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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TARDINESS POLICIES  
OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

By

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BS (Northeastern State University) 1997

MA (Southern Nazarene University) 2016

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July, 2020  
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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that student tardiness has been a challenge for educators as far back as the institution of modern schooling. While there has been considerable research about student absenteeism, student tardiness remains an under researched area, particularly at the elementary school level. The purpose of this study was to analyze and compare tardiness policies across several large, urban school districts, investigate their alignment with current research about tardiness and school attendance, and explore the possible relationship between school tardiness policies and student academic achievement. The research questions for this study were: What are the major similarities and differences in large school districts regarding school tardiness policy? How do large, urban school district policies align with research on tardiness and school attendance? Is there a relationship between school tardiness policies and student achievement? This study was done as a qualitative, Internet-based desk study involving no participants. Data were collected from selected school district websites and focus elementary school websites, including district and school board policies regarding student tardiness. Data were also collected from a variety of online databases to glean demographical and academic information. Findings from this study showed that the policies from each district varied from specific to vague, the quality of the district level policy was parallel at the school site, and that the district with the

most vague measures regarding tardiness also had the highest academic achievement over the other two schools. One of the three selected districts and elementary schools stood out as having the most specific measures regarding tardiness. The elementary school that had the highest academic achievement subsequently demonstrated the strongest evidence of parent communication and family involvement. Recommendations from this study include a continued study of elementary school tardiness policies and their possible relationship to student achievement, in addition to documenting the role of increased parent communication and involvement. It is recommended that policies be enacted from the top down and existing research about mitigating student tardiness be used to inform the specificity of school tardiness policies.

*Keywords:* Tardiness, school policy, absenteeism, parent involvement

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope.....	7
Rationale and Significance.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Conclusion.....	10
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Student Tardiness.....	11
Defining Student Tardiness.....	12
Factors Causing Tardiness.....	13
Strategies to Reduce Tardiness.....	15
Absenteeism, Chronic Absenteeism, and Truancy.....	17
Cultural Considerations of Tardiness.....	17
Children of Color.....	17
Undocumented Families and Students.....	20
Socioeconomic Influences on Tardiness.....	22
Poverty.....	22



Homelessness.....	23
Attendance Policies.....	24
Compulsory School Attendance.....	24
Influence of Policies.....	25
Summary.....	29
Discussion of the Theoretical Framework.....	29
Strengths and Weaknesses of a Policy Analysis.....	32
Conclusion.....	33
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	34
Research Design and Approach.....	34
Setting.....	36
Participants/Sample.....	36
Data Collection.....	37
Data Analysis.....	38
Participant Rights.....	40
Potential Limitations.....	40
Conclusion.....	41
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	42
Sample District and School Selection.....	42
Sample Districts.....	44
Data Collection.....	45
Demographics.....	46
Los Angeles Unified School District.....	46

Oklahoma City Public Schools.....	47
Miami-Dade County Public Schools .....	48
District Policy.....	49
LAUSD.....	50
OKCPS.....	51
MDCPS.....	51
School Policy.....	52
RVES.....	53
MES.....	53
VABHOE.....	53
Academic Assessment Comparison.....	54
California.....	54
Oklahoma.....	55
Florida.....	55
Major Findings.....	56
Finding 1.....	56
Finding 2.....	57
Finding 3.....	58
Finding 4.....	58
Finding 5.....	59
Findings and the Policy Attributes Theory.....	58
Policy Alignment with Federal State, and District Guidelines.....	62
Federal Guidelines.....	62

Comparison of State Guidelines.....	63
California Guidelines.....	63
Oklahoma Guidelines.....	63
Florida Guidelines.....	63
Comparison of District Policies.....	65
Conclusion.....	65
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	67
Discussion of the Findings.....	68
Similarities and Differences .....	71
Alignment.....	72
Student Achievement.....	74
Implications.....	75
Limitations.....	77
Recommendations .....	78
Final Conclusions.....	79
REFERENCES.....	81

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Elementary school selection criteria.....44

2. Western Elementary School racial demographics.....47

3. South-Central Elementary School racial demographics.....48

4. Southeastern Elementary School racial demographics.....49

5. School district tardiness policies and consequences..... 52

6. State statutes for attendance by state.....64

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Punctuality is the key to any goal-driven organization such as the school” (Adegunju, et al., 2019). However, the perplexity of dealing with student tardiness is not new. In a 1927 *Elementary School Journal* article, Roland and Corrigan presented research seeking to find ways to reduce tardiness. According to L.A. Lockwood (1930), “Tardiness is probably the most annoying breach of the rules of the attendance with which school officials have to deal” (p. 1). From over 1,800 tardies reported in a junior high school in Pennsylvania during the 1933-1934 school year (Kovar, 1936, p. 1) to over 5,000 reported in an elementary school in West Virginia during the 2014-15 school year, (Speciale, 2015, p. 3) it is evident that student tardiness is a chronic, ongoing problem.

In fact, Pellicer and Summers relayed “Tardiness is a problem – a serious one. It is a subtle thief which steals a most precious possession” (1985, p. 5). Kosakowski (1998) sought a remedy via research into a behavioral approach to student tardiness. Maile and Olowoyo (2017) report “Late coming to school is one of the major problems that have plagued many schools; there is hardly any school that is spared from this problem” (p. 1)

Research shows that tardiness has a negative effect on academic achievement (Caldarella et al., 2011; Gottfried, 2009; Gottfried, 2014). Gottfried (2014) performed a six-year empirical study of urban elementary schools and determined two primary findings: “First, students with greater tardiness perform worse on both standardized reading and math tests. Second, holding constant an individual's own record of tardiness, students whose classmates are tardy more frequently also have lower test scores” (p. 1). Caldarella et al. (2011) found the following:

Students who are frequently tardy may miss important opening announcements or academic activities. Teachers can become frustrated as late students disrupt instruction, often requiring reteaching of what they have missed. Tardy behavior can also negatively affect the overall classroom environment. (p. 104)

Not only does tardiness affect the student who is tardy, but his or her classmates as well (Gottfried, 2014). For example, students who arrive to class late cause such disruptions as stalling or disturbing the teacher's instruction, causing other students to be distracted by the late-comer, and the teacher or other students having to help the tardy student catch up to where they are in the lesson (Nakpodia & Dafiaghor, 2011, p. 60). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) results from the 2015-16 school year indicate that 32.2% of elementary school teachers and 47.6% of secondary teachers agreed/strongly agreed that student tardiness interfered with their teaching (NCES, March, 2018). In addition, students who are frequently tardy may "infect" others and cause them to start becoming late (Bataineh, 2014). "When many students arrive late to instructional periods throughout the day, teachers must continually restart class or delay beginning instruction because it is not practical to begin class on time (Tyre, Feuerborn, & Pierce, 2011, p. 132). In addition, Tyre et al. (2011) point out that if several students arrive to class tardy then classroom instruction time is greatly reduced.

According to research, tardiness is also associated with poor student behavior (Grayson, 2008; Sprick & Daniels, 2007). Sprick & Daniels (2007) relayed that, in addition to robbing teachers and students of instructional time and momentum, tardiness behavior also often leads to opportunities for students to misbehave in the halls and restrooms as well as when coming into the classroom (para. 2). Research by Gottfried (2014) also supports the negative behavioral consequences of students who are tardy. Students who are tardy may become socially disengaged

from their peers or feel alienated causing negative interactions that lead to behavioral issues. These behavioral issues can then, in turn, disrupt and negatively impact the learning of both the tardy and non-tardy students (Gottfried, 2012, p. 4).

In an effort to combat the problem of student tardiness, school districts put attendance policies into place. Research by Caldarella et al. (2011) reported that “Traditionally, school tardiness policies have consisted of a series of punitive measures such as office discipline referrals and after-school detention” (p. 2). However, without the support of school district policies on tardiness, school administrators are oftentimes left to come up with their own strategies to improve the timeliness of students at their school. “Rather than working with a supportive district, many principals spend time and effort finding ways to work around the district office to improve student achievement” (Bottoms & Fry, 2009, p. v). In other words, principals are expected to enact policies to improve attendance, reduce tardiness, and increase academic achievement. “All too often, we find that local policies and practices create barriers that prevent great leaders from thriving” (New Leaders, 2014, p. 1).

So it is understood that various causes of tardiness have been studied (Adegunja et al., 2019; Bataineh, 2014; Maile & Olowyo, 2017). The negative effects of tardiness on academics, in addition to behavioral and social implications have been researched (Drake, 2017; Gottfried, 2009; Gottfried, 2014). Teachers, school leaders, and district leaders have attempted a plethora of various strategies to tackle the issue of tardiness, including writing praise notes (Caldarella et al., 2011), offering reward systems (Kasakowski, 1998; Talkhee et al., 2013), contracting with students (Din et al., 2003), sponsoring “power hours”, assemblies, and giving trophies (McDonald, 2009), “positive sweeps” (Sprick & Daniels, 2007), intensive behavioral monitoring (Kasakowski, 1998), active supervision and immediate consequences (Tyre et al., 2011),

working with parents (Kerrins & Hayes, 1996), and administrative strategies (Moore, 2010). And yet, with these attempts to address at the situation from all sides – causes, effects, and strategies – the problem of tardiness remains.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While there is considerable research regarding the correlation between chronic absenteeism and tardiness to poor academic achievement, there is very little research regarding how school district policies on tardiness are created, administered, monitored, and to what degree they are research-based. Additionally, there is limited research on how school district policies regarding tardiness may or may not impact academic achievement, especially at the elementary school level.

“The U.S. Constitution contains no mention of education. With the federal government limited to those powers either expressly stated or implied in the Constitution, the federal role in public education is secondary to that of the states” (Beckam & Wills, n.d., para. 3). Therefore, “school boards are corporate bodies created for the purpose of implementing state legislative policy concerning public schools and locally administering the state's system of public education” (Beckam & Wills, n.d., para. 6). Local school boards serve many functions, one of which is the oversight and development of school policies within their district (Chen, 2018).

While local school boards have some autonomy, they are ultimately governed and their decisions guided by state legislatures. In addition, “the federal government, state legislature, and state boards of education also make policy decisions affecting local schools” (Beckham & Wills, n.d.). School board members are typically required to be 18 years of age, a U.S. citizen, a resident of the school district, and a registered voter (GreatSchools.org, 2009). Board members are encouraged to stay abreast of current trends in education via reading professional journals,



attending conferences and trainings, and through their membership in the National School Boards Association (NSBA) (Devarics & O'Brien, 2011, p. 26). However, many school board members are not required by either state legislation or their school board policy to receive school board training (Eisenstein, 2019).

In addition to inconsistencies in school board members' knowledge of current issues and trends in education, it is unclear whether the policy decisions they make are guided by research. It is evident that many district leaders strive to use research-based recommendations to inform their policies. For example, the Curlew School District (2015) "ensures that all students get high-quality, systematic, research-based, general education instructions" (para. 1). Indiana House Enabled Act (HEA) 1412 requires that schools use research-based equitable school discipline (2019). However, there is little to no indication of school districts utilizing research-based practices to implement policies for tardiness or absenteeism, but simply follow reporting procedures such as those directed by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). (National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Student attendance is paramount to academic success. In order for students to grow academically, they need to be present. Equally important is timeliness. Being late to school equates to missed instructional time just as absences do. While nearly every school district has policies and procedures pertaining to absenteeism, they oftentimes have very vague, or even no policies regarding student tardiness. Without any sort of consequence for being tardy to school, students often miss substantial class time by being late to school. The research has not concluded that punitive measures are effective.

The purpose of this study is to compare tardiness policies across three large, urban school districts, investigate their alignment with what research shows about tardiness and school attendance, and explore the possible relationship between school tardiness policies and student academic achievement.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions for this study guided by the literature are:

1. What are the major similarities and differences in large school districts regarding school tardiness policy?
2. How do large, urban school district policies align with research on tardiness and school attendance?
3. Is there a relationship between school tardiness policies and student achievement?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is policy attributes theory. The Policy Attributes Theory was developed by Andrew Porter and his colleagues (Porter et al., 1988; Porter, 1994). This theory “relates five components to successful policy implementation: specificity, consistency, authority, power, and stability” (Desimone, 2002, p. 438). *Specificity* represents the extent and detail of a policy. Desimone et al. (2016) stated:

We have identified three mechanisms that help translate general partnership goals into specific, clearly articulated actions: (a) establishing a clear vision and path for development, (b) providing mechanisms for regular communication, and (c) defining the scope of work. (p. 3)

*Consistency* represents the extent that policies either sustain or contradict one another. In addition, consistency means “the degree to which a policy is aligned with other school, district,

state, or federal policies“ (Desimone, et al., 2016, p. 6). “Policies gain *authority* through becoming a law, through their consistency with social norms, through their knowledge or support from experts, or through promotion by charismatic leaders” (Desimone, 2002, p. 439). *Power* represents the extent to which policies are associated with rewards or sanctions. This includes “the rewards and sanctions associated with the implementation of a policy...including explicit mechanisms, such as monetary incentives or accountability rating systems, or implicit levers, such as public praise from leadership” (Desimone, 2016, p. 8). *Stability* represents how policies stay the same over time. Desimone et al. (2016) explain that stability “captures the degree to which a policy or program is institutionalized and therefore able to persist over time” (Desimone, et al., 2016, p. 10).

### **Theoretical Framework**

*The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012) provides the theoretical framework for this policy analysis study. Bardach’s (2012) eight steps in his policy analysis approach are: defining the problem, assembling evidence, constructing alternatives, selecting criteria, projecting outcomes, confronting trade-offs, deciding, and telling your story (Bardach, 2002, p. xvi). This study was designed to investigate school tardiness policies at several districts, evaluate their implementation and consider whether they may or may not relate to student academic achievement. Bardach’s (2012) *Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* provided the basis to analyze the various state, district, and school policies in this study.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope**

The primary assumption that there are negative effects of tardiness has been well established (Batainch, 2014; Gottfried, 2012; Moore, 2010; Osae, 2017; Snyder, 2011). These

specific negative effects include class disruptions, loss of classroom instruction, increase in poor behavior, and low academic performance.

Limitations of this study include the fact that data are derived from online resources in which information can sometimes be outdated or limited. Additionally, it only includes data from school districts with the largest student population in their respective state: therefore, it may not appropriately represent smaller districts. This study is limited to public schools only, so charter schools, magnet schools, or other specialty schools may not be appropriately represented. Elementary schools selected for this study are those classified as “most diverse” (niche.com); therefore, schools with higher or lower ethnic makeups may not be appropriately represented. Lastly, this study focuses on three pre-kindergarten through sixth grade schools with student populations not greater than 700, so larger or smaller schools may not be adequately represented.

This study is a qualitative study of data collected via school district websites and other online databases regarding district information of demographics and academic achievement. The literature provides a foundation for this study by establishing a deeper understanding of student tardiness and school district policies.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Students arriving late are recognized as a great challenge plaguing schools across the United States. This study is significant due the lack of research that has been performed on the relationship between student tardiness and school policy. This researcher, a current elementary school administrator, has witnessed firsthand the many negative effects of student tardiness, especially in large, urban elementary school settings. As a current assistant principal who aspires to become a school superintendent, the findings from this study provide deeper insight into

policy analysis and serve as guide in writing school attendance and tardiness policies in the future.

### **Definition of Terms**

Terms utilized in this study are detailed below.

**Absenteeism.** “Any absence from school, including both excused and unexcused absences” (Ahmad and Miller, 2015, p. 4).

**Chronic absenteeism.** Missing 10 percent of the school year for any reason.

**Chronic Tardiness.** “The act of being repetitively late” (Study.com, n.d.).  
(attendanceworks.org.)

**Chronic truancy.** “Missing 10 percent of the school year without a valid excuse” (Ahmad and Miller, 2015, p. 4).

**Compulsory Attendance Law.** “Refers to state legislative mandates for attendance in public schools (or authorized alternatives) by children within age ranges for specific periods of time within the year” (Encyclopedia of Education, 2019).

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).** 2015 Federal law “which requires states to include five indicators measuring school performance, four focused on academic achievement, and a fifth ‘non-academic’ measure of school quality or school success” (Jordan & Miller, 2017).

**Excused absence.** “An absence from school due to a reason deemed valid by school administrations, which may include illness, doctor or dentist appointments, personal reasons justified by a parent or guardian, and other reasons within the discretion of school administrators” (Ahmad & Miller, 2015, p. 4).

**Student Academic Achievement.** Indicators used to determine the extent to which a student has attained specific academic growth goals in an instructional setting (Oxford Bibliographies, 2014).

**Tardies/Tardiness.** This is the quality or fact of being late.

**Truancy.** “Truancy generally refers to being absent without permission or good reason, especially from school” (USLegal, Inc., 2016).

**Unexcused absence.** “Any absence from school that is not deemed excused under the guidelines of a particular school administration” (Ahmad & Miller, 2015, p. 4).

### **Conclusion**

Tardiness is a problem that plagues almost every school district. Much research has been done which shows there is a relationship between tardiness and classroom disruptions, negative behaviors, and low academic performance. However, no research was found that demonstrates how school district policies affect student tardiness, and, in turn, academic achievement. By investigating this topic further, the researcher sought to understand this relationship and reveal findings that might inform school leaders and policy makers.

Chapter two is a literature review that focuses on defining tardiness, factors that cause tardiness, and strategies that have been utilized to reduce tardiness. In addition, related research is addressed about how school district policy regarding absences and tardiness may directly or indirectly impact student achievement.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review focused on two primary topics: student tardiness and attendance policies. Several aspects of student tardiness, including its definition, factors that may cause tardiness, and strategies to reduce tardiness are discussed. Components associated with tardiness, including absenteeism, chronic absenteeism, and truancy are covered. Particular considerations of culture, including experiences of children of color and undocumented families of children are exposed. Other considerations include families' socioeconomic status. Contained within socioeconomic status, considerations are made for students that are homeless or living in poverty. Aspects of attendance policies are covered, including compulsory school attendance and the influence of policies.

The research provides background knowledge to explain the problems associated with student tardiness, and how the implementation of school policy may or may not impact or reduce student tardiness. Additionally, this research examines if such policies, or the lack thereof, can be correlated with student academic achievement.

#### **Student Tardiness**

Studies by Reid (2000) reveal the relationship between excessive student tardiness and its negative impact on a student's future. Just by the mere nature of arriving late, students miss valuable instruction time. In order to more deeply understand student tardiness, the definition of what student tardiness is, the possible factors causing tardiness, and strategies to reduce tardiness must be examined. A deeper understanding of these concepts is essential in order to unpack causes of student absence and tardiness policies of each district and school in this study and perform a comparative analysis.

## **Defining Student Tardiness**

Tardiness is defined as “the quality of being tardy or late” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). One source that brought significant theoretical support of the definition and outcome of elementary student tardiness was Gottfried (2014). Gottfried (2014) relayed “School tardiness, or ‘tardies’ for short, is altogether an under-researched area, and yet this behavior has been flagged a signal of educational risk by both researchers and practitioners” (Gottfried, 2014, p. 3). He went on to say that “Being tardy is also a form of missing school, and similar to the effects of absences, tardiness may also be correlated with worsened student outcomes” (Gottfried, 2014, p. 4). Gottfried concluded this definition after performing an extensive, six-year study of tardiness of urban elementary school students. His study resulted in evidence that tardiness has an adverse effect on the academic achievement of elementary school students. Gottfried also found that tardiness is a disruptive behavior for not just the tardy student, but for all their classmates. In other words, students who arrive late cause the teacher to have to stop to address their needs and reallocate class time, therefore slowing instruction for the entire class. Additionally, Gottfried found that tardiness might be correlated with negative behavior and result in peer effects such as alienation, inattentiveness, and disengagement (p. 4).

Another researcher whose work is beneficial in defining elementary school tardiness is Bataineh (2014). Bataineh established a definition of lateness after analyzing 24 previous reports and papers. He defined lateness to be “a form of disruptive behavior that not only disrupts the class instruction but other students as well” (Bataineh, 2014, p. 2). These two researchers took a different approach in developing a definition of student tardiness: Gottfried (2014) based his definition on years of study and Bataineh (2014) based his definition from the analysis of others’ work. However, they concur that tardiness is a form of disruptive behavior.



While tardiness (the act of being late) and truancy (being absent without permission or good reason) do not have the same definition, they are correlated. For instance, Frisco Independent School district in Texas only excuses tardiness for medical appointments. Any other type of tardiness is deemed as missing part of the school day, which is documented as an absence. Once a student has missed 10 unexcused days, they are considered truant and the behavior will result in truancy charges (friscoisd.org, n.d.). Similarly, the Kentucky State School Law states “a student who has been tardy without a valid excuse on three or more days is also considered truant” (Spears, 2017). Both of these districts’ policies reinforce the concept that tardiness is connected to truancy.

### **Factors Causing Tardiness**

After Bataineh (2014) determined a definition of lateness, he went on to discover several factors associated with causes of a student’s lateness behavior. Some of these factors centered around economic influences such as students who live in poverty, single-parent homes, or have high mobility rates. As a result of these elements, other factors can arise, including fatigue, emotional challenges, lack of routine, and illness. More factors revealed by Bataineh’s (2014) study were associated with a student’s personal characteristics, such as being poorly organized, going to bed late, lack of routine, or maturity level. Additional factors relayed by Bataineh (2014) revolved around the student’s perception of school, such as no consequence for being late, the student’s expectations about the instructors, the instructor being late, challenges with the instructor’s authority, or simply that the beginning of the class wasn’t important to the students. Bataineh (2014) relayed that some students may simply find it difficult to make it from one class to another on time due to physical distance. Lastly, Bataineh (2014) determined that family background and cultural background can be factors causing tardiness (p. 3).

The same types of factors that cause student absences may impact lateness behavior as well. “Many students cannot get to school because of chronic health conditions; inadequate access to medical, mental health or dental care; unstable or poor-quality unhealthy housing; unreliable transportation; or a lack of effective family and community supports and service delivery” (Attendance Works, 2014, p. 12). In other words, these barriers not only cause absences, but may cause students to be late for school in general.

Other contributing researchers who determined factors causing student tardiness include Moore (2010), Osae (2017), and Snyder (2011). Moore (2010) determined factors such as “overcrowding, bathroom breaks, and locker problems; and personnel factors, such as teacher inconsistency and lack of administrative and teacher presence in the halls” to be a cause of lateness (p. 2). Snyder (2011) suggested that teacher lateness models poor behavior and promotes student tardiness (p. 1). Osae (2017) revealed more factors causing tardiness including disorganization, sleeping in, and it being simply a bad habit (p. 1).

Student tardiness is correlated with truancy and the two behaviors have many similar influences that cause them to occur. Reid (2000) shares several social and educational causes of truancy such as students being overwhelmed with home situations, those who don't like school or their teachers, those who may be avoiding a bullying situation, and students who are ill, transient, or economically disadvantaged. Reid (2000) emphasizes, however, “there is no single cause of truancy” (p. 76). He goes on to relay, “every truant is unique and so is every school and family unit” (Reid, 2000, p. 76). Conversely, just as there is no single cause of truancy, there is no one determined cause or set of causes of tardiness. The bottom line is that the causes of tardiness are vast and varying, depending on each individual student and their families, culture, socio-economic status, and the climate and culture of the district and school they attend.

## Strategies to Reduce Tardiness

There are several authors in this literature review with findings from strategies employed to reduce tardiness (Caldarella et al., 2011; Din, Isack, & Reitveld, 2003; Johnson-Gros, Lyons, & Griffin, 2008; Sprick & Daniels, 2007; Talkhee, Shaheen, & Bhamani, 2013; Varghese, 2014). Caldarella et al. (2011) utilized teacher written praise notes to elementary school students and reduced tardiness for chronically late students by 84% (p. 107). Din et al. (2003) saw notable improvement in the reduction of student tardiness when offered candy rewards as positive reinforcement (p. 8). Johnson-Gros et al. (2008) utilized Positive Behavior Support (PBS) strategies that not only reduced tardiness, but also significantly reduced behavioral problems (p. 39). In this study, data were obtained via office discipline referrals for tardiness and observations of tardiness behaviors in the hallways were made to establish the baseline. It was determined through the analysis of the data the three instructional periods of the day with the highest number of tardies. These periods were then targeted for intervention. Next, staff was trained on six components of active supervision: arriving at post on time, remaining at post during transition period, moving towards groups of congregating students in post area, physically escorting students during the entire transition time, consistently and continually scanning the transition area, and interacting with the students in a positive manner (Johnson-Gros et al., 2008, p. 43). After enacting PBS strategies, data was gathered regarding the number of referrals for tardies, and it revealed a considerable drop in tardiness rates for the targeted class periods.

Sprick and Daniels (2007) created the “*positive sweep*”. This meant that “after the tardy bell rings, administrators and security personnel typically “sweep” the hallways, sending wayward students to the office, where they record tardies, write passes, and send students to their classes” (p. 22). This strategy resulted in a 90% reduction in tardies in a five-week period (p. 2).

Talkhee, Shaheen, and Bhamani (2013) saw a significant reduction in tardiness after implementing a six-week long reward-based behavior modification plan (p. 8). A study by Varghese (2014) about implementing a new policy regarding tardiness (p. 2) influenced a 40% reduction in tardies and reduced discipline issues.

In the concise article, principal Catherine A. McDonald (2009) outlines the “Zero Tardy Campaign” she and her staff initiated in an effort to combat tardiness in her school. She explained that while her school district had an attendance policy, tardiness was to be handled by each principal as they saw fit. Their campaign included increasing information to parents of the importance of attendance, and implementing a “Power Hour”, which was “an intense early morning review of key language arts and math skills, designed to be fun activities that students would not want to miss” (p. 1). Additionally, the campaign included a motivator of students earning a “Zero Tardy Trophy”. While this campaign did help with tardies, McDonald stated: “Unfortunately, there are those times when no incentive or amount of positive reinforcement will remedy chronic tardiness, and additional efforts are needed to rectify this concern” (McDonald, 2009, p. 1). If the campaign didn’t make an impact on a chronically tardy student, McDonald was forced to pursue legal action guided by the state truancy regulations.

After reviewing the literature, a wide range of strategies to reduce student tardiness is revealed. Yet, it becomes clear there is not conclusive evidence that any given strategy, whether punitive or rewarding, that is consistently effective. However, none of the strategies discussed consider school tardiness policies. This study addresses this gap by comparing and analyzing tardiness policies and the possible ways they may impact student attendance, tardiness, or truancy.

## **Absenteeism, Chronic Absenteeism, and Truancy**

Tardiness is associated with and can lead to absenteeism. “Research has shown that students who tend to be tardy also tend to be absent” (Quarles, 2011, p. 88). Absenteeism includes excused and unexcused absences. Chronic unexcused absences can evolve into truancy. (Ahmad & Miller, 2015, p. 4). The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) “requires states to report chronic absence data and allows federal spending on training to reduce absenteeism” (attendanceworks.org). However, while there are connections between tardiness, absenteeism, chronic absenteeism, and truancy, how each individual state and local school address each one varies greatly. “Education is primarily a state and local responsibility in the United States” (US Department of Education, n.d., para 1). Therefore, each state and local school district determines the policies that govern attendance, tardiness, and truancy. So, while reporting chronic absences is federally mandated, reporting tardiness is not.

### **Cultural Considerations of Tardiness**

Culture is defined as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Perception of time or punctuality is affected by cultural norms (Chow, 2014; Garcia and Weiss, 2018). Bataineh (2014) supports this description as well by stating, “Different cultures have different standards concerning lateness” (p. 3). Aspects of tardiness behavior may vary dependent on cultural differences of students and their families.

### **Children of Color**

While tardiness has been examined from a general view (the quality of being late), student demographics need to be taken into consideration when determining whether current

policies for improving school attendance are effective. The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported:

Between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of U.S. school-age children who were White decreased from 62 to 51 percent and the percentage who were Black decreased from 15 to 14 percent. In contrast, the percentages of school-age children from other racial/ethnic groups increased: Hispanic children, from 16 to 25 percent; Asian children, from 3 to 5 percent; and children of two or more races, from 2 to 4 percent. (p. 24).

So, how does the number of children of color and the change in ratio of ethnic groups play into student tardiness or absences? A report from the Race Matters Institute (RMI) reveals “Certain barriers to regular school attendance disproportionately affect children of color, especially African American, Latino and Native American children, who tend to experience much higher levels of chronic early absence” (RMI, 2013, p. 1). Research from Garcia & Weiss (2013) concurs with the report from RMI: “Students who were diagnosed with a disability, students who were eligible for free lunch, Hispanic English language learners, and Native American students were the most likely to have missed school, while Asian students were rarely absent” (p. 3).

The organization *Attendance Works* reveals data about disparities involving chronic absenteeism. “An analysis of NAEP (National Association of Educational Progress) data from 2011 and 2013 shows that 22 percent of black fourth graders and 23 percent of black eighth graders missed too much school, compared with 19 percent of whites. The gaps were wider in some states” (Attendance Works, 2015, p. 13). It is evident that this trend is increasing. For the 2015-2016 school year, the US Department of Education said, “Consider the relative differences: compared to their white peers, American Indian and Pacific Islander students are over 50 percent

more likely to lose three weeks of school or more, black students 40 percent more likely, and Hispanic students 17 percent more likely” (ed.gov).

Collectively, data from these various studies demonstrate trends in associations between race/ethnicity and student attendance. Attendance Works’ (2015) report relays that “Chronic absence does not affect all students equally. In many cases, those who need school the most are attending school the least” (p. 11). So why is race/ethnicity characterized as a factor to consider for tardiness? “Minority students are more often in larger schools, and school size is itself related to a number of educational outcomes, including absenteeism, dropping out, academic achievement, and a range of engagement behaviors” (Kirkpatrick-Johnson et al., 2001, p. 324).

There has been considerable research regarding Hispanic/Latino culture in relation to timeliness and student success (Clutter & Zubieta, 2009; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). Clutter and Zubieta (2009) provided insights and understanding of Hispanic culture when they reported, “Hispanics tend to be more relaxed and flexible about time and punctuality than U.S. natives, [and]... Within the Hispanic community, not being on time is a socially acceptable behavior” (para. 7). However, it should be noted that those considered “U.S. natives” consist of a growing number of people from Hispanic/Latino descent. In fact, Noe-Bustamante (2019) with Pew Research notes “nearly 60 million individuals trace their heritage to Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and to Spain” (para. 1).

Moreno and Gaytan (2013) emphasized that, “recognizing barriers that may not initially seem directly related to school success is necessary to meet the needs of Latino students” (p. 8). Chronic tardiness would be such a barrier. Quiocho and Daoud explained “Latino parents often misunderstand their role in their children’s education because they didn’t understand the concept of involvement as defined by the school” (p. 257). Hispanic or Latino parents may also not

understand the implication of missing school in the early years. “Chronic absence in kindergarten has an immediate impact on academic performance for all children, especially Latino students” (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 5). This aligns with parents of Hispanic or Latino students possibly not realizing the importance of ensuring their children get to school on time, or fully understanding the attendance policies and procedures. Subsequently, research by Garcia and Weiss (2018) revealed that Hispanic students were among the highest group characterized by ethnicity to miss school. They reported from their findings:

Hispanic ELLs (English language learners) and Native American students were the most likely to miss three or more days of school (24.1 and 24.0 percent, respectively, missed more than three days of school), followed by black students (23.0 percent) and Hispanic non-ELL and white students (19.1 and 18.3 percent, respectively). Only 8.8 percent of Asian non-ELL students missed more than three days of school. (Garcia & Weiss, 2018, p. 3)

### **Undocumented Families and Students**

Often associated with the Hispanic or Latino population of students and families in relation to absence or tardiness behavior are the sheer numbers of undocumented Hispanic or Latinos in the United States. “In 2017, 44 percent of U.S. immigrants (19.7 million people) reported having Hispanic or Latino origins” (Zong et al., 2019, p. 6). There are federal mandates that allow and protect education for undocumented students. “U.S. public schools may not deny or discourage enrollment to any school-age children, regardless of their immigration status. In addition, such students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, special education services, and school-sponsored events and activities” (NASSP, n.d., para. 1).



Although undocumented students are afforded educational rights in the United States, there are other obstacles to take into account when considering school attendance and tardiness. One significant challenge could be the language barrier faced by families who don't speak English sufficiently to understand the school attendance policies and procedures.

“Approximately 48 percent (21.2 million) of 44.2 million immigrants ages 5 and older were Limited English Proficient (LEP)” (Zong et al., 2019, p. 6). The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice states “Schools must communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English” (ed.gov, n.d., para. 1). This includes information such as the school district’s policies and procedures for student discipline, special education services, parent-teacher conferences, and parent student handbooks. Any of these could potentially include information about absences or tardiness. However, if undocumented families, for example, did not receive a handbook in Spanish, or are not receiving communication from school they may be fearful of asking too many questions about information or from getting too involved with interactions that prompt immigration-related concerns.

“Immigrant families can face unique difficulties such as actual or threatened deportation of parents, and the need to return to one’s country of origin for unexpected family emergencies” (RMI, 2013, p. 2). This fear can negatively impact undocumented students in many ways.

“Immigration crackdowns are having a widespread harmful impact on children’s academic performance, school attendance and classroom behavior, not just among immigrant children but native-born students as well” (Jones, 2018, para. 1). Cultural consideration in regards to tardiness is significant for this study as it envelops large, urban schools that have considerable populations of children of color.

### **Socioeconomic Influences on Tardiness**

Another important consideration when thinking about the aspects of tardiness behavior is the socioeconomic status of families. Families in poverty often do not realize the detriment to the education of their child due to tardiness or absences. “Because children from low-income families may be likely to miss school or be late more often than higher income children, the consistency of children’s school attendance may account for part of the achievement gap between poor and nonpoor students” (Morrissey et al., 2010, p. 2). Students who are homeless or have an unstable residence are at risk for being absent or tardy to school. “Residential and family instability may make establishing and maintaining routines difficult, which in turn may lead to more school absences and tardies” (Morrissey et al., 2010, p. 2). Nolan et al. (2016) relays that “a student’s socioeconomic status can also have an impact on their likelihood to be truant” (p. 24). Therefore, how socioeconomics may impact student attendance or punctuality must be examined more closely.

### **Poverty**

Another situation that may impact student’s ability to comply with school absence and tardiness policies is poverty. Students of families whose socioeconomic status (SES) is low or in the poverty range tend to have limited resources or access to resources that help ensure school success (apa.org). “More recent research continues to find a negative relationship between absences and achievement, particularly as family socioeconomic status (SES) declines” (Gottfried, 2014, p. 54). However, even if families intend to comply with school absence and tardiness policies, there are conditions that challenge their intent to follow through. Students in impoverished situations often have to care for other siblings, deal with lack of care and illness, and move around frequently so that the family can find employment (Cutillo, 2013). “When

families are poor, they lack resources (often taken for granted by many middle-class families) that make regular school attendance much easier” (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 12).

There is often a state-of-mind associated with compliance with school absence and tardiness policies. Families in poverty often “do not recognize the long-term harm of missing school” (Cutillo, 2013, para. 4). Additionally, worrying about attendance or tardiness policies may be the least of their concerns. “The prevailing attitude within these communities is about survival, not school attendance” (Cutillo, 2013, para. 4). The impact of poverty is far reaching. “In 2018, 16.2% of all children (11.9 million kids) lived in Poverty USA—that’s almost 1 in every 6 children” (poveryusa.org, n.d.). As a result of poverty, some students may become homeless or transient. These types of low socioeconomic situations may impact their attendance and punctuality in school. Research by Garcia & Weiss (2018) revealed the following:

Looking at poverty-status groups, 23.2 percent of students eligible for free lunch, and 17.9 percent of students eligible for reduced-price lunch, missed three school days or more, compared with 15.4 percent of students who were not FRPL-eligible (that is, eligible for neither free lunch nor reduced-price lunch). (p. 4)

Subsequently, students who are absent or late for school miss instructional time, which, in turn, negatively impacts their academic success. Morrissey et al. (2014) confirm this when they found that “Higher rates of school absence and tardiness may be one mechanism through which low family income impacts children's academic success” (p. 1).

**Homelessness.** Some students living in poverty become homeless. “The federal Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 defines a homeless person as one who lacks a permanent nighttime residence or one whose residence is a temporary living arrangement. The law directs each state to adopt a plan for educating homeless children including transportation and other

school services” (Lunenburg, 2011, p. 3). Students living in a homeless situation can face insurmountable challenges, especially when it comes to attending school regularly and on time. “Residential instability (e.g., frequent moves, doubling up, homelessness) is associated with absenteeism and poor academic outcomes for children” (RMI, 2013, p. 3). Students who are not only homeless, but also transient, face even greater challenges with stable, consistent school attendance. “According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, one of six children has attended three or more schools by the time he/she completes third grade. Mobility is highly correlated with poor attendance” (Chang & Romero, 2008, p. 13).

### **Attendance Policies**

School districts report their attendance to their respective state Department of Education. “The attendance rate tells you the average percentage of students attending school each day in the given year, as reported by the state Department of Education” (GreatSchools, 2011). “The attendance rate is important because students are more likely to succeed in academics when they attend school consistently” (GreatSchools, 2011). All school districts have some type of attendance policy that reflects their state’s compulsory school attendance. Additionally, most attendance policies issue punitive measures for absences and tardies (Meador, 2020).

### **Compulsory school attendance**

“Between 1852 and 1918 all states and territories in the United States enacted compulsory school attendance laws” (Richardson, 2019). Compulsory school attendance refers to state mandated attendance in public schools by all students and enacts age ranges in which a student is required to attend school (USLegal, 2016, para. 1). The age requirements for compulsory school attendance vary from state to state, but typically they range from the age of

five to the upper age of between sixteen and seventeen (Cave, 2019). While each state mandates their own compulsory school attendance policies, parents or guardians are ultimately responsible for compliance with the policies. “Parents, or those persons with legal custody, are held responsible for school attendance in every state” (Cave, 2019, para. 3).

Compulsory school attendance is also associated with tardiness. Dougherty (1991) wrote a fastback document that examined truancy, absenteeism, and tardiness and how, since compulsory education was established, educators have had to deal with these obstacles to education. “Tardiness, a persistent problem in schools, is defined within the educational system as late arrival to school or class and is linked to absenteeism and school dropouts. On-time arrival to school and class became an issue with compulsory school attendance” (Cain & Agger, 2013, p. 769).

### **Influence of policies**

French, Gerstle, and Neilhaus (1991) argued that “Sound and reasonable attendance policies can set clear standards and high expectations for students” (French et al., 1991, p. 1). However, subsequent research sheds new light on the influence of attendance policies. In 1996, Kerrins & Hayes concluded from their research that “Students and parents should be involved in and informed of school policies and procedures” (p. 51). Not only should parents be kept abreast of policies and procedures involving tardiness and attendance, these policies and procedures should be updated as needed. Kerrins & Hayes (1996) stated that policies and procedures “should be carefully monitored, consistently enforced, and regularly evaluated for effectiveness” (p. 51).

Hanover Research (2013) issued a 21-page report that looked at all aspects of attendance policies and examined the effectiveness of various approaches. “The correlation between student

attendance and student learning has recently garnered significant attention from education stakeholders, including state-level policymakers” (2013, p. 2). This research allowed educators to more deeply understand how student attendance policies affect overall attendance rates and patterns. In the report, cause and effect of tardiness, different incentives for both students and teachers, communication strategies, disciplinary actions, and comprehensive strategies were all examined. While this study did not specifically address tardiness, it resulted in two key findings that stood out and may prove useful to showing the relationship between tardiness and school policy.

First, Hanover (2013) found that “The most successful attendance policies extend beyond school walls, heavily incorporating students’ families as well as external community service organizations” (p. 6). The same district policies that hold families accountable for student absences can apply to tardiness as well. The report went on to describe that “Communication strategies offer cost-effective solutions for districts working to improve attendance rates” (p. 6). Just as successful campaigns addressing absences can work well, those addressing tardiness via social media, school websites, automated systems, and parent outreach to communicate and promote importance of timeliness to students and families have been documented by researchers to be successful as well.

The Hamilton Project was a strategy paper developed by researchers who proposed a framework for states to use to design their accountability plans and to adopt chronic absenteeism as one measure of school quality or student success (SQSS) (Bauer et al., 2018). The goal was that this framework would serve as a guide in developing strategies to “make real gains in lowering chronic absenteeism and in raising student achievement and graduation rates” (Bauer et al., 2018, p. 5). The researchers emphasize the importance of parent communication and discuss

strategies for helping to inform families about school attendance policies (Bauer et al., 2018). In this report, the researchers also stress the importance of strong communication with parents, including home-school communications, two-way texting, and informational mailings and their influence on decreasing chronic absenteeism as a result of these communications (Bauer et al., 2018, p. 20). Lastly, the report states, “Past truancy is a strong predictor for future truancy” and goes on to say, “Left unaddressed, attendance issues in a school can lead to a host of negative consequences for students’ academic achievement and health” (p. 6). This finding supports previous research by Quarles (2011) that found “There was a significant correlation between the number of tardies and absences in English and math test scores” (p. 88).

Some districts have tried using technology to learn more about how to reduce tardiness. Grayson (2008) produced a series of three whitepapers regarding the results of tardiness interventions from dozens of schools in three independent school districts that utilized the eCampusUSA™ rules-based software application system. These three school districts were on a quest to figure out how to deal with excessive tardiness and collaboratively decided that, in order to reduce tardiness, students must be held accountable for their tardiness behavior. This plan included immediate and consistent consequences that would escalate, and that the parents needed to be involved and immediately contacted. This software was designed to track tardiness and relay what consequences would occur to both the school personnel and sent an instant email to the parent. In addition, a letter was generated for mailing.

Data were analyzed for 1,026,777 tardies in schools that implemented the software program. The program increased consequences for students who failed to meet the school’s guidelines for tardiness. The first whitepaper entitled *What One Million Tardies Reveal About Accountability* “assesses the impact of holding students immediately accountable for their

behavior and, perhaps more importantly, whether that behavior can be influenced” (Grayson, 2008, p. 1). The whitepaper pointed out one million tardies, each averaging ten minutes long, equates to 166,667 hours of lost instruction time. The findings showed that student behavior was indeed changed with the implementation of the software accountability program and which resulted in significant increase in instructional time. Additionally, after analyzing the data for the three-year period, the researchers concluded that by reducing tardies by 75-85% “the net result is a minimum gain of approximately 125,000 hours of instruction” (Grayson, 2008, p. 4-5).

The second report is entitled *What Does a Three-Year Study Reveal About Influencing Student Behavior?* This researcher set out to answer the question of whether or not student tardiness behavior could be changed with a system of accountability via the software program. Indeed, with consistent implementation in the schools with the strictest policies, tardiness could indeed be reduced by 75-85%.

Grayson’s (2008) third whitepaper includes an analysis of interventions and is entitled *What Are the Best Policies That Change Student Behavior?* The schools that utilized the software could set up how strict (such as only one warning is given prior to discipline) or lenient (two warnings issued) their tardiness policies were, and describe the resulting consequences (such as detention or principal meeting). The strictest was “Category 1” and the most lenient was “Category 2”. Results showed “The strictest policy (Category 1) had the best results. It achieved a 75-80% reduction in tardies and did the best job of influencing student behavior” (p. 11). Comparatively, the Category 2 schools only reduced tardiness to the 60-70% range (p. 8).

These three whitepapers examined findings from research as a result of several strategies implemented in three school districts. Collectively, the strategies revolve around the implementation of punitive measures, tracked and guided via an attendance accountability



software program. These factors were aligned and led to learning about how these punitive measures or stricter policies could reduce absenteeism.

### **Summary**

The intent of school attendance policies is essentially to improve the attendance and punctuality of students. While compulsory attendance laws are intended to require students to be in attendance, compliance is highly dependent on the family to get their children to school. Communication is key in helping families understand not just the guidelines and expectations outlined in school attendance policies, but the how attendance impacts academic performance. Many attendance policies are punitive in nature, which can lead to more success in ensuring students come to school each day and arrive on time; Other research finds that punitive approaches can be problematic.

### **Discussion of the Theoretical Framework**

Michael A. Gottfried has extensively researched all aspects of student absence and tardiness. In nearly every one of his 67 research works, he implicates policy enactment in regard to student absence and tardiness. It is important to understand school policy on all levels. For example, Granite School District (2019) relays: “Policies are important because they help a school establish rules and procedures and create standards of quality for learning and safety, as well as expectations and accountability” (para 6). Charlotte Danielson (2002) describes in her book *Enhancing Student Achievement* how successful policies regarding attendance and tardiness are grounded in the fact that attendance is essential and not optional.

*The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012) offers a solid framework to support school policy analysis. This framework is used to analyze school tardiness and absence policies across several large, urban school districts. Additionally, this framework

will help support consideration of possible “outcomes”, which may be translated as possible relationships between these schools’ tardiness and absence policies and student academic achievement. The eight steps in this policy analysis approach are defining the problem, assembling evidence, constructing alternatives, selecting criteria, projecting outcomes, confronting trade-offs, deciding, and telling your story (Bardach, 2002, p. xvi). In this framework the first four steps focus on framing the analysis and steps five through eight focus on doing the analysis.

“Defining a policy problem is an act of conceptualizing collective problems or challenges to be dealt with” (Hanberger, 2001, p. 53). Bardach (2002) explains that, in the quest to define a policy problem, it can be thought of in terms of a deficit or excess (p. 1). For example, Gottfried (2014) emphasized that policy makers need to focus on early education, as prior research suggests that for urban students, missing school is detrimental in many ways (p. 7). However, many school districts fall short in implementing such education. Therefore, this lack of implementation could be defined as a policy problem. “Assertions of deficit or excess should come with magnitudes attached” (Bardach, 2002, p. 5). These “magnitudes” may include, for example, the size, spectrum, or abilities of the problem. Bardach (2002) goes on to say problem definitions may contain conditions or “odds” (p. 6). An example of the spectrum of this policy analysis is how school policy on attendance and tardiness may be associated with the negative impact of students’ absences and tardiness determined by researchers such as Calderella et al. (2011) and Gottfried (2009, 2014). This is relatable to analyzing school district attendance policies in that they may or may not specifically address the issue of tardiness.

Policy analysis requires evidence to support that the problem does indeed exist.

“Effective decision-making requires good advice, and that depends on informed use of evidence both in developing policy and in evaluating its effect once implemented” (Gluckman, 2013, p. 6).

Evidence of the overall issue of student absences and tardiness is a problem that has been well established over time (Bathaineh, 2014; Grayson, 2008; Lockwood, 1930; Maile & Olowoyo, 2017; Nakpodia & Difiaghor, 2011; Pellicer & Summers, 1985; Speciale, 2015; Sprick & Daniels, 2007; Tyre et al., 2011). Bardach (2002) relays that evidence is needed for three primary reasons (p. 12). These are: to assess the nature and extent of the problem, to assess the particular features of the concrete policy situation, and to assess the policies that have been considered to work effectively in similar situations (Bardach, 2002, p. 12).

“People making choices are at the heart of policy studies, but not all theories conceptualize this process extensively” (Cairney & Heikkila, 2014, p. 364). “A policy theory is defined as the total of causal and other assumptions underlying a policy” (Hoogerwerf, 1990, p. 285). In other words, policy theories provide insight into what makes up a policy. Policy theories suggest policy enactment has a lot of moving parts. Cairney & Heikkila (2014) suggest that “the policy process is complex and there is no ‘general theory’” (p. 364). However, for this study, Bardach’s (2002) guide provides a solid foundation on which to perform a policy analysis of school attendance policies. “To ensure that a policy is fully analyzed, understood, and implemented effectively, it is necessary to conduct a policy analysis” (Holquist, 2013, p. 1). Holquist (2013) discloses “by following these steps, you will ensure that you effectively and efficiently assess a policy before implementation or making alterations” (para. 10). These steps will guide the researcher in developing a strong tardiness policy analysis.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of a Policy Analysis**

One strength of qualitative research is that it allows homogeneous exploration and an understanding of behaviors of values, beliefs, and assumptions (Choy, 2014, p. 101). The process revealed features of similar school settings in regards to their school tardiness policy and how these policies may or may not impact student academic achievement. Next, while this particular research is a case study of just three schools in three urban districts, the findings it reveals are relevant for many other school districts as well in consideration of tardiness policies. “Data usually are collected from a few cases or individuals so findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Findings can however be transferable to another setting” (Anderson, 2010). Additionally, because this research was Internet-based, it allows the researcher to go outside the range of traditional, centralized studies and obtain a sample set from districts across the United States, with increased potential to glean a broad range of statistical information.

Choy (2014) also points out “The strengths of quantitative research can, however, also be weaknesses” (p. 102). This dilemma relates to this study as there are many aspects where the examination of similar school settings in relation to their tardiness policies may not paint the whole picture. “Many important characteristics of people and communities including both rich and poor, for example, identities, perceptions, and beliefs that cannot be meaningfully reduced to numbers or adequately understood without reference to the local context in which people live” (Choy, 2014, p. 102). Another weakness of this research is that, while there is a plethora of information on the Internet available at one’s fingertips, there is a risk that some data may not be accessible, limited, or inaccurate. “There are no standards, that is, no process to check information accurately. Most information in the Internet does not go through a review process” (Essays UK, 2018, para. 11). In order to provide the most accurate data for this study and reduce

this weakness, the researcher performed validity checks of data presented in this paper by cross-checking information.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review of overall student tardiness provides a definition of lateness, factors that lead to lateness, proposed strategies for dealing with the tardiness issue, cultural and socioeconomic considerations, and school policies regarding tardiness. The literature offers data and research from a variety of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies. These combine to support a collective view of the overall negative effect of tardiness for both the tardy student and all students in the classroom. This literature review also offers evidence of reduction of tardiness through a variety of implemented strategies, as well as deeper insight about how to study and analyze school policy.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to compare tardiness policies in three elementary schools from the largest urban school districts in the state in which they are located, investigate their alignment with what research shows about tardiness and school attendance, and explore the possible relationship between school tardiness policies and student academic achievement. Through conducting research using publicly available content, data were gathered regarding school district and school tardiness policies. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the major similarities and differences in large school districts regarding school tardiness policy?
2. How do large, urban school district policies align with research on tardiness and school attendance?
3. Is there a relationship between school tardiness policies and student achievement?

This qualitative research was performed by examining the tardiness policies of demographically similar elementary schools in three of the largest districts in Oklahoma, California, and Florida. For each district, the demographic information of size, ethnicity, reading and math proficiency data, and district policies and procedures were gathered and analyzed.

#### **Research Design and Approach**

This research design used is a qualitative case study. “The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured [if measured at all] in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). The case study approach aligns

with the purposes of this research, in that it allows the researcher to examine the qualities of the entities (the school districts) and their processes and meanings (school district policy). The “quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” of characteristics of school district policies were the data gathered for analysis.

“Case studies are based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group or event to explore the causes of underlying principles” (Press Academy, 2018). Creswell (2013) describes a qualitative case study as one that “explores real-live, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information...and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97). This case study entailed a deep dive into data collected from multiple bounded systems (three specific school districts) regarding their tardiness policies.

The method used to gather data for this research was Internet-based research. “Internet-based research method refers to any research method that used the Internet to collect data” (Krantz, 2010). This type of data-collection method complements this particular multi-case study as it affords the researcher the ability to consider districts that would otherwise be challenging to compare due to proximity to one another. “In case study research, researchers use documents as a source of contextual information about events that cannot be directly observed” (Boblin et al., 2013, p. 5). In this multi-case study, the “documents” are data from three large, urban school districts regarding their attendance policies, demographic information, and statistical information derived from school and district web sites, school board policy and procedure manuals, and online school statistic data bases.

### **Setting**

The setting for this research is three large urban school districts' publicly available data. The researcher did not have personal contact with the actual school districts or sites being used for the study. Information about the setting for each individual school district or school sites was gathered via online inquiry from the respective school district website. Three public, non-charter elementary schools were selected for this research. The schools are located in California, Oklahoma, and Florida. These states were selected by the researcher to represent the east coast, central, and west coast of the United States.

### **Participants/Sample**

As this is a desk study using publicly available data, there are no human participants. The researcher determined the parameters and selection procedure for which states, school districts, and schools would make up this study's sample. This criterion was selected to determine a sample set with several similar features. First, the researcher selected states representing the eastern, south central, and western portions of the United States to make up the study set. Second, the researcher used the same website for selection of the districts and schools to be examined in order to maintain consistency in the data collection (Niche.com). Once it was determined what the largest urban school district from each state was, the researcher selected a focus school from each sample district. Third, in an attempt to have an equitable representation of students, the researcher filtered the selections so that the schools representing the most ethnically diverse student body was listed with the highest to the least. Those with the "most diverse" earned an "A" rating. This ranking is determined from statistical data from the U.S. Department of Education. Fourth, to select each focus school, the researcher chose the first



elementary school on the list of schools with the most diversity in each selected district that met the following criteria:

- Public school that was not a charter, magnet, or other specialty school
- Served a range of students between pre-kindergarten through sixth grade
- Enrollment does not exceed 700 students

### **Data Collection**

Data for this research in regards to absence and tardiness policies for the sample set of schools were collected from each school district website, their school and/or district policy and procedures manual, and other online databases. While several other online databases were considered, Niche.com was selected as the primary database for particular school demographics, student diversity, and academic performance. Niche.com relays “We use the most up-to-date data available from dozens of public data sources including the Department of Education, U.S. Census, and FBI” (2019).

However, in order to ensure validity of much of this information, data were gleaned from the National Center for Education Services. “The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the U.S. and other nations” (NCES, 2019). All districts and schools in this study are represented on NCES. “NCES fulfills a Congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report complete statistics on the condition of American education; conduct and publish reports; and review and report on education activities internationally” (NCES, 2019). However, while NCES is typically the most accurate school district database, it oftentimes does not have current, updated information for the current, or even past school year. In other words, the data may be a year or

two behind in being reported. Therefore, data were collected from several sites in order to gather as much sufficient, accurate, up-to-date data possible.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to compare tardiness policies in three elementary schools from the largest urban school districts in the state in which they are located. To do this, extensive data from each district and school were collected. First, the attendance and tardiness policy from each school was collected. Next, student demographic data was gathered, such as age/grade, race, and gender. School-specific data was collected regarding student academic achievement, free or reduced lunch rates, student to teacher ratios, and any other information relevant to the school or district in relation to this study. After all data were collected, each respective school district's policies regarding attendance and tardiness was analyzed utilizing Bardach's (2012) *Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* as a guide. The policy and other data analysis provided a means to address each research question for this study.

An important step in applying this framework that is tightly connected to the review of school policy is constructing the alternatives. Specifically, this means to consider alternative policy options or possible strategies to solve or alleviate a problem (Bardach, 2002). Bardach (2002) suggests keeping one's alternatives to just a few but says to always first agree to "Let present trends (or 'business as usual') continue undisturbed" (p. 18). By doing so, it is possible "to see if 'natural' change will affect the scope of the problem" (Bardach, 2002). However, Bardach (2002) reminds us that "policy ideas that sound great in theory often fail under conditions of field implementation" (p. 42). So, when considering a policy alternative, it should be "robust enough that even if the implementation process does not go very smoothly, the policy outcomes will still prove to be satisfactory" (Bardach, 2002, p. 43.)

Selecting the criteria is “the most important step for introducing values and philosophy into the policy analysis, because some possible ‘criteria’ are evaluative standards used to judge the goodness of the projected policy outcomes that are associated with each of the alternatives” (Bardach, 2002, p. 32). “Evaluative criteria are standards used to judge the merits of policy proposals” (Kraft & Furlong, 2019, para. 1). Bardach (2002) reviews commonly used evaluative criteria finding efficiency, equality, equity, fairness, and justice, freedom, community and other ideas, and process values. Bardach (2002) suggests that the initial focus be on just one primary criterion and make it the “principal objective to be maximized (or minimized)” (p. 44).

Bardach (2002) relays that projecting the outcomes is the hardest step in the *Eightfold Path* (p. 47). “This step can be difficult and requires some data or evidence to determine both the direction of an outcome, but the magnitude and size as well” (Erdman, 2018, para. 15). By projecting outcomes, each policy alternative is evaluated based on the criteria. “Sometimes, this process will help eliminate policy alternatives that do not produce desired outcomes and impacts” (Holquist, 2013). In other words, it simply may not turn out the way it was expected.

Confronting the trade-offs is when there has to be a compromise between the projected outcomes and the actual outcomes. “Oftentimes, as clear policy “winner” is often not produced from the analysis; therefore, it is important to look at trade-offs between the policy alternatives to identify the best alternative” (Holquist, 2013, para. 7). After consideration of the trade-offs, Bardach (2002) says that, at this point in the process, there needs to be focused, narrowed, and deepened analysis to prepare for the seventh step of decision (p. 69).

“Deciding simply means to choose the policy alternative based on your analysis” (Holoquist, 2013, para. 8). Bardach (2002) warns that if there is a struggle to decide, then the trade-offs may have not been fully clarified or implementation issues have not been considered

(p. 69). A comical, but important analogy that Bardach (2002) uses to explain this is the “twenty-dollar-bill test”. In this old adage, two economists are walking along and one sees a twenty-dollar bill. The other economist declares that there is no way that it is a twenty-dollar bill lying on the ground, or otherwise, someone else would have already picked it up. “The analogy is this: if your favorite policy alternative is such a great idea, how come it’s not happening already?” (Bardach, 2002, p. 70.). This is an important thing to consider when deciding your policy alternative.

### **Participant Rights**

This research was performed using publicly available data. There are no human participants.

### **Potential Limitations**

One potential limitation of this study is that it only focuses on attendance and tardiness policies in elementary schools. Therefore, it may not accurately represent middle or high school tardiness policies, and if they effectively reduce tardiness. Another limitation is that since this is an Internet-based research, there are limitations with the availability of data, or that data is up-to-date. In addition, this research represents only a sample of the largest traditional, urban districts in the selected states. For that reason, it may not appropriately represent other sizes or types of school districts. Also, this study focuses on schools that represent the most ethnically diverse in each district. So, a school that, for example, had 95% of one ethnic type as the majority would not be represented. The final potential limitation may be personal bias on the part of the researcher as a former elementary educator and current elementary administrator. “Research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies” (Anderson, 2010, p. 2).

## Conclusion

This chapter described the research design and approach to be used for this Internet-based, qualitative study of the tardiness policies of three public elementary schools. In order to perform the policy analysis, Bardach's (2012) *The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012) framework was utilized. The value of evidence gathered for policy analysis depends on certain factors. First, it depends on "the likelihood that it will cause you to substitute some better decision for whatever decision you would have made without it" (Bardach, 2002, p. 13). Second, it depends on "the likelihood that the substituted decision will...produce a better policy outcome that would have been produced by the original decision" (Bardach, 2002, p. 13). Third, it depends on the "magnitude in value between the likely-to-be-improved outcome and the original outcome" (Bardach, 2002, p. 13). Bardach (2002) also emphasized that, when gathering evidence, ensure that it includes quality, research-based literature and best practices.

" 'Tell your story' is to clearly tell the story; trade detail for brevity" (Holquist, 2013, para. 9). However, *how* you tell your story is key. "A number of organizations or projects that support researchers and scientists in communicating with policymakers draw on the same insights and have come to similar conclusions: the way in which information is presented is crucial" (Davidson, 2017, p. 3). Bardach (2002) explains that you need to "explain your basic story to someone in sufficiently simple and down-to-earth terms that someone will be able to carry on with the task of public, democratic education" (p. 71). Results from the data analysis will be presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

In this chapter, the process involved in selecting the sample districts that were chosen for this Internet-based, qualitative desk study is explained. Each sample district will be discussed in detail, with a policy analysis conducted for each school district and elementary school. Charts of school data and other relevant information that inform the analysis will be shown. Findings from these policy analyses will be conveyed and the researcher will demonstrate how they relate to the Policy Attributes Theory (Porter et al., 1988; Porter, 1994) and Bardach's (2012) Policy Analysis framework.

This chapter concludes with the findings obtained via an Internet-based, qualitative study to answer the research questions:

RQ 1: What are the major similarities and differences in large school districts regarding school tardiness policy?

RQ 2: How do large, urban school district policies align with research on tardiness and school attendance?

RQ 3: Is there a relationship between school tardiness policies and student achievement data?

#### **Sample district and school selection**

When this study began, the researcher first determined what criteria would be used to select which districts and schools that would be utilized to support this research. Initially, the researcher selected five, large urban districts in states representing the eastern, south central, and western portions of the United States for this desk study analysis. The original states selected were California, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Florida. After each state was selected, the next goal was to determine the largest urban school district in each respective state. The

researcher used data from NCES.org and Niche.com for current enrollment data. Once the five districts in each state were determined, the researcher selected a sample school representing each district based on the following similar initial criteria determined by the researcher:

- Largest elementary school in each selected district
- Public schools only (no magnet, charter, or private schools)
- Had an enrollment between 500-550 students
- Served students pre-kindergarten through fifth grade
- The major ethnicity was not lower than 55% or higher than 65%

However, after the researcher began a deep dive into evaluating the data from each of the five districts and schools, the variances between schools by using the initial established criteria began to emerge. When first selecting the largest school district in each state, the range and ratio in ethnicity and language status became evident and were divergent. For example, there were a significantly higher number of Hispanic students in comparison to the other ethnicities, or there were a considerable number of African Americans, with other ethnicities being only a few percent. In addition, the data from five districts and five schools proved to be a sample set with many gaps and differences. Therefore, the researcher re-evaluated the criteria and determined several major changes would make this study more aligned and equitable (See Figure 1). First, the number of states in which to select the focus districts and elementary schools was reduced from five to three. The state selected to represent the western section was California, the state selected to represent the south central section was Oklahoma, and Florida was selected to represent the eastern portion. Second, the number of schools selected would still represent the same regions but move from five selected districts to three. Third, in order to have the most equitable representation of ethnicities of elementary school students in a large, urban setting, the

researcher changed to a selection of schools based on the one from each district that was “most diverse” versus simply choosing the largest school in each district with a set range of diversity. In other words, the researcher filtered the data to draw out schools within each district that received a top rating on diversity, rather than a range of students where the major ethnicity was not lower than 55% or higher than 65%. Two other criteria that were adjusted were grade level and enrollment size. Due to the number of elementary schools that include sixth grade, it was added to the range of student grades within each school setting. In order to maintain an enrollment range but have some flexibility in order to maintain an equitable ratio of ethnic diversity, it was determined to change the range from 500-550 to enrollment that does not exceed 700 students. The researcher maintained the criteria that the selected schools were public schools that weren’t a magnet, charter, or private school.

Each selected elementary school represented the highest ethnic diversity in each selected district.	Each selected elementary school must be public school only (no magnet, charter, or private school).	Each selected elementary school must not have a student enrollment that exceeds 700 students.	Each selected elementary school serves students pre-kindergarten up to the sixth-grade level.
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*Figure 1.* Elementary school selection criteria.

### **Sample Districts**

After using a process of initial selection, analyzing, re-consideration, re-analyzing, and narrowing the focus for this school policy study, the researcher examined one state from the western portion of the United States, one from south central portion, and one from the eastern portion. The selected states were California, Oklahoma, and Florida. From these three states, the largest, urban school district was selected from each one to study. Since the focus of this study is ethnically diverse elementary schools, a focus school from each respective district was selected.



The first district selected, representing the western section of the United States, is Los Angeles Unified School District, located in southern California. The focus elementary school selected from this district is Rio Vista Elementary School. The second district selected is Oklahoma City Public School District, located in central Oklahoma. It represents the south central section of the United States. The focus elementary school selected from within this district is Monroe Elementary School, located in the north central part of the district. The third district selected, representing the eastern portion of the United States, is Miami-Dade County Public Schools, located in southern Florida. The focus elementary school selected from within this district is Virginia A. Boone-Highland Oaks School. It is located in the most southernmost tip of the state.

### **Data Collection**

Data collected for this study were gathered via an Internet-based desk study. District and school data were gathered from these primary resources: school district websites, school websites, Niche.com, NCES.ed.gov, the U.S. Department of Education (ed.gov), NAEP.gov, and GreatSchools.org. In order to reduce inconsistencies, the researcher gathered overall data from one primary database, Niche.com. Niche.com was selected as the primary resource above others, as it is a comprehensive database that acquires its data collectively from public data sources such as the U.S. Department of Education and NCES (Niche.com). Every school district must report data to the U.S. Department of Education and NCES, therefore making Niche.com the most research-based and accurate information. In order to verify the accuracy of the data collected, and to deepen the research into student academic achievement, another database, GreatSchools.org was utilized. GreatSchools.org also provides demographic information that can be compared to Niche.com to provide deeper validity of the data. GreatSchools.org is an

independent nonprofit organization with a database that creates profiles for every district and school in the United States that reveals demographical information, in addition to test score ratings, and a variety of indicators of school quality (GreatSchools.org). GreatSchools.org also offers student achievement ratings for each district and school. “The GreatSchools Test Score Rating is computed based upon the percent of students scoring proficient or above on their state’s standardized assessment in each grade and subject” (GreatSchools.org). Each respective school district and school website not only provided demographic information and academic information, it is where their particular policies regarding attendance and tardiness were found, providing pertinent information to this study. For deeper insight to how students perform academically in each respective state, the researcher utilized the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Report Cards. The NAEP is the “largest continuing and nationally representative assessment of what our nation's students know and can do in subjects such as mathematics, reading, science, and writing” (nationsreportcard.gov, 2020).

### **Demographics**

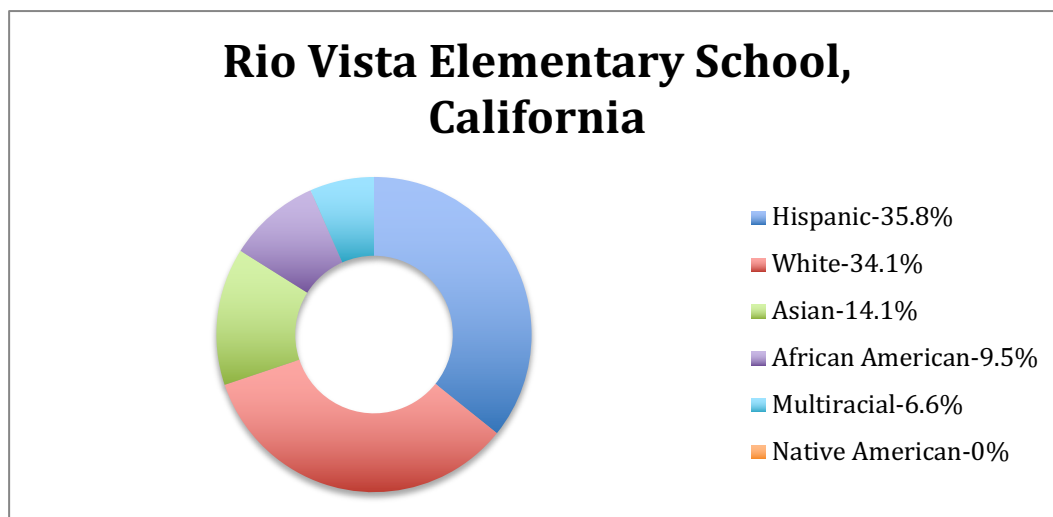
For this study, the researcher sought to equalize the group of elementary students whose data were being examined. To accomplish this, a filter on the Niche.com website was applied that ranked elementary schools for the “most diverse”. For each district, the top school from each district that met this designation, in addition to the other study criterion, was selected.

#### **Los Angeles Unified School District**

The first district selected, representing the western section of the United States, is the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It is the largest urban school district in California. This district has a total school enrollment of 487,134 and has 607 elementary schools (lausd.net, 2020). LAUSD is not only the largest district in the state of California, it is the second largest in

the United States, encompassing 710 square miles (lauds.net, 2020). Of the over 480,000 students in its population, this district serves 62,521 students with disabilities and 98,170 students who are English Language Learners (ELL) (lauds.net, 2020).

The focus elementary school selected from the LAUSD is Rio Vista Elementary School (RVES). It is located in the southwest portion of the district. It is a kindergarten through fifth grade school with a current enrollment of 455, a student-teacher ratio of 23:1, and 44% receiving free or reduced lunch (Niche.com, 2020). This elementary school was listed as the first with an “A” rating for diversity (Niche.com). The ethnic makeup of this elementary school represents a nearly even number of Hispanic and White students with an average of 35% each. The remaining students represented are Asian, African American, and Multiracial (see Figure 2).



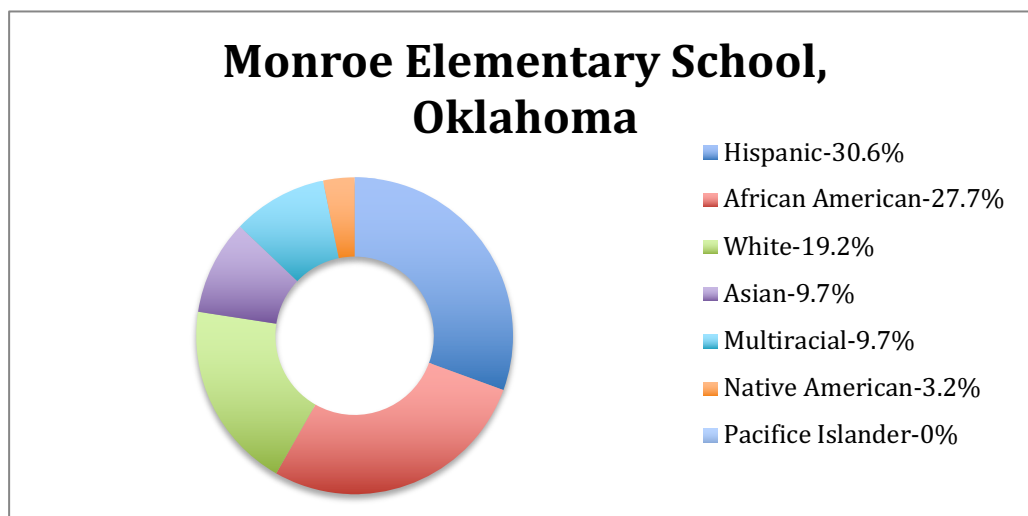
*Figure 2.* Western elementary school racial demographics

### **Oklahoma City Public School District**

The second district selected for this study, representing the south central portion of the United States is Oklahoma City Public School District (OKCPS) in central Oklahoma. This district has 38,709 total student enrollment and has 55 elementary schools (Niche.com). OKCPS has a total school enrollment of 45,000 students and encompasses 135.5 square miles in

Oklahoma City (okpcs.org, 2020). Of their enrollment, 12% of their school population is comprised of students with disabilities and 13,000 students are ELL (okcps.org, 2020).

The focus elementary school from OKCPS is Monroe Elementary School (MES). It is located in the north central part of the district. It is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school with a current school enrollment of 412, a teacher-student ratio of 15:1, and 100% of students receive free or reduced lunch (Niche.com, 2020). The ethnic makeup of this elementary school represents a nearly even number of Hispanic and African American students with an average of 29.2%. The remaining students represented are White, Asian, Multiracial, and American Indian (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* South-Central Elementary School racial demographics

### **Miami-Dade County Public School District**

The third district selected for this study, representing the eastern portion of the United States is Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) in southern Florida. This district has a total school enrollment of 354,842 and has 297 elementary schools (Niche.com). MDCPS is the fourth largest school district in the United States, covering over 2,000 square miles of land (2020, dadeschools.net).

The focus elementary school, Virginia A. Boone-Highland Oaks School (VABHOS), is located near the most southernmost tip of the state. It is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school with a present enrollment of 654 students with a student-teacher ratio of 15:1 and 53% free or reduced lunch (Niche.com, 2020). The ethnic makeup of this elementary school represents Hispanic students as the largest population (40.5%), with White and African Americans making up an average of 29% of the student population. The remaining students represented are Asian and Multiracial (see Figure 4).

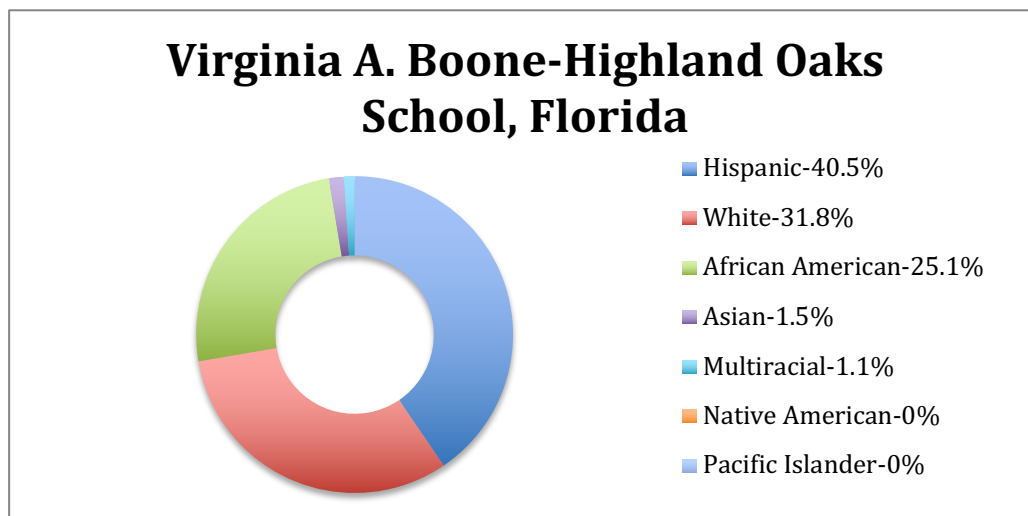


Figure 4. Southeastern Elementary School racial demographics.

### District Policy

School districts provide guidance to their respective schools via school board policy. Review of school policy for this study was grounded in the Policy Analysis Theory (Porter et al., 1988; Porter, 1984). Desimone (2007) reminds us that there are five components that relate to successful policy implementation: specificity, consistency, authority, power, and stability (p. 438). *Specificity* represents the extent and detail of a policy. This section will specifically address the extent and detail of each respective school district's policies. The designated schools'

district board attendance and tardiness policies were collected from each school's district website.

### **LAUSD**

The Los Angeles Unified School District defines tardiness as “when a student is not in class, or designated place as defined by each school, when the tardy bell rings signaling the time class is to begin” (LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual, 2018, p. 58). It goes on to explain that a student is considered tardy when they arrive to their class or assigned location after the bell has rung. When a student is tardy to class, they are to be marked as such, designating if it is excused, unexcused, or non-compliant (LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual, 2018, p. 58). The policy spells out that parents/guardians must write an explanatory excuse note any time they are aware their child is tardy (C.C.R., Title 5, Section 306). The LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual (2018) also addresses how tardiness relates to school truancy:

Any unexcused tardy in excess of 30 minutes will be counted toward truancy classification. Tardies in excess of 30 minutes constitute as a truancy and can be counted in combination with whole day truancy to establish truant and habitual truant status.

(p. 58)

Students with extensive tardiness, such as being habitually late, are considered to be truant and are placed on an Attendance and Dropout Prevention Plan, and that “uncleared tardies shall be resolved in the same manner as uncleared absences” (LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual, 2018, p. 58.) (see Figure 4)

### **OKCPS**

Oklahoma City Public Schools defines tardiness as when a student arrives to class after the bell rings (OKCPS Attendance Policy Manual, 2019). Consequences of repetitive tardiness results in the following:

- Students will be placed on an Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP)
- Students who arrive to school one or more hours late in the morning or afternoon, or leave school an hour early will be counted ½ day absent (see Figure 4)

### **MDCPS**

Miami-Dade County Public Schools defines tardiness as “the absence of student at the time the regularly scheduled session begins, provided that the student meets the definition for being present before the close of the day” (MDCPS Student Attendance Reporting Procedures, 2019, p. 4). The policy discusses repercussions of student tardiness by stating: “District school boards are authorized to establish policies that allow accumulated unexcused tardies, regardless of when they occur during the school day, and early departures from school to be recorded as unexcused absences” (Section 1003.02(1)(b), F.S., 2019). Further consequences can result from numerous tardies. The district policy says, “A student who has 20 or more cumulative tardies will not be allowed to participate in interscholastic competitions or performances for the remainder of the school year” (MDCPS Student Reporting Procedures, 2019, p. 4). (See Figure 5)

District Name	District Tardiness Policy	Consequences
LAUSD	“When a student is not in class, or designated place as defined by each school, when the tardy bell rings signaling the time class is to begin. A student is considered tardy when they arrive to their class or assigned location after the bell has rung, and they are to be marked as such, designating if it is excused, unexcused, or non-compliant (LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual, 2018, p. 58).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unexcused tardy in excess of 30 is counted towards truancy classification</li> <li>• Tardies in excess of 30 minutes can be counted with whole day truancy to establish truant and habitual truant status.</li> <li>• Students with tardiness issues are placed on an Attendance and Dropout Prevention Plan.</li> <li>• Uncleared tardies shall be resolved in the same manner as uncleared absences.</li> </ul> (LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual, 2018, p. 58)
OKCPS	“Student tardiness is defined as when a student arrives to class after the bell rings” (OKCPS Attendance Policy Manual, 2019, p. 16).	Students who have repetitive tardiness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will be placed on an Attendance Improvement Plan (AIP)</li> <li>• Will be counted ½ day absent if they arrive one or more hours late in the morning or afternoon, or leave school an hour early</li> </ul> (OKCPS Attendance Policy Manual, p. 16, 2019)
MDCPS	“Student tardiness is defined as an absence of student at the time the regularly scheduled session begins, provided that the student meets the definition for being present before the close of the day” (MDCPS Student Attendance Reporting Procedures, 2019, p. 4).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A student who has 20 or more cumulative tardies will not be allowed to participate in interscholastic competitions or performances for the remainder of the school year”</li> </ul> (MDCPS Student Reporting Procedures, 2019, p. 4).

Figure 5. School district tardiness policies and consequences.

### School Policy

This section will specifically address the extent and detail of each respective school’s policies. The designated focus elementary schools’ attendance and tardiness policies were collected from each school’s website.



### **RVES**

At Rio Vista Elementary School, their school policy states: “You are late, when you arrive after 8!” and goes on to state that three tardies count as an absence (Rio Vista Elementary School Handbook, 2019). Their school policy relates excessive absences to truancy:

Progressive consequences for tardy students will begin the second week of school. Please note that if your child is late or absent (excused or unexcused), you will receive an automated call from LAUSD. Three tardies (for more than 30 minutes) or three absences without a note are considered truant. LAUSD will automatically generate written truancy notices after three unexcused absences. (Rio Vista Elementary School Handbook, 2019)

### **MES**

At Monroe Elementary School in Oklahoma City, the school policy aligns exactly with the district policy regarding arrival to school later than one hour or departing from school prior to one hour before the end of the school day, in that it still be counted as a ½ day absence (Monroe Elementary School Parent Handbook, 2019, p. 16). However, in regard to tardies, the Monroe Elementary Parent Handbook (2019) is more vague: “Tardies do not count as absences, but more than three tardies will draw attention for attendance intervention because any time a student misses class and instruction represents a loss of education” (p. 16).

### **VABHOE**

Florida’s Virginia A. Boone-Highland Oaks Elementary Parent Handbook (2019) requires students that arrive late to school to report to the attendance office in order to obtain an admit pass before going to class (p. 13). Their school policy relays consequences of tardiness: “Excessive tardies may result in loss of privileges, detention, parent conference, and/or suspension” (p. 13). However, they do not specify what constitutes “excessive tardies”.

## Academic Assessment Comparison

This section provides information from each state regarding their assessment instrument used, and compares and contrasts the academic success of each selected state, district, and elementary school.

### California

The *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress* (CAASPP) is utilized in California as their statewide assessment instrument (cde.ca.gov, 2020). Within the CAASPP, there are six tests, including the Smarter Balanced Assessment System, a Grade Two Diagnostic Assessment, science assessments, alternative assessments for those with disabilities, and Spanish assessments. All assessments are aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the California Department of Education relays that by requiring CAASPP across the state they achieve more uniformity (cde.ca.gov, 2020).

Because CAASPP tests are given statewide, they provide an opportunity to measure the skills of all students against the same academic standards in the same way, and the results provide information schools can use to improve teaching and learning (cde.ca.gov, 2020)

The NAEP Report Card for California reveals an average score of fourth grade students in 2019 is 237 for math, which is 5.28 points lower than the national average, and 216 in reading, which is 2.96 points lower than the national average (nationsreportcard.gov, 2019). The students in the focus elementary school for this district RVES average 67% proficiency in reading and 58% proficiency in math (niche.com, 2020).

## Oklahoma

Oklahoma uses the Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) as their statewide assessment instrument. While Oklahoma originally adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010, they repealed CCSS in June of 2014 and it was replaced with the Oklahoma Academic Standards (sde.ok.gov, 2020). The OSTP are aligned to these Oklahoma Academic Standards. Students in grades 3-8 are assessed in Mathematics, English Language Arts, and Science. Students in grade 11 are also assessed in U.S. History and must take the College and Career Readiness Assessment (CCRA) (sde.ok.gov, 2020).

The NAEP Report Card for Oklahoma reveals an average score of a fourth grade students in 2019 is 237 for math, which is 2.81 points lower than the national average, and 216 in reading, which is 3.09 points lower than the national average (nationsreportcard.gov, 2019). The students in the focus elementary school for this study, MES, average 12% proficiency in reading and 8% proficiency in math (niche.com, 2020).

## Florida

Florida uses *The Florida Standards Assessments* as their statewide assessment instrument. The FSA, which measures student success with the Florida Standards, includes assessments in English Language Arts (grades 3-10), Mathematics (grades 3-8), and End-of-Course (EOC) assessments for Algebra 1 and Geometry (fldoe.org, 2020). While Florida used to be a CCSS state, it adopted its own set of state standards in January 2020 called the B.E.S.T. standards, which stands for Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (Mahoney et al., 2020).

The NAEP Report Card for Florida reveals an average score of fourth grade students in 2019 is 246 for math, which is 5.19 points higher than the national average, and 216 in reading,

which is 5.27 points higher than the national average (nationsreportcard.gov, 2019). The students in the focus elementary school for this study, VABHOE, average 73% proficiency in reading and 70% proficiency in math (niche.com).

### **Major Findings**

The major findings that emerged from the analysis of the three schools/districts are:

1. One of the three selected districts and elementary schools stood out as having the most specific measures regarding tardiness.
2. One of the three selected districts and elementary schools stood out as having the most vague measures regarding tardiness.
3. One of the three selected elementary schools stood out as having higher academic results than the other two selected elementary schools.
4. One of the three selected elementary schools demonstrated stronger evidence of parent communication and push for family involvement.
5. Each of the three selected school districts' language in their policy aligned with their respective state statutes regarding tardiness.

#### **Finding 1**

Of the three schools that were researched, Rio Vista Elementary School had the most specific and punitive measures regarding tardiness. Their tardiness policy details that three tardies count as an absence (Rio Vista Elementary School Handbook, 2019). In addition, the school district policy tightly aligns tardiness with truancy. The LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual (2018) specifies “any unexcused tardy in excess of 30 minutes will be counted toward truancy classification” and goes on to explain that when a student is classified as truant due to

tardiness is placed on an Attendance and Dropout Prevention Plan (LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual, 2018, p. 58).

## **Finding 2**

Of the three selected districts and elementary schools, the one that stood out as having the most vague measures regarding tardiness was Florida's Virginia A. Boone-Highland Oaks Elementary. The VABHOE Parent Handbook (2019) states in their policy "Excessive tardies may result in loss of privileges, detention, parent conference, and/or suspension" (p. 13). While it appears punitive at first glance, the word "may" indicates that there is not a definitive measure taken for tardiness or for a set number of tardies. In the "APPENDIX B –Commonly Referenced State of Florida House Bills and School Board Policies" of the handbook, it addressed late arrivals and early dismissals, but does not specifically cite the policy from the district regarding tardiness (vabhoe.org, 2019, p. 31).

In contrast, at the district level, the policy regarding tardiness is more definitive in nature, as it indicates, "A student who has 20 or more cumulative tardies will not be allowed to participate in interscholastic competitions or performances for the remainder of the school year" (MDCPS Student Reporting Procedures, 2019). While the school did not issue a concrete consequence for a specific number of tardies, it is spelled out at the district level. The school does appear to follow the district mandate, but it would be very difficult for a parent to determine as it is not specifically spelled out in the main section of the handbook or the appendices; there is only a reference made that parents can view all the school board rules online and parents are referred to the school district website (vabhoe.org, 2019, p. 31).

**Finding 3**

Of the three schools that were researched, VABHOE in Florida had higher academic results over the focus elementary school in California and significantly higher academic results than the focus elementary school in Oklahoma. According to Niche.com (2020) students at VAHOE have a 73% proficiency in reading and 70% proficiency in math. In contrast, the students at RVES average 67% proficiency in reading and 58% proficiency in math, and MES students come in significantly behind with a 12% proficiency in reading and 8% proficiency in math (niche.com, 2020).

**Finding 4**

Of the three selected elementary schools, VABHOE in Florida demonstrates stronger commitment to parent communication and push for parent involvement, as evidenced in its school website. Rio Vista Elementary School in California did have a “PTA” (Parent Teacher Association) tab to share materials with parents about the PTA, as well as a “Families” tab that contains various information and resources for families (riovistaes-laUSD-ca.schoolloop.com, 2020). Monroe Elementary School in Oklahoma did have a “Families and Community” tab, but it only addressed their after school program and makes no mention of any type of PTA at their school site (okcps.org, 2020). Neither Rio Vista Elementary School nor Monroe Elementary School had any type of parent newsletter on its website. In contrast, Virginia A. Boone-Highland Oaks Elementary School had PTA monthly newsletter that included parent resources, monthly happenings and a calendar of events, specific ways to be involved, and a letter from the principal (vabhoepta.org).

### **Finding 5**

Each of the three selected school districts' language in their policy aligned with their respective state statutes regarding tardiness. What this means is that whatever the state statute says regarding tardiness is reflected in the school district policy that addresses tardiness. In contrast, if the state statutes regarding student tardiness were vague, or lacked specific rules for handling tardiness, that same policy was carried down to the school level.

### **Findings and the Policy Attributes Theory**

There were some interesting insights revealed when looking at each focus elementary school's attendance policy through the lens of The Policy Attributes Theory (Porter et al., 1988). Porter's (1988) theory specifies five components to successful policy implementation: specificity, consistency, authority, power, and stability (csail.org). Each finding brought out different ranges of these components.

For Finding 1, RVES in California had the most specific and punitive measures regarding tardiness, so it would rank high in *specificity*. The policies between the state, district, and selected elementary school were very aligned, so this policy would also rank high in *consistency*. In a review of the website over past three years, the policy has remained the same, which makes it highly *stable*. "A policy gains power through rewards and sanctions, power is established through force" (Porter et al., 1988). There is no evidence that the policy for RVES provides awards for good attendance or timeliness, but it does give very punitive measures for non-compliance to the attendance policy, so it would rank mid-level on *power*. There was no evidence to be found that demonstrated that RVES had any stakeholder decision-making, buy-in, or investment to developing their attendance policy. Therefore, the *authority* would be low. In

respect to *The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012), RVES was very specific when it came to the aspect of selecting criteria for their policy.

For Finding 2, the focus elementary school which had the most vague measures regarding tardiness was Florida's VABHOE. In other words, there wasn't a defined number of tardies indicated that would cause a particular outcome. Therefore, they would rank low in *specificity*. Since there are no state statutes in Florida addressing tardiness specifically (Figure 4), and neither does the district or school, it would rank high in *consistency*. *Stability* was high for their tardiness policy, as it has remained the same over the past four years. There was also vague evidence of *power*. However, *authority* for this school is high, as it had a very strong stakeholder buy-in and investment, especially from parents via their Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (vabhoepta.org). In evaluating this policy through the lens of *The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012), it is evident the policymakers considered alternatives for their district as demonstrated through higher flexibility.

For Finding 3, this same focus elementary school in Florida (VABHOE) had higher academic results over the focus elementary school in California and significantly higher academic results than the focus elementary school in Oklahoma. In correlating their policies on attendance and tardiness to the five criteria for a good policy, while some attributes ranked low, three ranked very high. Porter et al. (1988) reminds us "policies vary in their specificity, consistency, authority, power and stability, and the higher the policy is on one or all the attributes, the greater the chance of its successful implantation (csail.org, para. 3). While RVES in California also ranked high in three of the five components, they revolved around punitive measures and no evidence was found about stakeholder influence or buy-in.



For Finding 4, once again, VABHOE demonstrated via their school website a strong amount of parent communication. The ESSA requires that every school district have a written policy on parent and family engagement (ed.gov). While this study does not focus on parent and family engagement policies, the literature on student tardiness points strongly to how parental communication is imperative in informing parents of the importance of attendance and timeliness (Bauer et al., 2018; Kerrins & Hayes, 1996; McDonald, 2009). Therefore, there is a correlation between parent communication and attendance and tardiness. “When families and the programs where children learn work together and support each other in their respective roles, children have a more positive attitude toward school, stay in school longer, have better attendance, and experience more school success” (ed.gov)

The district in which VABHOE is located, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, has an extensive, seven-page detailed document about its parent and family engagement policy in their handbook (2019, pp. 61-68). The Los Angeles Unified School District has an even more detailed, 28-page long policy regarding Parent and Family Engagement (lauds.net). In contrast, Oklahoma City Public School District has only a two-page parent and family engagement policy (okcps.org). In relating this to The Policy Attributes Theory (Porter et al., 1988), the more detailed policies represent higher *authority*, as they promote stakeholder buy-in. The detailed policies are more *specific* and *consistent*, leaving guesswork out of guidance for the schools to follow in implementing parent and family engagement practices. The specificity in this policy aligned with the aspect of “selecting the criteria” according to *The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012),

Lastly, Finding 5 revealed that all three selected school districts had tardiness policies aligned with each of their state statutes were regarding tardiness. This overall finding about

student tardiness policies, when associated with the Policy Attributes Theory (Porter et al., 1988), relates strongly to the attribute of *consistency*, as it demonstrates strong alignment to each state statute. *Specificity* is low, as there are variances in language regarding tardiness from the state down to the district level. Research of the policies reflects that they have remained *stable* over time.

### **Policy alignment with federal, state, and district guidelines**

#### **Federal Guidelines**

With the issuance of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the states were given more power from the federal government to set up their own accountability standards within their policies within the parameters described in the law (attendanceworks.org). “ESSA also requires states to report chronic absence data and allows federal spending on training to reduce absenteeism” (attendanceworks.org). ESSA requires that states define and measure school quality, and they must select one indicator, or metric, to measure it. “These indicators must meet rigorous selection criteria in the law” (attendanceworks.org). Chronic absence, defined as missing 10 percent of the school days in one academic year for any reason, meets or exceeds this selection criteria (attendanceworks.org). Each district and school selected for this study complies with the rules for defining chronic absence, reporting requirements, and policy to address chronic absenteeism. Through this compliance and alignment with federal guidelines, this is an area where all districts and schools in this study rank high for consistency and stability, according to Porter’s Policy Attributes Theory (1988).

## **Comparison of State Guidelines**

### **California guidelines**

The California Department of Education (CDE) provided guidance and information to their school districts through their State School Attendance Review Board (SARB), its SARB Handbook, and its Model SARB recognition program (AttendanceWorks.org). The California State SARB provides specific guidelines to assist district superintendents and school boards in designing their individual school board policies in alignment with the state requirements (cde.ca.gov). This indicates high attributes of specificity (Porter et al., 1988). Additionally, the California State SARB has developed a sample policy regarding attendance as a resource to aid school districts as they develop their policies to address attendance, truancy, and dropout concerns (cde.ca.gov). (see Figure 5)

### **Oklahoma guidelines**

The Oklahoma State Department of Education utilizes the Oklahoma School Board Association (OSSBA) to provide specific guidance to school districts about how to write their school attendance policies (ossba.org). Like the California guidelines, this provision supports high attributes of specificity (Porter et al., 1988). Their guidance aligns with the Oklahoma State Statutes regarding student attendance (see Figure 5). While the OSSBA provides many free services to school districts in Oklahoma, they charge a fee, as opposed to the SARB in California, for districts to use their policy services.

### **Florida guidelines**

The Florida State Department of Education (FLDOE) states, “It is the policy of the state that each district school superintendent be responsible for enforcing school attendance of all students” (fldoe.org). Their policy indicates that each district’s school board policy must define

what an excused and unexcused absence is, how parents are involved, and requires tracking of student absences. District school boards are charged with establishing guidelines in their attendance policy as follows:

Each district school board establishes an attendance policy that includes, but is not limited to, the required number of days each school year that a student must be in attendance and the number of absences and tardiness after which a statement explaining such absences and tardiness must be on file at the school. Each school in the district must determine if an absence or tardiness is excused or unexcused according to criteria established by the district school board (Section 1003.24, Florida Statute).

In addition, the FLDOE says, “Early intervention in school attendance matters is an effective way of producing good attendance habits that will lead to improved student learning and achievement (Section 1003.26, Florida Statute). (see Figure 6)

STATE	STATUTE
California	<p><b>CALIFORNIA EDC 48260. School attendance.</b>            (a) A pupil subject to compulsory full-time education or to compulsory continuation education who is absent from school without a valid excuse three full days in one school year or tardy or absent for more than a 30-minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof, shall be classified as a truant and shall be reported to the attendance supervisor or to the superintendent of the school district (Safesupportivelearning.ed.gov).</p>
Oklahoma	<p><b>OKLAHOMA 70 O.S. §10-106. Records of attendance of pupil – Report of absence.</b>            If a child is absent without valid excuse four (4) or more days or parts of days within a four-week period or is absent without valid excuse for ten (10) or more days or parts of days within a semester, the attendance officer shall notify the parent, guardian or custodian of the child and immediately report such absences to the district attorney in the county wherein the school is located for juvenile proceedings pursuant to Title 10A of the Oklahoma Statutes (Safesupportivelearning.ed.gov).</p>

<b>Florida</b>	<p><b><u>FLORIDA 1003.26. Enforcement of school attendance.</u></b></p> <p>(b) If a student has had at least five unexcused absences, or absences for which the reasons are unknown, within a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences, or absences for which the reasons are unknown, within a 90-calendar-day period, the student's primary teacher shall report to the school principal or his or her designee that the student may be exhibiting a pattern of nonattendance (Safesupportivelearning.ed.gov)</p>
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*Figure 6.* State statutes for attendance by state.

### **Comparison of District Policies**

Each respective school district represented in this study followed the federal guidelines for chronic absenteeism and state statutes regarding absenteeism (Figure 6). However, there were slight variances in how the district addressed tardiness in relation to attendance.

The district – including the school board, the superintendent, key staff and influential stakeholders in the community – must have the capacity to develop and articulate both a vision and a set of practices that send a clear message regarding the mission of schools located in the district (Lynch, 2012, p. 121, para 3). In regards to attendance statutes, California does mention “tardy” and Oklahoma addressed “parts of days”, but Florida makes no mention at all regarding tardiness (see Figure 5). Each respective focus elementary school addressed tardiness accordingly. In other words, if the state statute spelled out specific rules for tardiness, it was in the district policy; if the state statute was vague, or had no specific spelled-out rules for tardiness, this vagueness was reflected in their school policy.

### **Conclusion**

The National Forum on Educational Statistics (2018) explain: “Policies that are punitive in nature, such as an out-of-school suspension for students who are truant or chronically absent, may not be the most effective method for supporting student learning and achievement” (p. 23). This forum guide goes on to relay that the best practices for attendance policies is that it meets the needs of students, and that the most important goal in trying to improve attendance practices

should be centered around maximizing student academic achievement (National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2018). So, when thinking about these best practices, how does each district and school policies regarding tardiness optimally support learning? Are punitive measures effective for reducing tardiness or supporting student learning and achievement?

To answer the research questions, the researcher grounded this study in the Policy Analysis Theory (Porter et al., 1988; Porter 1984) and utilized Bardach's (2002) policy analysis approach to guide the deep dive into each of three state's, district's, and school's policies. While considering the five components for successful policy implementation, the researcher discovered several findings from this analysis. These findings will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Since the establishment of schooling in the United States of America, student absenteeism and student tardiness have been a consistent problem for schools around the nation (Moore, 2010, p. 14). While there is significant research addressing student absenteeism, there is limited research to investigate possible solutions to alleviate student tardiness. “School tardiness, or “tardies” for short, is altogether an under-researched area, and yet it is highly likely that this behavior would undeniably be flagged a signal of educational risk by both researchers and practitioners” (Gottfried, 2014, p. 3). While there has been research into factors that cause student tardiness (Bataineh, 2014; Gottfried, 2014; Moore, 2010; Osae, 2017; Snyder, 2011), as well as research into strategies to reduce student tardiness (Caldarella et al., 2011; Din, Isack, & Reitveld, 2003; Gottfried, 2014; Johnson-Gros, Lyons, & Griffin, 2008; Sprick & Daniels, 2007; Talkhee, Shaheen, & Bhamani, 2013; Varghese, 2014), there is very little research that deeply examines school tardiness policy and its implications.

The researcher, an elementary school administrator and long-time educator, has witnessed problems with elementary school student tardiness time and again. Additionally, the researcher has worked in several districts, each with varying degrees of school tardiness policies, or the lack thereof. The researcher hoped that by examining data and completing a comparative analysis of each selected focus district and elementary school regarding their tardiness policies, she would gain insight into how to develop more effective school tardiness policies that would, in turn, positively impact student learning.

The purpose of this Internet-based, qualitative desk study was to compare tardiness policies among three large, urban school districts, investigate their alignment with what research

shows about tardiness and school attendance, and explore the possible relationship between school tardiness policies and student academic achievement. Data were gathered from the selected state, district, and school websites, federal databases, and other various educational databases to gather information regarding demographics, tardiness policies and procedures, and academic achievement results. Data were limited to what was available online, and the researcher made all attempts to utilize the same databases to provide consistent, comparable information about each state and district. Since this was an Internet-based desk study, there were no participants or surveys. This chapter includes discussion of the major findings related to tardiness policies of three, large, urban elementary schools. Specifically, conclusions will be made regarding the findings in relation the Policy Attributes Theory (Porter et al., 1988). Discussion is presented about connections to this study and Bardach's (2012) *The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012) framework. This chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations of the study, possible future research, and a summary.

This chapter contains responses to the research questions:

- RQ 1: What are the major similarities and differences in large school districts regarding school tardiness policy?
- RQ 2: How do large, urban school district policies align with research on tardiness and school attendance?
- RQ 3: Is there a relationship between school tardiness policies and student achievement?

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Bardach's (2012) approach uses eight steps to guide a policy analysis. Yet, Bardach (2012) notes that all eight steps may not necessarily occur in order while performing a policy



analysis, and that not every step may be significant in each case (p. xvi). However, for this particular study, “assembling some evidence” has been a key step to consider. “Assembling some evidence is actually a step that recurs throughout the entire process, and it applies particularly to efforts to define the problem and to project the outcomes of the alternatives being considered” (p. xvi).

Porter’s Policy Attributes Theory provides “five components to successful policy implementation: specificity, consistency, authority, power, and stability” (Desimone, 2002, p. 438). These attributes were utilized when examining each school district policy, which helped to highlight potential strengths and weaknesses of each respective policy.

Given the fact that the researcher only had web-based data available, these two theories were very complementary and worked in tandem to provide a solid overall analysis of school policy. *The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* (Bardach, 2012) framework provided a foundation in which to closely analyze each school policy, while the Policy Attributes Theory (Porter et al., 1988) provided the lens through which to assess school policy implementation.

From this analysis, five overall findings emerged. The first finding revealed that of the three schools, RVES in California has the most specific and punitive measures in their policy regarding tardiness. Their policy specified that three days of tardiness equates to an absence, unexcused tardies in excess of 30 minutes constitute truancy status, and that those students classified as truant due to tardiness are placed on an Attendance and Dropout Prevention Plan. (LAUSD Attendance Policy Manual, 2018, p. 58).

The second finding showed that VABHOE in Florida has the most vague measures regarding tardiness in their policy, only indicating that there only “may” be consequences, such

as loss of privileges, detention, parent conference, and/or suspension” (VABHOE Parent Handbook, 2019, p. 13). However, it lacks exact details regarding whether a certain number of tardies equates to an absence or specifically what may happen if a student is tardy or is tardy too much, or even what “too many tardies” would consist of. However, the district has much more precise details regarding tardiness, and specifies that if a student accumulates 20 or more tardies that they will not be allowed to participate in interscholastic competitions or performances for the rest of the school year (MDCPS Student Reporting Procedures, 2019). While the handbook refers to the district policy (in that a parent can access the district website to view it), it does not spell out or demonstrate clear alignment with district expectations.

The third finding revealed that this same elementary school in Florida had the highest academic results over the other two focus schools in this study. In fact, for 2019, Florida ranked 5.19 points higher than the national average for math, and 5.27 points higher than the national average for reading (nationsreportcard.gov, 2019). The NAEP Report Card reported both California and Oklahoma scoring lower than average for both math and reading. Specifically, while VABHOE students averaged 73% proficiency in reading and 70% proficiency in math, RVES students scored only 67% proficiency in reading and 58% proficiency in math, while MES students came in significantly lower with an average of 12% proficiency in reading and 8% proficiency in math (niche.com, 2020).

A fourth finding revealed that all three districts were in compliance with ESSA rules for having policies in place for parent and family engagement at the district level. However, VABHOE in Florida showed stronger evidence on its school website of parent communication and push for parent involvement, versus the other two focus elementary schools. This included a strong and active PTA program, school activity calendars, and a monthly newsletter with a letter

from the principal. While the district in Oklahoma did have a family engagement page on their district website that talked about how they had PTAs at schools, there was no information or evidence about a school PTA at MES. Additionally, MES did not have a link for parents to click on to find out how to join the PTA, how to get involved in their child's school, school functions or activity calendar, or a parent newsletter. RVES in California did have a link for parents to click on to join their PTA, as well as a link to apply to become a school volunteer. However, they did not present a newsletter or a school activity calendar.

The fifth and final finding for this research showed that all three of the selected school districts had language in their district policy that addressed tardiness in the same manner as their respective state statute required. While districts demonstrated compliance with state statutes, some policies were more vague than others. If the policy was vague at the district site, it was vague at the school level site as well. If there were more punitive measures written in the policy at the district level, the school handbook relayed more punitive measures as well.

The Policy Attributes Theory (Porter et al., 1988) entails five components for successful policy implementation. Guided by this theory, the research questions for this study were addressed:

### **Similarities and Differences**

#### **Research Question 1: What are the major similarities and differences in large school districts regarding school tardiness policy?**

Each district, LAUSD, OKCPS, AND MDCPS, had very specific and detailed guidelines and consequences for *absences*. This included what was deemed an excused or unexcused absence, what specific consequence would occur as a result of absences, how absences directly related to truancy, absence reporting requirements, parent involvement in accountability for absences, and some type of verbiage to reiterate how absences are detrimental to learning.

All three districts shared near exact definitions of what tardiness was, and addressed tardiness in some manner, whether specific or vague. The LAUSD and OKCPS have established outside boards and resources are available to help districts write policy regarding attendance and tardiness.

Each selected district from each selected state had variances in the number of tardies that would constitute an infraction and lead to a consequence. All three districts had a range of how tardiness would be addressed, if there were consequences, what the consequences would be, if the number of tardies equated to absences, or if tardies correlated to truancy. While the other two districts had strong outside resources and boards for support to guide and develop their school district attendance and tardiness policies, MDCPS simply mandates that all districts follow Florida State Statutes regarding attendance.

The Policy Attributes Theory (c-sail.org, 2020) reminds us “a highly specific policy will take the guesswork out of implementation” (para, 2). The policy for each district regarding absenteeism was highly specific. However, the policies for each district regarding tardiness ranged from specific to vague.

### **Alignment**

#### **Research Question 2: How do large, urban school district policies align with research on tardiness and school attendance?**

The U.S. Department of Education has research-based data regarding absenteeism and its impact on student achievement (ed.gov). “Attendance Works is an action research project, moving vertically from local environments to national policy-making” (attendanceworks.org, 2020). They have an extensive research-based foundation that guides schools in addressing chronic absenteeism and its role in student achievement (attendanceworks.org, 2020). This

policy analysis examined if the policies of the three selected school districts aligned with research regarding student attendance and tardiness.

The school district in California, LAUSD, employs several programs to address chronic absenteeism. For example, they have Learning Communities for School Success, which supports research-based strategies designed to improve school climate, as well as its State School Attendance Review Board (SARB) that utilizes the state's database on attendance to help district policy-making ([attendanceworks.org](http://attendanceworks.org), 2020). Subsequently, LAUSD has the most specific attendance and tardiness policies of the three districts in this study. While MDCPS and OKCPS do not have the same strong evidence of a research-based foundation, they both align with their state and federal guidelines for their attendance and tardiness policies.

A policy that is highly specific will “take the guesswork out of implementation” ([c-sail.org](http://c-sail.org), para. 2). The three selected school districts and focus elementary schools had policies for tardiness that ranged from highly specific to vague. LAUSD had the most specific and detailed tardiness policy of the three selected districts.

Consistency calls for uniform practice. “The better aligned a reform is with current school, district, state, or federal policies or goals, the more seamless the implementation will be” ([c-sail.org](http://c-sail.org), para. 3). All three districts policies aligned with federal and state policies. LAUSD and OKCPS both had tight alignment with district guidelines. MDCPS gave overall guidance, but ultimately left many of the decisions and policies regarding tardiness up to each individual school.

“Policies gain authority through becoming law” ([c-sail.org](http://c-sail.org), para. 4). Each school district demonstrated authority via their alignment with each respective state's statutes on tardiness. Power is another attribute in Porter's (1988) Policy Attributes Theory. C-Sail.org explains “A

policy gains power through rewards and sanctions” (para. 5). The selected districts in this study had a range of power demonstrated in their tardiness policy. For example, LAUSD had very punitive measures for non-compliance of timeliness, while MDCPS had very vague measures for dealing with tardiness. None of the districts or schools showed that there were any type of reward system for being on time for school. All three districts had evidence for at least the past three years of having the same policy regarding tardiness. Therefore, all three districts’ policies remained stable and consistent over time.

### **Student Achievement**

#### **Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between school tardiness policies and student achievement?**

For this study, three school districts were selected from three different states: California, Oklahoma, and Florida. The districts were selected to represent the western, middle, and eastern sections of the United States. Within each state, a focus elementary school was chosen that met pre-determined criteria. After each selected district and focus elementary attendance policies were analyzed, the researcher investigated the academic performance of each elementary school to see if there were a relationship between these policies and student achievement.

As presented in the findings, Florida outranked the other two selected districts academically. VABHOE ranked 5.19 points higher than the national average for math, and 5.27 points while VABHOE students averaged 73% proficiency in reading (5.27 points higher than the national average) and 70% proficiency in math (5.19 points higher than the national average) (niche.com, 2020). In relating these achievement data to policies, VABHOE had the most vague policy regarding tardiness of the three focus elementary schools.

In this small study, there was no relationship between school tardiness policy and student achievement. Why does the school with the most vague policy have the highest test scores? The findings of this particular study cannot prove or disprove this finding conclusively, due to the limitations in accessing more data regarding each school's specific tardiness data. Additionally, to examine this relationship, there needs to be access to student test scores over a period of time in relation to the stability of the tardiness policy in place. Gleaning information about parent perception or school climate and participation may help address these questions. Unfortunately, this data are not accessible from an independent, online desk study.

### **Implications**

There are several implications based on the findings from this research, the policy analysis, and the review of literature:

1. Even though there has been much research into causes and possible solutions for student tardiness, there are few studies that examine policy implications.
2. The school districts in this study had research-based policy alignment and each school policy analyzed addressed student tardiness in varying degrees from specific to vague.
3. Top down, from federal, to state, to district, to individual school, there is very little emphasis on tardiness; all primary policies and guidance revolve around attendance, chronic absenteeism, and truancy.
4. It is inconclusive that specific or punitive measures to address tardiness are effective in reducing tardiness. Student academic achievement may or may not be affected specifically by the implementation of district or school policy regarding tardiness, or via punitive measures or consequences.

5. While school policy typically entails a punitive measure, no policy that was analyzed included positive rewards or reward systems, although research cited in the literature review revealed several studies that have been done using positive rewards to reduce tardiness.
6. In comparing all three districts, the district with the most vague policy regarding student tardiness had the highest academic achievement, so in this small study, the tardiness policy did not align with academic ratings.
7. While several pieces of literature to support this study highlight the importance of parent communication, this element was not evident in the data.

The overarching goal of this study was to examine and analyze how the student tardiness policies of three selected districts and focus elementary schools compared to each other. Additionally, the researcher hoped to add to a limited body of research surrounding tardiness at the elementary school level. From the results of this study of three sample districts, school policy-makers and administrators can see the implications of various attendance and tardiness policies to help inform their policy-making practice.

The first implication from this study is that more consideration for specificity in tardiness policies should be addressed and likened to the detail in which attendance is addressed in school policy. All three selected districts and schools were very specific about the attendance criteria, but much more vague when it came to tardiness policies. The second implication is that tardiness in general should be considered more clearly associated with absenteeism and truancy by policy-makers and administrators. The third implication is that there needs to be more guidance and vertical alignment in policy making regarding tardiness in addition to the policies in place regarding absenteeism from the federal level all the way to each individual school. Implications



three and four revolve around punishment and reward for tardiness. While the literature in this study revealed many causes of student tardiness as well as a wide variety of strategies to implement approaches to reduce student tardiness, both positive and punitive, there were variances in policies, demonstrating a lack in attempts to reduce tardiness. The sixth implication revolves around the fact that of the three schools studied in this research, the school with the most vague policy language around tardiness experienced the highest test scores. While this small study cannot conclude a direct correlation between tardiness policies and academic achievement, the school with the highest test scores also exhibited the highest parental communication and involvement.

The seventh, and final implication is that, while much of the literature in this study emphasized the importance of parent communication in potentially reducing student tardiness, it may not be clearly evident in this study. The school that exhibited the highest parental communication and involvement according to the available data on the school's website subsequently had the highest academic achievement over the other two schools in this study. However, this is a desk study and limited to what is available online. In addition, schools do not put all the same resources, newsletters, or other information on their websites, or even consistently keep them current.

### **Limitations**

The overall challenge with this study is that it was limited to what data were available online. The researcher strived to find consistent databases and information to perform this comparative analysis. However, the inaccessibility to some data, such as each school district's and school's actual tardiness numbers, limited the boundaries of this policy analysis. This study could have more credibility had it included direct data from each respective school, interviews

from district leaders regarding tardiness, and surveys from families regarding tardiness.

Additionally, it would have more credibility had it been coupled with quantitative research in regards to academic achievement and test scores. For example, if the researcher could have obtained actual hard copies of each respective school's test data for the past three years, the statistical data regarding student academic achievement would have been stronger.

### **Recommendations**

The following are recommendations as a result of this policy analysis:

1. As it has been noted previously, research regarding tardiness, especially at the elementary level, is very sparse. Continued study in this area may present even more data regarding of elementary school tardiness and its possible relationship to student achievement.
2. More top-down emphasis and guidance needs to be implemented regarding student tardiness and how it is associated with student absenteeism, chronic absenteeism, and truancy. For example, if states had more specific guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education regarding tardiness, they could pass those requirements down to their districts and school policies.
3. Because the focus elementary school that demonstrated the highest level of parent communication through its PTA, newsletters, and school activity calendar had the highest test scores, more consideration should be made by schools to increase parent communication. This, in turn, could increase parent involvement and buy-in for their child's education and could increase attendance and reduce tardiness, which could also improve academic achievement.

The following is recommended for future research:

1. For future research, it is recommended policy makers collect data from each individual school site regarding actual tardiness numbers or percent of tardiness not reported. While this information was not readily available online, future research could include contacting each school regarding such data as the average number of students who are tardy, how many tardies led to absences, chronic tardiness and chronic attendance data, truancy data, school academic performance over time, interviews from administrators or district policy-makers, and any other data to support the research and impact of school tardiness.
2. For future research, parent, teacher, and/or administrator perception surveys of student tardiness and absence policies could deepen insight and inform decision-making towards better-informed practices in crafting policies from this perspective.
3. For future research, documenting parent communication efforts at school sites would be advantageous in providing additional data to help clarify possible correlation between higher levels of parent communication and involvement with reduced tardies and higher academic performance.

### **Final Conclusions**

The researcher set out to thoroughly explore student tardiness at the elementary school level and to complete a policy analysis regarding elementary school tardiness. This study was an Internet-based, qualitative desk study that proved to be an informative, yet tedious research that often resulted in frustration due to the limitation of available data. Overall, however, this study provided much needed additional research and insight into elementary school tardiness. Additionally, the policy analysis brought some interesting information to light, such as the variances in policies from specific to vague and if there were punitive measures attached or not.

From this analysis, a discovery was made that the district with the least specific student tardiness policy had the best academic achievement. This study also revealed that there was alignment between federal, state, and district regarding attendance and tardiness policies, but there were some inconsistencies in how the policy language was relayed at the school sites in each respective elementary school handbook.

In this researcher's professional educational settings over time, she has observed a variety of techniques employed by schools and districts to be flexible with student arrival time in order to bolster Average Daily Attendance (ADA) numbers. States use school districts' ADA to determine their funding (edsources.org). So, for example, if a school is somewhat lenient towards timeliness in order to "allow" students to be late but not count towards lowered attendance, the researcher wonders how this may or may not affect studies regarding student tardiness.

As a current school administrator, the researcher intends to take the results of this study and accomplish two things. First, the researcher, now well grounded in Bardach's (2012) Policy Guide, will be able to move forward as a current policy-maker in her building, or as a future district policy-maker, to use the eight steps to help guide policy implementation and policy analysis. Second, the researcher will be able to use this policy analysis as a model to inform practice regarding the need to put more emphasis on the impact of student tardiness at the elementary school level.

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