of learning to become a great leader. However, sometimes it's not leadership style, rather the school staff's abilities to sustain and augment efficacy over the long term (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). Good results like those experienced in this charter school are not mainly the result of the principal's leadership style. Instead, like this reference demonstrates, it is leaders' "understanding and diagnosis of the school's needs and their application of clearly articulated, organizationally shared educational values through multiple combinations and accumulations of time, context-sensitive strategies that are "layered" and progressively embedded in the school's work, culture, and achievements" (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016, p. 1).

### **RQ3: What theoretical framework serves as the foundation for policies at CSS?**

Many options exist to incentivize students to reduce truancy. While parties and certificates can help, there are other means of motivating students to participate and engage more in school, thus reducing truancy. These rewards support the incentive theory of Motivation. Researchers describe a "...positive, dynamic relationship between motivation, perceptions of the learning environment, and engagement. External raters' assessments showed significant positive correlations with students' self-reported engagement. Findings indicate how the instruction

offered in these Japanese elementary schools supported students' foreign language learning motivation" (Oga-Baldwin, Nakata, Parker, & Ryan, 2017, p. 140). The answers of the participants suggest that CSS does promote adherence to school policy partly using rewards and by promoting positive relationships between students, parents, and school staff.

Rewards such as donut and pizza parties and additional rewards for other activities like Box Tops shows a coordinated effort to promote adherence to policy not just on an individual basis but school-wide. Additionally, on an individual basis at the end of each quarter, students receive certificates and coupons that they can use with their household. These actions promote the continued adherence to policies and procedures and shows a collaborative effort among various school staff. When one can connect with a student and show appreciation for their effort, it reinforces that trust and confidence within the students, enabling them to invest more not only in themselves, but in the schools they attend.

Another potential option for good policy is addressing concerns and issues students may face regarding their academics. Something that was not touched upon in the interview was the multitude of challenges students might face that discourage them from attending school each day. Motivation to do positive things like attend school may be thwarted by those problems. For example, some students may have concerns with public speaking. A recent study shows the prevalence of the fear of public speaking among college students, especially women. "A great number of undergraduates' report fear of public speaking. This fear is more prevalent among women, students who participate in few activities involving speaking to groups of people, and those who have a self-perception of their voice as high-pitched or too soft" (Ferreira Marinho, Mesquita de Medeiros, Côrtes Gama, & Caldas Teixeira, 2017, p. 127). If there is fear of public speaking and the classes do not allow for alternative modes of class participation, such students may feel overburdened and not attend class.

Part of good policy implementation is to provide options for every student to excel. Using the example of public speaking, should students not have options to participate that do not involve public speaking, they face a potential problem with engagement, interest, and motivation. Colleges for example, tend to have programs to support students with documented disabilities so they can bring in proof of their disability and get special accommodation in their classes for their condition (Ferreira Marinho, Mesquita de Medeiros, Côrtes Gama, & Caldas Teixeira, 2017). If they have mental health problems or if they have physical disabilities or mental disabilities like stuttering or ADHD, they are provided the tools to communicate with their professors and have alternative ways to participate and engage in class.

### **Implications**

Communication was an important finding from the topics discovered with parents, students, teachers, and everyone else involved. For a problem like truancy to be managed, everyone must be on the same page. Staff within the school like cafeteria workers, janitors, and teaching assistants, must present the same expectations when it comes to attendance. Attendance is very important for not only the academic future of a student, but also for the school itself. Truancy within schools is a growing problem and school staffs that cannot effectively manage truancy rates may fail to embolden their students to succeed.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

To improve attendance and reduce truancy, one recommendation is for schools to educate everyone involved and working for the school with attendance policies. Having everyone aware of what is expected regarding student attendance may be a crucial step at reducing truancy. Sound structure within the school permits for easier practice, easier communication as seen in the interview answers. Thus, leading to positive outcomes.

For communication to be solid, schools must have strong leadership at all levels. When there is strong leadership at the top, the tone is set where attendance is a priority for everyone at the school. When strong leaders are active at each level, then implementation of objectives is easier. At least that was the case for CSS. The principal provides great leadership and emboldens people like teachers and parents to take on the leader role and provide the same level of efficacy.

Leadership and teamwork are so important concerning efforts to improve attendance and reduce truancy. Such a complicated issue cannot be tackled by one person. Responses must involve a team of people looking to improve outcomes every day. The administrator at CSS, for instance, checks daily for absent students. The same can be said of the teachers, a comprehensive response that emphasizes group effort and leadership.

The last recommendation involves the idea of motivation. Motivation should start early. CSS prides itself in its ability to reward students for perfect attendance throughout the year. Students receive pizza or donut parties not just at the end of the year, but each semester or quarter. Imagine as a student feeling a sense of pride for coming to school each day because of receiving an award or a reward? That feeling of pride and accomplishment can lead to a greater sense of motivation.

Motivation is key in determining outcomes for truancy. Highly motivated students seem to want to avoid absences and lateness. If school staffs motivate students throughout the year, they may have in return, lesser truancy rates. Rewards are not the end-all means of decreasing truancy rates. However, they are a key aspect. Most of the respondents stated that they are passionate about their job and helping students. The parent interviewed noted how it is important to care and try to be there for their children as they attend school. These positive attitudes lead to the success of the school and increase motivation for students.

This study focused on school leaders, and the research focus was not on the perspective of a student. Can a positive attitude towards school help students avoid negative behavior patterns like truancy? The general opinion from researchers is that some teens have a negative attitude towards school. “Adolescents who have unfavorable attitudes toward school and teachers are at elevated risk for dropping out of school and engaging in behavioral health risks” (Zaharakis et al., 2017, p. 138). These negative attitudes may lead to negative behaviors and then negative academic outcomes. For example, if a hypothetical “Lucy” sees school as boring and not worthwhile, she may begin showing up late to class. If she sees her grades slip from being late to class, she may begin skipping school. If enough skips or unexcused absences accumulate, Lucy’s parents or guardians may have to come in and deal with the situation. Although such a scenario may not be the typical experience for all students, it can be an example of how negative attitudes can bring to a student to truancy.

Student truancy is so complex that it needs to be re-examined on deeper levels to understand the various potential solutions that can be offered. Researchers noted how negative attitudes toward school can lead to a desire to partake in negative behaviors like using cannabis or other drugs. They state “negative attitudes toward school were indirectly associated with increased cannabis involvement through peer network health. This relationship was not moderated by gender” (Zaharakis et al., 2017, p. 138). Cannabis use and drinking at earlier ages can lead to bad outcomes for youth.

Positive attitudes may be generated many ways. Strong leadership helps create a positive learning environment. However, there is also an aspect to the human personality that can further aid in developing a positive attitude and that is resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to overcome difficulties in life and use those tragedies to make one stronger (Greitens, 2015). Perhaps teaching resiliency and self-love may help students deal with the plethora of challenges life

throws at them. Parents and teachers can enable students to invest in themselves and have higher self-esteem that can then lead to improved resilience (Greitens, 2015). Without resilience, it can be hard for youth to maintain a healthy attitude towards things that challenge them, like school.

People often discuss what needs to be done in a punitive or non-punitive sense to combat truancy. The problem is, not enough is being done to tackle the problems within a student that would cause them to be truant in the first place. Having negative attitudes that may translate to cannabis use or may lead to truancy are just parts of a giant puzzle that is a human life. To not encourage someone to pursue a means of elevating themselves to move beyond the turmoil is taking their chances away at recovering.

Possible steps to increase resilience in a student:

1. Teach them a skill or talent.
2. Provide for them a place to voice their concerns.
3. Allow them space to find solutions on their own.
4. Provide support when they do reach an answer (Greitens, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 5 offered an examination of how the answers of respondents align with current research and how these findings can be applied to find solutions regarding student truancy. Schools like the one selected are ones that have worked hard at delivering the kind of care and critical thinking that allows for positive outcomes from students, school staff, and parents. The interviews provided an outline of what can be done by any school to be successful regarding student truancy. It may be a difficult journey, but it is a rewarding one if done right.

For instance, providing adequate and easy to understand school materials like a student handbook is a key way to spread knowledge of school policy. When school staff further reinforce school policy by calling students and using software to contact parents of tardy or absent

students, they provide an ongoing assessment and reinforcement of school rules, increasing a likelihood of positive outcomes. Parents may have trouble making sure their children go to school, but ultimately, if given proper tools and options for communication, they can take actions that contribute to students' ability to attend school, not be absent or tardy and succeed in school.

Parents and school staff have the responsibility to do right by students and provide a path towards success. It may be a complex challenge, but the CSS policies examined here offer some possibilities. It takes a lot of work and collaboration between parties to set up policies and structures and enforce them. But such efforts can lead to success. Research indicates non-punitive measures are a potential option along with consistent assessment of attendance, or discipline tracking. These steps are just the beginning.

Principal leadership is such an integral aspect to any school. Although leadership from teachers and parents is crucial, the most crucial would have to be school administration. When interviewing the administrator of the selected Charter school, the fact the participant is so hands-on with attendance, personally assessing situations with students, demonstrates the power of action, of care. When administrators care about their school, about their students, they provide a shining example to all within the school.

## REFERENCES

- Ahtola, A., Björn, P. M., Turunen, T., Poikonen, P., Kontoniemi, M., Lerkkanen, M., & Nurmi, J. (2015). The concordance between teachers' and parents' perceptions of school transition practices: A solid base for the future. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 60*(2), 168-181. doi:10.1080/00313831.2014.996598
- Aragon, S. R., Poteat, V. P., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. W. (2014). The influence of peer victimization on educational outcomes for LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ high school students. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11*(1), 1-19. doi:10.1080/19361653.2014.840761
- Babb, B. A. (2014). A truancy court program to keep students in school. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2504548
- Barghaus, K., Fantuzzo, J., LeBoeuf, W., Henderson, C., Li, F., & McDermott, P. (2016). Problems in classroom engagement: validation of an assessment for district-wide use in the early primary grades. *Early Education and Development, 28*(2), 154-166. doi:10.1080/10409289.2016.1197012
- Bartholomay, E. M., & Houlihan, D. D. (2014). A review of absenteeism and truancy: interventions and universal procedures. *Behavior Analysis in Practice, 7*(2), 151-153. doi:10.1007/s40617-014-0016-1
- Bernstein, D. A. (2011). *Essentials of psychology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Birkett, M., Russell, S. T., & Corliss, H. L. (2014). Sexual-orientation disparities in school: The mediational role of indicators of victimization in achievement and truancy because of feeling unsafe. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(6), 1124-1128. doi:10.2105/ajph.2013.301785
- Breda, M. J. (2014). Truants' perceptions of family factors as causes of school truancy and non-attendance. *Journal of Psychology, 5*(1), 47-53. doi:10.1080/09764224.2014.11885504

- Brinkmann, S. (2014). Interview. *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, 1008-1010. Retrieved from [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4614-5583-7\\_161](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4614-5583-7_161)
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Bye, L. (2010). *Truancy prevention and intervention: A practical guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, C., Culhane, D. P., Metraux, S., Park, J. M., & Venable, J. C. (2015). The heterogeneity of truancy among urban middle school students: A latent class growth analysis. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(4), 1066-1075. doi:10.1007/s10826-015-0295-3
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 221-258.
- De Witte, K., & Csillag, M. (2012). Does anybody notice? On the impact of improved truancy reporting on school dropout. *Education Economics*, 22(6), 549-568. doi:10.1080/09645292.2012.672555
- Dembo, R., Wareham, J., Schmeidler, J., Briones-Robinson, R., & Winters, K. C. (2014). Differential effects of mental health problems among truant youths. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 43(3), 402-427. doi:10.1007/s11414-014-9435-6
- Redacted citation.
- Dronkers, J., Veerman, G. M., & Pong, S. (2017). Mechanisms behind the negative influence of single parenthood on school performance: Lower teaching and learning

conditions? *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 58(7),1-16.

doi:10.1080/10502556.2017.1343558

Duarte, D., & Hatch, T. (2014). Successful implementation of a federally funded violence prevention elementary school counseling program: Results bring sustainability. *Professional School Counseling*, 18(1), 71-81.

doi:10.5330/prsc.18.1.vt15g6343m4130v7

Education.com. (2016, April 27). Truancy fact sheet | Education.com. Retrieved from <https://www.education.com/reference/article/truancy-fact-sheet/>

Edwards, R., & Holland, J. (2013). *What is qualitative interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury.

Emmel, N., Seaman, J., & Kenney, F. (2013). *Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research: A realist approach*. SAGE.

Ferreira Marinho, A. C., Mesquita de Medeiros, A., Côrtes Gama, A. C., & Caldas Teixeira, L.

(2017). Fear of public speaking: Perception of college students and correlates. *Journal of Voice*, 31(1), 127.e7-127.e11. doi:10.1016/j.jvoice.2015.12.012

FLDOE. (2014, October 28). Attendance and enrollment. Retrieved from

<http://www.fldoe.org/how-do-i/attendance-enrollment.shtml>

Gase, L. N., DeFosset, A., Perry, R., & Kuo, T. (2016). Youths' perspectives on the reasons underlying school truancy and opportunities to improve school attendance. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(2), 299-320.

Goodwin, L. (2011, December 12). Florida county will throw parents of truant kids in jail.

Retrieved from <https://www.yahoo.com/news/blogs/lookout/florida-county-throw-parents-truant-kids-jail-165408463.html>

Great Schools! (2017). Redacted.

- Greitens, E. (2015). *Resilience: Hard-won wisdom for living a better life*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Haight, C. M., Chapman, G. V., Hendron, M., Loftis, R., & Kearney, C. A. (2014). Evaluation of a truancy diversion program at nine at-risk middle schools. *Psychology in the Schools, 51*(7), 779-787. doi:10.1002/pits.21775
- Hutcheson, E. (2014). *The San Francisco wellness initiative's effect on truancy, suspension, and expulsion rates*. Unpublished master's thesis, Georgetown University Digital Commons. Retrieved from <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1043963>
- Iyamu, I. F. (2016). Motivation as an elixir to participatory pedagogy for academic success in schools: Implications for the Nigerian school system. *African Research Review, 10*(4), 144-154. doi:10.4314/afrev.v10i4.11
- Jacob, B. A., & Lovett, K. (2017, July 27). Chronic absenteeism: An old problem in search of new answers. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/chronic-absenteeism-an-old-problem-in-search-of-new-answers/>
- Kaufman, M. J., & Kaufman, S. R. (2013). *Education law, policy, and practice: Cases and materials*. New York: Wolters Kluwer Law & Business.
- Losen, D. J. (2015). *Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion*. Teachers College Press.
- Mallett, C. A. (2015). Truancy: It's not about skipping school. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 33*(4), 337-347. doi:10.1007/s10560-015-0433-1
- Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A., & Fontenot, R. (2013). Does sample size matter in qualitative research?: A review of qualitative interviews in research. *Journal of Computer Information Systems, 54*(1), 11-22. doi:10.1080/08874417.2013.11645667

- Maschi, T. D., & Leibowitz, G. S. (2017). *Forensic social work, Second Edition: Psychosocial and legal issues across diverse populations and settings*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Maynard, B., McCrea, K., Pigott, T., & Kelly, M. (2012). Indicated truancy interventions: Effects on school attendance among chronic truant students. doi:10.4073/csr.2012.10
- Mazerolle, L., Bennett, S., Antrobus, E., & Eggins, E. (2017). The coproduction of truancy control. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 54(6), 791-823.  
doi:10.1177/0022427817705167
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Monahan, K. C., VanDerhei, S., Bechtold, J., & Cauffman, E. (2014). From the school yard to the squad car: School discipline, truancy, and arrest. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(7), 1110-1122. doi:10.1007/s10964-014-0103-1
- Nitschke, F., Mazerolle, L., & Bennett, S. (2014). Third party policing and school truancy. *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 5211-5221.  
doi:10.1007/978-1-4614-5690-2\_172
- Oga-Baldwin, W. Q., Nakata, Y., Parker, P., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Motivating young language learners: A longitudinal model of self-determined motivation in elementary school foreign language classes. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 49, 140-150.  
doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2017.01.010
- One Call Now. (2018). How it works - One Call Now. Retrieved from  
<https://www.onecallnow.com/how-it-works/>
- Parkin, S. (2016). *An applied visual sociology*. London: Taylor and Francis.

- Rehman, A., & Haider, K. (2013). The impact of motivation on learning of secondary school students in Karachi: an analytical study. *Educational Research International*, 2(2), 139-147.
- Reid, K. (2014). *Managing school attendance: Successful intervention strategies for reducing truancy*. Oxfordshire, England: Routledge.
- Reid, K. (2017). *Managing and improving school attendance and behaviour: New approaches and initiatives*. Routledge.
- Rocque, M., Jennings, W. G., Piquero, A. R., Ozkan, T., & Farrington, D. P. (2016). The importance of school attendance: Findings from the Cambridge study in delinquent development on the life-course effects of truancy. *Crime & Delinquency*, 63(5), 592-612. doi:10.1177/0011128716660520
- Rollnick, S. (2016). *Motivational interviewing in schools: Conversations to improve behavior and learning*. Guilford Publications.
- Schargel, F. P. (2014). *Creating safe schools: A guide for school leaders, teachers, counselors, and parents*. London: Routledge.
- Shelton, B. (2014). A comparison of punitive and nonpunitive truancy program outcomes in an urban school district. *ProQuest LLC*, 1-179.
- Shmueli, B. (2017). Hybrid incentives: Carrots, sticks, or carrots which become sticks? *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2977408
- Shute, J., & Cooper, B. S. (2014). *Fixing truancy now: Inviting students back to class*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. [u.a.: Sage Publ.
- Staudt, M. (2014). The needs of parents of youth who are truant. *Best Practices in Mental Health*, Number 1 / April 2014, pp. 47-53(7), 1(7), 47-53.

- Taylor, D. R., Gray, M., & Stanton, D. (2016). New conditionality in Australian social security policy. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, *51*(1), 3-26. doi:10.1002/j.1839-4655.2016.tb00362.x
- Thompson, J. G. (2013). *The first-year teacher's survival guide: Ready-to-use strategies, tools and activities for meeting the challenges of each school day*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Titelman, P. (2014). *Clinical applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- USNEWS. (2017). Redacted.
- Virtanen, T. E., Lerkkanen, M., Poikkeus, A., & Kuorelahti, M. (2014). Student behavioral engagement as a mediator between teacher, family, and peer support and school truancy. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *36*, 201-206. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2014.09.001
- Zaharakis, N., Mason, M. J., Mennis, J., Light, J., Rusby, J. C., Westling, E., ... Way, T. (2017). School, friends, and substance use: Gender differences on the influence of attitudes toward school and close friend networks on cannabis involvement. *Prevention Science*, *19*(2), 138-146. doi:10.1007/s11121-017-0816-y
- Zyromski, B., & Mariani, M. A. (2016). *Facilitating evidence-based, data-driven school counseling: A manual for practice*. Corwin Press.



## Appendix B- Permission Letter to Site Director Request

**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND****PERMISSION LETTER FOR SITE DIRECTOR IN RESEARCH**

March 20, 2018

Dear Dr XXXX,

As part of the requirement for completing the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational Leadership at the University of New England, I am conducting a research project on Policies and Procedures Perceived by School Leaders to Reduce Truancy in a Public Charter School.

This letter is to request your permission for a parent, two teachers, a board member and two administrators of your school to participate in my research study.

The purpose of this research is to learn about school leaders' perception on how CSS Charter School continues to retain a low truancy rate when compared to other charter schools within the same school district. I am interested in recording face to face interviews with the leaders mentioned above in the upcoming weeks. Participation in this study is voluntary.

It will involve an interview (approximately 30-45 minutes in length) to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. Any of the participants may decline to answer any of the interview questions. They may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any adverse consequences by advising the researcher.

With everyone's permissions, the interviews will be recorded to facilitate the collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.

Once the transcribing of the interview is done, I will send each participant a copy of the transcript to give them an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points. All information they provide is completely confidential. Participant names will not appear in any dissertation or report resulting from this study, however, with their permission anonymous quotations may be used.

The data collected during this study will be locked in an office in my supervisor's lab. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you and the others agree to participate, please provide me with an approval letter on the school's letterhead to conduct the study at a chosen site.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at 305-XXX-0000 or email [adesulme@une.edu](mailto:adesulme@une.edu).

The results of this research are available to you upon your request. Thank you for your time and consideration of this project.

Sincerely,



Alix Desulme

Doctoral Student

University of New England

## Appendix C-Participant Consent

**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND****CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH****Project Title: Policies and procedures perceived by school leaders to improve attendance in a public charter school**

**Principal Investigator(s):** Alix Desulme, student, University of New England, adesulme@une.edu. Michelle Collay, Ph. D., Faculty Advisor, University of New England, mcollay@une.edu

**Introduction****General requirement language:**

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this study being done?**

- My goal is to understand school leaders' perspectives about how policies and procedures reduce truancy and improve student attendance.

**Who will be in this study?**

- Participants in this study will have the following features:
  - Are at least 18 years of age.
  - Have at least 1 year experience working or associated with CSS.
  - Work at a public Charter School or a parent of a child attending a public Charter School.
- At least eight participants will be involved with this study.

**What will I be asked to do?**

- Participants chosen for this study will have to do the following:
  - A 30-minute interview where participants will be asking questions about their perspective on attendance improvement at CSS. Questions asked during these sessions will help me understand school leaders' perspectives about how policies and procedures reduce truancy and improve student attendance.
  - The interview will occur during the month of May of 2018
- Participant must be comfortable with the interview being audio recorded. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by REV.com, a trusted transcription agency. After

the interview, you will have the opportunity to read your transcript. You have the right to delete and edit any information you choose.

- As the researcher for this group, I will administer the interviews.

#### **What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.
- You may have concerns that your identity will not be fully protected.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be a benefit to others, teachers, and school leaders who want to improve truant rates in their schools.

#### **What will it cost me?**

- By assisting me with my study, there will be no costs to you.

#### **How will my privacy be protected?**

- Your interview will take place at a setting where you are most comfortable and secure.
- The results from my study will be shared with you, the other participants in this study, my dissertation committee, editors, and anyone interested in reading about these results.

#### **How will my data be kept confidential?**

- The results from this study will be reported anonymously and others will not know you participated because no identifiable information will be reported in the results of the study.
- All data collected for this study will be kept in a locked file. This locked file will be kept in a locked room at my house.
  - After the completion of this study, all data resulting from this study will be destroyed, including audio recordings, hard copies, and electronic data.
  - Data will be stored on a password protected computer.
  - Data will be coded.
  - Data will be encrypted using industry standards.
  - No individual recognizable information will be collected.
- You will create your own pseudonym to protect your identity and will be referenced by that name throughout the study. I will not keep a code sheet. I will only reference you by your pseudonym.
- Your employer will not be directly mentioned in this study.
- The college(s) you attended will not be directly mentioned in this study.
- Please note that regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.
- A copy of the signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only I will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during this project.
- Audio recordings created from your interview will be made accessible to myself and Rev.com, a trusted transcription agency.
  - These audio recordings will be destroyed as soon as the project is complete.

- The results from my study will be shared with you, the other participants in this study, my dissertation committee, editors, and anyone interested in reading about these results.
  - If you would like a copy of the results, please verbally ask me for one.

### **What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University of New England nor your employer.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

### **What other options do I have?**

- You may choose not to participate.

### **Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researcher conducting this study is Alix Desulme. For questions or more information concerning this research, you may contact me at 305-900-7000, [adesulme@une.edu](mailto:adesulme@une.edu) or Michelle Collay, Ph. D. at 207-602-2010, [mcollay@une.edu](mailto:mcollay@une.edu).
- If you choose to participate in this research, study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Alix Desulme at 305-900-7000, [adesulme@une.edu](mailto:adesulme@une.edu) or Michelle Collay, Ph. D. at 207-602-2010, [mcollay@une.edu](mailto:mcollay@une.edu).
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

### **Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

### **Audio Recorded (check one)**

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audio recorded.

### **Member Check**

After your interview, I will email your transcript for your review. You have the right to remove and edit the information you choose.

---

**Participant's Statement**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

---

Participant's signature or  
Legally authorized representative

---

Date

---

Printed name

**Researcher's Statement**

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**



4-16-2018

---

Researcher's signature

---

Date

## Appendix-D-Questions

1. Are you familiar with the written policies and procedures at your school that is designed to encourage attendance?
2. Are you familiar with the written policies and procedures about attendance at other public charter schools? If so, can you compare and contrast them?
3. In what ways do you (teachers, administrators, Board) strive to adhere to the written policies and procedures?
4. How would you describe perfect attendance? Anti-truancy? Policies and procedures?
5. How do you characterize the effectiveness of good attendance policies and procedures at your school? (Teacher, Administrator & Board Member)
6. What role do you see yourself taking as staff to improve student attendance?
7. What role do you see yourself taking as a parent to encourage improving your student's attendance at school? (parent only)
8. Do you have any external stakeholder that supports improving student attendance? If so, please explain.
9. Please tell me a story without using a child's name where attendance policies and procedures are/were beneficial to improving attendance?
10. What are your recommendations for improving attendance rates at the school?