

Spring 5-20-2019

Understanding High School English Learners' Chronic Absenteeism

Patricia A. George
patricia.george@student.shu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations>

Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [First and Second Language Acquisition Commons](#), [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

George, Patricia A., "Understanding High School English Learners' Chronic Absenteeism" (2019). *Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs)*. 2627.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2627>

Understanding High School English Learners' Chronic Absenteeism

by
Patricia A. George

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Department of Education Leadership Management and Policy

May 2019

© 2019 Patricia A. George

All Rights Reserved

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Patricia A. George has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Spring Semester 2019**.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor:

Dr. Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj

Carolyn Sattin Bajaj

Committee Member:

Dr. Daniel Gutmore

Daniel Gutmore

Committee Member:

Dr. Bryan Meadows

Bryan Meadows

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.

ABSTRACT

Chronic absenteeism has significant implications for both the individual student and society at large and has been receiving attention for over a century. Every school day counts. Regular attendance provides students with opportunities to learn and has a strong link to achievement. Conversely, poor attendance has serious implications for high school students. For each subgroup of students there is a similar pattern: the likelihood of chronic absenteeism increases as students progress through high school. Notably, the U.S. Department of Education found English learners experience higher chronic absenteeism than their non-English learner peers when they reach high school. Furthermore, compared to their white peers, Hispanic students were found to be 17 percent more likely to lose three weeks of school or more.

This dissertation was designed to determine barriers to attendance for suburban New Jersey high school English learners who have been identified as chronically absent. The focus of this qualitative case study was on the importance of understanding high school English learners' chronic absenteeism from their perspective. While views about the place of young people in schools and society have changed over the past few years, student voice is noticeably absent from the discussion about chronic absenteeism at the state and district level. Specific studies of high school English learners' experiences related to their chronic absenteeism do not exist. There is an abundance of research on student attendance and its impact on student achievement, but little research exists on high school English learners' views regarding barriers to attendance. By taking student voice into account when addressing chronic absenteeism, there is a possibility for school leaders to combat chronic absenteeism with policies and programs that address student barriers to attendance.

A qualitative research design was conducted by examining the experiences of student and school personnel, as well as the practices and policies, being implemented to combat the issue. The case study focused on understanding individual perspectives to identify themes and patterns related to student barriers to attendance. In the context of exploring student voice related to English learners' chronic absenteeism, the research design focused on understanding strategies for improved attendance with particular interest on how school personnel were engaged in using specific strategies. Through the collection of interview, documentation, and observational data, a detailed conceptual theory for guiding interventions within the field of education related to chronic absenteeism. A constant comparative analysis of the data revealed the emergence of several themes and patterns. The findings reflect commonalities in the themes of family influences, financial pressures, transportation issues, immigration concerns, academic challenges as English learners, and some notable experiences, if not widely spread. Interviews with school personnel also elicited ideas about how to combat chronic absenteeism at the high school by building relationships with students, families, and stakeholders.

Keywords: chronic absenteeism, English learners, student voice, ESSA, attendance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this remarkable journey, I have been blessed to have the love and support of family and friends who provided me with a foundation of faith, love, perspective, and determination that carried me throughout the process. While my mother and grandparents are no longer here to celebrate this achievement, their gifts of unconditional love and passion for learning have remained with me and contributed to my work as a student, educator, and parent. Above all, this work is dedicated to my three extraordinary sons. For enthusiastically encouraging me throughout the pursuit of all my educational and professional goals, leading up to and including my doctorate, I thank you for your love and patience as I completed the necessary work. I share this accomplishment with you. The three of you continue to be my greatest joy and inspiration.

It is with great respect and appreciation that I extend my gratitude to the members of my committee. Working with you has been the most significant learning experience of my life. With your support and guidance, I have completed a work of which I am proud, and I am indebted to you. I would especially like to express my gratitude to Dr. Sattin-Bajaj, my mentor, for supporting me throughout the entire process with your knowledge, guidance, and encouragement. I am truly fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from you, and I continue to be inspired by the work you are doing in the field of education. Dr. Gutmore, your insightful suggestions and assistance in the design of this case study were invaluable. I am grateful to have benefitted from your scholarship and expertise during the last five years. Dr. Meadows, your generosity of time and knowledge about the subject matter greatly enhanced the study. I thank you for enthusiastically joining the committee and for your positive energy and support of the research.

In education, our greatest academic achievements are the result of the tireless work of dedicated and caring teachers. I wish to thank the extraordinary members of the ELMP faculty at Seton Hall University's College of Education and Human Services. You are all exceptional leaders in the field of education, and I am honored to have learned so much from all of you.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the district Superintendent and study participants for their unique contributions to this research. For graciously allowing me the opportunity to interview students and staff, and for warmly welcoming me into your school, I thank you for your commitment to the students you serve and for allowing me to tell their stories.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Research Design.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	10
Limitations.....	11
Delimitations.....	13
Organization of the Dissertation.....	13
Definition of Terms.....	14
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	18
Review Methods.....	18
Introduction.....	19
Trends and Patterns of Chronic Absenteeism.....	20
Effects of Chronic Absenteeism on Student Achievement.....	22
Contributing Factors and Barriers.....	25
ESSA and Indicators of SQSS.....	26
New Jersey.....	29
English Learners.....	35
Interventions and Programs.....	39
Student Voice.....	42
Theoretical Framework.....	43
III. METHODOLOGY.....	45
Overview.....	46
Sample Population/Data Source.....	47
Student Entry to New Jersey K-12 Education.....	47
School Personnel Participants.....	48
Selection Procedures.....	52
District Absenteeism Policies and Procedures.....	54

Research Questions	55
Development of Interview Instrument	55
Data Collection and Analysis.....	59
Role of the Researcher	65
Validity and Reliability.....	68
IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS	71
High School English Learners' Perceptions	71
School Personnel Perceptions	84
School Based Policies and Responses: Tiered Approach	85
V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	100
Summary.....	101
Implications for Theory	107
Recommendations for Policy.....	110
Recommendations for Practice	114
Recommendations for Future Research.....	121
REFERENCES	124
APPENDIX	
A. NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPORTING GUIDELINES.....	138
B. STUDY SITE DISTRICT ABSENTEEISM POLICY.....	139
C. STUDENT RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	145
D. STUDENT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS OVER THE AGE OF 18	146
E. PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE.....	147
F. PARENT/GUARDIAN RECRUITMENT LETTER	148
G. PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS UNDER 18 YEARS OLD.....	149
H. SCHOOL PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT LETTER AND CONSENT	150
I. SCHOOL PERSONNEL CONSENT FORM.....	151
J. STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	152
K. SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	157
L. CONTACT SUMMARY FORM.....	160

M. STUDENT RECRUITMENT FLYER	161
N. SCHOOL PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT FLYER	162
O. PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT STUDY	163

LIST OF TABLES

1	2017 English Language Arts PARCC Scores Based on Expectations	38
2	2017 Algebra and Geometry PARCC Scores Based on Expectations.....	38
3	School Personnel Participant Demographics	50
4	Student Participant Demographics.....	51
5	High School Demographics	53
6	Strategies Being Used at the Study Site and Recommendations for ELs.....	115

LIST OF FIGURES

1 Tiers for absenteeism 111

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For students to learn and achieve to their fullest potential, they must attend school regularly and be engaged in the learning process. Therefore, reducing chronic absenteeism is an important factor in closing the student achievement gap. However, chronic absenteeism is an issue that plagues many school districts and is particularly concentrated among certain student populations. According to data collected by the United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2016b), disparities in chronic absenteeism by key demographic characteristics are evident, though chronic absenteeism is an issue that affects students from every background. For example, research shows that students from low-income families are more likely to be chronically absent, but the negative effects of missing too much school impacts all socioeconomic groups (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014).

More than six million public school students, or 13 percent of the total enrolled population, do not attend school regularly, i.e., they are missing at least three weeks of school. This rate climbs to approximately 20 percent for high school Hispanic students. A USDOE (2016c) report entitled, *New Data Show Chronic Absenteeism is Widespread and Prevalent Among All Student Groups*, claims that nearly one in five Hispanic high school students are chronically absent. Furthermore, students of different races and ethnicities experience chronic absenteeism at different rates. For example, 20 percent of high school students are chronically absent compared to more than 12 percent of middle school students and 11 percent of elementary school students (USDOE, 2016c). Gender does not play a significant role, as male and female students are found to be similarly likely to be chronically absent (USDOE, 2016b). The findings

demonstrate that for each subgroup of students there is a similar pattern, i.e. the likelihood of chronic absenteeism increases as students attend high school.

One group for whom chronic absenteeism is a problem is high school English learners. For English learners, missing the academic content instruction and dialogue that takes place in a classroom setting puts them at an additional disadvantage since that may be their only opportunity to hear English in the course of their daily activities (Center for Public Education, 2017). Higher absenteeism for low-income and minority students holds them back academically, accounting for as much as a quarter of the achievement gap between poor and non-poor students (Goodman, 2014). Chronic absenteeism among English learners (ELs) is highest at the high school level and often leads to students struggling academically or dropping out of school (USDOE, 2017c). Notably, the Civil Rights Data Commission report (USDOE, 2019) found that English learners experience higher chronic absenteeism than their non-English learner peers when they reach high school.

Chronic absenteeism among English learners is important because this subgroup is growing dramatically. According to the United States Department of Education (2016), over 4,800,000 English learners (ELs) were enrolled in schools in 2014–15. The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reports the percentage of public-school students in the United States who were ELs was higher in school year 2014–15 (9.4 percent, or an estimated 4.6 million students) than in 2004–05 (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.3 million students). According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) and the U.S. Department of Education, ELs represent approximately 10 percent of the total K–12 student population in our nation’s schools. The percentage of ELs is generally higher in more urbanized

areas, such as cities and suburbs, than for those in less urbanized areas (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

A primary cause of low academic achievement, chronic absenteeism is also a powerful predictor of a student's risk of dropping out of school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012b). According to the United States Department of Education (2017), irregular attendance can be a better predictor of whether students will drop out before graduation than test scores. Dropping out of high school, which chronically absent students are more likely to experience, has been linked to poor outcomes later in life, from poverty and diminished health to involvement in the criminal justice system (USDOE, 2016a). In addition to increased drop-out rates among high school students, chronically absent students are at risk for a variety of negative health and social problems (Dube & Orpinas, 2009, p. 87). School leaders should recognize absenteeism as a warning sign for risk behavior participation (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008). Excessive absenteeism has been shown to be related to criminality, substance abuse, unemployment, and reduced lifetime income (Jones, Lovrich, & Lovrich, 2011). While absenteeism can be seen as a short-term condition, prolonged absenteeism may be a predictor of lasting issues that may persist into adulthood, such as economic deprivation and social, marital, occupational and psychiatric problems (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

One of the ways that the issue of chronic absenteeism has been addressed is through federal legislation. Reflecting an increasing awareness that chronic absenteeism is a key indicator for assessing school and student success, states are now required to report chronic absenteeism rates for schools. Henceforth, school districts will be allowed to spend federal dollars on training to reduce absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015, ESSA is a reauthorization of the 1965

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The most recent version of the federal government's K-12 law, ESSA provides a key provision for states to develop individual accountability indicators, among them chronic absenteeism (Klein, 2015). Under ESSA, the federal government requires school systems to include state test results, academic progress, the graduation rate, and an additional measure of school quality that is chosen by individual states. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) represents the first time that federal education law specifically mentions this measure of attendance.

ESSA requires that state accountability systems include at least one additional indicator of school quality or student success (SQSS) as part of their school accountability systems fifth indicator. In requiring states to designate a fifth indicator alongside metrics of student performance (i.e., academic achievement, graduation rates, and English language proficiency), Congress recognized the need for schools to improve the conditions in which children learn, including measures of healthy school environments such as chronic absenteeism and school climate (USDOE, 2017a). States had the opportunity to choose holistic and meaningful accountability indicators to measure student progress that are aligned to ensure that targets and goals are met that will likely to lead to improved educational outcomes for students (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017). At the start of the 2017-2018 school year, the District of Columbia and at least 37 states, including New Jersey, had picked chronic absenteeism as a fifth non-academic indicator to measure SQSS in their accountability systems.

Statement of the Problem

While there is wide agreement that missing school may have a negative impact on student achievement, there is less understanding about student experiences with chronic absenteeism and how to combat it (Center for Public Education, 2017). Additionally, there is limited research to

suggest school leaders are seeking input from their students as they look to improve student attendance. Excluding student voice pertaining to the experiences that affect attendance eliminates potentially valuable input that could shed light on methods to adequately address the issues of chronic absenteeism and students' dropping out. Two groups of factors identified as being associated with a risk for dropping out are students' social background (including minority group membership, male, highly mobile, overage for grade level, and growing up in a single parent home); and students' educational experiences (such as low grades, low test scores, retention one or more times, disciplinary problems, and absenteeism) (Stout & Christenson, 2009).

Many dropout intervention programs include examining multiple indicators of student engagement within four subtypes (Stout & Christenson, 2009): academic, behavioral, cognitive, and affective. Academic and behavioral indicators include monitoring attendance, while cognitive and affective indicators require understanding students' personal meaning of experiences and performance. Therefore, as school leaders develop plans to reduce chronic absenteeism, student voice can identify common barriers to regular attendance or shed light on factors that may contribute to formulating a successful resolution. Current research encourages embracing student-led environments that place students at the center of their own learning and suggests students be given the opportunity to be heard, listened to, and recognized for their contributions to their education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Gunter & Thomson, 2007; Smyth, 2006; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). The student-led learning environment stresses that students need a voice in why, what, and how learning experiences take shape.

New Jersey named chronic absenteeism, the percentage of students who are absent for 10 percent of the school year, as the only school quality indicator, counting for 10 percent of an

overall score. New Jersey chose chronic absenteeism based on public input, the belief that addressing it can boost student success, and because an individual school can take steps to reduce it. Advocates for Children of New Jersey statewide report provides data on chronic absenteeism at the state, district, grade, and demographic level that points to high school students who are economically disadvantaged, enrolled in special education, or have limited English proficiency as being at a higher risk of chronic absence than their peers (ACNJ, 2016). The state of New Jersey has the fourth highest number of recent immigrant students in the United States. As reported by the New Jersey Department of Education (2016), there are approximately 70,000 English learners in our public schools, an increase of more than 30 percent since 2010. Eleven New Jersey districts report that 100 percent of their students are ELs. By focusing on New Jersey high school ELs, this study aims to produce data on how they describe their experiences with chronic absenteeism to understand any patterns or themes associated with barriers to regular attendance that can be used to drive policy decisions.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) will serve as the theoretical lens with which to analyze the chronic absenteeism experiences of high school English learners in this study. When used to explore issues in education, this theory looks at the student's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. Ecological systems theory defines complex layers of different environmental systems that students encounter. Bronfenbrenner's theory recognizes the importance of studying a student's behavior in the context of multiple environments, from the most intimate home ecological system to the larger school system and the most expansive system, society and culture. The student's

interactions with family, friends, classmates, teachers, and school leaders affect the student's development.

In addition, the student's reactions to each of these social groups affect each of the relationships, creating a link between the student's family and school, family and peer relationships, or family and culture. Due to these variations, this study will pay close attention to the quality and type of connections that exist for the student between these contexts.

Bronfenbrenner theorized that changes or conflict in any one environment will influence the others. Using ecological systems theory as a framework, this study will examine how each of these systems interact with and influence each other in every aspect of the high school English learners' pattern of chronic absenteeism.

The conceptual framework for this study is constructed from my knowledge and personal perspectives as an educator and developed as an outgrowth of my professional work and research of the extant literature. Currently, the existing body of literature on chronic absenteeism for high school English learners (ELs) is heavily concentrated on data attributed to this population in terms of numbers and possible future outcomes. Further review of the results demonstrates that high school English learners continue to have high chronic absentee rates. However, there are significant gaps in the literature from the perspectives of the students. As there is extremely limited research on the nature of high school English learner student experiences related to chronic absenteeism, I will use Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to expand on or uncover differences from what is already known about factors that impact English learners' ability to attend school regularly.

Coupled with data that links regular attendance to academic success, the literature also focuses on ESSA's attention to chronic absenteeism in an effort to combat the problem for

students in our nation's schools, with attention to student voice as a means to include students in the discussion of school intervention programs to improve attendance for English learners. Results indicate student voice research is rapidly opening up spaces and capacities for historically marginalized students to play key roles in school change and hybrid learning spaces (Gonzalez & Hernandez-Saca, 2016). Therefore, this study will seek to understand the causes of individual student absences as central to considering solutions that are individualized and respect student perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

Drawing on literature centered on the issues of chronic absenteeism and student voice, the purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand the personal experiences of high school English learners (ELs) that supported or detracted from their attendance. In this study I paid particular attention to the barriers high school English learners' experienced and identified as preventing them from attending school regularly. This study also identified common themes or patterns to better equip school leaders as they develop practices and policies that could assist the academic success of students through consistent attendance. Finally, this inquiry will add to the literature regarding high school chronic absenteeism and will address the paucity of empirical research specific to English learners (ELs) in the state of New Jersey.

Research Questions

The central question guiding this study is, how do high school English learners account for their chronic absenteeism?

RQ 1. How do high school English learners explain their reasons for not attending school?

RQ 2. What barriers do English learners describe as preventing them from regular school attendance?

RQ 3. What additional supports do English learners identify as potentially helping to improve their attendance?

Research Design

To complete the study, I used qualitative research methodologies to collect relevant information about the topic. A sample size of six students identified as English learners (ELs) at a suburban New Jersey high school were selected for participation in the study according to their history of chronic absenteeism. Additionally, a sample of six relevant school personnel with knowledge of tracking and monitoring absenteeism were interviewed for their unique perspectives on the issue relevant to the district. Finally, document analysis of federal, state, and district policies and practices contributed to the research design. Since I was interested in exploring the personal experiences of the students, each piece of information was reviewed, compared, and contrasted with the sample of students interviewed.

A qualitative research design was used for this case study in order to utilize interviews with multiple stakeholders. This qualitative study collected English learner participant's stories of their experiences with absenteeism, personnel interviews with school leaders and absentee officers to provide context, and document analysis of existing policies and practices that address the issue. The study sought to understand the students' views on their own attendance patterns and factors that improve or impede the students' ability to attend school regularly. Principals, school leaders, and attendance review committee members contributed a deeper understanding of chronic absenteeism among individual ELs who were not attending school. School personnel also addressed parent and family circumstances, systemic and district instructional and

operational decisions, and school-based programs specific to reducing chronic absenteeism. A comprehensive approach to understanding high school English learners' chronic absenteeism included document analysis of existing literature and resources. Data were gathered primarily through semi-structured interviews to discover commonalities and dissimilarities. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The analysis was completed by identifying themes and patterns and by clustering data until enough evidence was collected to answer the research questions.

Significance of the Study

This study intended to address a gap in literature on high school English learner students' experiences with chronic absenteeism using a New Jersey sample which had not been explored. A narrative inquiry was selected in a commitment to represent the voice of the relatively unknown high school English learner to provide theoretical, practical, and policy insight into the central issue of chronic absenteeism. Additionally, it was my intention to add the voices of students to the discussion on chronic absenteeism in our schools by identifying additional supports the students believe could potentially help to improve their attendance. Knowing the absenteeism experiences of high school English learners shed light on efforts to build and maintain a foundation for ongoing learning and academic success through consistent participation in New Jersey's public education system. Taking a comprehensive approach to addressing student absenteeism with those most greatly impacted has the capacity to change the culture of non-attendance (Hartnett, 2007). Understanding the factors that contributed to high school English learners' chronic absenteeism could help district leaders implement new policies to improve attendance and academic success among this population within their schools. Adding

student voice to the discussion on chronic absenteeism may reduce impediments to student learning and improve organizational culture.

Limitations

Participants of this narrative case study were currently enrolled New Jersey public high school English learners. The participants in this study were full-time students. Experiences of full-time students (working, not working, caregiver responsibilities) varied from student to student. Participant voices or narratives did not represent the stories of all English learners' chronic absenteeism experiences. Additionally, differences among ethnicity/countries of origin may have accounted for differences in personal and academic experiences. Through cross-referencing data supplied by the dean of students that contained information about all chronically absent students and all English learners at the study site, I identified students who had a history of or were in danger of being classified as chronically absent, as defined in New Jersey's ESSA State Plan, i.e., the percentage of a school's students who have not been present for 10 percent or more of the days that that they were "in membership" at school (NJDOE, 2017).

In not interviewing ELs who were not chronically absent, I did not learn what factors in their lives contributed to them attending school regularly and was not be able to examine similarities and differences. As a monolingual speaker, I was limited to learning the experiences of English learners who had a basic command of the language and who could articulate responses in a reflective manner without the assistance of a translator. These included students in ESL level II and III, and students with interrupted formal education (SIFEs); they were not newcomers or Level I students, unable to actively produce language in English. Level II students responded with short phrases, and though they mispronounced words or made grammatical mistakes, they were able to name, recall, and organize their responses; they often

have an active vocabulary of up to 1000 words. Level III students responded with short phrases, simple sentences, and social language; they often have an active vocabulary of up to 7000 words.

By only speaking to students who could communicate effectively English, I did not include the experiences of those students in a newcomer program or students who had only recently entered the country and did not learn how a lack of English may be playing a role in their opting out of class time. Excluding English learners identified as Level I students and newcomers from my study meant I was not able to learn about the difficulties those students were facing with acculturation. Further, I could not learn whether their recent immigration, adjustment to American culture, and limited English proficiency were playing a role in their opting out of class time.

Based on my sample, my questions were geared toward students who had some experience either learning the language here or in his or her home country, which made it easier for students to articulate obstacles to attending school and expand upon their answers. This also accounted for the possibility that the student had been culturally acclimated to a New Jersey suburban school campus but was still facing barriers to regular attendance. I was also able learn if a student's comfort level with English communication had provided him or her with employment opportunities that were interfering with attendance. Transferability of findings were limited to applying the results of the research in this situation to other similar situations. For example, by presenting a detailed description of a high school English learner's struggle to attend school regularly, and particularly his or her struggle at the study site, I made conclusions as to why certain factors might have affected the student in certain ways. However, I was unable to generalize my findings to all English learners throughout New Jersey or elsewhere in the country. With a small sample size, the results could not be generalized.

Delimitations

Research is delimited by choosing to conduct a qualitative study in which I explored chronic absenteeism among high school English learners at a high school where I did not teach. Participants were not students I have taught or am currently teaching. By focusing on those English learner students identified as being chronically absent from high school, I narrowed the scope of my research. My study chose not to explore the role or perspectives of parents. In addition, I deliberately chose not to include translators for students with limited English proficiency in order to avoid gaps and/or the loss of some amount of information from those interviewed. Lack of a common language between myself and those interviewed would make it difficult to use a theoretical sampling strategy among speakers from different countries with a different vernacular. Instead, the study collected data from personal interviews with students I could speak to directly, documentation of school and district attendance policies, New Jersey state policies, and ESSA policy related to chronic absenteeism.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in the following manner. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II contains an in-depth review of the literature exploring major trends in chronic absenteeism. Federal and state findings and policies provided a broad context for a review of research primarily focusing on English learner student data regarding the research topic. A discussion of the foundations and tenets of student voice and Bronfenbrenner's cultural-ecological theory is provided. Chapter III includes a discussion of the qualitative research design and methods used while employing student voice and cultural-ecological theory as analytical frameworks to qualitatively examine how to view the experiences of English learners' chronic absenteeism. A discussion of the data collection process and the strategies used in the analysis

process are also included. Chapter IV presents the general findings of the study and a discussion of the meaning of those results in the context of the research questions posed. Finally, Chapter V presents a summary that outlines a discussion of the key research findings, how those findings relate to the literature, implications of the findings for practice and policy, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provide context for certain terms within the scope of this study.

Average Daily Attendance (ADA). A measure of the percentage of students in attendance each school day.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP). A measurement defined by the United States federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act that allows the U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized tests.

Chronic absenteeism. Counts all student absences, including excused, unexcused, and suspensions. Chronic absenteeism is calculated as the number of students in the most recent school year that missed 10 percent or more of the instructional days in the school year divided by the total number of students enrolled (NJDOE, 2015a). Schools must be in session for a minimum of 180 days. Generally, the term chronic absenteeism refers to a student missing 10 percent or more of the school year, or approximately 18 school days (Center for Public Education, 2017).

Cumulative Days in Membership (CDM). Defined as the number of school days in session in which a student is enrolled or registered during the annual reporting period from July 1

through June 30. The count commences the first day the student is expected to start, even if they do not actually attend that day.

Data Aggregation. Refers to combining individual data values into summary data. For example, a school may combine information on each student's daily attendance into an overall school total.

Data Disaggregation. Refers to breaking down data into smaller groups. For example, a school may decide that it is more useful to see daily attendance by class period rather than the aggregated total.

Department of Children Protection and Permanency (DCPP). Formerly known as the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), DCPP is responsible for the safety and well-being of children and youth.

English Language Development (ELD). Describes both the student and the program; not a term generally used in New Jersey school districts.

English language learner (ELL) / English learner (EL). English Language Learners students are defined in N.J.A.C 6A:15-1.2 as students from prekindergarten through grade 12 whose native language is other than English and who have sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing and understanding the English language as measured by an English language proficiency test, so as to be denied the opportunity to learn successfully in the classrooms where the language of instruction is English. This term means the same as limited English-speaking ability, the term used in N.J.S.A. 18A:35-15 to 26. This term also means the same as English Language Learner (ELL) which is the term used by the Federal Government.

English language proficiency (ELP). The degree to which an EL can process and use language in any one of the domains of speaking, reading, writing, or listening (NJDOE, 2016).

The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA). Signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 to fund primary and secondary education, emphasizing equal access to education.

English as a Second Language (ESL). Describes the program that students are enrolled in but colloquially ESL is used for both the student and the program that provides English language instruction as the students' second language.

Describes both the student and the program that provides English language instruction as the students' second language.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015, ESSA is a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Home instruction. The provision of one-to-one or small group instruction in the student's place of residence or other appropriate setting due to a health condition, need for treatment, court order, or exclusion from general education for disciplinary or safety reasons.

Limited English Proficient (LEP). Students who are between 3 to 21 years old, enrolled or preparing to enroll in elementary or secondary school, either not born in the United States or speaking a language other than English and owing to difficulty in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English, not meeting the states' proficient level of achievement to successfully achieve in English-only classrooms.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A U.S. Act of Congress signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2001 that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965.

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). An annual assessment given to grades 3 to 11. Students receive scores ranging from 1 to 5 on the computerized tests. Those who score a 4 or a 5 are considered to be meeting the expectations of their grade level. Those scoring a 3 are "approaching" their grade level, while students earning a 1 or 2 need significant improvement.

Qualitative Coding. Labeling qualitative data to indicate patterns or themes that emerge from data analysis.

School Day in Session. A day on which the school is open and students are under the guidance and direction of a teacher(s); and the day must be 4 hours or more to be considered a full day (or at least 2½ hours for kindergarten) (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3(a) and (b)).

Students with a limited or interrupted formal education (SIFEs / SLIFEs). A subset of English learner newcomers to United States schools, above the age of seven, who have missed more than six consecutive months of formal schooling prior to enrolling in a U.S. school and/or are more than two years below grade level in content due to limited educational supports.

School quality or student success (SQSS). State accountability systems under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Student voice. The values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of individual students and groups of students in a school and educational practices that are based on student choices, interests, passions, and ambitions.

Truancy. A measure of counting only unexcused absences when students do not attend school.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Review Methods

This literature review covers the issues related to chronic absenteeism and the development of education policies that address chronic absentee rates in the United States, the relationship between attendance and achievement, and contemporary issues regarding English learners in schools. This review will focus on studies that analyze chronic absenteeism in the United States, state and federal education policies, with respect to chronic absenteeism and high school English learners, books and studies that focus on historical background and the significance of ecological systems theory and student voice, and seminal works. Information was gathered primarily from electronic databases (EBSCOhost, ProQuest, ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE, and Google Scholar) and print editions of peer-reviewed educational journals, government reports, and legislation. Documents include academic journals, educational periodicals, bulletins, reports, manuscripts, dissertations, theses, government reports, and books.

Search terms used in the literature review include chronic absenteeism, absenteeism, attendance, student socioeconomic status, ESL students, LEP students, EL students, high school absenteeism, New Jersey ESSA state plan, ESSA accountability measures, regular attendance, dropout rates, student voice, grounded theory, and high school English learners. Relevant information was identified in the literature on federal and state responses to chronic absenteeism, English learners, student voice, and ecological systems as a theoretical framework for the study. Chronic absenteeism among students in the United States, student voice among adolescents, and high school English learners met the criteria for inclusion. Studies that are not within the time frame of the last 10 years are not included, apart from those that provided historical relevance.

Introduction

Chronic absenteeism has been examined empirically along with the evidence that exists regarding its relationship to academic outcomes and the factors contributing to absenteeism. This study examined English learners' views on attendance, chronic absenteeism, and any student barriers to attending school regularly to add to the extant literature regarding high school chronic absenteeism generally and for this sub-population specifically. By focusing on New Jersey public high school English learners, this study aimed to produce research-based findings to inform education leaders when making policy decisions concerning chronic absenteeism and how best to address it, particularly among English learners at the high school level.

In this chapter, I review the relevant literature to provide an understanding of the ongoing effects of chronic absenteeism on English learners. Specifically, I review national and state efforts to improve attendance and address absenteeism, evidence about the causes of absenteeism, and the lack of student voice among English learners, in response to concerns and policies. Thus, the chapter is divided into six sections. First, I briefly review the major trends and patterns of chronic absenteeism in our nation's schools. Second, I review the literature surrounding the effects of chronic absenteeism on student achievement. Third, I focus on the literature that addresses contributing factors to absenteeism among English learners and the resultant barriers to achievement. Fourth, I review the emergence of chronic absenteeism as ESSA's fifth indicator for student success as a direct response to federal and state concerns about high absentee rates in our nation's schools. Fifth, I review the literature specific to New Jersey's chronic absenteeism rates. Sixth, I review literature that addresses student voice with a focus on how it can positively impact school reform and policies related to chronic absenteeism. The final section of this literature review introduces the application of student voice research, situated

within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model of development, as the theoretical framework for the study.

Trends and Patterns of Chronic Absenteeism

Absenteeism is not a new concern for school leaders. Educators and local officials were focused on absenteeism as early as the late 19th century when a quarter of the juveniles jailed at the Chicago House of Correction in 1898 were there for truancy (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). Despite policy makers' and educators' best efforts, chronic absenteeism remains at crisis proportions. In June 2016, when the United States Education Department first released data collected by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), the report included an analysis of attendance rates in nearly every public school. It showed that for black, Latino, American Indian, and multiracial high school students, roughly 20 percent or more were chronically absent from class. In other words, 20 percent or more students missed more than 18 days of school. For Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander high school students, 25 percent or more were chronically absent.

Nearly 1 in 5 students in our nation's high schools are chronically absent (USDOE, 2017c). Overall, almost 20 percent of students in high school are chronically absent compared to more than 12 percent of students in middle school. The chronic absenteeism rate is the lowest for elementary school students at 11 percent. Chronic absenteeism varied across grade levels for specific groups of students. Data presented in the United States Department of Education's 2013-2014 *Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools* shows that at the high school level, 18 percent of all students and 21.2 percent of English learners (ELs) are chronically absent; 11.5 percent of middle school ELs are chronically absent; 8.7 percent of elementary ELs are chronically absent; and 16.0 percent of other ELs are chronically absent, which includes students enrolled in vocational or adult learning educational programs.

The phenomenon of chronic absence is both widespread and highly concentrated (Balfanz, 2016). Attendance Works, a national initiative (2017), reports more than seven million students nationwide are chronically absent from school. While nine out of ten school districts experience some chronic absenteeism, around half the 6.5 million students who were chronically absent in the 2013-14 school year were enrolled in just four percent of American school districts and 12 percent of schools (Balfanz & Chang, 2016). These 654 districts are spread across 45 states and the District of Columbia (Cooper, 2016). Furthermore, 10 percent of chronically absent students can be found in just 30 districts in two states with very large student populations, California and Texas (Balfanz & Chang, 2016). Based on data from the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, combined with data from the Common Core of Data, provided by the National Center for Education Statistics, and revised numbers from New York City Schools, one out of ten schools in the nation has extreme chronic absence (30 percent or more of students chronically absent), while another 11 percent face high levels (20-29 percent of students chronically absent) and almost half of all schools have a more modest problem, with less than 10 percent of students chronically absent (Attendance Works, 2017).

The impact of chronic absenteeism is most severe in impoverished districts. However, Robert Balfanz, who leads the Everyone Graduates Center, a research center at Johns Hopkins University dedicated to identifying and solving barriers that prevent students from graduating high school, also identified chronic absenteeism in districts that are more affluent and suburban with high overall academic achievement. Those districts that have experienced a significant influx of low-income students in recent years are equally affected, and “chronic absenteeism follows poverty wherever it is found in significant concentrations” (Balfanz, et al, 2016, p. 15). In some rural areas, as well as in disadvantaged urban districts, poverty and impediments to

students' getting to school consistently pose a challenge for policymakers and education leaders (Cooper, 2016). According to Attendance Works (2016), many poor rural districts also have high rates of chronic absenteeism, and a majority of districts report rates of 30 percent or higher are rural and town districts.

Effects of Chronic Absenteeism on Student Achievement

Chronic absenteeism can have significant implications for individual students and society at large. Attendance Works promotes the importance of regular school attendance and has extensively studied how missing school affects students. Their work shows that both standardized test scores and grades are influenced by absences. At every age, and in every racial and ethnic group, chronically absent students score lower on standardized tests (Ginsburg et al., 2014). Attendance plays a significant role in student performance and is considered the most prominently identified characteristic of the at-risk student, starting as early as preschool and kindergarten (Chang, 2016). Gottfried and Gee (2017) found that in the early grades, absenteeism is most rampant in kindergarten, and its consequences are particularly detrimental, often leading to poorer academic, behavioral, and developmental outcomes later in life. Chang's (2008) research on the importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades concludes that elementary students who are chronically absent have lower reading and math achievement; by middle and high school, chronic absence can be used as a clear warning sign for potential dropouts. Rice (2017) also found that students who miss excessive days are more likely to fall behind academically and are more likely to drop out.

A 2011 Baltimore Education Research Consortium study examined a cohort of sixth graders from 2008-09 (Class of 2015) to determine the prevalence of early warning indicators of non-graduation. Of the four early warning indicators (chronic absence, failing courses, overage

for grade level, and having been suspended three or more days) chronic absence was the early warning indicator that was the most prevalent predictor of non-graduation. Standardized test scores, gender, and students receiving ESL or special education services over the eight-year span of the study were analyzed but did not meet the study's criteria as highly predictive indicators of non-graduation. Free or reduced-price meal eligibility was not included in analyses because more than three-fourths of the Class of 2007 qualified and a trait that characterizes most of the cohort is not especially useful as a predictor. In that study, chronic absence was defined as missing 20 or more days of school in a given school year, or for students enrolled for part of the year, an attendance rate below 89 percent, whether excused or not. The probability of graduation dropped from 70.0 percent for students with ten or fewer days absent in sixth grade to 28.6 percent for students who were chronically absent in sixth grade. In other words, the probability of graduation is nearly two and a half times better for a student with ten or fewer absences compared to a chronically absent student. Also, as attendance rates fell, on-time graduation rates dropped as well, down to 13.2 percent for students missing 40 or more days.

The findings emphasize the importance of providing supports to help students attend school regularly as rates of chronic absence tend to increase through the middle grades and especially in high school. When they reach secondary school, students who are chronically absent score lower than their peers on achievement tests and are less engaged in the classroom (Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Chronic absenteeism has been linked to strained peer relationships, poor academic achievement, and school disengagement (Outhouse, 2012). Among secondary students who drop out, chronic absenteeism may lead to a drastic limitation on future earning potential (Nam & Huang, 2009). For those who pursue post-secondary studies, the consequences

of chronic absenteeism can persist through higher education with students demonstrating lower levels of persistence and success in college (USDOE, 2016a).

The consequences of chronic absenteeism are not exclusive to the students missing school. It may also hurt classmates with high attendance to the extent that teachers use class time to remediate or repeat lessons (Goodman, 2014). The teaching experiences of Marie Groark, executive director of the Get Schooled Foundation, a nonprofit group that commissioned the Johns Hopkins study, are illustrative of this phenomenon. Theoretically, there were 35 students enrolled in her New York public high school class in the Bronx, but on any given day, only 20 to 25 students attended class. Since they were never the same 20 or 25 students from one day to the next, Groark was always playing catch-up (Perez-Pena, 2012).

In a study that looked at the effects of chronic absenteeism on classmates' achievement among urban elementary schoolchildren, Gottfried (2015) found that chronic absenteeism has whole-class effects. As the number of chronically absent students in a class increased, the achievement of all suffered. In fact, students in classes with no chronically absent students had reading and math achievement test scores that were 10 percent higher on average than those in classrooms where half the students were chronic absentees. Specifically, Gottfried's (2015) results consistently indicated positive and statistically significant relationships between student attendance and academic achievement. Consistent with prior research, he found that students who were chronically absent had lower test scores. Notably, the classmates also scored lower when peers were chronically absent. In other words, when students in the classroom had good attendance, everyone in that room scored higher than students in classrooms with chronically absent peers. Gottfried's (2015) findings indicate that all students are negatively affected by chronic absenteeism.

Contributing Factors and Barriers

Due to the circumstances of their lives, some students are forced to miss school for a host of reasons. A thorough investigation of chronic absenteeism, school refusal, and attendance-related literature reveals there are several factors that impact attendance. Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among students in poverty, students with disabilities, minorities, students who move and change schools often, and students who are involved in the juvenile justice system (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016). The data also indicate that when one child stays home from school, siblings often will too (Rice, 2015). Socioeconomic status, school climate, and parental involvement are most often mentioned as factors attributed to chronic absenteeism across the spectrum of literature on the topic.

Within the category of socioeconomic status lies a plethora of causes for chronic absenteeism. Work commitments (Marvul, 2012); lack of transportation (Gottfried, 2009); student drug use (Flaherty, Sutphen, & Ely, 2012); an unstable home life (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012); residential instability or homelessness (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012a) are often cited. Community-specific factors include unsafe neighborhoods, low compulsory education requirements, and a lack of social and education support services have also been strongly correlated with absenteeism (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). Supplementing the family's income may become more important than attending school on a regular basis. Although these issues are not solely found in economically marginalized communities, they nonetheless tend to be more concentrated in disadvantaged communities, particularly those composed of minority groups (Claes, Hooghe, & Reeskens, 2009).

School climate has been found to contribute to students missing 10 percent or more of the school year. Typically, an unhealthy school climate includes unsafe routes to school, bullying,

safety issues, ineffective school discipline, or disengagement from the school system (Rafa, 2017). Poor conditions or inadequate school facilities, teacher shortages, poor student-teacher interactions, and geographic access to school also factor into the equation (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). Student-specific factors associated with absenteeism include teenage motherhood, low academic performance, repeating grades, lack of caring relationships with adults, negative peer influence, and availability of job opportunities that do not require formal schooling (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012b) also found a lack of student motivation and test-avoidance to be contributors.

At the elementary level, a study by Gottfried and Gee (2017) found that children from larger families, lower socioeconomic status, and those with poorer health faced increased odds of chronic absenteeism. Transportation has also been linked to absenteeism. Gottfried (2017) also used a national large-scale dataset of children (the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten class of 2010-2011) to determine whether the way in which kindergarten students get to school might influence if they go to school. The findings show that children who took the school bus to kindergarten had fewer absent days over the school year and were less likely to be chronically absent compared with children who commuted to school in any other way. While it is challenging to determine the root cause of chronic absence, developing a better understanding of the barriers that students face could inform effective interventions (Rafa, 2017).

ESSA and Indicators of SQSS

The new federal education law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), included changes to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) by giving more freedom to states to tailor their education policies. In addition to giving state education agencies more local control over educational planning, states were required to design accountability systems for implementation

in the 2017-18 school year. These accountability systems annually measure five indicators that assess progress toward the state's long-term educational goals, with a focus on student subgroups: those who are economically disadvantaged, minorities, children with disabilities, and English learners (ELs). The first three indicators are related to academics and are holdovers from NCLB. The first indicator measures academic achievement in an annual assessment. The second indicator measures additional academics, such as student growth and graduation rates for secondary schools. The third indicator is an additional academic indicator for presecondary schools.

ESSA's new requirements are the fourth and fifth indicators. The fourth indicator holds state-wide systems accountable for improvement in the English language proficiency (ELP) of English learners (ELs). The fifth indicator requires states to add at least one measure of school quality or student success (SQSS) to their statewide accountability system that is evidence-based, systematically measurable, and meaningfully differentiated between schools (USDOE, 2016). ESSA's fifth indicator must be related to improvements in student achievement and high school graduation (USDOE, 2016a). Additionally, the fifth indicator must include measures of student or educator engagement, student access to and completion of advanced coursework or postsecondary readiness, school climate and safety, or any other indicator under a broad banner of SQSS.

Under ESSA, chronic absence is a required reporting metric for local and state report cards and an optional measure for school accountability (Attendance Works, 2017). The school-level chronic absenteeism rate is calculated by dividing the number of chronically absent students during the school year by the total number of students enrolled in the school. For Federal ED Facts reporting requirements, starting with School Year 2016-17, only students who

were enrolled in school for 10 or more days will be considered in the school's absentee rate calculation. Whether or not states decided to use chronic absenteeism as their fifth indicator of SQSS, they are now required to provide annual state report cards submitting chronic absenteeism information for purposes of the Office of Civil Rights data collection. ESSA provides flexibility to school districts to use their Title II professional development fund to train staff on issues related to school conditions for student learning, including chronic absenteeism (Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law No. 114-95, Sec. 1111(c)(viii)(I)). Additionally, Title I, II, and IV funds are available for state and local education agency utilization in meeting the educational needs of impoverished students, which includes identifying how to understand and tackle chronic absenteeism.

Prior to the implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes (2012a), found that only six states: Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon and Rhode Island measured chronic absenteeism. They argued that policy makers were looking at absenteeism in the wrong way. While districts and states were required to measure average daily attendance (ADA) rates, they were not focused on the relatively small number of students who accounted for most of the absences. Chronic absence data are becoming increasingly available, and several states already make annual chronic absence data available online. Current school accountability systems provide opportunities for sharing information, measuring progress toward state and district goals, and supporting greater educational equity (Education Commission of the States, 2018).

Given the importance of accountability, many states are taking ESSA guidelines to improve upon their existing systems. ESSA requires states to select at least one indicator of school quality or student success for each grade span. Under ESSA, 37 states and the District of

Columbia enacted legislation to include chronic absenteeism as the fifth indicator of SQSS in their accountability systems, New Jersey among them (Education Commission of the States, 2018). The FutureEd (2017) Table from Georgetown University lists 33 states (including New Jersey) and the District of Columbia as having provided a definition of chronic absenteeism as being absent 10 percent or more of the school year. Montana provided a definition of chronic absenteeism as being absent five percent or more of the school year. Alabama and Hawaii provided a definition of chronic absenteeism as being absent 15 or more days during the school year. The assigned weight and end-of-the-year target goal for reducing chronic absenteeism varies from state to state.

New Jersey

New Jersey enrolled 1.37 million students during the 2017-2018 school year. In a U.S. News and World report (2018), New Jersey public education ranked second in the nation in enrollment in and quality of pre-K, test scores and the public high school graduation rate, as well as higher education attainment, graduation rates, college debt and tuition costs. According to the Institute of Education Sciences, at the start of the 2014 school year, the percentage of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools who were Caucasian was less than 50 percent (49.5 percent) for the first time and represents a decrease from 58 percent in Fall 2004. In contrast, the percentage of students who were Hispanic increased from 19 to 25 percent during the same period (NCES, 2017). In 2016, there were more than 72,000 children in New Jersey schools who receive some form of ESL or bilingual teaching (NJDOE, 2017). The state records the number of students who are classified by their district as Limited English Proficient (LEP). That number is a rough proxy for newly-arrived immigrant school children, sometimes called newcomers or port-of-entry students, as well as for United States-born children of immigrant

parents who still speak another language at home. Across New Jersey, the number of students classified as speaking limited English has increased by almost one third since 2010, according to data from the state's Department of Education (2018).

The process of placing students in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs begins when students are enrolled in school. School districts are responsible for identifying ELs in grades K-12 with a home language survey to determine whether students qualify for ESL services based on degree of English language exposure. English learners (ELs), also known as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, are currently defined and counted on various NJDOE reports. In addition to counting ELs for state and federal aid, guidance from the United States Department of Education requires that ELs are included in ESL programs regardless of participation in a language assistance program. Furthermore, school districts are responsible for demonstrating English learner student progress toward English Language Development (ELD).

New Jersey, as is true for most states with large EL populations, requires that schools typically test students to determine how much English they speak, read and write to assess their needs. Students receive a department-approved screener test to determine their level of English proficiency in order to provide direction on where students should be placed academically to receive appropriate LEP services. Assessments are administered by bilingual/ESL certified teachers. In addition, school districts must maintain a census of all students whose native language is not English, including students who live in the district but do not attend a district school (ECS, 2018). Any student who is identified an EL, in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:15, must be reported as such in NJSMART. This enables school districts to count ELs as eligible to receive federal Title III funds for students whose parents have declined program services and/or for accommodations on state assessments regardless of parent refusal of program services.

Students must receive a score of 4.5 or higher on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test to be considered for proficient status. Notably, print literacy is given more weight than oral literacy in academic English. Students who achieve a score of 4.0 overall are exited out of the ESL program.

In 2012, New Jersey added chronic absenteeism as an accountability metric for elementary and middle schools as part of New Jersey's waiver from No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB allowed, but did not require, states to consider attendance as a secondary measure for evaluating adequate yearly progress (AYP). Under NCLB secondary schools were required to track truancy. However, as documented by an Education Commission of the States (ECS, 2017) analysis entitled, *50-State Comparison: States' School Accountability Systems*, states each had their own definition of truancy and most only counted unexcused absences. While most states included an attendance measure, a 2016 ECS report on education trends shows that many adopted a school-wide attendance measure, which could mask a large number of chronically absent students. Few states or schools monitored chronic absence rates for students or schools. Federal law did not require it, and few states asked for it. Chronic absence differs from truancy in that it tracks both excused and unexcused absences.

Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ, 2017) found that across the state of New Jersey, approximately 177 school districts had more than 10 percent of their students chronically absent. According to the report, minority students and those from low-income families were most likely to miss more than 18 days, along with students in kindergarten or high school (ACNJ, 2017). A review of state Department of Education data shows that 125,000 New Jersey students missed more than 18 days of school in 2013-2014, putting them at a greater risk of falling behind their peers academically. New Jersey's ESSA State Plan defines chronic

absenteeism as the percentage of a school's students that are not present for 10 percent or more of the days that that they were in membership at a school (NJDOE, 2017).

In 2017, Attendance Works researchers Hedy N. Chang, Lauren Bauer, and Vaughan Byrnes collected data during the 2013-2014 school year by examining chronic absence levels in 92,333 schools across the country. In New Jersey, 129,000 students were identified as chronically absent, i.e., approximately 9.7 percent of all public-school students (ACNJ, 2017). A state-by-state analysis conducted for this study indicates that New Jersey schools serving more students in poverty have higher chronic absence levels. Nationally, eight percent of schools reported chronic absenteeism during 2013-2014, while New Jersey reported six percent, with the overall distribution of chronic absence highest at the significant level (i.e., 10-19 percent of students). Chronic absence levels for New Jersey schools varied by school type with alternative schools reporting the highest extreme chronic absence levels at 30 percent or more among 58 percent of the student population. Poor attendance in New Jersey remained highest in kindergarten and in high school (Zalkind, Coogan, & Sterling, 2016).

Patterns in New Jersey mirror trends nationally in terms of the increased likelihood of chronic absenteeism among certain student populations. The 2017 Advocates for Children of New Jersey annual report shows that absences remain highest for students with special needs, homeless students, low-income students, and English learners. For measures of school quality and student success (SQSS) that are unique to high school, New Jersey's ESSA State Plan must address how research shows that improvement in those areas can increase graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment, persistence, completion, or career readiness (NJDOE, 2017). New Jersey's federal accountability system under ESSA includes a fifth indicator that measures chronic absenteeism rates related to school quality and student success (SQSS).

The NJDOE recommends that school districts develop a policy that determines when to record a student who is not in school for an extended period for reasons other than illness (e.g., travel with family) as a dropout. A student may be considered a transfer during the extended leave when the student is re-enrolled in and attending another school (in the United States or abroad). The New Jersey Department of Education recommends that each school district develop policies that determine a specified number of days, with a minimum of 180 days, required for students to be considered for promotion or graduation (New Jersey School Register, Section 2.7.3). According to the New Jersey Department of Education (2017), chronic absenteeism will be factored into the summative rating used to identify schools that need comprehensive and targeted support and improvement. Additionally, school-level chronic absenteeism will be included in each district's annual School Performance Report (SPR) for kindergarten through grade 12 starting in 2016-17, per ESSA Sec.1111.

For New Jersey School Performance Reports and Title I accountability, under the ESSA indicator of school quality or student success, only students who were in membership at school for 45 or more days will be considered in the school chronic-absenteeism rate calculation for accountability purposes. Chronic absenteeism will be factored into the summative rating used to identify schools in need of comprehensive and targeted support and improvement (NJDOE, 2017). Any New Jersey school with more than a six percent chronic absenteeism rate is advised to implement an action plan. State action plans can be categorized into four general areas: attendance improvement plans, public awareness initiatives, data usage and early warning systems, and school improvement efforts (Rafa, 2017). As additional measure, a New Jersey Assembly panel advanced legislation designed to combat the state's chronic absenteeism in December 2017, putting forward a bill requiring schools to develop a corrective action plan

(CAP) when 10 percent or more of the students are chronically absent. The bill, approved by the Assembly Appropriations Committee, also requires the state education commissioner to include data on the number and percentage of chronically absent students in annual school performance reports, and to report on rates to the state Board of Education (Adely, 2017).

High stakes accountability has brought what was once a hidden problem into the spotlight. Experts at Bellwether Education Partners, a reform-oriented consulting firm that has undertaken an extensive review of state ESSA plans believe that there should be some protections against manipulation of attendance data, but it is unclear to what extent states have those safeguards in place. New Jersey schools will be held accountable for student attendance in an effort to reduce chronic absenteeism. Bellwether Education Partners' executive summary (2017) identified concerns about manipulation of data as well as inconsistencies in reporting. They stated the ways that schools count partial-day absence or instances when a teacher forgets to take attendance will take on new importance. However, they argue intentional data manipulation and post-dated attendance changes would raise red flags. To accurately monitor chronic absenteeism rates and remain transparent, the New Jersey Department of Education's website makes annual chronic absence data available online. New Jersey has included chronic absenteeism data for elementary and middle schools for years, and beginning with the 2016 School Performance Reports, chronic absenteeism data was included for high schools (NJDOE, 2018). By publicly posting the chronic absenteeism data for each school on the website, the public can have conversations with schools about their data.

Attendance data are already collected by most school districts, but not often analyzed effectively to decrease absentee rates (Chang & Jordan, 2012). Most schools count how many students show up daily (average daily attendance) but do not monitor students who miss so many

days that they are at academic risk. By simply monitoring average daily attendance, school districts miss the opportunity to intervene early, preventing students from falling so far behind that they require remediation or drop out. By identifying students who are chronically absent, each school can help states and districts determine the level of resources and support needed to improve attendance. Gottfried (2010) found that decreased attendance is correlated with exacerbated academic issues for minority youth, especially when compared to their non-minority counterparts.

English Learners

School districts nationwide continue to enroll English learners in unprecedented numbers. As a result, classrooms across the United States are housing much more diverse students who speak more languages than they were twenty-five years ago. The American school-age population is growing more diverse across culture, race/ethnicity, academic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds (Sobel & Taylor, 2011). From 1997 to 2009, public schools experienced a dramatic increase in the number of English learners (Minaya-Rowe, 2015). The English learner (EL) population increased by 51 percent, while the general population increased by only seven percent according to Minaya-Rowe (2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education's Migration Policy Institute (2015) 4.85 million English learners were enrolled in public schools during the 2012-13 academic year, representing nearly 10 percent of the total K-12 student population a notable increase from data reported in 1995 when 2.1 million of the public-school students were identified as participating in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at school.

Minaya-Rowe's research of effective educational programs, practices, and policies for English learners (2015) concludes that approximately five million ELs from low socioeconomic

families were attending schools with limited resources and inadequate funding to meet the needs of the students. Homeless, Title I, and migrant students were more likely to be ELs than the overall student population and Hispanic or Latino students represented more than three times the share of ELs, compared to all students (USDOE, 2017c). More than 75 percent of ELs in 2014–15 were Hispanic or Latino but made up just 25 percent of all students. Asians also comprised a larger percentage of ELs than all students; about five percent of all students were Asian, but Asians accounted for 11 percent of ELs. White students made up the third-largest share of ELs at six percent. This increase in racial and ethnic diversity has been accompanied by an increase in language diversity (Sargrad, 2016). While most of the immigrants that our schools serve are of Latin American, Asian, or Caribbean descent, students hail from hundreds of different countries and linguistic backgrounds (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). While some immigrant children come to the United States with a strong educational base from their countries of origin, others are minimally educated and have experienced interrupted formal education, depending on school attendance opportunities prior to entry into the United States (Wepner, 2012).

In 2016, there were more than 72,000 children in New Jersey schools who receive some form of ESL education or bilingual teaching (NJDOE, 2017). The state records the number of students who are classified by their district as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Across New Jersey, the number of students classified as speaking limited English has increased by almost one third since 2010, according to data from the state’s Department of Education (2017). The nationwide graduation rate for foreign-born Hispanic young adults was lower than the rate for those who were first generation (USDOE, 2018). Among foreign-born and first-generation young adults, graduation rates were lower for Hispanics than for non-Hispanics. EL students are about two times more likely to drop out than native and fluent English speakers (USDOE, 2018).

Only 63 percent of ELs graduate from high school, compared with the overall national rate of 84 percent. Of those who do graduate, only 1.4 percent takes the SAT or ACT college entrance exams.

New Jersey students posted higher overall scores on the 2017 PARCC assessment in math and reading compared to earlier rounds, but large numbers of students continued to miss the mark. Despite additional accommodations of extra time and bilingual dictionaries during PARCC assessment administration, English learners still lag among peers in terms of academic achievement (NJDOE, 2017). Grade 10 current and former English learner students scored lowest on the English Language Arts PARCC assessment. English learners must simultaneously develop academic language while mastering grade-level content. They may be several years below their age-appropriate grade-level in terms of basic concepts and content knowledge if it is new content for them, if they are SIFE students, or if there is a curricular mismatch in sequencing between the two school systems. Some arrive illiterate in their first language.

Despite these challenges, English learners are expected to master literacy and math to prepare for high-stakes assessments such as ACCESS 2.0 and PARCC. Validity is called into question when ELs are required to take the PARCC test before they are ready linguistically. At a basic level, the PARCC test was normed on English speaking populations, which further undermines the test's validity for English learners. As seen in Table 1, Grade 11 current and former ELs combined compared favorably with prior years in English Language Arts (NJDOE, 2017). However, as seen in Table 2, English learners demonstrated a decline in grade 9 through grade 11 math achievement on the PARCC Algebra II Math assessment.

Table 1

2017 English Language Arts PARCC Scores Based on Expectations

	Not met	Partially met	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding
Grade 9					
Former ELS	59.4	17.8	13.9	8.0	1.0
Current ELs	72.0	17.2	8.3	2.4	1.0
Grade 10					
Former ELS	63.9	14.6	11.5	8.6	1.3
Current ELs	78.2	12.3	6.8	2.8	1.0
Grade 11					
Former ELS	44.8	23.7	18.5	11.6	1.4
Current ELs	55.9	24.2	13.7	5.9	0.2

Note. All scores are expressed in percentages. Data for English Language Arts PARCC Scores from NJDOE (2017).

Table 2

2017 Algebra and Geometry PARCC Scores Based on Expectations

	Not met	Partially met	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding
Algebra I					
Former ELS	33.3	38.2	16.5	11.0	1.0
Current ELs	38.9	41.5	13.4	5.8	0.5
Geometry					
Former ELS	24.2	47.8	20.4	6.8	0.8
Current ELs	28.4	50.2	16.9	4.1	0.3
Algebra II					
Former ELS	60	21.3	10.5	7.5	0.8
Current ELs	68.5	18.8	7.8	5.1	0.4

Note. All scores are expressed in percentages. Data for Algebra and Geometry PARCC Scores from NJDOE (2017).

Interventions and Programs

Attendance-based research has resulted in the creation and advocacy for a wide array of intervention programs designed to boost attendance rates. Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have recently aligned efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism. However, the breadth of approaches to combating chronic absenteeism underlines the multiple and sometimes competing theories of the causes and consequences (Birioukov, 2016). Although considerable fiscal resources have been spent to implement programs aimed at improving attendance rates, the effectiveness of the programs remains unclear (De Witte & Csillag, 2012; Mac Iver, 2011; Sheppard, 2011). Much like the causes and consequences of chronic absenteeism, the solutions are aimed at the student, family, and/or school, depending on where the research focus lies (Birioukov, 2016).

In many school districts throughout the United States, students over a certain age no longer need parental consent to be absent from school. For those students who do require parental permission, Birioukov (2016) posits that it strips the student's agency of deciding when he or she will attend school. In the past, truancy sweeps empowered local law enforcement to detain students who were out of school during school hours (Birioukov, 2016). Current practices in some districts include court proceedings aimed at enforcing parental supervision of attendance by fining parents for their children's absence. However, Birioukov notes the approach of criminalizing chronic absenteeism has mixed results, with evidence suggesting that many prosecutions led to higher absence rates following the court proceedings (2016). Furthermore, adolescents in the latter stages of secondary schooling may be residing by themselves, making parental responsibility irrelevant. Recent evidence suggests that *No Pass, No Drive* laws, which

make obtaining (or keeping) a driver's license conditional on school performance, reduce chronic absenteeism among high school students (Rashmi & Vidal-Fernandez, 2014).

Researchers investigating the influence of families on a student's attendance have proposed that schools establish closer contact with parents and guardians (Stone & Stone, 2011). Advocates for Children of New Jersey (2017) recommends school administrators and teachers make a personal connection with families. Several recent studies have tested low-cost, information-based interventions to improve student attendance. In one such program, parents received a postcard about the importance of attendance. One random-assignment evaluation found that sending parents that single postcard reminder about the importance of attending school increased attendance by 2.4 percent (Rogers, Duncan, Wolford, Ternovski, & Reitano, 2017). Text messaging parents is a low-cost intervention that has been shown to improve attendance by 17 percent (Bergman & Chan, 2017). Nonprofit groups promote attendance and lobby for better data collection, like Get Schooled and Attendance Works (Perez-Pena, 2012). In the past, schools focused on daily average attendance and viewed it as a compliance issue, sending letters home when students missed school (Rice, 2017). Now, schools are encouraged to identify the reasons students are missing a large number of days and connect with parents to offer support.

Educational, mental health, and other professionals who commonly address chronic absenteeism are interested in risk factors and intervention approaches relevant to appropriate responses regarding prevention, early intervention, and intensive intervention (DePaoli et al., 2015). Kearney and Graczyk (2013) found researchers from various disciplines have produced rich yet diverse literature for conceptualizing chronic absenteeism that has led to considerable confusion and lack of consensus about a pragmatic and coordinated assessment and intervention

approach. They saw the potential of a Response to Intervention (RtI) framework to promote regular attendance, target interventions for at-risk students, and provide intense and individualized interventions for students with chronic absenteeism. RtI emphasizes the need for early identification and intervention, progress monitoring, behavioral assessment, empirically supported procedures and protocols, and a team-based approach to focus on preventions and early intervention efforts (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Furthermore, RtI provides a structure and process for the early identification and systematic response to students with educational challenges (Sabatino, et al, 2013). The tiers form a continuum of service. Tier one incorporates universal or schoolwide behavioral and instructional supports; tier two provides targeted or group-wide prevention and remediation services; and tier three offers intensive individualized student interventions (Hale, 2008).

Though prior empirical research has identified a broad range of determinants of chronic absenteeism, Gottfried and Gee (2017) found it is difficult to determine the relative importance of one factor over another, hence making it challenging to develop appropriate supports and services to reduce school absences. While it is important for schools to mine attendance data on an ongoing basis, there is a concern that using year-end data for accountability will not take into account that some students may be chronically absent for reasons outside of a school's control (Blad, 2017). The literature provides numerous recommendations to prevent and/or reduce chronic student absenteeism. However, evidence that these programs are effective remains limited. Based on the review of the existing literature, districts will require taking a multipronged, tailored approach that involves some form of monitoring, prevention, and intervention. Given the limitations of the existing research, it is likely that a combination of strategies must be leveraged by schools, parents, and communities to fully address student

attendance issues. Rice (2015) suggests taking a strategic approach with a combination of data collection, communication, and bolstering family supports (2015). Chronic absenteeism is a complicated problem that will ultimately require an equally complex solution.

Student Voice

The subject of student voice in school reform and decision-making traces back to the creation of student government in 1894 at George Junior Republic School in Freeville, New York (Johnson, 1991). However, from the time since *The Nation at Risk* report was published in the late 1980s until the present, the topic of student voice has received little, if any, mention in national school reform agendas (Mitra, 2008). Although many high schools have struggled with how to improve academic outcomes, few have gone straight to the source and asked the students (Mitra, 2008). Attending to student voices may enrich the conversations adults have with one another regarding changes in practice (Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). Student voice can address academic concerns, student alienation, and a pathway to reform (Mitra, 2008).

An overview of the literature suggests school leaders should consider actively engaging in conversations with students to better understand their experiences and thoughts regarding their attendance (Hartnett, 2007; Reid, 2008). Previous research has identified important benefits of student voice initiatives for schools, youth, and adults (Mitra, 2008). Student voice practices encourage learners to become involved in managing their own learning and growth, by setting goals and managing resources to achieve these (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). While initiatives are being developed to gather data on chronic attendance at the state and district level, student voice is noticeably absent from the discussion. Student voice research supports establishing positive student relationships and listening to each learner's voice in creating productive learning climates (McCombs, 2018). Gunter and Thomson (2007) suggest students should be involved in

shaping the decisions that impact their participation in schools. In *Student Voice in School Reform: Building Youth-Adult Partnerships That Strengthen Schools and Empower Youth*, Mitra (2008) believes schools will be more successful when student voice is included in school reform efforts as a catalyst for change. Soliciting student feedback and incorporating student voice provides opportunities for students to become actively involved in school change. By taking student voice into account when addressing chronic absenteeism, school leaders may find a new way of looking at an old problem.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and relied on an active interviewer approach to gather subjective student experiences and investigate multiple determinants of chronic absenteeism. Recent revisions to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) emphasize culture and the diversity of human experience as being central to human development (Velez-Agosto, et al, 2017). The purpose of employing Bronfenbrenner's theory as the foundation for this study was to identify the developmental transformations of the student as part of his or her interdependent cultural and social systems. In essence, ecological systems theory seeks to identify the spheres of influence in a person's life and may help to understand the factors influencing student attendance and how challenges might be addressed. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), viewed human development in terms of an ecological system, which can be divided into five subsystems, or layers of environment, which he regarded as important in understanding the development of the human being from childhood to adulthood. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems were well suited to an exploration of student voice in understanding chronic absenteeism because of its appreciation for and attention to the factors that drive human development.

Specifically, this study analyzed how the co-occurrence of Bronfenbrenner's theory of related factors (1) process, (2) person, and (3) context (micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystem) are associated with high school English learners' probability of being chronically absent. Concepts associated with culture are categorized within various macro systems, such as laws, rules, information, and ideology (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of human development maximized the discovery process by linking theory and data more thoroughly. Part of the rigor of conducting a qualitative study involves interacting closely with the data. Consequently, this model makes the research more rigorous through a systematic collection of data related to multiple factors that influence the student, the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis, and the generation of theory.

Ecological systems theory was appropriate for this qualitative case study as the study focused on describing and understanding English learners' experiences with chronic absenteeism within a unique cultural framework. This theory allowed for the analysis of social and cultural factors that influenced and shaped English learners' school behavior. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that a theory emerging from a systematic discovery process provides a means to construct patterns of behavior and the relationships between ideas or categories. Overall, ecological systems theory offered the conceptual tools to understand relationship interactions while exploring the diversity of experience. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's theory made it possible to isolate key factors that may subsequently assist school leaders as they design policies and practices to prevent chronic absenteeism.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand high school English learners' chronic absenteeism and their perceptions of the factors contributing to absenteeism. Students were asked to describe the family, school, and personal factors that influenced, both positively and negatively, their ability to attend school regularly. This inquiry was accomplished through in-depth interviewing as the primary method of data collection and open and inductive coding as primary forms of analysis. This qualitative case study followed a Straussian (1967) grounded-theory design to guide the collection and analysis of interview data to identify emerging categories and generate substantive theory. To obtain the perspectives of high school English learners with chronic rates of absenteeism, the study was conducted in a New Jersey school district in a diverse suburban community interested in addressing the issue with input from students. The high school received full accreditation from the Secondary Schools Commission of the Middle States Association and two "Promising Practices" National Character Education Awards for its programs promoting Cultural Awareness and Positive Behavior Supports in Schools.

Grounded-theory methodology was used as a basis for how data were collected and analyzed after interviewing six students and six school personnel, by conducting constant comparison analysis of the data and letting the data drive the process of generating categories and theory. A grounded theory framework allowed the participants to tell their stories through dialogue and conversation to identify multiple determinants of chronic absenteeism that were grounded, theoretically and empirically, in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological system of development. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory was used to determine how the co-

occurrence of the immediate environment, personal connections, and social and cultural values (micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem) affected behavior related to chronic absenteeism. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology for this study. This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) overview, (b) rationale, (c) sample population/data source, (d) selection procedures, (e) district absenteeism policies and procedures, (f) research questions, (g) development of interview instrument and interview questions, (h) data collection and analysis, (i) role of the researcher, and (j) validity and reliability.

Overview

Drawing on literature centered on chronic absenteeism and student voice, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand high school English learners' experiences with chronic absenteeism. Identifying themes and patterns related to high school English learners' chronic absenteeism was intended to help school leaders better develop policies and procedures to address the issue of chronic absenteeism among this segment of the school population. This study was designed to understand the experiences of high school English learners' chronic absenteeism. A qualitative research design facilitated data collection that reflected the participants' perspectives, a population that has been missing from the research on the mechanisms contributing to chronic absenteeism. The literature reflects that student perspectives have been overlooked when establishing and implementing attendance practices and policies. As previously noted, research has pointed to primarily punitive attendance policies that tend to be reactive and ineffective.

Grounded-theory design was used to generate substantive grounded theory of high school English learners' views and experiences with chronic absenteeism. A narrative study allowed me to gather interpretive data through verbal responses. Narrative studies can lead to a deeper

understanding of the participants' perception about a particular social or human problem. Qualitative research is particularly suited for the exploration of an area of study where research is nascent or lacking or where much of the research work has been derived from concepts and theory from another area. The selection of a narrative study design was essential, as it allowed for the flexibility of arriving at results through interaction with study participants. Furthermore, a narrative study allows the researcher to gather interpretive data through verbal response, which leads to more understanding of the participants' perception about a particular social or human problem (Creswell, 2007). Gathering responses that include student voice on the subject of chronic absenteeism can provide insight to school leaders as they develop a plan to tackle this issue.

Sample Population/Data Source

The English language student participants of this study were comprised of six high school English learners from a suburban PreK-12 district in New Jersey. Gender was split evenly among three boys and three girls. Spanish was the first language of all six Hispanic ELs interviewed. Countries of origin among the ELs interviewed were identified as Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Honduras. Two students had been in the United States since 2014, the other four arrived in 2016. Only one of the male students resided in a two-income parent household. Only one of the girls lived independently without the support of a family unit.

Student Entry to New Jersey K-12 Education

Students came from a variety of educational backgrounds either directly to the study site or after attending different school districts. Two of the male students were enrolled at the study site after attending schools in different New Jersey districts; one had previously attended high

school in Connecticut. Three students were enrolled in the eleventh grade, with the other three students split among ninth, tenth, and twelfth grades. Out of the six students, two students had to repeat a grade level due to chronic absenteeism and a failure to recoup their grades through portfolio or appeal. The study site was the first district that the three female students enrolled in upon entry to the United States.

School Personnel Participants

On average, school personnel participants had 11 years of experience working in the district. Gender was split evenly among school personnel with three women and three men. Although all had previous experience as teachers, none of the participants had previously taught English as a second language. Two school leader participants reported fewer than five years of administrative experience; the principal had eleven years' experience as a district administrator, with one year in his current position at the high school and an additional five years as a teacher. All school personnel had knowledge of the district's chronic absenteeism, policies, and procedures. Each administrator self-identified as taking a direct role in collecting and analyzing student chronic absenteeism data for his or her respective building, department, and/or grade level. Each administrator used the same district-wide electronic database to access and document student chronic absenteeism. While each of the participants was an English speaker tasked with monitoring and improving chronic absenteeism for the entire high school study body, the principal implemented an initiative in Spring 2018 to provide translators to staff members throughout the school day when needed to communicate with students and families.

For reporting purposes, and to protect participants' identities, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. At the time of the study, the high school was implementing an attendance review committee, a development instituted in the district in January 2018 by the

newly tenured principal. The current principal joined the high school in January 2018 after serving the district as an administrator at the middle school. After viewing the high school's drop out and attendance rates, the principal made chronic absenteeism and graduation his priority at the high school. In concurrence with the focus on chronic absenteeism, the principal has begun taking the first steps toward implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a research-based program designed to identify individual students, as well as identify school-wide chronic absenteeism problems, to teach explicit behavioral expectations.

During their interviews, several school personnel participants referenced one or both of these character development initiatives. In addition to PBIS, another initiative being considered in the high school at the time of data collection included considering implementing a new approach to reward students for positive behaviors, specifically good attendance records. Second, the district itself was in its first year of applying district-wide criteria to identify and support students who met the state standards for chronic absenteeism and district standards for credit loss as a result of days absent. All school personnel participants were enthusiastic about the recently reorganized position of attendance officer currently held by a veteran teacher who had successfully held the post several years ago. Each of the school personnel participants expressed their optimism in the principal's attention and approach to transforming policies that have not been successful in the past. At the time of the interviews, each participant was an active member of the newly formed absentee review committee that met for the first time in September 2018. The individual interview demographics specific to the school personnel interview participants is summarized in Table 3.

Interviews and document analysis of policies, procedures, correspondence, meeting minutes, and newspaper articles deepened understanding by collecting a variety of data on the

Table 3

School Personnel Participant Demographics

School personnel	Gender	Years in current position	Years in district
Principal	Male	1	16
ESL Supervisor	Female	5	10
Dean of Students	Female	5	10
Attendance Officer	Female	5	14
Mentor	Male	10	10
Committee Member	Male	7	7

topic. The study did not include charter schools, vocational schools, and special education schools. The following criteria were used to select the site: the school was a New Jersey public school; the school was configured with only Grades 9-12; and the school district reported all demographic and testing information to the NJDOE.

According to the most recent data available from the New Jersey Performance Report (2016-2017), the high school housed 1,910 students. Current English learners made up five percent of the study body, or approximately 96 students. Economically disadvantaged students accounted for 41 percent of the high school's student body. The New Jersey Performance Report (2016-2017) designated math achievement, chronic absenteeism, and the four-year graduation rate as three areas in need of improvement at the high school. The district reported a 17.9 percent chronic absentee rate among the entire high school population, which is close to the state and national average of 20 percent among all high school students. The district classified chronic absenteeism as 10 percent of the student body having missed 10 percent or more of the required 180 days in session during the school year. However, it is important to note that after a student had accumulated 16 unexcused absences, he or she lost credit for coursework, which required him or her to repeat the course of study the following year.

Roughly 20.70% of current ELs and 20.60% of Hispanic students enrolled at the district high school were chronically absent. The sample size of Hispanic English learners included three males and three females, the majority being juniors (3), and one student in each of the other three grades: freshman, sophomore, and senior. During the 2017-2018 academic school-year, chronic absenteeism caused all of the student participants to lose credit for coursework, postponing graduation for an additional year. All of the students interviewed spoke Spanish at home and identified it as their first language. In addition to English, Spanish was second-most spoken language at the study site. Countries of origin for the participants included Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Four years was the longest amount of time the students reported being in the United States, the least amount of time reported as two and a half years. Five of the six students lived with at least one parent. Three students lived with a mother, step father, and at least one sibling. Two students lived with only a mother. One student had been removed from the home by the Department of Children Protection and Permanency (DCPP) and was living on her own. Table 4 summarizes the individual interview demographics specific to the student interview participants.

Table 4

Student Participant Demographics

Student	Gender/Age	Origin	Grade	ESL level	Years in USA	Days absent
Brayan	M/16	Colombia	10	III	3	12
Catherine	F/18	Colombia	11	III	4	29
Jessica	F/18	Honduras	11	II	2.5	19
Juan	M/16	El Salvador	09	II	4	12
Lainey	F/18	DR	11	III	4	14
William	M/18	DR	12	II	2.5	19

Note. DR = Dominican Republic.

Selection Procedures

The district chosen to participate in the study was charged with educating more than 6,300 students and was composed of six schools. There were four K-5 elementary schools, one middle school serving Grades 6-8, and one high school serving Grades 9-12. As part of New Jersey's accountability system, the district's performance reports provided a picture of diverse K-12 schools that served many types of students. According to ESSA state policy in the state of New Jersey, the study site's chronic absenteeism was identified as an issue in need of improvement in three of the four K-5 schools and at the high school. The district's middle school is ranked as the 11th most diverse school in the state of New Jersey. The middle school was identified as a focus school because it was among the 10 percent of New Jersey schools with the overall lowest subgroup performance, a graduation rate below 75 percent, and the widest gaps in achievement between different subgroups of students. After receiving targeted and tailored solutions to meet the school's unique needs, the middle school exited focus status in 2017.

The 2014-2015 school report card stated most of the district's high school students spoke English (65.9 percent of students), which is lower than the states' average among New Jersey high schools (75.5 percent of students). White students at the high school were in the minority at 20.6 percent, compared to the state average of white enrollment at 44.6%; Hispanics were the majority at the high school at 32.5 percent, followed by Black students at 23.6 percent and Asian students at 22.1 percent. Spanish was spoken in 19 percent of students' homes, with, Gujarati, Arabic, Hindi and other languages spoken by students in 2016-2017. An asterisk in Table 5 represents New Jersey data not available to protect student privacy (Table 5).

Table 5

High School Demographics

Enrollment variables	Study site	State HS
High School Student Demographics		
White	20.6%	44.6%
Black	23.6%	15.7%
Hispanic	32.5%	27.8%
Asian	22.1%	9.8%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.3%	0.2%
American Indian	0.0%	0.1%
English Learners	5.0%	—
Languages Spoken at Home		
English	65.9%	75.5%
Spanish	19.0%	15.2%
Gujarati	1.8%	1.0%
Arabic	1.8%	1.0%
Hindi	1.6%	1.0%
Other	10.4%	8.5%
Chronic Absenteeism		
School-wide	17.9%	20%
English Learners	20.70%	11.3%
Hispanic	20.60%	12.3%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	14.30%	—
Economically Disadvantaged	21.60%	38%
Grade 9	10%	11%
Grade 10	14%	12%
Grade 11	17%	14%
Grade 12	30%	20%
High School Graduation Rate		
School-wide	80.9%	90.5%
Hispanic	*	84.3%
Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	94.2%	96.6%
English Learners	47.1%	76.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	72.4%	83.9%
2017 ACCESS 2.0 Assessment		
High School English Learners' Years in District	# of students tested	Score below 4.5
1	23	*
2	23	*
3	17	*
4	12	*

District Absenteeism Policies and Procedures

The district's high school community expects all students to be in school on a daily basis and promotes good attendance through rules and regulations that detail specific attendance procedures and guidelines regarding school absences, tardiness, and class cuts (see Appendix B). Guidelines are in accordance with NJSA 18:38:2.6 legal (excused) absence parameters. As such, absences due to Out of School Suspension(s) (OSS) or In School Suspensions (ISS) are not considered school absences. Notification procedures related to possible loss of credits are in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.8, i.e., Programs to Support Student Development, and the district adheres to the New Jersey state law that governs truancy. Student absenteeism records are provided on the school website, the Parent Portal, and in correspondence sent to parents when attendance warning letters are necessary.

Chronic absenteeism was defined by the district as being absent for 10 percent or more of the 180 days enrolled in an academic school year, or 18 days. Teachers were required to enter daily attendance on a school portal that reported to NJ School Smart within the first ten minutes of class time to accurately record absences. These methods immediately captured and reported a student's tardy to class, class cut, and absenteeism. The district's high school student and parent handbook stressed that student participation was an integral part of each course. The Board of Education imposed an attendance policy that required regular attendance with no more than 16 absences in any one course for students to receive full credit for that course. Students were required to provide doctor's notes in order to have the absence excused. While the state identifies chronic absence as missing 10% of the school year (or roughly 18 days in a year), district policy held students to the rule that unexcused absences in excess of 16 days can result in

an automatic grade of “FA” (attendance failure). Students were responsible for attending school each day and for attending all classes, including study halls and lunch.

Research Questions

The central question guiding this study is, how do high school English learners account for their chronic absenteeism?

RQ 1. How do high school English learners explain their reasons for not attending school?

RQ 2. What barriers do English learners describe as preventing them from regular school attendance?

RQ 3. What additional supports do English learners identify as potentially helping to improve their attendance?

Development of Interview Instrument

The research for this study followed a uniform protocol to ensure that the interviews yielded data consistent with the study’s goals. In keeping with a qualitative research design, face-to-face interviews were conducted with school personnel, attendance review committee members, and students. Initially, I contacted the district superintendent to request permission to conduct the study at the high school. Once permission was granted, I received a formal letter (see Appendix O). First, during the summer, I met with the school principal to introduce myself and explain the study. During our initial meeting I was able to obtain information about attendance policies and procedures. In addition, the principal provided me with the names and email addresses of school leaders and attendance review committee members I could contact directly to discuss participation in the study. In total, invitations to interview were extended to the superintendent, high school principal, dean of students, ESL supervisor, attendance officer,

two attendance committee members, a guidance counselor, and ESL teachers to inquire whether they would be willing to participate in the study (see Appendix N). Each participant was provided with a flyer explaining the study, my association with the university, and a letter of informed consent to review prior to selection (see Appendix H). Of the eleven school personnel contacted, six agreed to participate in the case study. Each school personnel member was contacted because they are directly responsible for implementing, monitoring, or overseeing absentee policies and procedures at the high school. My interest in interviewing school personnel was to better understand their role and response to the experiences of their students, parents, and/or guardians.

According to school policy and Board of Education regulations, the high school principal was responsible for meeting with parents to discuss their child's attendance record when the student had missed more than twelve days of school. The principal and attendance review committee members were tasked with deciding whether credits should be awarded or denied in cases in which the threshold number of absences is exceeded. High school assistant principals and the dean of students oversee student absenteeism for the grade level they oversee. The attendance officer was required to oversee daily absences and tardiness. In addition, while adult students over the age of eighteen were able to write excuses for their tardiness or absence from school, an assistant principal must have first verified and approved these notes before they were submitted to the attendance office. District high school students who were truant were required to report to the grade level assistant principal with his or her parent or guardian upon return to school. District assistant principals also had the responsibility of making recommendations to counselors when parents needed to be notified regarding a student's absenteeism.

At a question and answer session that I conducted with ESL high school students, a flyer explaining the study and letters of informed consent were distributed to students who expressed an interest in participating, along with a pre-questionnaire to gather preliminary data and determine possible participants (see Appendix M). The pre-questionnaire also provided background information, which served, at times, to prompt additional questions during the interviews (see Appendix E). Eligibility to participate in the study required that students' English skills were developed sufficiently to communicate responses directly to me without the use of a translator. Furthermore, to be eligible, students had to be currently enrolled in the school's English learner program and had to have been identified as being chronically absent in the year prior to the study and/or absent six or more times during the first three months of school. In order to verify that the students were eligible for the study, I cross-referenced two data sets provided to me by school leaders. The first data set listed all students currently enrolled in the ESL program at the high school. The second data set listed all students currently identified as being chronically absent or at risk of being chronically absent at the high school. Once all forms and pre-questionnaires were returned, six Hispanic students were identified as eligible for participation in the study based on their current status as enrolled in the ESL program and history of chronic absenteeism, i.e., a student who was not present for any reason, excused, unexcused or for disciplinary action, was considered absent unless permitted by statute or regulation (ESSA, 2015).

Once the participants agreed to volunteer in the study and met selection criteria, a follow-up confirmation letter was sent providing the details and process involved in conducting the study. The letter indicated that no participant would be identified and that his or her privacy would not be violated. Letters were written in English with translation in the person's first

language when applicable. In-depth interviews were held with participants at the high school at a mutually agreed upon location and time. Interviews were then set up according to convenience for the students and members of school personnel. A form requesting permission for the use and release of confidential taped responses was signed by all participants (see Appendix D). This permission form also indicated that once the study was completed, all tapes would be destroyed.

The general organization and content of interview questions were predetermined but allowed for the flexibility to adjust, reword, and ask additional follow-up questions. The use of this format allowed me to build on the responses of the research participants and allowed the participants to take the lead as their stories unfolded. I did not restrict the responses of the participants but rather allowed them to speak freely. Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry (2011) suggest, “Expansive, honest and reflective accounts may be less forthcoming and more difficult to access from participants if a rigid set of questions or a more structured interviewing technique are used” (p. 23). Open-ended questions provided a format to engage school leaders, attendance review committee members, and students on what they knew, thought, and felt about high school chronic absenteeism through their perceptions and experiences.

Once school began, the principal and I met again to conduct a second, lengthier interview. Before interviewing students, I met with and interviewed school leaders, the attendance officer, and attendance review committee members. Interviews were conducted on a one-time basis in one-on-one, in-depth interviews with six public high school English learner students and six school leaders and attendance review committee members. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed within a day of the interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Common trends, patterns, themes, and concerns were identified as they factored into policy that addressed chronic absenteeism prevention and programs. Data were collected and analyzed to understand how and why students were unable to attend school on a regular basis and to identify what trends or patterns were connected. The study utilized publicly available data from the United States Department of Education, the New Jersey Department of Education and district policies, procedures, supports, and consequences related to chronic absenteeism. In addition, document analysis specific to chronic absenteeism included federal and state law, school correspondence to students and parents specific to absenteeism, school absence reporting procedures, school schedules specific to the students interviewed, and records of attendance review meetings (agendas and minutes) as permitted. These documents helped to determine how the school was monitoring, addressing, and reporting chronic absenteeism. Data from all schools that were vocational, charter, and special education were removed from the study.

I anticipated that students having a history of being chronically absent or in danger of being chronically absent could be difficult to reach or recruit for participation. Despite these challenges, gaining in-depth knowledge of the conditions and concerns experienced by these students was crucial to the study. Language barriers, distrust of government or service providers, and lack of transportation are acknowledged challenges in conducting research with hard-to-reach groups (Froonjian & Garnett, 2013). In recognition of the challenges in reaching some populations, Froonjian and Garnett (2013) use a variety of techniques to reach out to these communities including targeted and time-location sampling methods. My strategy in overcoming these and other obstacles involved direct communication with the principal to request access to students while in school.

While students were not permitted to meet with me during instructional time, and they often left school immediately upon dismissal, I requested and was granted the opportunity to meet with them during their study hall and lunch periods. In addition, time-location sampling (also known as venue sampling) was employed to interview members of the target population at specific times in set venues, such as at the high school in a private office during lunch and study hall periods. Students who volunteered emailed their email addresses and cell phone numbers on the submitted pre-questionnaire forms. Having that information made it possible for me to contact students directly to arrange and confirm confidential interviews. Being able to text students immediately before the interview was especially helpful since there were occasions when they had been assigned last-minute lunch detentions or in-school suspensions. In those instances, the interview had to be rescheduled.

Regardless of circumstances, all interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon time for all of the participants. I worked with school leaders and students to identify a secure location in which to meet with them individually. Student interviews took place in the privacy of a high school administrator's office not visible to classmates or staff members. For students identified as requiring parental/guardian consent to participate in the study, I worked with them to determine a mutually agreed upon time at the school to conduct the interviews. I worked to limit the identification of participants in the research study by assigning a pseudonym to each participant.

While interviews were always conducted when school was in session, the office was located in an area with limited proximity to members of the school community. After all the participants granted their permission, the interviews began. The door was always kept open to put students at ease, but interviews were confidential so as not to compromise the student's

honesty in responding and the reliability of the data. The purpose of open-ended questions was to assess the participant's perspective and gain insight on their experiences (see Appendix J). All interviews lasted, at a minimum, approximately 40 minutes to an hour in duration.

Open-ended questions were created and geared to provide in-depth responses from the participants. When meeting privately with students and school personnel, my questions were shaped by the stories they shared about their lived experiences. Questions focused on what the participants knew about chronic absenteeism and what they believed were the results of circumstances, involuntary or voluntary, that contributed to students regularly attending school (see Appendix K). In order to prevent compromising the consistency of the interviews, the questions asked of the participants were done in a similar format, utilizing the same tone and facial expressions throughout the interview process. Asking open-ended questions, I paraphrased the research participants' comments, probed for further information, and asked additional clarifying questions, as needed (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2013). Additionally, I sought immediate confirmation of the accuracy of my interpretation during each of the interviews, as well as further information and/or clarification with students during the follow up questions. The in-depth interview strategy embodied the research genre of individual lived experience to assess, according to the interviewees' responses, the factors that influenced chronic absence. During the interviews, body language, tone of voice, and level of emotional intensity was observed and recorded in field notes or reflections. These notes became part of the artifacts of the study along with interview transcripts (see Appendix L). Communication skills assisted in framing questions and using gentle probing to elicit detailed and authentic responses.

A grounded theory framework allowed the participants to tell their stories through dialogue and conversation. Main topics covered in the student interviews included: (a) the

student's history in the district, (b) transportation to and from school, (c) experiences with chronic absenteeism, and (d) school schedule. Follow-up questions, supported by probing, clarifying questions, and paraphrasing, were used to clarify responses. Of particular interest were responses related to school support systems, relationships with family and friends, and school culture. Transportation questions included probing questions to determine if the student perceived any safety concerns related to getting to and from school. The focus on questions about the student's absenteeism sought to further understand the reasons the student offered for missing school. Another consideration was learning whether or not the student was aware of exactly how many days he or she had missed. Questions about reporting procedures and consequences revealed the level of school support and/or parental involvement/guardianship in the student's life. Asking about the student's schedule at school and at home helped to shed light on whether personal responsibilities played a role in his or her chronic absenteeism. Finally, asking for input from students on how parents, teachers, or school leaders could support them in improving their attendance were done so to gain answers that may not have been considered from an adult perspective.

Through interviews with school personnel, I sought to gain insight into the central phenomenon of chronic student absenteeism. Throughout the interview process, I focused on building and maintaining a credible relationship with each of the research participants and used open-ended interview questions to engage them in the study. The use of such questions allowed me to build the responses by asking further, more focused questions related to the participants' opinion about the reasons for student absenteeism and the applications and policies of the school administration regarding absenteeism. I acknowledged the expertise of the research participants. Questions were directly related to their experiences, attitudes, and opinions regarding the

personal, family, academic, and social factors contributing to English learner students' chronic absenteeism. I probed, as needed, to elicit further information and to clarify my understanding of each participant's role and responsibility related to reporting, monitoring, and addressing chronic absenteeism. I sought permission to digitally record the interviews for the purpose of transcription. I also took handwritten descriptive, observational notes. Each research participant was asked to provide a pseudonym to be used in any presentation or publication related to the study; initially for the dissertation and potentially for future conference presentations or journal publications. Any of the participants who opted not to choose a pseudonym were assigned a name.

I continued to reflect upon the data as I conducted interviews by reviewing journal notes. By simultaneously reflecting and collecting data, I was able to focus and shape the study as I progressed. Using grounded theory to generate findings, I used a naturalistic, contextualized process of constructing knowledge (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016). Grounded theory places a priority on what is studied over the methods of studying it and acknowledges the researcher's role in interpreting data. Developed in the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1968), the grounded theory methodology was first described by Glaser and Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967. According to Corbin and Strauss (1997), their goal in developing grounded theory was to return attention to the generation of theory. Consequently, they explained in their book 'how the discovery of theory from data, systematically obtained and analyzed... can be furthered' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory is defined as “the systematic discovery of theory from the data of social research” (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016). This method uses a series of structured steps to develop qualitative data into codes, organize the codes into conceptual categories, and link the categories

into a theory that explains the phenomenon under study. The goal of the grounded theory approach is to generate theories that explain how some aspect of the social world 'works.' The goal is to develop a theory that emerges from and is therefore connected to the reality the theory is developed to explain. The constant comparative method is utilized for analyzing data in order to develop a grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that when used to generate theory, the comparative analytical method they describe can be applied to social units of any size. This process involves identifying a phenomenon and making decisions regarding initial collection of data based on one's initial understanding of the phenomenon.

I incorporated flexible guidelines for coding data when engaged in a grounded theory analysis to include open coding to compare, conceptualize, and categorize data; axial coding to make connections between categories; and selective coding to relate the core category to other categories in order to validate relationships between them (Glaser & Straus, 1967). After the data were collected and documented, I studied the material to prepare it for analysis. This required a close reading of the data. The process of defining what the data conveyed was my first step. Using Google Sheets and Microsoft Excel, I assigned a label to segments of data that simultaneously categorized, summarized, and accounted for each piece of data collected. I then labeled those categories with terms based on the actual language from the participants. The initial phase involved naming each word, line, or segment of data. My goal during the initial phase was to remain open to emerging theoretical developments. The second phase was more focused and selective to pinpoint and develop the most salient categories into large groups of data. Coding provided the link between collecting the data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. This allowed me to move beyond concrete statements and documentation to

analytic interpretation of themes and patterns and how one factor related to their chronic absenteeism influenced another.

The coding process generated descriptions of the setting, participants, categories, and themes for analysis to organize the various cases into a general description. The Excel document assisted in organizing the frequency of similar responses among participants while observing the patterns that existed in their responses related to their actions and viewpoints. To accurately convey the participants' perceptions of their experiences, the data were summarized into narrative form, using the participants' own words to delineate the causal conditions, context, and intervening factors that contributed to high school English learners' chronic absenteeism. Finally, I interpreted the meaning of the data and reported the findings by relating it to the literature. Digital audio files of each interview have been stored on a password protected USB memory device in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. All digital audio files, demographic questionnaires, interview transcripts and field notes have been safely stored and retained for at least three years in compliance with IRB guidelines, after which they will be destroyed once it is determined that no further analysis is needed.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher's personal history and experience may influence how she collects, interprets, and analyzes data. Therefore, one must consider her own biases as they relate to subjectivity and interaction with informants. As a result, measures to assure transparency were employed in this study's design, data collection, and analysis. Additionally, a researcher's biography can influence the design and execution of data collection and must be taken into consideration during all stages of the interview process and subsequent interpretation. For example, I am a product of New Jersey public schools and have three children who also attended

the state's public schools. My experiences growing up, as well as my involvement and perspectives related to my children's education, have shaped my outlook on the importance of school attendance as it relates to academic success. Further, I believe parental attitudes that value school attendance and academic achievement can often play a significant role in motivating a student to attend school regularly. However, I also view school culture and socioeconomic status as playing an equally significant, and sometimes competing, role.

As a teacher of English as a second language, I have worked with English learners from various countries of origin and ages, across grade levels from kindergarten to undergraduates in college, in rural, suburban, and urban areas. From what I have seen, while my students' neighborhood environments might differ, the economic responsibilities and struggles some high school students face can often be similar. For ELs who are self-supporting as a result of coming alone to the United States, regular attendance can be challenging. Evening shifts at work leave students exhausted, and I am often faced with the task of waking them during lessons. Others are not only attending school and working but also have the added responsibility of parenthood. When a child is too ill to attend daycare, students who are parents must miss school to seek medical treatment for their child or stay at home until the child is well. The rigor of academics can also dissuade students who struggle. For some students, disciplinary measures due to tardiness, loss of credit due to cutting class, or multiple unexcused absences contribute to their absenteeism.

During this study I interviewed English learner students with similar backgrounds to the students I have taught in other private, public, and post-secondary schools. Therefore, my subjective experiences include conscious and subconscious understandings of bilingual/bicultural education, the relationship between regular attendance and academic success, and the detrimental

effects that absenteeism has on the learning community as a whole, as well as the individual student. As an educator, I know firsthand the instructional difficulties high school ESL teachers face when students are chronically absent. The pacing of lessons and assessments is often thrown off, and time must be set aside to bring students up to speed when they have missed as little as a day of instruction. Depending on the circumstances, one student's absenteeism can affect the individualized attention the rest of the students receive. Also at stake are the consequences for schools and districts who do not meet state goals. Lastly, the individual learning experiences of high school ELs are my priority. High school is rigorous. When English learners miss school and fail to make up assignments or assessments, their grades suffer. It can often snowball very quickly for the student, making it difficult for them to rebound.

My first-hand knowledge of various high school English learner challenges influenced the ways in which I think about chronic absenteeism. My experiences teaching high school students allowed me to develop probing questions relevant to high school English learners who are experiencing the consequences of chronic absenteeism, specifically how their absences affect their ability to keep up with the workload and how that in turn affects their stress levels and relationships with teachers, classmates, family members, and employers. Knowing that ELs do not often advocate for themselves, my probing questions also focused on their understanding of school resources and whether they had reached out to a school leader or faculty member to help them navigate issues related to absences. I approached the analysis of the data by looking at the unique personalities and circumstances of each individual case as I do my own students. All these factors contributed to the way in which I view chronic absenteeism for high school ELs and the lens through which I collected and analyzed the data and approached the topic under study.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative methods do not attempt to ignore the subjectivity or biases of those being studied, in this case, high school English learner students with a history of chronic absenteeism. Instead, qualitative methods acknowledge bias and subjectivity and seek to capture a rich view of the perspective of those being studied, even embracing bias and subjectivity as essential parts of a larger view. Thus, qualitative methods are more complete and more capable of capturing tacit perceptions and even eliciting the verbalization of perceptions previously unknown. Qualitative research assumes the value of personal voice and informal speech in the data collected, and even the reporting of research results is marked by more informal language and narrative. The interview evolves according to the respondent. To maintain integrity, the researcher calls on reflexivity, a conscious process of openness to the data and a commitment to see past one's biases. Though qualitative research is an exploration of values, biases, and the subjective experience of respondents, it is seen as valid, reliable research in its authentic adherence to the data and the perceptions of respondents.

Qualitative research requires the researcher take an active role in the collection and interpretation of participant viewpoints. To be credible, qualitative research must be valid and reliable. To decrease threats to credibility I triangulated data; i.e., I used multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings (Yin, 2009); performed member checks by sending participants a copy of their interview transcript and asking them to verify the accuracy of the content; and requested peer (or colleague) review of my findings as they emerged. Multiple data sources that were used to confirm findings included participant interviews and document review. Documents included newspaper articles, pamphlets, correspondence to families and the community, minutes

from attendance committee review meetings, academic achievement reports, school newsletters, and written records of district-wide events within the case I was studying.

Peer debriefing was a strategy that supported my research in a consistent manner as it required that I work with several colleagues who held impartial views of the study. Impartial peers were individuals with prior experience with the topic of research. I sought their aid to examine drafts of findings and general methodology to gain beneficial feedback, enhance credibility, and ensure validity. Through the investigation, peers were asked to identify what they considered vague descriptions of data that required further clarification. A thorough debriefing included an examination of transcribed interviews (names of participants deleted for confidentiality), policy documents, and handwritten reflections. To avoid jeopardizing credibility, I met with peers following transcription of interviews.

To increase dependability of study findings, I provided a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis methods and how decisions were made throughout the study. Recording the process in notes was useful in analysis. Finally, to enable other researchers to make decisions about transferability of results, I used detailed descriptions. The interview format of in-depth, one-on-one, digitally recorded and immediately transcribed narratives ensured credibility of the content. Detailed notes were made to maintain consistent questioning and probing techniques. Reflective journals were kept throughout all phases of data collection and analysis. Grounded theory connotes a general explanation that develops in interaction with the data and was continually tested and refined as data collection continued.

To safeguard against my own bias as an English as a second language teacher, I wrote about my impressions and experiences following interviews with students. Following each interview, I reflected upon the overall interaction to address any concerns related to my

interpretation of the responses (syntax, pronunciation, word choice) and compared my personal reflection of the data against the structured data analysis. These entries presented a picture of my perceptions of the interview session including the student's body language, intonation, general attitude about the interview, and how the responses were delivered.

Entries included a reflective summary of the data prior to structured analysis and documentation. While it may be impossible to eliminate all researcher bias, maintaining journal entries helped minimize the effects that my personal experiences may have had on what is being reported in this study, while facilitating my ability to identify instances where validity may be threatened during the stages of data analysis and reporting. Reflecting in this manner added another level of validity to ensure that the results were derived from the responses of the participants and not my own bias. This qualitative case study is concerned with the meanings that participants attributed to their reason(s) for being chronically absent. I was entrusted to accurately present the participants' stories. To ensure that the students' responses were truthful, I emphasized that I am not a teacher or administrator in the school district that they attend and have no authority over them. Furthermore, I assured participants that their identities would be kept private with the use of pseudonyms, and their responses would remain confidential.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the prominent themes and patterns I found through my analysis of one-on-one interviews with six English learners and six school personnel at a suburban New Jersey high school. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the personal experiences of high school English learners (ELs) that support or inhibit their attendance. In the context of exploring student voice related to English learners' chronic absenteeism, several themes and patterns emerged. The findings reflect commonalities in the students' responses regarding the influence of family, financial pressures, transportation issues, immigration concerns, academic challenges as English learners, and some notable experiences, if not widely spread. Interviews with school personnel also elicited ideas about how to combat chronic absenteeism at the high school.

High School English Learners' Perceptions

Family Influences

English learners identified the barriers that prevented them from regularly attending high school. Each participant offered insight into why they have missed more than 10 percent of the school year (18 days or more) and the issues that directly affect them at school and at home. The influence of family played an important part in explaining students' absenteeism (and attendance) in several different ways. The participation of parents in regular and meaningful communication involving academics played an integral and positive role in their child's attendance. In contrast, the absence of family was a barrier to attendance for some.

Family Supports to Counteract Chronic Absenteeism

Positive family involvement was identified as a key component in working to eliminate one of the barriers to attendance for two student participants. While both students were chronically absent due to several factors, their parents worked to reduce their evening activities so they could get a good night's sleep. For those two students, they reported the focus had become their ability to sleep at least eight hours each night in order to be able to catch the bus and get to school on time. One student described a modern-day equivalent of a "light's out" policy to restrict technology at bedtime. Another student stated she was encouraged to resign from a twenty-hour evening shift at McDonald's. In place of her salary, she received an allowance for chores completed at home.

Brayan described his parents' active role in supporting their son's efforts to get to school on time each day. Brayan stated that he, his mother, and step father mutually recognized that his gaming, internet, and cell phone usage was cutting into his much-needed sleep time. Further, it was directly impacting his ability to attend school. He confessed that Fortnite, the online video game that he played with friends, had been keeping him up into the early hours of the morning. During the 2017-2018 school year and the early part of 2018-2019, his late-night video game routine caused him to oversleep, miss the bus, and report absent from school on average once a week. Again, during the first three months of the 2018-2019 school year, Brayan had already missed 12 days of school, some of which had been attributed to gaming. Brayan's first marking period report card precipitated the intervention of his parents. Already 12 days absent, Brayan was in danger of losing credit for the year, and he was failing most of his classes. Together, he and his parents came up with a plan to curtail his gaming habits. A weekday digital curfew was imposed at 10 p.m. to turn off his video game console, computer, and cell phone. Brayan

admitted he has not always followed the plan, but when he has, he has been able to wake up on time to catch the bus.

I'm turning off everything early so I can get to school on time. I'm really trying to be here. I'm trying my best, but I'm really obsessed with video games.

Lainey's parents also supported her efforts to get a good night's sleep this year so she could arrive on time every day and improve attendance. When her boss at McDonald's would not agree to adjust Lainey's hours, she spoke with her parents, and they were in favor of her decision to give up her part-time job. Her twenty-hour a week work schedule was the biggest factor related to her chronic absenteeism.

The first thing was I was working 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. every day so sometimes I don't want to wake up. I get depression because I see my grades, and I don't understand nothing, so I feel stupid or something. I left the job. I talked to my boss and they don't let me change. They told me I could select my hours, but that's a lie.

With her parents' blessing, and an agreement that she could earn a small allowance at home, she quit her job at McDonald's in order to focus on school. Lainey voiced a desire to do well this year and make school a priority, but she misses the extra money and knows it would go far to help the family budget.

Family Obligations and Challenges that Present Barriers to Attendance

Family obligations and challenges were identified as contributing factors for four out of six English learners' chronic absenteeism. Included in the category were issues such as limited understanding of the importance of attendance/school, parent work schedules, family travel, and family care obligations. All of these factors hampered students' ability to maintain daily routines. Catherine related an example of parents not fully comprehending the consequences of missing school or being late. When her mother has worked all night, she has chosen to spend time with Catherine and her sister in the morning. While her mother has sometimes driven

Catherine and her sister after they have missed the bus, she is not always able to do so. On those days the sisters chose to stay home for the day.

Lately my mom always takes us (to school). She works a lot, so she wants to spend time with us in the morning. She says ‘it doesn’t matter if you guys are late;’ well it does, but she wants to see us. Sometimes I take an Uber if I miss the bus, and my mother can’t take us. Sometimes I just stay home to be with her.

It can be hard for students to either go against their parents or resist the temptation to avoid school when their parents are not demanding that they attend. For Juan, his mother’s work schedule played a significant role in determining whether he could get to school. Since moving to the new home that they share with Juan’s aunt and niece, Juan’s mother has started working longer hours. As a result, Juan has been left on his own when he needs to leave in the morning and when he returns home from school. Juan was used to having his mother get him up in the morning before the move and has not developed his own strategies for getting to school since relocating. Now that she is already at work in the morning when he needs to leave and still at work at the end of a school day, there has been no one home to monitor his absences.

Missing school means it has been twice as hard to catch up with missed assignments, and Juan has often felt overwhelmed. Instead of doing his homework, he admitted he has sometimes slept, gone to a friend’s house, or played video games. Adjusting to his new home and school environment has been difficult now that his mother is working longer hours. When speaking about their new living arrangement, he stated dejectedly, “I liked it better in the last place.”

When students and parents are forced to reverse the role of caregiver, the responsibilities attached to that dynamic can sometimes present significant barriers to attendance. This was the case for two students who were pressed with family care during the illness of parents. For Lainey and William, family medical emergencies caused them to miss a significant amount of time during the 2017-2018 school year. In both cases, the students’ mothers were hospitalized.

Both students stayed with their mothers to act as translators because their English was better than that of the other family members. Both students lost credit for the classes they missed because they did not know they were required to obtain documentation from hospital staff members. Both students were unaware that documentation verifying their mothers' medical procedures would excuse their absences for credit recovery.

Lainey has also learned that she needs to bring in a doctor's note whenever she is out sick in order to have those absences excused.

Another reason for my absences was I was sick. Now I know that if I bring my note from my mom, they don't excuse it. I have to see the doctor.

Normally, William's mother would have called the school to report him absent. However, during her hospitalization, she was unable to do so. When asked if he told anyone at school about his mother's hospitalization and the challenges he faced at school, he said he did not share the situation with anyone in the district. "No, it was just me and my sister. Just my sister knew." Having recently enrolled in the district before his mother became ill, William had not yet developed any relationships with school personnel. However, by the end of the 2017-2018 school year William was encouraged to share the reason for his absences related to his mother's care with the appeals board and was able to recoup lost credits by completing a portfolio project. William voiced that he clearly misses the support of extended family he left behind in the Dominican Republic. "I have a lot of family there."

Financial Factors

Financial issues also prevented some students from prioritizing school attendance. In some cases, students voiced that they could not give up employment due to financial responsibilities. Apart from one, all the students described varying levels of economically disadvantaged households that required every member to contribute financially. Such difficulties

compound and/or help explain these students not getting to school due to a lack of sleep or a lack of time to do the required homework in preparation for class work. Employment responsibilities during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 played a role in missed school for four of the six participants.

Jessica lives alone and is under the supervision of the Department of Children Protection and Permanency (DCPP), formerly known as the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS).

I live independently right now because I was pulled by DYFS. Because I'm working and I have a lot of things like my homework, I'm not doing good. I'm so tired because I work after school. Last week I missed because I was tired. I start work at 4 p.m. and I finish at 8 p.m. every day, Saturdays and Sundays too. I have to pay my rent. I try to come here every day, but it's too hard.

While she received government assistance with food and utilities, Jessica was responsible for paying her rent. Working seven days a week at a business that processes paychecks and personal checks left very little time for her to get homework done. In addition, Jessica must take public transportation to work immediately after school, which made it difficult to stay after school to receive extra help. When asked if the school has communicated with Jessica directly about the amount of days she has missed, she admitted, "The school calls, but it doesn't help." She did believe that a daily wake-up call from someone at the school might help her to get out of bed in the morning. "I don't have family here. I never get to see my mom."

Prior to enrolling in school at the study site, William attended school in New London, Connecticut for a year. He reported that life has changed for William, his mother, and his sister since they relocated to New Jersey, "It was different. My stepfather was living there; my mom's husband." William shared that the absence of his stepfather has contributed to the family's

financial strain. As a result, William has been giving his entire paycheck to his mother to help pay the rent.

During the week, William has worked on Monday and Wednesday from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. as a busboy at a local diner. He also worked an additional six hours on Saturdays and Sundays for a total of 20 hours a week. William had internet access on his phone and tried to get schoolwork done during his break at work, but he reported that there is never enough time. Like Juan, William has been responsible for getting himself up in the morning and off to school. His mother has already left for work. His work schedule made it difficult to wake up in the morning for school. He has often overslept, which caused him to miss the entire day of school. Furthermore, he admitted that when he has attended school after working late, he has regularly fallen asleep during class time and study hall.

Transportation Issues

Distance, time, and transportation to school were identified as issues that discouraged four out of six interview participants from regular school attendance. Inconvenient access to school during bad weather, especially during winter months was a significant challenge. Students either did not have parents at home when they needed to leave for school, or their parents did not have driver's licenses and/or vehicles available when the students missed the bus.

Winter weather has made it especially difficult for three students who often walked to school. Two students have walked when they have missed the bus. However, William's only option has been to walk since he lived too close to the school to qualify for transportation. Of the three students who have faced transportation barriers, only William voiced safety concerns on the way to school during bad weather. His 15-minute walk to school, which he considered safe in normal weather conditions, became treacherous during the winter. In good weather the

path was clear. However, when it snowed, the path was often plowed under and covered in ice, and walking became difficult and hazardous. William said he has boots, but “there is nowhere to walk. There is a path, but it’s piled with snow.” While this seems like an issue that could have been addressed by the district to create a safe pathway, the student had not voiced his difficulties navigating the walkway to anyone prior to my interview. Shy, exhausted, and struggling to communicate, he appeared to be trying to handle everything on his own.

Since walking has been his only option for getting to school daily, William expressed with some frustration that he felt it was unfair to be penalized with lunch detention when he arrived late to school during the winter months.

If I get to school late, I get lunch detention. I don’t like that because I’m late when it’s snowing. I walk. Last year, yes, I had lunch detention, but not this year. Not yet.

In order to avoid lunch detention, William said he planned to use Uber to get to school in bad weather when he can afford it. In fact, all the students were familiar with Uber and said they had used it as an option, but it was chosen rarely due to the expense. Similarly, when Brayan, Catherine, and Lainey have overslept and missed the bus and family members were not available to drive them, they have had to take an Uber to get to school on time. Often, when they did not have the funds to pay for a ride or knew Uber would not get them to school on time, they chose to stay home for the day.

Immigration Factors

Family travel related to addressing immigration requirements were cited by two students as their greatest contributing factor of chronic absenteeism during 2017-2018. Many of Catherine’s absences were attributed to being detained by immigration officials in Colombia. After her father’s death, she overstayed her visit in Colombia, not understanding the ramifications. “I didn’t have my dad’s death certificate (and needed it to leave Colombia)

because I'm a minor." As a result of being detained in her country of origin, she missed two weeks of school. Catherine was also unaware of the consequences of missing so much school until she returned. When she got back to New Jersey, she learned she could not simply return to class but was required to re-enroll in school. The district's Board of Education also required the death certificate and immigration documentation to excuse her absences for credit recovery, which Catherine was unable to produce.

Brayan and his family were often required to travel out of state to Maryland and Pennsylvania for court appearances related to the family's residency in the United States. To attend those meetings, the family travelled by car. As a result, Brayan was gone at least three days each time they travelled to fulfill immigration requirements.

Well, we are immigrants, so we are doing the papers. Two of those days are traveling to Pennsylvania or Maryland and a day there. I always call.

In total, the family's out-of-state travel was attributed to 6 of the 12 days he had already missed by November of the 2018-2019 academic school year. Brayan and his family met with the attendance officer in late November and learned that calling the school is not enough to excuse the absences. They learned they needed to provide documentation from immigration officials in order for Brayan to receive credit in his coursework. Since meeting with the attendance officer, he and his family are prepared to procure documentation during any future court appearances.

The principal stated he has found the greatest challenge the district continued to face with parents of English learners is that they have been afraid to come into the school.

They're afraid that maybe there's something the matter with their immigration status and that they're going to get in trouble. We're trying to change that perception. We want them to feel welcome here.

In the past, the principal used the translation services of his secretary to call home to ask families for a meeting. The secretary would explain that the reason for the meeting was to

discuss the student's academic progress or concerns about attendance. To put family members at ease, ESL department leaders and teachers would also play a role. Correspondence and communication would include a reassurance that the sole purpose of the meeting was to discuss the student. Families would be encouraged to invite extended family and friends to join the meeting for added support and translation. The ESL department also took an active role in coordinating meetings with families at the high school. Those meetings often included extended family members who have been in the country longer to provide translation services and offer further clarification. In fact, school personnel welcomed everyone to attend and did not put a limit on the number of guests who could join the meeting. The inclusion of a support network provided additional comfort to families, especially if they were familiar with the school district and its rules and policies.

English Learners' Academic Challenges

Poor school attendance among the English learner participants has manifested itself in significant costs in terms of their academic learning and connection to peers and teachers. Consequently, academic issues were identified by all of the chronically absent student participants. Challenges reported included preparedness and an understanding of content being delivered in English, especially after extended absences. Students also reported high levels of stress and frustration at losing ground academically.

Classes taught by monolingual English teachers were cited by students as more challenging, and these were the classes in which more students were struggling to demonstrate mastery of content. English language proficiency was a significant barrier to the students' capacity to recover academically after a lengthy absence. All the student participants stated that Spanish was the language spoken at home and socially with most friends at school. For many

students, the language barrier made it very difficult to adjust to school in New Jersey when they first arrived, especially when they started high school in the current district of mostly English speakers. Catherine was one of the students who avoided attending classes because instruction in English was a challenge. Additionally, Catherine's interrupted formal education in Colombia made it difficult for her to keep up with classmates and course responsibilities. During the 2017-2018 academic school year, Catherine missed 24 days of 11th grade.

I couldn't understand classes at all. I used to stay home a lot because whenever I get sick, I can't focus at all. I'm really low in school because since I was a freshman; I didn't get my classes. I have to catch up but in a really rough way. If I don't copy from others, the teacher must explain it to me. Since I was in middle school I always had 'F's.' I have never passed any classes.

Similarly, when Jessica enrolled in the school district in 2016, she stated, "It was hard because I didn't speak anything in English. Now I speak a little bit." Despite that and other challenges, Jessica was excelling academically.

Prior to registering for school at the study site, Brayan and Juan attended different New Jersey schools that housed many Spanish speakers. Before enrolling in his current high school, Brayan attended a neighboring middle school for two years in a district composed of mostly Spanish speaking students and teachers. Brayan is one example of a student who has embraced his new school culture and views being immersed in English as a positive development, especially because his girlfriend speaks only English.

It was kind of hard at first because my English wasn't good, but I used Google translate. I have learned more English here than at the other school because more people speak English here.

Like Brayan, Juan attended a New Jersey high school where all his classes were taught in Spanish throughout the year. However, Juan has not adjusted well to an environment dominated by English speaking classmates and teachers. He said he finds his classes harder and misses his

friends and teachers at the other school. Initially, he attributed his chronic absenteeism to headaches. When asked if he had seen the school nurse or a doctor, Juan reported that he had not. As the interview progressed, Juan voiced that the linguistic barrier and the struggle to understand his English-speaking teachers and classmates have been stressful for him. He went on to voice that the stress of trying to understand what is being taught and spoken in English brings on the headaches.

Though Juan's chronic absenteeism caused him to repeat the ninth grade, his grades were dropping again due to being frequently absent and his failure to make up the work he missed when absent. Instead of seeking help with schoolwork or his headaches, Juan said he was in the habit of getting on the bus at the end of the day and ignoring his homework when he got home. Admittedly, he avoided speaking English and added, "I only hear English; I don't listen." When asked what the school or his mother could do to help him with his headaches and stress to help him get to school more often, he said, "I don't know."

William's English proficiency level was at the beginning stages, and he used Google translate to communicate occasionally during the interview. Like Brayan, William also viewed learning English as something positive, even while he acknowledged that it is not easy, "It's hard (English), but it helps me with work and the customers.

They say 'I need something' like water, soda, napkins, something. The customers talk to me, and I feel good when they need something, and I know what to get. The customers are good to me.

While all the students stated it was difficult to transition to their new high school as Spanish speakers, most of them credited the high school's English immersion program for their improved language ability in the short time they had been there. Apart from Juan, all of the students reported that their developing confidence in English proficiency had enabled them to better navigate school

policies and culture, develop relationships with teachers and peers, and advocate for themselves, especially as it related to absenteeism.

Loss of Instructional Time

A lack of English language proficiency was reported as a significant barrier in how students were able to rebound academically after a lengthy absence. Prolonged absences made it difficult to catch up with work requirements in all their classes.

Though Jessica was able to keep her grades up despite her challenges, she believed that it would help her to have a tutor or mentor available to keep her on track with her assignments.

Yeah, I think that would help me. I try every day to come here to school early. I talked with my geometry teacher, and I'll ask for help.

In the past, Catherine claimed she made the effort to seek tutoring assistance after an extended absence but found it did not help. She explained that there were discrepancies in the type of coursework she was exposed to in Colombia before arriving in the United States. Catherine did not learn pre-Algebra in middle school while in Colombia. Additionally, the way math was taught to elementary and middle school students in the United States diverged from the instructional practices of her home country. Algebra has posed the biggest obstacle for Catherine, but there were large gaps in her educational background knowledge across the curriculum in addition to challenges attributed to her English proficiency.

Yeah, I stay sometimes with a tutor. For example: Algebra. Since I'm a junior they can't teach me from (what other students learned in) 7th grade. I didn't have it in 7th grade, so how can I catch up? If they explain me something it doesn't help. There are some things I just can't get.

Both Brayan and William stated that in addition to speaking with teachers, they found it necessary to also communicate with friends to get help with assignments. Talking with friends helped them learn the work they missed when they were absent for an extended time. For Catherine, the Dean

of Students was the person she reached out to when she was in distress about having missed a lot of school. The Dean has been tasked by the principal to lead the attendance review committee and closely monitor chronic absenteeism at the high school. At the start of the 2017-2018 school year, Catherine met with the Dean of Students to discuss reentry after being detained in Columbia. Catherine was not able to have her absences excused for credit recovery, but she reported that it was the Dean who tried hardest to help and always made time to listen when Catherine stopped by her office. Most of Catherine's stress was related to her struggle to make up assignments after being absent and her inability to catch up with classmates.

School Personnel Perceptions

This chapter also explores the experiences and perceptions of school personnel related to English learner students' chronic absenteeism. In addition to school personnel viewpoints, school leaders shared a number of challenges and strategies. Current leadership has recognized the need for a thorough review of school-based policies and responses and has implemented a tiered approach, with an emphasis on expanding non-punitive incentives. Under the leadership of the principal, an action plan has been incorporated to include the creation of an attendance review committee, the services of in-house, bilingual translators to improve home-school communication, and the expansion of community partnerships. The goal of this whole school approach is to actively involve all stakeholders to create viable solutions toward a shared mission. The role of school leaders in understanding and responding to high school English learner absenteeism concerns is presented and serves as a starting point for areas of focus among this population.

School Based Policies and Responses: Tiered Approach

Students expressed finding inspiration to attend school from multiple sources. Similarly, school personnel voiced the opinion that they recognized multiple strategies are needed to effectively reduce chronic absenteeism. While there is not one specific support that will motivate all students to get to school every day, school leaders have implemented a tiered approach that they hope will make a difference in a student's ability or desire to attend. An appeals process, a portfolio project, and a mentor program are three parts of a non-punitive tiered approach that supports chronically absent students.

According to school personnel, a punitive approach had been the central remedy for chronic absenteeism before the current principal arrived in early 2018. Under the current principal's leadership, while school policy dictates that punitive measures remain in place, there is a greater focus on positive reinforcement and a tiered approach to applying consequences for chronic absenteeism. The principal reiterated that truancy cases have decreased.

Appeals Process

While the district still leaned toward the punitive side by taking credits away at the end of the year when students had accumulated unexcused absences, one way that the district supported all chronically absent students was to provide them with an opportunity to appeal their absence record. According to the principal, all options were on the table when reviewing a student's chronic absenteeism. Ultimately, a determination of the student's chronic absenteeism record was under the purview of the student absence appeals board. Comprised of instructional deans and the principal, the board made the final decision to either reinstitute credits, assign additional work, or put a plan into place for students to help them minimize absences in the future. At the end of the school year, chronically absent students received notification that they had lost credits

for the classes for which minimum absences were exceeded. At that time, the student absence appeals board met with students who were losing credit, and the student's absenteeism was evaluated. Thereafter, students and family members were given an opportunity to meet with the principal over the summer. According to the principal's rough estimate, at least 10 out of the 13 school-wide cases had a successful appeal last summer.

There is an appeal process, and I'm often very lenient. I'll put the kids under a contract for a year to try to motivate them to come to school to create more of an incentive, but I do think that we need to get better at providing incentives for students, and that's part of the task of the new attendance committee. Over the summer a couple of people on the committee have been looking at what other schools are doing. When they meet those are some of the things they can talk about. Ultimately, I only took credits from two or three students because they never responded to anything. They didn't come in; they didn't make the effort.

For students who adhered to responsibilities outlined in an appeal, credits were reinstated either when documentation was provided to explain the student's absence or when portfolio projects were completed according to a mutually agreed upon contract. In doing so, students were able to satisfy course requirements and advance to the next grade level or graduate. While the principal was largely successful in assisting a majority of students with the appeal process, he was genuinely disappointed with his inability to obtain a satisfactory result for all 13 students despite multiple attempts to connect with students and families through mail and email.

Portfolio Project

In addition to the appeals process, the principal offered the remainder of the chronically absent students the opportunity to complete a portfolio project. Under the supervision and instruction of teachers during before and after school instruction, students were required to complete a project that garnered the necessary credits to pass a course. Both students and their parents/guardians were required to sign a contract and complete the work to the satisfaction of the principal and content teacher based on objectives, state standards, and assessments that

demonstrate mastery. William was unable to keep up with his work in 2017-2018, and his grades dropped. However, he was able to progress to grade 12 because he completed a portfolio project in the spring. Catherine was also among those who were given an opportunity to participate in a portfolio project in the Spring of 2018 in order to make up coursework and move to the next level grade level. While she initially agreed, Catherine did not follow through. In not completing the portfolio project, she lost the opportunity to progress to the next grade level.

Mentor Program

A third program in place to support chronically absent students was a teacher-led initiative. In January 2018 two high school teachers who were completing their administrative internship toward supervisory certification piloted a program that is now in the early stages of being expanded. The interns identified a small group of students at the high school who were already chronically absent in October 2017. The determination was based on the total number of absences at that point in the school year, i.e., four or more. The mentors determined that the students in the greatest need were freshmen and seniors.

Senior students needed to graduate, and if they were absent too many days, they would not be doing that at all or on time. With freshmen the goal was starting the process of developing good behavior patterns that would hopefully help them throughout the course of their high school career.

Once students were identified the mentors dug a little deeper. They reached out to the student's grade level administrator to ask if the students were a part of any other intervention program.

We have other programs at the school, and we didn't want to doubly assail the students or unnecessarily waste resources if they were already getting that support via some other avenue like AVID for instance, which works for the freshman students.

Once the interns cross-referenced their list, they came up with 10 students between them. They began working with the students during teacher preparation periods because they did not have assigned periods to meet with students.

We didn't want to take the students out of the same period every day either when we met with them. We would take them out of a class that was hopefully a class they could afford to miss.

During the initial meeting the mentors introduced themselves to the students and let them know that participation in the program was not a punitive measure. According to a co-founder of the mentor program, who is also a member of the attendance committee, the program provided a "personalized kind of mentorship, intensive mentorship, in a non-punitive fashion." While assuring the students that they were not in any kind of trouble whatsoever, they did inform the students of the amount of days they had missed and let them know the repercussions.

"Obviously the conversations varied from student to student and also grade to grade because if you talk to a freshman then they have a very different experience than a senior, and they kind of know the system much less." The mentors tried to diagnose exactly what the issue was that the student was facing at home, why they could not get to school, or why they were choosing not to get to school. "From there we would actually have them sign a contract and we would give them three attainable goals or specific procedures to help them improve their attendance."

In addition to being identified for the portfolio project, Catherine was among those students identified for the mentor program in the Spring of 2018. She received a written agreement of behavior that served as a contract for improvement and created opportunities for mentors to check in with her on a bi-weekly basis. Due to the severity of her chronic absenteeism, Catherine and her mentor scheduled weekly meetings to check in and to discuss ways that she could recoup her credits and come up with strategies to improve her attendance.

Catherine admitted that she often missed those meetings. “No (the mentor program did not work for me) because it was the end of the year. I already missed too many days.” The same mentor had already reached out to her again in the Fall 2018. Catherine relayed that the mentor requested to set up a meeting so that the two of them can come up with strategies to help her get back on track. “Yes, he said he wants to have a meeting with me, but he didn’t say when.”

Mentors shared that they noted some perceived cultural differences among English learners related to how education in their country of origin was viewed by families and the value placed on attendance, but nothing was explicitly stated to them by students. The principal recounted an instance of an English learner who faced a barrier to attendance during the 2017-2018 school year.

We struggled with a girl last year, and she ultimately didn't graduate. She had a lot of absences. Her parents just didn’t support her education. Their priority was that they needed her to be the hostess in their restaurant. You know, we fought. We tried to talk with them to encourage attendance for her to get her diploma, but she didn't return this year. She’s done.

The mentors worked with two English learners during the pilot program in early 2018, one student that was currently enrolled in the ESL program, and one that had exited. The mentors related that each student had very specific situations that differentiated them from everybody else in the program.

We had a student from Honduras. Previously, the year before, the student had major issues with absenteeism and some type of family issues, without getting into too much detail. The student lost credit and never really recouped those absences. Later the student became apathetic. While it’s not a cultural thing per se, it was the student’s history with absenteeism that continued to pervade their ability to make it to school.

In some cases, the attainable goals that were written into the contract were to set an alarm clock and keep it out of reach from their bed, so they had to get up to turn it off. Another goal was for students to get their clothes ready the night before. Mentors believed this was especially

effective for some of the younger students who had previously had support at home in the past but perhaps did not have that any more due to the loss of a family member.

Maybe they had had a grandparent (living with them) before, but that support wasn't around anymore so they kind of needed to be preemptive. Some of the discussions were philosophical in nature. Some of it was discussing how this was really going to have an impact. Some of them didn't know that if they miss X number of classes, they were going to lose credit for a course. Some of them didn't realize that a course was even necessary for them to graduate in the first place.

The mentors would stress why being present was so important whether it be in high school, in college, or at the workplace. They shared research with students regarding the success that other students experienced when they were in school versus the long-term effects of missing school.

The odds are stacked against them when they are not in school. Not just even graduation but down the road, right? So, we shared some of that information with them as well.

Meetings would take place every two months or so unless a more frequent meeting was warranted by a greater number of absences.

Then we'd meet sooner to ask 'Hey, what's going on? What's the deal?' and some of it was medical, and they were going to get a note for it. Some of it wasn't. Overall, we had a decent amount of success.

The mentors viewed the program as successful in reducing absences for nine out of ten targeted students who were able to do so by adhering to the behavior management constructs detailed in the contracts. In addition, all nine students improved academically across all subject areas.

At the very least, they got better. Some got better at a higher rate than others, but it was all somewhat successful. What we found was more important than I realized. Having something to tether them tangibly to the school building was important. In one instance, it was a student wanting to play baseball in the spring, and that was huge for him. The fact that we were able to connect academics to attendance played a huge role in whether he was able to be on the team. Whereas some students benefitted just from knowing that we were looking for them, asking about them, and wanting to hear what they had to say. That was so much more powerful than I first thought because these were kids that were legitimately falling through the cracks. They weren't necessarily failing their classes, they weren't discipline problems, they were just absent a few times a month, and it was catching up with them. Through the mentorship program they were accountable to

something. They were accountable to us knowing that we were going to have this conversation, knowing we were in their corner looking out for them.

Unfortunately, the mentors were not able to bring one of the students back into the fold. She was working a 50-hour-a-week job, and her parents did not even want her to continue school and graduate. There was no support at home.

The research contributed by the mentors was being used as a model to create an expanded mentor program to train additional teachers to reach more students. While the mentors conducted meetings with students and collaborated on the project on their own time during lunch and preparation periods, they have recommended that an expanded program provide a block of time for school personnel to devote to mentoring students that does not require sacrificing personal time by implementing a designated duty schedule during the school day.

Focus on Non-Punitive Incentives: Policy Changes / Revisions

The study site's proactive commitment to combat chronic absenteeism was evident in the creation of non-punitive incentives while still enforcing district policies. The current principal has been a district administrator for 11 years. He was brought on as principal of the high school in January of 2018. The graduation rate was 80% when he came on board, compared to the state average of 90.5% and the national average of 84%. The principal attributed a part of that to chronic absenteeism. "Over the past decade, chronic absence has gone from being a virtually unknown concept to a national education metric that provides every school with critical data revealing how many students miss so much school that their academic success is jeopardized" (Chang, Bauer & Byrnes, 2018). District leadership recognized chronic absence as a significant obstacle to academic success. Last year was the principal's first year at the high school, and he made chronic absenteeism and graduation rates the focal point of his first half year tenure. The principal stated emphatically that he is committed to getting students to school.

It's a challenge that faces the school community, but overall my belief is I want students in class. I feel that's the best way for students to learn. I'm really trying to reduce suspensions, give staff support in dealing with students who present behavior challenges, and reduce absenteeism by creating the attendance review committee. We want students in school.

Under the principal's leadership, there are efforts underway to offer and ensure the implementation of learning support programs for pupils vulnerable to chronic absence. A three-tiered early intervention has been implemented or considered in an effort to reduce chronic absenteeism at the study site. Tier 1 strategies were designed for at risk students to encourage good attendance, create an environment that fosters positive relationships with families and students, communicate the impact of chronic absenteeism to all stakeholders, and implement programs to recognize good attendance. Tier 2 interventions included personalized early outreach with the expanded mentor program under consideration and an action plan (e.g., contract) for students who need more support to avoid chronic absence. Tier 3 interventions have included a coordinated interagency response and legal intervention for truant students requiring intensive support.

According to the principal, the attendance policies are clearly stated but continually reviewed.

We hold students to a certain number of allowed absences, which I think are very fair. However, what we've experienced is that over the last few years, our population has become more transient, and many of those students come with some attendance issues. Since we're continually looking at our policy, we're now seeing that it's not working for all students, so we want to support them to come and get to school.

Although students were still receiving detentions and suspensions for unexcused absences, all school personnel stated they believed that the school's attendance policies were changing for the better. To their knowledge, they could not identify a specific balance between incentives to comply versus punitive measures. However, they revealed that discussions were

underway to redefine school policy, actions, and responsibilities. All school personnel reported that it was obvious the punitive actions needed to change based on the conversations that have taken place under the leadership of the current principal. While all school personnel participants relayed a genuine commitment to ensure students show up to class every day, the leadership role that the principal has undertaken is irreplaceable. He has acted to ensure the high school approached chronic absenteeism with a comprehensive, tiered approach to improving attendance that aligns with the overall mission of promoting academic achievement for all students.

Whole-School Approach

According to an interactive map created by The Hamilton Project (2018), using national data reported by school districts to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights from the 2015-16 school year, chronic absence among Limited English Proficient (LEP) students at the high school reached 18.6 percent, which exceeded the district rate of 10.2 percent and the state rate of 11.3 percent, but was less than the overall national level of 24.3 percent for the LEP population. District absenteeism rates included school days missed for any reason, excused or unexcused, including illness and disciplinary issues like suspensions. As a result, the school leadership team believed reducing absenteeism required a whole-school approach to include data analysis, an examination of discipline policies, encouraging academic engagement to keep students motivated to show up, and coordinated district resources to tackle non-academic factors that keep students out of school.

Attendance Review Committee

At the start of the 2018-2019 school year, an attendance review committee was formed to begin collecting and continuously reviewing information to identify students at risk of chronic absenteeism. While still in the early stages, the attendance review committee has used monthly

meetings to discuss strategies they believe are necessary to get students to school. The Dean of Students is tasked with overseeing the attendance review committee's work. Ultimately, the principal envisions the structure of the committee to include the Dean of Students, the attendance officer, the two teachers who piloted the mentorship program, the school nurse, and one or two guidance counselors. The school's SAC (student assistance counselor), responsible for supporting students at risk for school failure, and/or a member of the child study team will be asked to represent special education students. When asked if he had considered inviting students to join the committee, the principal said that might be a possibility once the committee was firmly established and fully functional.

The Dean of Students noted that in response to the ESSA requirement of having to list chronic absenteeism rates for the prior school year on their state report card, they have decided to set a percentage, rather than a fixed number. The Dean has found that setting a percentage allows the district to track students' missed school time throughout the school year. Having the data tracked provides a moving indicator that can alert school leaders early if there is a problem. School leaders are focused on diagnosing patterns of absenteeism among the affected students. Their goal is to gather information at the early stages to gain further insight into causes. Using a data-driven, comprehensive approach as a diagnostic tool for early detection, the Dean believes the district can better identify where early intervention is needed.

Recognizing that the system of individual teachers taking attendance is not foolproof, the Dean of Students explained there are efforts underway to provide professional development to teachers so that absenteeism is recorded uniformly and consistently. Some of the pitfalls to collecting consistent data can be traced to classroom or substitute teacher error or a lack of timely entry. Some problems with reporting are related to those students who have cut class or

arrived late to class after attendance was taken. Procedures and policies must be clearly stated and reviewed so that records can accurately reflect when students are in class and when they are not. During the year, district guidance counselors are also asked to monitor student attendance. Administrators become involved once a student is frequently absent. ESL teachers at the study site have taken the initiative to maintain an open dialogue with administrators when daily attendance records raise concerns. Among members of the attendance review committee and school leadership, everyone takes an active role in keeping track of student attendance.

The Dean of Students has had multiple conversations with students to discuss priorities with an emphasis on recognizing and appreciating the positive value of school and learning. Often setting aside time in the day when students show up in need of support, the Dean takes the opportunity to discuss attendance and mediate any distress students are experiencing. Administrators and staff at the high school encourage an open-door policy to build positive relationships. In working together with students and parents, they hope to improve school attendance concerns, community orientation, and the integration of all students.

Along with the formation of the attendance review committee, the district created a new position this year for an attendance officer. The teacher chosen to fill the role had been a Dean in charge of absenteeism a few years ago. The attendance officer's past contribution to the program resulted in a decline of absenteeism. However, when the district changed the structure of the job description for Deans to include only those educators with supervisory certification, the teacher went back into the classroom. Recently returned to the role at the start of the 2018-2019 school year, the attendance officer has been overseeing student tardiness and absenteeism and working with the attendance review committee to help identify chronically absent students. While the attendance officer does not speak Spanish, teachers in the building have taken the

initiative to send bilingual students to the office with ELs to translate important information about their absenteeism.

The attendance officer has had conversations with students when they were absent for two or more days a month, asking if there were any problems with the family or if students were experiencing any physical problems. Cognizant that students may be out of school once or twice because they were not feeling well, yet not sick enough to go to the doctor, the attendance officer always advised students to see a doctor and get a note. Bringing a note to school excused the absence so that students did not lose credits for courses they were taking. Since the officer and students started having those conversations, more students have been bringing doctors' notes after being out due to illness. Therefore, those absences were reported as excused for credit recovery. However, all absences were still reported to the state and counted against the district's attendance rate.

Under the principal's leadership, the high school also changed the consequences for students who arrived late to school. Previously, after four late arrivals to school or class, a student got an after-school detention. When they accumulated 20 late arrivals, they received an in-school suspension. The policy has been changed to reflect the principal's priority of having students in class learning.

I don't want kids to be out of class so we're still doing something punitive, but now they get an automatic lunch detention the first time they are late in the morning. The lunch detention is monitored by the attendance officer. She follows up with the students, and she also builds incentives into that to reward good behavior.

The attendance officer believes the policy is fair and provides opportunities to communicate with parents. "I believe it serves as a deterrent and encourages students to plan to arrive on time, which contributes to improved time management skills and reduced absenteeism." The officer reported that there were between 60 to 70 late arrivals to school in

December 2017; in December 2018 that number has dropped to 27. When a parent escorted their student into the high school, that student did not get lunch detention. “I haven’t had too many people take me up on that, but I have had a few parents who will call and say, ‘It was my fault’ that the student was late.” While late arrivals are not excused in those circumstances, students were exempt from lunch detention that day. Catherine mentioned that the attendance officer was the main point of contact for her at school as well as the person who communicated consequences and followed up with her mother.

Home-School Communication Barriers

The linguistic barrier at the study site on both sides of the relationship (home and school personnel) was another powerful factor that had inhibited effective intervention into students’ chronic absenteeism. Results of school personnel interviews highlighted a lack of comfort in communicating with families in their first language of Spanish while recognizing that parents needed to be fully apprised of the ramifications of missed days for their children. Reports from school personnel indicated that many days were missed because families were either not insistent on attendance or had their own health challenges or work responsibilities that made it impossible for them to ensure their child was attending. Prior to the current principal’s tenure, due to limited resources, school personnel were often unable to acquire adequate translation services for the variety of languages spoken by their students’ families. At the same time, family members who lacked enough English proficiency were often unable to communicate effectively with school personnel.

Although the high school secretary had often provided bilingual services, the principal did not want to overburden her with constant translating for school personnel. Additionally, he stated that while some members of the ESL department spoke Spanish well enough to

communicate with families, they too could not keep up with demand for translation services. To remedy this situation and keep parents informed of their child's progress and attendance, the principal recently implemented an intervention pathway designed to increase the number of in-house translators available to school personnel. Before the conclusion of the 2017-2018 school year, the principal identified high school bilingual teachers who speak various languages. He asked the vice principal in charge of the duty roster to establish a reorganized version to schedule bilingual teachers for translation duty and to make that task a priority this year. As a result, the schedule has been adjusted to currently include eight periods of translation duty for school personnel to communicate with families. Bilingual teachers have bridged the gap by making phone calls home or joining family meetings and conferences with English-speaking teachers and administrators. The principal wanted to give school personnel every opportunity to establish a connection and start a dialogue with families. His goal has been to meet the academic needs of the English learner population by including families in discussions about the importance of education and attendance.

Monthly attendance letters have always been posted to the parent portal in English. In order to reach families for whom English is their second language, efforts were underway to have attendance information translated into other languages before being posted. If parents visited the portal to monitor their children's grades, they would see attendance letters on that site. However, if parents were unable to comprehend the message in English, the district was not getting the maximum benefit from the technology available to them. "You know, we wish we would hear from all the parents because we want the parents to be a partner in this." The principal wanted to change the fact that the district always seemed to hear from the parents of students for whom absenteeism is not a real concern.

Community Partnerships

District-wide efforts to track chronic absenteeism and apply solutions were initiated by school leaders to support the entire community. The superintendent has stated that the focus has been on much more than improving score statistics; the larger issue is equity and access for all. In 2017, the school district received a grant from the New Jersey Collaborative Center for Nursing to combat chronic absenteeism. The grant has been used for community outreach to improve communication with parents and other community partners. Partnerships with local foundations were expanded through New Jersey health organizations, Advocates for Children of New Jersey, local research hospitals, the Board of Education, and the Mayor and town Council.

Working in partnership with students, parents, and the community the district has applied resources toward combating attendance obstacles and increasing opportunities for students to graduate high school. Enhanced communication efforts have included placing fliers and posters around town, posting messages on police signs and the township's television channel, and increased social media messages. Funds were allocated to before and after school opportunities and transportation options were being investigated to provide alternatives for students who miss the school bus. The district has envisioned bringing the conversation of attendance to the forefront of everybody's vocabulary. School personnel have maintained that educating everyone about the impact of absenteeism on academic, socioeconomic, and health outcomes begins with building strong community connections.

The next chapter completes the dissertation with the implications of theory and practice related to chronic absenteeism among high school English learners and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter provides a summary of the study, including an interpretation of the findings and explanation of their implications for the existing literature, theoretical understandings of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems, recommendations for policy and practice in the field, and recommendations for future research. The following includes a discussion of how the study's findings relate to and extend the existing literature on combatting chronic absenteeism among high school English learners. This qualitative case study aimed to understand how high school English learners account for their chronic absenteeism and the barriers that prevent them from regular school attendance. While there is wide agreement among educators that chronic absenteeism negatively impacts high school English learners, this research expanded the limited literature about chronic absenteeism among this population by hearing directly from the students. Key findings of the study, including common barriers and critical supports, were consistent with existing literature.

Notably, family-specific factors played a significant role in all the students' chronic absenteeism. Low family income, low parent involvement, conflicting home and school priorities, immigration concerns, and language differences were the predominant factors that students identified as contributing to their chronic absenteeism. In addition, four out of six students experienced a recent change in the family's structure that adversely affected their attendance. While the school implemented a number of key non-punitive supports that show promise in helping to re-engage students who were chronically absent or at risk, it is important to acknowledge that some factors related to family instability are outside the purview of school personnel. In fact, though school personnel were committed to seeking solutions, it is unrealistic

to think that schools can respond to all of the needs and challenges that prevent students from attending school. School leadership at the study site has some control over school-related issues related to chronic absenteeism. However, factors for which the school has little or no control require school leaders to seek community-level, strategic responses that include district and school personnel involvement.

Summary

Chronic absenteeism is at the forefront of ESSA school quality and student success improvement plans in schools throughout New Jersey and across the country. This study sought to include student voice to understand the experiences of the chronically absent and to identify the factors contributing to their absences. Furthermore, by focusing on New Jersey high school English learners, this study aimed to produce data on how students described their experiences with chronic absenteeism to understand any patterns or themes associated with barriers to regular attendance that could be used to drive policy decisions. Finally, drawing on students' suggestions and experiences, the goal of the study was to identify additional supports the students believed could potentially improve their attendance.

The sample of six high school English learners who participated in the study described their life circumstances and the experiences that contributed to their chronic absences. Some of the barriers that students faced were consistent with the literature (conflicting work schedules and family care issues), while others have not been explored in depth (immigration factors, acculturation, and independent living arrangements). Conversely, the issue of school safety as a deterrent to attendance, which is widely addressed in the literature review as a contributing factor to chronic absenteeism, did not emerge as particularly salient in this study. Each of the six students interviewed expressed the opinion that all aspects of the high school environment were

safe. None of the students interviewed claimed to have been bullied or harassed by other students either in school or while being transported to and from school, nor did they express that as a factor related to their chronic absenteeism. However, transportation issues and weather obstacles for walkers were relevant for some of the students' ability to get to school.

Historically, not getting enough sleep has been commonly reported among high school students and associated with several risk factors including being late to school, chronically absent, and experiencing poor academic performance (Medic, G., Wille, M., & Hemels, M. E., 2017). During puberty, adolescents become sleepy later at night and need to sleep later in the morning as a result in shifts in biological rhythms (Knutson, 2009). Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Sleep Medicine have recommended that high schools start at 8:30 a.m. or later to give students the opportunity to get the required 8 to 10 hours of sleep for good health. Studies have shown that when school start times have been pushed back, students have experienced increases in amount of sleep, academic performance, and attendance, as well as decreases in tardiness to first period classes (Wallace, 2016). Yet, according to a School Health Policies and Practices Study (2014), schools started before 8:30 a.m. in 93% of high schools and 83% of middle schools in the United States.

When asked what they believed would positively affect their ability to attend school, students in this study fervently and unanimously supported a later start time to the school day. Currently, students at the high school are required to be in class at 7:35 a.m. with dismissal at 2:15 p.m. English learner participants believed starting at 9 o'clock in the morning would be ideal, even if it meant they would be dismissed later. However, while none of the students were involved in after-school activities, two of them relied on income from after-school jobs. Bills related to school hours have been introduced in at least 14 states, including New Jersey. In

accordance with P.L. 2015, Chapter 96, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) was charged by Governor Christie with studying the issues, benefits, and options regarding instituting a later start time to the school day in middle schools and high schools. Common obstacles were identified as potential increases in transportation costs and scheduling difficulties, particularly for students involved in after-school activities and those who work at the end of the school day.

In 2017, the New Jersey Department of Education determined that “delaying the start times for schools has been shown to have significant advantages and few disadvantages.” It concluded that the decision should be left up to individual school districts to determine what is best for their community. However, in March of 2019, following years of debate about later start times, the New Jersey Senate Education Committee voted to advance a bill that would establish a pilot program (Addely, 2019). According to the bill’s sponsor, Senator Richard Codey, under the proposed legislation, five New Jersey school districts from different parts of the state were to be chosen to participate. Starting at 8:30 a.m. or later, the high schools were to be assessed over four years to focus on whether there were positive benefits in health, academic success, and/or safety.

In addition to later start times, most students expressed the benefits of having staff members check in with them or offer assistance when students most needed guidance and support. Research suggests a caring school environment, a clear sense of structure, and explicit expectations regarding conduct influence positive academic performance, values, and attitudes (Klem & Connell, 2009). English learners are significantly dependent upon the characteristics, skills, and capacities of the staff and leadership of school personnel devoted to supporting them (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Furthermore, Stanton-Salazar (2010) asserted the role of ESL teachers as institutional agents for English learners went beyond providing key resources and instruction

to enabling “the authentic empowerment of the student.” All but one of the students mentioned the same ESL teacher as having played an instrumental role in acclimating them to their new surroundings and responsibilities. This study demonstrated the potential benefit of school leaders creating relationship-building opportunities, a finding consistent with the literature on mentoring relationships.

When school personnel provided guidance on school norms and policies, students were better able to understand what was required of them across content areas. Great schools do not exist apart from great leaders (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2016). However, an effective principal recognizes that neither teachers nor principals who are working alone can improve schools, but rather teachers and principals working together (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). One of the most consistent findings from studies of effective school leadership is that authority to lead can be dispersed between and among school personnel (Bierly, Doyle, & Smith, 2016). The principal at the study site prioritized chronic absenteeism and shared actionable plans with school personnel.

Most significantly, this case study suggested the importance of a solutions-driven vision for improving attendance, by addressing barriers, improving communication, and including teachers, nurses, counselors, and supervisors in attendance review committee meetings. Delegation was at the forefront of the principal’s new leadership model to support school personnel so they could improve student outcomes. School personnel consistently related the principal’s leadership as the driving force behind positive engagement with stakeholders to tackle the issue of chronic absenteeism. It was not enough for the principal to have communicated the importance of understanding how chronic absenteeism affects student

outcomes, he also acted. In leading by example, the principal rallied all stakeholders to play a role in improving attendance for all students.

These findings highlight the importance of ethical leadership that puts the best interests of the students first by seeking innovative, non-punitive solutions. Many of the solutions the school developed are not unique to English Learners and apply to all chronically absent students. Strategies that were EL specific included the principal-led initiative to develop a bilingual duty roster for school personnel to communicate with parents and students during the school day. Translators were available to assist in conferences to discuss student absences, tardiness, lost credits, and academic progress in a timely manner. Another strategy specific to ELs was the selection of the ESL Supervisor to serve on the Attendance Review Committee. Given the findings of the study, enhancements to strategies currently in place would address the unique needs of English learner students as discussed in recommendations for practice and shown in Table 6. The implementation of an attendance review committee demonstrated the understanding that leadership is delegated in order to sustain improvement. Non-punitive measures to support student progression and address chronic absenteeism reflected a desire to create caring relationships. With a focus on capacity building, the school leadership team and attendance review committee were working together to analyze actionable data, engage in problem solving, and review best practices to improve attendance. A district-wide initiative led by the superintendent embraced strategic partnerships that extended to the community at large to address barriers to attendance.

The findings of this study also have the potential to open discussions among school administrators regarding the implementation of mentor relationships for students. Mentor relationships have been shown to inspire students and keep students involved in school (Kostyo,

2017). Used to address many social and educational concerns, mentorships offer a support system to chronically absent students. Mentors who speak directly with English learners can gain insight to the individual barriers that have influenced student attendance. Mentors tasked with monitoring chronically absent English learners can encourage and foster social competence not only for attendance but for academic success throughout their educational experience. According to the National Student Attendance, Engagement, and Success Center (2018), research confirms that quality mentoring relationships have powerful positive effects on young people in a variety of personal, academic, and professional situations.

Mentoring, at its core, assures students that someone cares about them and that they are not alone in dealing with daily challenges. Research from the National Mentoring Partnership (2019) confirms that quality mentoring relationships have powerful positive effects on high school students in a variety of personal and academic situations. Ultimately, mentoring connects students in need to a role model that can assist with personal growth and social opportunities. Districts in Baltimore, Maryland have used mentorship programs to help confront especially high rates of concentrated absences (Weinberger & Forbush, 2018). During the 2017-2018 school year, mentors at the study site worked out behavior agreements to initiate an effective and reasonable action plan by checking in with chronically absent students and creating a written contract.

According to Kennelly and Monrad (2007), mentoring has significant positive effects on high levels of absenteeism. A study conducted by Big Brothers Big Sisters found that students who met regularly with their mentors were 52 percent less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and 37 percent less likely to skip a class (The National Mentoring Project, 2019). Similarly, Carhill-Poza (2015) examined the importance of linguistic peer support and social

relationships in the second language learning experiences and outcomes of immigrant adolescents. Furthermore, Carhill-Poza (2017) found that school policies designed to support language development ended up isolating English learners from mainstream and bilingual peers. Starting from the position that “immigrant youth negotiate multiple social contexts within their schools that influence their choices, opportunities, and language learning outcomes,” Carhill-Poza (2015) was able to link ELs improved academic English to peer support from English or bilingual speakers. The high school ELs in Carhill-Poza’s (2015) study benefitted from additional support from peers who linked them to both linguistic and academic resources. Peers could also provide students with the resources they need to navigate absenteeism policies in a new school. Whether acclimating students to the hidden culture of their new school, developing strategies for good attendance, providing insight on school policies, or simply showing students that someone cares, a peer mentor might be able to connect with students in ways that school personnel cannot. Bilingual community mentors enrolled in college can provide a window into what life would be like with a high school degree. Like all initiatives, creating a peer leadership program would take time, but it has the potential to reach a greater number of students affected by chronic absenteeism.

Implications for Theory

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems theory was used to analyze the multiple factors that may relate to high school English learners’ chronic absenteeism. Experiences relayed by the students supported the theory that multiple factors of family (the most intimate home ecological system), school policies and personnel (the larger school system), and the students’ limited English proficiency within a monolingual English environment, in which students’ limited English proficiency places them at a disadvantage (the most expansive system of society and

culture) inevitably interacted with and influenced every aspect of the students' chronic absenteeism. The daily environments of home life, culture, school norms, and societal expectations interacted and influenced chronic absenteeism. These factors were identified by the students as either supportive or detrimental to their ability to regularly attend school. Interactions between groups affected the students' experiences at school with links to two or more factors playing a role for each student.

The students' interactions also played an important role in how they viewed their responsibilities and motivations for attending school. In addition, the students' reactions to each of these social groups affected each of the relationships, creating a link between the student's family and school, family and peer relationships, or family and school culture. Due to these variations, the findings identified the quality and type of connections that existed for the students between these contexts. Bronfenbrenner theorized that changes or conflict in any one environment influenced the others. Using ecological systems theory as a framework, this study examined how varying degrees of real or perceived parental support of daily attendance created conflict for students.

The findings demonstrated that all student participants were influenced by aspects of change and conflict, whether family related or attributed to societal demands. The students' abilities to make school their priority was overshadowed by conflict when the family environment influenced decisions related to attending school. Financial responsibilities took precedent when basic survival was at stake. Internal motivation and self-regulating behavior were lacking when students were left to their own devices. Scheduled immigration appointments or detentions were mandatory. Devotion to a parent's medical needs took priority over all else. Relationships, conflicts, and barriers were interrelated. Each conflict had a domino effect on the

students' ability to attend school and their ability to succeed academically. The result for students was a loss of instructional time that had dire consequences and stunted their academic progress. None of the barriers to attendance could have been addressed in isolation.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that students need to utilize communication tools to create positive relationship interactions and experiences that will help them thrive in their immediate school environment. The findings of this case study validated Bronfenbrenner's theory about the importance of communication and its role in self-advocacy and relationship building. Half of the students, who identified as Level III English learners by WIDA Consortium standards, had developed positive relationships that supported their experiences at school (Level IV being the highest level of proficiency for students enrolled in an English as a Second Language program). Only when students obtain a score of 4.5 on the end-of-the-year proficiency exam (ACCESS), can school districts begin the conversation over whether or not to exit a student from ESL services. In New Jersey, school districts are required to consider multiple criteria (e.g., grades, teacher reports, etc.) when making the decision to exit a student from receiving ESL program services, but the student's attainment of a score of 4.5 on the ACCESS test is fundamental. Bronfenbrenner's seminal theory of human development placed great emphasis on the active role of the student as he/she interacts with diverse social agents (parents, caregivers, peers, teachers, other members of the community). However, Bronfenbrenner's theory, primarily developed with monolingual English speakers in mind, does not help explain the experiences of English learners. Therefore, the theory doesn't consider the situation for language learners or emerging bilinguals or multilinguals.

As Carhill-Poza's (2015) study demonstrated, a social capital framework (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) needs to be added to better understand how peer mentors can help ELs build

relationships and access supports. In the early stages of English proficiency, the three students who identified as Level II English learners reported limited to no connection with anyone in the school community. They related feeling more pressure from school demands and difficulties with language. Furthermore, they voiced more anxiety, irritability, and stress from being apart from family and friends who spoke Spanish. These three students also faced more financial pressure than the Level III students, yet they were without the necessary communication tools to advocate for themselves or develop much-needed support systems. Reciprocal relationships with supportive and knowledgeable peers are theorized to link immigrant students to academic and institutional resources (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In addition, social capital that includes peer relationships with academically engaged and more proficient conversational partners (bilingual or monolingual) provides ELs with a form of cultural capital to acclimate students to their new environment.

Recommendations for Policy

Any school that wants to improve student outcomes must focus on attendance, as noted in ESSA policy. Consideration must be given to attendance, and it must be closely tracked from the first day of school. In addition, school districts are required to list chronic absenteeism rates for the prior school year on the state report card. Chang (2018) suggests that states should not seek to penalize schools that fall short on attendance but use the data to identify where they can target resources to fix the problem by taking a positive, problem-solving approach. Accurate data that are accessible and regularly reported in a format that is easily interpreted can be used to target prevention and problem-solving strategies.

It can be useful for schools and districts to utilize attendance-reporting systems that can collect secondary students' attendance/absence data at the class period level, with the ability to

aggregate and disaggregate these data for reporting. When districts use percentages (not fixed numbers) when creating a database, they are able to create attendance tiers. Those tiers categorize the level of resources needed to implement interventions: satisfactory attendance (missed less than 5 percent of school), at-risk attendance (missed 5-9 percent), chronically absent (missed 10-19 percent), and severely chronically absent (missed 20 percent or more; see Figure 1). Several states have incorporated chronic absenteeism into early warning systems (NCES, 2017).

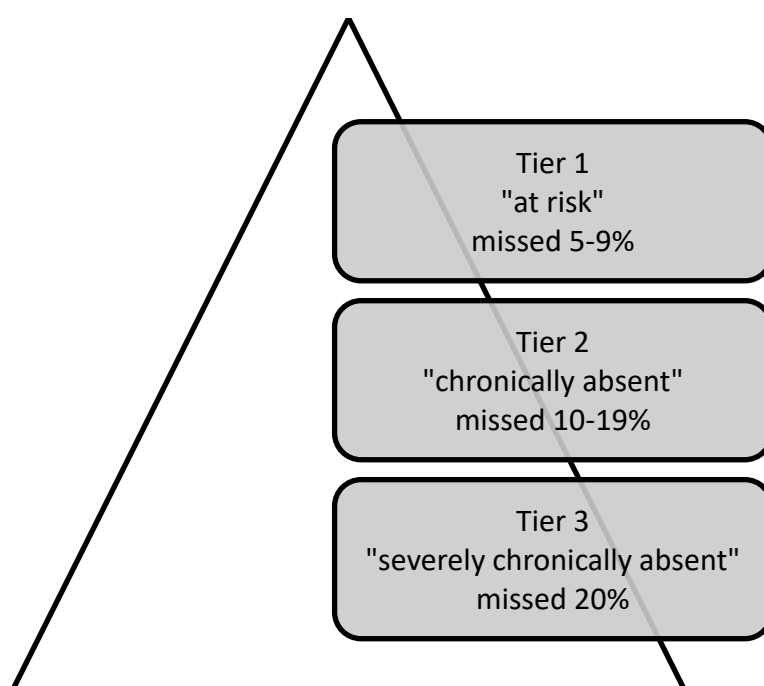


Figure 1. Tiers for absenteeism. Adapted from *Chronic absence: 3 Tiers of intervention*, Attendance Works, 2019.

Mapping the data can provide a moving indicator to alert school leaders to diagnose patterns of absenteeism among the affected students in the early stages. For example, district maps can identify how attendance patterns differ over time across schools and whether district leaders can derive any hypotheses about how individual schools are approaching attendance issues differently. Percentages cast a spotlight on whether chronic absence is getting better or

worse at individual schools, among cohorts of students in each school, or across grade levels. Longitudinally, districts could determine how attendance patterns differ over time across schools and whether they can derive a hypothesis about how these schools approached attendance issues differently.

At the start of the 2018-2019 school year, study site leaders were able to identify individuals and groups of students who were missing 10 percent of their days on roll and review the data for patterns. The best predictor of chronic absence in the current year is poor attendance during the prior year and/or the first month of school (Attendance Works, 2018). Using a data-driven, comprehensive approach as a diagnostic tool for early detection, the district was able to better identify where early intervention was needed. This policy can put school leaders in a position to have a positive impact on the school's attendance rates. This study found that school districts would benefit from creating a uniform and complete data analysis of absenteeism that captures both the frequency of absences and their structure as exactly as possible. Early warning systems provide a method for schools to use attendance data to track student attendance to effectively include variables of days of the week, content missed, academic performance, and behavior. Both unexcused and excused absences should be noted carefully with the aid of bilingual translation and supporting documentation. Using uniform codes for reasons of absences would provide a district-wide method of evaluation and comparison that could be shared among school leaders to identify best practices. While it would be difficult to apply a uniform coding policy at the state level to an issue that has so many variables, state-wide school leaders with similar student demographics could benefit from joining forces and sharing data strategies. A collaborative approach to addressing common challenges among neighboring districts offers another avenue for school personnel to seek solutions. Creating a standard

attendance taxonomy that supports improved attendance data quality and comparability between schools could be useful for policymaking at the district level (NCES, 2018).

Secondary school students have their attendance recorded more frequently as they change classroom locations throughout the school day. Therefore, different attendance measures provide different levels of detail. For example, if attendance is collected as the number of minutes a student is present during one class, it is possible to document and analyze the time the student is exposed to academic content. The National Forum on Education Statistics (2017) provides attendance taxonomy categories for uniform reporting procedures when describing excused or unexcused absences. They include noninstructional activity recognized by state, district, or school; illness, injury, health treatment, or examination; family activity; family emergency or bereavement; religious observation; student employment; transportation not available; disciplinary action, not receiving instruction; legal or judicial requirement; student is skipping school; and situation unknown (default category to be used only until the correct attendance category is determined).

While taxonomy categories offer uniform reporting codes when describing absences, school improvement efforts must be designed with an understanding of the interrelated nature of these subsystems as barriers to student attendance (e.g., curriculum and instruction, parental involvement, transportation systems). As policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels continue to mandate or incentivize initiatives to address chronic absenteeism, they must propose solutions that attend to the complex relationships between each level of the problem by listening to the barriers identified by students. From this perspective, policy makers and school leaders must attend to solutions in the classroom, among district and school leaders, and within the framework of community, state, and federal networks.

For students who report repeated absences due to work schedules, policies should consider the benefits of restructuring the school day to include work/study schedules, vocational training that includes employment opportunities, or the addition of an adult learning center for students experiencing chronic absenteeism dictated by socio-economic challenges. Several districts offer adult high school programs for students who have had to leave a traditional high school setting due to chronic absence. Adult high schools offer instructional hours that accommodate working students and parents. Vocational and technical schools offer students an opportunity to learn a skill that easily translates to employment opportunities while attending high school and upon graduation. Unfortunately, these alternatives are not always available to students in every school district.

In New Jersey, for purposes of counting school attendance, a full day in session must include not fewer than 4 hours of actual instruction, exclusive of study hall or lunch periods (N.J.A.C. 6A:32-8.3). A four-hour intensive schedule of instruction would allow students to spend the afternoon offsite earning money with time to spare for the completion of homework and a good night's sleep. However, any school reform that involves restructuring the school day must consider district concerns as well as ESSA mandates that govern testing, accountability, and school improvement.

Recommendations for Practice

Throughout New Jersey and the rest of the country, districts have responded to opportunities to address chronic absenteeism under ESSA by using data to set education goals that can be measured and met. Once district's data have identified students are at risk due to poor attendance, school personnel should take steps to understand the root causes. It would be beneficial for attendance-review committee members, ESL teachers, or mentors to collaborate

Table 6

Strategies Being Used at the Study Site and Recommendations for ELs

Strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism	For all	For ELs	Recommended policies / Practices tailored to needs of ELs
Leadership vision to communicate policies, practices and concerns to all stakeholders	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide bilingual tool kit for families and newcomers and bilingual workshop sessions with community partnership resources
Discussions about challenges to collecting accurate data	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide staff professional development • Identify alert system for at-risk ELs
Tracking of daily attendance / tardiness using percentage tiers	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniform codes / taxonomy to include EL specific patterns
Formation of Attendance Review Committee to monitor attendance data	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include student representatives • Invite EL families/students of EL chronically absent to get input
Creation of Attendance Officer position	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign bilingual translator to ensure accurate attendance and tardiness reports and opportunities for positive interactions
Lunch Detention Policy for late arrivals to school to keep students in class vs. prior In-School Suspension	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to ELs to address winter walkers' concerns about path to school and identify transportation concerns • Adjust arrival time • Restructure school day to include Work/Study program
Use of district website to post absence data	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include 1st language translation of correspondence
Use of data to identify at-risk students	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to students directly to intervene before isolated absences becomes chronic
Support of Mentor Initiative to match chronically absent students to monitor progress	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect students with caring adults, peer mentors, and positive role models that include members of bilingual community
Relationship-building opportunities for ELs to build trust and provide support	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure all students are connected to a caring adult with L1 compatibility; identify students who come to school without the support of a caring adult
Provide bilingual translation to communicate concerns about absences		X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure two-way communication between homes and school: language-appropriate written and verbal contracts; invitations to conferences, activities, and events
Non-punitive portfolio project for students to recoup missing credits due to chronic absenteeism	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructure school day: Work/Study schedule for 11th / 12th grade working ELs to earn course credit and income, or • Later start to school day for employed ELs

Note. Data for recommended policies and practices from *Establishing school-wide attendance incentives* Attendance Works (2016).

and determine whether a student's absenteeism was related to barriers specific to family contributors, aversion to school, transportation factors, or disengagement issues. Weekly attendance and supporting data can serve as a starting point to determine whether students need case management, home visits, or other types of mental health and mentoring services intervention. When the student's barrier to attendance is within the scope of the school district, targeted interventions can promote positive student outcomes. However, the success of developing school-based solutions that work for the students requires high-quality data, open dialogue among stakeholders, and networking with community partners.

Among K-12 stakeholders, there is a general understanding that students' socio-economic status is at the heart of concerns about chronic absenteeism and student achievement. Therefore, districts and schools must continue to look outside the schoolhouse to improve outcomes. Removing barriers and delivering opportunities that enable all students to attend school daily is not the job of a single individual, organization, program, or school. Some barriers may require that district leaders enlist the help of legal entities, i.e., the courts, volunteer organizations, or social services, to provide case management of individual chronic absentees. It is recommended that district leaders call upon partnerships with community-based organizations and agencies to provide support. Within the district, guidance counselors, school social workers, and nursing staff members are the primary link between school and community partners to help families connect with available community resources.

Potential community-based partners that schools should engage in efforts to reduce absenteeism include providers of health and social services, enrichment programs, and literacy volunteers. In a study of the Chicago public schools, Anthony Bryk, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and his colleagues concluded, "Relationships are

the lifeblood of activity in a school community" (Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2019) recommends that schools establish networks with their school community to connect needed social and health-related services with their students. Using all the resources available to them, schools can enlist the services of social workers, physicians, dentists, vision and hearing specialists, and mental health and family counselors on site. These networks provide safety nets to address issues of homelessness, hunger, health, transportation, and social-emotional concerns that interfere with attendance and learning (Parrett & Budge, 2012). In addition, school leaders can provide support by coordinating efforts among schools, leveraging community partnerships, providing matching or seed funding for special projects, and helping with grant writing (ASCD, 2019).

Community partners should be invited to participate in workshops held on site to leverage the input of students, families, and stakeholders. Resources that support the educational goals of students, families, and schools can be found at the local, state, and national level. Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Coalition for Community Schools, United Way, Communities in Schools, YMCA/YWCA, Project TEACH, and the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University all offer significant resources in the community to incorporate stakeholder involvement into a school's improvement process for students at risk of school failure. Information sessions should be also be coordinated with local businesses, religious institutions, community organizations, and public agencies to provide valuable resources. Guest speakers in the ESL community could serve as role models for newcomers and share strategies for how to successfully find a balance between two cultures. Additionally, districts might want to consider including community representatives to speak with teachers and administrators to

better understand the perspectives and values of the communities they serve. The Department of Children and Families funds health and educational programs to assist students and families with low-cost services and medications (2019). Their representatives can offer strategies focused on comprehensive health, nutrition, and emotional support for students that includes the meaningful engagement of parents. Workshop sessions with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and improved school attendance can lead to improved student learning, stronger families, and positive school culture.

Professional development for staff should include ways to identify common challenges to collecting accurate and comparable attendance data and provide practical suggestions for addressing these challenges. Leadership should also define role-based actions that district staff members can take to improve the collection of high-quality attendance data and promote responsible data use. By pooling the collective experiences of those who collect, maintain, and report student attendance data, school leaders can provide best practices that meet the common needs of the education community. These efforts serve to promote a shared vision and establish a unified understanding of working partnerships to combat chronic absenteeism.

Additional professional development should give all stakeholders an opportunity to contribute their experiences and perceptions of the problem from their unique perspectives. School personnel who have regular interaction with the student are in the best position to identify the student's situation. Understanding a student's motivation and ability to get to school can also help consider possible supports. Therefore, coaches, club advisers, afterschool program providers, and instructional staff should be given an opportunity to share their perspectives on reasons why they perceive students are absent. These key stakeholders might also be invited to

reach out to the student to find out what is driving his or her absences and offer support as a mentor by encouraging daily attendance.

Another practical recommendation is for school leaders to identify bi-lingual employees who would be willing and able to provide translation for faculty and staff during a scheduled duty period. Once obtained, school personnel should be provided with a roster of translators who are available while school is in session. Having translators available during the day makes parent-teacher communication more effective in dealing with disciplinary issues, absenteeism concerns, or academic discussions on a timely basis. The U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education have made it clear that 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 (2015a). In addition, schools must respond to a parent's request for language assistance and must provide translation or interpretation from appropriate and competent individuals; districts may not rely on or ask students, siblings, friends, or untrained school staff to translate or interpret for parents (USDJ & USDOE, 2015a). For districts with larger English learner populations and those districts with many different first languages, it will be necessary to obtain outside resources to provide translation service to keep the lines of communication open. Translation schedules allow staff members to know who is available to support their language needs on any given day. The NASEM (2017) report explains that linguistic differences between parents and school personnel are a barrier to family engagement that must be addressed so that school-family communication and engagement can improve for English learners.

While some barriers to attendance were isolated, a number were cited with more frequency to warrant more policy-based interventions. Specifically, the findings indicated that

families, school personnel, and community members must work in partnership to address barriers and reduce chronic absenteeism. In addition, the findings of this study concluded the importance of bridging the cultural and linguistic divide for English learners and their families. To ensure two-way communication between school personnel and families, school districts should provide language-appropriate written and verbal correspondence related to chronic absenteeism contracts and strategies, frequent contact and requests for feedback, and personal invitations to participate in school conferences, activities, and events. Social media platforms also offer avenues for authentic communication to keep families informed and connected to the school community. Communication is key, but districts cannot overlook the need for developing a systematic approach to properly reduce stressors, anxiety, and adjustment for English learners who are struggling to communicate in their second language.

School leaders who are committed to enacting real and lasting change toward addressing chronic absenteeism are connecting families with outreach programs, local organizations, and social services to improve relationships and provide invaluable resources. Finding solutions often requires asking questions and listening to the needs of the student. If transportation is an issue due to car trouble, winter weather, or a student missing the bus, it is recommended that school districts create a support system for families to identify community resources and/or car pools. If necessary, school districts should consider providing a winter bus service to accommodate students who live within walking distance of the school. Education Week (2019) reports that in Maine, some schools send teams of teachers and volunteers through neighborhoods to help walk young students to school, addressing safety concerns and helping them feel motivated to get to school on chilly winter days. In some districts, when students have missed excessive days because of acute illnesses, they have partnered with community

organizations to offer free flu shots to students (EdWeek, 2019). Dental care, eye exams, physicals, immunizations, food pantries, and clothing donations are among the many services that schools are coordinating to support families financially and bring them into the fold.

Groups like the Coalition for Community Schools believe the more careful monitoring of chronic absenteeism will lead schools to focus more on "whole child" out-of-school factors and take a collaborative, "all-hands-on-deck approach to supporting our students," said José Muñoz, the organization's director (EdWeek, 2019). Other schools started a public-awareness campaign to inform families about the importance of attendance. ESSA funding can be allocated to provide bi-lingual workshops and toolkits to educate families on the importance of regular attendance. Explaining the correlation between good attendance and academic success can spark awareness and open dialogue with parents about the consequences of poor attendance on the students' ability to succeed in and out of school. Creating a partnership with parents to instill habits that help promote good sleep can improve chronic absenteeism. Another practical recommendation is for districts to collaborate with parents to encourage a 'device curfew' since CDC (2018) research finds technology use (computers, video gaming, or mobile phones) may also contribute to late bedtimes and subsequent chronic absenteeism.

Recommendations for Future Research

To date, there are no studies that examine the chronic absenteeism experiences of speakers of languages other than Spanish. Further research is needed to determine if the experiences of students from other cultures are similar or different from the Hispanic participants of this study. Exploring the chronic absenteeism experiences of different groups of English learners can offer varying perspectives.

Further, exploring how English learners are oriented to the norms and expectations of American schools would enhance our understanding of the impact of cultural adjustment on chronic absenteeism.

Attendance not only affects individual students but also can affect the academic environment of an entire school. English learner students' chronic absence has adverse consequences for their educational and long-term success, for schools they attend, and for other students in those schools. Therefore, it would be particularly beneficial to determine the impact of chronic absenteeism on classroom teachers.

Future studies should also examine the input and voice of families. Determining the impact of change in the family structure on a student's attendance would also be particularly insightful.

English learner participants mentioned that having a mentor relationship influenced their motivation to attend school and improved their confidence in the ability to succeed academically. Furthermore, students claimed having a mentor or concerned staff member check in with them influenced their motivation to get to school and their confidence in their ability to make up the work they missed to keep up with classmates. For those reasons, investigating the role of indirect or direct mentoring in future studies may help determine how the influence of a mentor positively impacts attendance. Analyzing school personnel experiences with mentoring relationships over time, and to what extent they believe those relationships and strategies contributed to improved attendance, would also be beneficial.

Future research studies could build on this study through a longitudinal approach with the same participants in grades 9 and 10 for the next two years to see how their chronic absenteeism and academic performance evolves and whether their perspectives change over time.

While chronic absenteeism among high school English learners exceeds that of their English-speaking peers, elementary level ELs have lower absence rates than peers. A study to determine explanations for lower rates of chronic absenteeism among elementary school aged ELs would make a valuable contribution to the literature.

Beyond research, I recommend that school leaders and policymakers consider the power of student voice when developing educational policies and practices that affect English learners. If they hope to affect a successful resolution, school leadership must develop a relationship-building mechanism that includes student voice. As committees formulate plans to combat chronic absenteeism, they must invite students to join the discussion.

REFERENCES

- Adely, H. (2017, December 18). One in ten students is chronically absent in New Jersey. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/education/2017/12/18/one-10-students-chronically-absent-new-jersey/961695001/>
- Advocates for Children of New Jersey. (2017). *Chronic absenteeism in New Jersey 2017 report*. Retrieved from <https://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/>
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2019). *Fostering a healthy, safe, and supportive learning environment: How high performing/high poverty schools do it*. ASCD. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109003/chapters/Fostering-a-Healthy,-Safe,-and-Supportive-Learning-Environment@-How-HP~HP-Schools-Do-It.aspx>
- Attendance Works. (2019). *Chronic absence: 3 Tiers of intervention*. Retrieved from <https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/>
- Attendance Works. (2016). *Establishing school-wide attendance incentives*. Retrieved from <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/2011/06/AW-Incentives-two-pager-1-4-11.pdf>
- Attendance Works. (2017). *Portraits of change: Chronic absence levels by state*. Retrieved from <http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/portraits-of-change/chronic-absence-levels-state/>
- Attendance Works. (2017). *What is chronic absence?* Retrieved from <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/early-education-toolkit/chronic-absence/>
- Attendance Works. (2018). *Where are the nation's chronically absent students found?* [Story Map]. Retrieved from <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=7f567623f36744dda5ad339aba32aca2>
- Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012a). *Chronic absenteeism: Summarizing what we know from nationally available data*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools.
- Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012b). *The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the nation's public schools*. Retrieved from <http://new.every1graduates.org>
- Balfanz, R., Chang, H., & Byrnes, V. (2016). *Preventing missed opportunity: Taking collective action to confront chronic absence*. Retrieved from Attendance Works website: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/preventing-missed-opportunity/>

- Balfanz, R., & Chang, H. (2013). *Improve attendance: Increase success*. Retrieved from National Association of Secondary School Principals website: http://www.nassp.org/Content/158/pl_nov13_balfanz.pdf
- Barry, M., & Reschly, A. (2012). Longitudinal predictors of high school completion. *School Psychology Quarterly, 27*(2), 74–84. doi:10.1037/a0029189
- Bartoletti, J., & Connelly, J. (2013). *Leadership matters: What the research says about the importance of principal leadership*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Bellwether Education Partners. (2017). *An independent review of ESSA state plans*. Retrieved from <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/independent-review-essa-state-plans>
- Bergman, P., & Chan, E. (2017). *Leveraging parents through technology: The impact of high-frequency information on student achievement*. Retrieved from Columbia University Teacher's College website: <http://www.columbia.edu/~psb2101/ParentRCT.pdf>
- Bickelhaupt, D. (2011). Here! But what about those who are not? Reinforcement among chronically absent elementary students, its effectiveness, and the why behind the absences. *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal, 18*(1), 54–61. Retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ963129)
- Bierly, C., Doyle, B., & Smith, A. (2016). *Transforming schools: How distributed leadership can create more high-performing schools*. Boston, MA: Bain & Company.
- Birioukov, A. (2016). Beyond the excused/unexcused absence binary: Classifying absenteeism through a voluntary/involuntary absence framework. *Educational Review, 68*(3), 340–357. doi:10.1080/00131911.2015.1090400
- Blad, E. (2017, October 17). Schools mount fight against chronic absenteeism: Districts work to ensure students are in school. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/10/18/schools-mount-fight-against-chronic-absenteeism.html>
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. (5th ed.) Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2013). *Reframing organization: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, E. (2015, October 7). White House announces new effort to fight chronic absenteeism in schools. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/white-house-announces-new-effort-to-fight-chronic-absenteeism-in-schools/2015/10/07/4e9fc64a-6c67-11e5-b31c-d80d62b53e28_story.html
- Brundage, A., Williams, I., Chamberlin, D., Kern, L., Hinke, J., Brown, P., Sicilian, D., . . . Henriquez, M. (2017). *Reasons for chronic absenteeism among secondary students. Florida Department of Education and the University of South Florida*. Retrieved from <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Aggregate-RCA-Report-Final.pdf>
- Bruner, C., et al. (2011). *Chronic elementary absenteeism: A problem hidden in plain sight*. Retrieved from Attendance Works website: <https://www.americaspromise.org/resource/chronic-elementary-absenteeism-problem-hidden-plain-sight-child-and-family-policy-center>
- Buehler, M., et al. (2012). *Why being in school matters: Chronic absenteeism in Oregon public schools* [Research Brief]. Retrieved from Attendance Works website: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Oregon-Research-Brief.pdf>
- Burnette, D. (2016, January 19). ESSA poses capacity challenges for state education agencies. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2016/01/20/essa-poses-capacity-challenges-for-state-education.html>
- Burnette, D. (2017, September 29). Why did so many states choose to use these two ESSA indicators? *Education Week*. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2017/09/why_so_many_states_choose_ESSA_indicator_data_capacitys.html
- Buysse, V., & Peisner-Feinberg, E. (2013). *Handbook of response to intervention in early childhood*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- Carhill-Poza, A. (2017). “If you don’t find a friend in here, it’s gonna be hard for you”: Structuring bilingual peer support for language learning in urban high schools. *Linguistics and Education*, 37, 63–72. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2016.09.001
- Carhill-Poza, A. (2015). Opportunities and outcomes: The role of peers in developing the oral academic English proficiency of adolescent English learners. *Modern Language Journal*, 99(4), 678–695. doi:10.1111/modl.12271
- Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA). (2018). *Content-based second language instruction: What is it?* Retrieved from <http://carla.umn.edu/cobal/t/CBI.html>

- Center for Applied Linguistics. (2018). *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)*. Retrieved from <http://www.cal.org/siop/about/>
- Center for Public Education. (2017). *Preparing English language learners for academic success*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Center for Research and Reform in Education. (2017). Evidence for ESSA: Who we are. Retrieved from <http://www.evidenceforessa.org/page/who-we-are>
- Chang, H., Bauer, L., & Byrnes, V. (2018). *Data matters: Using chronic absence to accelerate action for student success*. Retrieved from Attendance Works website: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/data-matters/>
- Chang, H., & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York, NY: Columbia University National Center for Children in Poverty.
- Chen, G., & Weikart, L. (2008). Student background, school climate, school disorder, and student achievement: An empirical study of New York City's middle schools. *Journal of School Violence*, 7(4), 3–20. doi:10.1080/15388220801973813
- Chen, P., & Rice, C. (2016). *Showing up matters: The state of chronic absenteeism in New Jersey, 2nd annual report*. Retrieved from Advocates for Children of New Jersey website: <http://acnj.org/issues/school-attendance/the-state-of-chronic-absenteeism-in-counties/>
- Claes, E., Hooghe, M., & Reeskens, T. (2009). Truancy as a contextual and school-related problem: A comparative multilevel analysis of country and school characteristics on civic knowledge among 14 year olds. *Educational Studies*, 35(2), 123–142.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, presence, and power: “Student voice” in educational research and reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(4), 359–390.
- Cooper, J. (2016). Where are the nations’ chronically absent students? *Education Week*, 36(4), 6.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). *CCSSO resource on ESSA*. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsso.org>
- Council of Chief State School Officers. (2016). *Let’s get this conversation started: Strategies, tools, examples and resources to help states engage with stakeholders to develop and implement their ESSA plans* (CCSSO Stakeholder engagement guide). Retrieved from <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/file/ccsso-stakeholder-engagement-guide>
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.) Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DePoy, E., & Gitlin, L. (2016). *Introduction to research: Understanding and applying multiple strategies* (5th ed.). United Kingdom: Elsevier.
- De Witte, K., & Csillag, M. (2012). Does anybody notice? On the impact of improved truancy reporting on school dropout. *Education Economics*, 22(6), 549–568. doi:10.1080/09645292.2012.672555
- Dube, S., & Orpinas, P. (2009). Understanding excessive school absenteeism as a school refusal behavior. *Children and Schools*, 31(2), 87–95.
- Eaton, D., Brener, N., & Kann, L. K. (2008). Associations of health risk behaviors with school absenteeism: Does having permission for the absence make a difference? *Journal of School Health*, 78(4), 223–229. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2008.00290.x
- Education Commission of the States. (2014). *50-State comparison: What methods are used to identify English language learners?* Retrieved from <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquestNB2?rep=ELL1403>
- Education Commission of the States. (2018). *50-State Comparison: States' school accountability systems*. Retrieved from <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-states-school-accountability-systems/>
- Education Law Center. (2018). *NJDOE Fall survey enrollment report: NJ DOE school report cards*. Trenton, NJ: Education Law Center.
- Education Trust. (2017). Chronic absenteeism: An overview. Retrieved from <https://edtrust.org/students-cant-wait/chronic-absenteeism/>
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, As Amended by Every Student Succeeds Act, Accountability and State Plans, 34 Fed. Reg. 200 and 299(May 31, 2016). Federal Register: *The Daily Journal of the United States*. Sec. 200.14.
- Every Student Succeeds Act, Public Law No. 114–95, Sec. 1005(c)(4)(C)(ii)(I)-(II). Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/essa>
- Fensterwald, J. (2016, February 1). New federal law puts spotlight on English learners. *Ed Source*. Retrieved from <http://edsources.org/2016/new-federal-law-puts-spotlight-on-english-learners/94222>
- Flaherty, C. W., Sutphen, R. D., & Ely, G. E. (2012). Examining substance abuse in truant youths and their caregivers: Implications for truancy intervention. *Children and Schools*, 34(4), 201–211. doi:10.1093/cs/cds008

- Francis, D. (2006). *Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners*. Retrieved from ¡Colorín Colorado! website: <http://www.colorincolorado.org/research/practical-guidelines-education-english-language-learners-research-based-recommendations>
- Froonjian, J., & Garnett, J. (2013). Reaching the hard to reach: Drawing lessons from research and practice. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 36(12), 831–839. doi:10.1080/01900692.2013.795161
- Gallagher, K. (2016). *Best practices for teaching English language learners*. *Support English language learners' series*. Retrieved from Getting Smart website: <http://www.gettingsmart.com/2016/03/3-best-practices-for-teaching-english-language-learners/>
- García-Gracia, M. (2008). Role of secondary schools in the face of student absenteeism: A study of schools in socially underprivileged areas. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(3), 263–280. doi:10.1080/13603110601103204
- Georgetown University. (2017). *Chronic absenteeism and the fifth indicator in state ESSA plans*. Retrieved from Attendance Works website: http://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Future-Ed-Table_Chronic_Absenteeism.pdf
- Ginsburg, A., Jordan, P., & Chang, H. (2014). *Absences add up: How school attendance influences student success*. Retrieved from Attendance Works website: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/absences-add-up/>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL. Aldine.
- Gonzalez, T., & Hernandez-Saca, D. (2016). In search of voice: Theory and methods in K–12 student voice research in the US, 1990–2010. *Educational Review* 69(4), 1–23. doi:10.1080/00131911.2016.1231661
- Goodman, J. (2014). Flaking out: Student absences and snow days as disruptions of instructional time (NBER Working Paper No. 20221). Retrieved from <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20221>
- Gottfried, M. (2014). Chronic absenteeism and its effects on students' academic and socioemotional outcomes. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 19(2), 53–75. doi:10.1080/10824669.2014.962696
- Gottfried, M. (2015). Chronic absenteeism in the classroom context: Effects on achievement. *Urban Education*, 54(1), 3–34. doi:10.1177/0042085915618709

- Gottfried, M. (2010). Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 434–465. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40645446>
- Gottfried, M. (2009). Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31(4), 392–415. doi:10.3102/0162373709342467
- Gottfried, M., & Gee, K. (2017). Identifying the determinants of chronic absenteeism: A bioecological systems approach. *Teachers College Record*, 119(7), 1–34.
- Gunter, H., & Thomson, P. (2007). Learning about student voice. *Support for Learning*, 22(4), 181–188. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9604.2007.00469.x>
- Hamilton Project. (2018). *Chronic school absenteeism in the United States*. Retrieved from Brookings Institution website: http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/chronic_school_absenteeism_in_the_united_states
- Hartnett, S. (2007). Does peer group identity influence absenteeism in high school students? *The High School Journal*, 91(2), 35–44.
- Indiana Department of Education. (2009). *Effective programs for English language learners (ELL) with interrupted formal education*. Retrieved from Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services website: <http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/SIFE-Article-final-OT.pdf>
- Jacob, B., & Lovett, K. (2017). *Chronic absenteeism: An old problem in search of new answers*. Retrieved from Brookings Institute website: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/chronic-absenteeism-an-old-problem-in-search-of-new-answers/>
- Jimenez, L., & Sargrad, S. (2017). A new vision for school accountability. Retrieved from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/03/03/427156/a-new-vision-for-school-accountability/>
- Jones, T., Lovrich, N., & Lovrich, N. R. (2011). *Updated literature review on truancy: Key concepts, historical overview, and research relating to promising practices with particular utility to Washington State*. Retrieved from Models for Change website: http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/537/Updated_Literature_Review_on_Truancy.pdf
- Kearney, C. (2008). An interdisciplinary model of school absenteeism in youth to inform professional practice and public policy. *Educational Psychology Review*, 20, 257–282.
- Kearney, C. (2008). School absenteeism and school refusal behavior in youth: A contemporary review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28(3), 451–471. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2007.07.012

- Kearney, C., & Graczyk, P. (2014). A response to intervention model to promote school attendance and decrease school absenteeism. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 43(1), 1–25. doi:10.1007/s10566-013-9222-1
- Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (2007). *Approaches to dropout prevention: Heeding early warning signs with appropriate interventions*. Washington, DC, National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research.
- Klein, A. (2015, November 30). ESEA reauthorization: The Every Student Succeeds Act explained. *Education Week*. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2015/11/esea_reauthorization_the_every.html
- Klem, A., & Connell, J. (2009). Relationships Matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *The Journal of School Health*, 74(7). doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08283.x
- Kostyo, S. (2017). A teacher's view on reducing chronic absenteeism. Retrieved from National Mentoring Partnership website: <https://www.mentoring.org/2017/09/teachers-view-reducing-chronic-absenteeism/>
- Lamdin, D. (1996). Evidence of student attendance as an independent variable in education production functions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 89(3).
- Landis, R., & Reschly, A. (2011). An examination of compulsory school attendance ages and high school dropout and completion. *Educational Policy* 25(5), 719–761. doi:10.1177/0895904810374851
- Landis, R., & Reschly, A. (2013). Reexamining gifted underachievement and dropout through the lens of student engagement. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 36(2), 220–249. doi:10.1177/0162353213480864
- Leonard, J. (2011). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to understand community partnerships: A historical case study of one urban high school. *Urban Education*, 46(5), 987–1010. doi:10.1177/0042085911400337
- Lundien, K. (2009). *Exploring a secondary urban ESL program: Addressing the social, affective, linguistic, and academic needs of English language learners (ELLs)* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED535539)
- MacIver, M. (2011). The challenge of improving urban high school graduation outcomes: Findings from a randomized study of dropout prevention efforts. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 16, 167–184.
- Malarz, L. (2018). *Bilingual education: Effective programming for language-minority students*. Retrieved from ACSD website: http://www.ascd.org/publications/curriculum_handbook/413/chapters/Bilingual_Education@_Effective_Programming_for_Language-Minority_Students.aspx

- Mann, L. (2016). *ESSA's fifth indicator: An argument for chronic absenteeism*. Retrieved from Policy Innovators in Education website: <http://pie-network.org/article/essas-fifth-indicator-an-argument-for-chronic-absenteeism/>
- Martin, C., Sargrad, S., & Batel, S. (2016). Making the grade: A 50-state analysis of school accountability systems. Retrieved from Center for American Progress website: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2016/05/19/137444/making-the-grade/>
- Marvul, N. (2012). If you build it, they will come: A successful truancy intervention program in a small high school. *Urban Education*, 47(1), 144–169.
- Mathis, W., & Trujillo, T. (2016). *Lessons from NCLB for the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Retrieved from National Education Policy Center website: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/lessons-from-NCLB>
- McConnell-Henry, T., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2011). Member checking and Heideggerian phenomenology: A redundant component. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(2), 28–37. doi:10.7748/nr2011.01.18.2.28.c8282
- Medic, G., Wille, M., & Hemels, M. E. (2017). Short- and long-term health consequences of sleep disruption. *Nature and science of sleep*, 9, 151–161. doi:10.2147/NSS.S134864
- Minaya-Rowe, L. (2015). *Effective educational programs, practices, and policies for English learners*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Mitra, D. (2008). *Student voice in school reform: Building youth-adult partnerships that strengthen schools and empower youth*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nam, Y., & Huang, J. (2009). Equal opportunity for all? Parental economic resources and children's educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 625–634.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). Fast facts. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=96>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *The condition of education*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cgf.pdf
- National Cooperative Education Statistics System. (2017). *Forum guide to collecting and using attendance data* [Research Brief]. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=NFES2017007>
- National Education Association. (2008). *English language learners face unique challenges* [Policy Brief]. Retrieved from https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/ELL_Policy_Brief_Fall_08_%282%29.pdf

- National High School Center. (2013). *Early warning systems: Designing effective interventions to improve college & career readiness*. Retrieved from American Institutes for Research website: Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/resource/early-warning-systems-designing-effective-interventions-improve-college-career-readiness>
- National Mentoring Partnership. (2019). Mentoring impact. Retrieved from <https://www.mentoring.org/why-mentoring/mentoring-impact/>
- New Jersey Department of Education. (2017). *Guidance for reporting student absences and calculating chronic absenteeism*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/behavior/attendance/ChronicAbsenteeismGuidance.pdf>
- New Jersey Department of Education. (2016). *Implementing English language learner program services in New Jersey: A summary of program review* (N.J.A.C. 6A:15). Retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/policy/ImplementingELLPrograms.pdf>
- New Jersey Department of Education. (2017). *Keeping our kids safe, healthy and in school: Attendance, truancy, and chronic absenteeism*. Retrieved from <http://www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/behavior/attendance/>
- New Jersey Department of Education. (2017). *NJ school performance report*. Retrieved from https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/report.aspx?type=state&lang=english&SY=1617&schoolyear=2016-2017#P31e5b2665da446d0ab6b4af80d2652e3_4_207iS2
- Office for Civil Rights. (2016). *2013–2014 Civil rights data collection*. Retrieved from Department of Education website: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>
- Outhouse, C. (2012). Carnegie units and high school attendance policies: An absence of thought. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 15(4), 3–21.
- Parke, S., & Kanyongo, Y. (2012). Student attendance, mobility, and mathematics: Achievement in an urban school district. *Journal of Educational Research*, 105(3): 161–175.
- Partnership for 21st Century Learning. (2018). *Framework for 21st century learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.p21.org/>
- Pellegrini, D. (2007). School non-attendance: Definitions, meanings, responses, interventions. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23(1), 63–77.
- Perez-Hernandez, D. (2017, January 1). TEA releases public's answers to ESSA survey. *Brownsville Herald*. Retrieved from https://www.brownsvilleherald.com/news/valley/tea-releases-public-s-answers-to-essa-survey/article_aa0a2d20-d09f-11e6-8285-8bdd2abcc8b1.html

- Perez-Pena, R. (2012, May 17). Chronically absent students skew school data, study finds, citing parents' role. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/17/education/up-to-15-percent-of-students-chronically-skip-school-johns-hopkins-finds.html>
- Pringle, J., et al. (2011). Interpretive phenomenological analysis: A discussion and critique. *Nurse Researcher*, 18(3), 20–24.
- Parrett, W., & Budge, K. (2012). *Turning high-poverty schools into high-performing schools*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Rafa, A. (2017). *Chronic absenteeism: A key indicator of student success*. Retrieved from Education Commission of the States website: <https://www.ecs.org/chronic-absenteeism-a-key-indicator-of-student-success/>
- Rashmi, B., & Vidal-Fernandez, M. (2014). No Pass No Drive: Education and allocation of time. *The Journal of Human Capital*, 8(4), 399–431.
- Reid, K. (2008). Behavior and attendance: The national picture; a synopsis. *Educational Review*, 60(4), 333–344. doi:10.1080/00131910802393365
- Rice, C. (2015). *Showing up matters: The state of chronic absenteeism in New Jersey*. Retrieved from Advocates for Children of New Jersey website: http://acnj.org/downloads/2015_09_08_chronic_absenteeism.pdf
- Rogers, T., Duncan, T., Wolford, T., Ternovski, J., & Reitano, A. (2017). *A randomized experiment using absenteeism information to nudge attendance*. Retrieved from Institute of Education Sciences website: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/pdf/REL_2017252.pdf
- Ross, T. (2013, June 5). Addressing urban poverty in America must remain a priority [Blog post]. *Center for American Progress*. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2013/06/05/65268/addressing-urban-poverty-in-america-must-remain-a-priority/>
- Sargrad, S. (2016, January 13). Hope for English-language learners. *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/articles/2016-01-13/every-student-succeeds-act-brings-new-hope-for-english-language-learners>
- Schmidt-Davis, J., & Bottoms, G. (2011). *Who's next? Let's stop gambling on school performance and plan for principal succession*. Retrieved from Southern Regional Education Board website: http://publications.sreb.org/2011/11V19_Principal_Succession_Planning.pdf
- Sheldon, S. (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family, and community partnerships. *Journal of Educational Research*, 100(5), 267–275. doi:10.3200/JOER.100.5.267-275

- Smyth, J. (2006). When students have power: Student engagement, student voice, and the possibilities for school reform around dropping out of school. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 9(4), 285–298. doi:10.1080/13603120600894232
- Sobel, D., & Taylor, S. (2011). *Culturally responsive pedagogy: Teaching like our students' lives matter*. Brill NV: Bradford.
- State of New Jersey Department of Education. (2017). *Guidance for reporting student absences and calculating chronic absenteeism*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/behavior/attendance/ChronicAbsenteeismGuidance.pdf>
- State of New Jersey Department of Education. (2017). New Jersey statewide assessment reports: Spring 2017 PARCC results. Retrieved from <http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/achievement/17/parcc/spring/excel.htm>
- Stout, K., & Christenson, S. (2009). Staying on track for high school graduation: Promoting student engagement. *Prevention Researcher*, 16(3), 17–20.
- Sheppard, A. (2011). The non-sense of raising school attendance. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 16(3), 239–247.
- Thiessen, D. (2006). Student knowledge, engagement, and voice in educational reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(4), 345–358.
- Toshalis, E., & Nakkula, M. (2012). *Motivation, engagement, and student voice toolkit*. Retrieved from Students at the Center website: <https://www.jff.org/resources/motivation-engagement-and-student-voice-toolkit/>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). *Selected social characteristics in the United States, 2012–2016: American community survey 5-year estimates: Language spoken at home*. Retrieved from https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_5YR_DP02&prodType=table
- U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2016). *A first look: Key data highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation's public schools*. Washington, DC: Civil Rights Data Collection.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2015a). *Every student, every day: A community toolkit to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/chronicabsenteeism/toolkit.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2015b). *National and state-level high school graduation rates for English learners: Fast facts*. Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) Retrieved from https://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast_facts/OELA_FF_HS_GradRates.pdf

- U.S. Department of Education. (2015c). *Our nations English learners: What are their characteristics?* Data Story. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/el-characteristics/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2015d). *Transitioning to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics, ED Facts file 141, Data Group 678. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essafaqstransition62916.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2015e). *What works: Dropout prevention intervention report*. Institute of Education Sciences Retrieved from <http://whatworks.ed.gov>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2016a). *Chronic absenteeism in the nation's schools: An unprecedented look at a hidden educational crisis*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html#one>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2016b). *New data show chronic absenteeism is widespread and prevalent among all student groups*. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/new-data-show-chronic-absenteeism-widespread-and-prevalent-among-all-student-groups>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2016c). State non-fiscal survey of public elementary and secondary education, 2014–15. *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.27.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2017a). *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2017b). *Every Student Succeeds Act: New Jersey State Plan*. New Jersey Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/njconsolidatedstateplan.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2017c). *Racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools: National elementary and secondary enrollment by race/ethnicity projection model, 1972 through 2026*. *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 203.50. Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cge.asp
- U.S. Department of Education. (2019). *Chronic absenteeism in the nation's schools: A hidden crisis*. Civil Rights Data Commission (CRDC). Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>
- U.S. Department of Justice, & U.S. Department of Education. (2015). Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>

- Vélez-Agosto, N. M., Soto-Crespo, J., G., Vizcarrando-Oppenheimer, M., Vega-Molina, S., García-Coll, C. (2017). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory revision: Moving culture from the macro into the micro. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(5), 900–910. doi:10.1177/1745691617704397
- Weinberger, S. G., & Forbush, J. B. (2018). *The role of mentors in reducing chronic absenteeism*. Arlington, VA. Phi Delta Kappa International.
- Wepner, S. (2012). *Changing suburbs, changing students: Helping school leaders face the challenges*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- WIDA. (2014). *Research brief: Collaborative learning for English language learners*. Wisconsin Center for Education Research. University of Wisconsin-Madison, WI. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/PG/Documents/dissertation/HS%20EL%20ABSENTEEISM%20Dissertation/LIT%20REVIEW%20ABSENTEEISM/research_Briefs_WIDA_Rsrch_Brief_CollaborativelearningforELLs.pdf
- Wilkins, J. (2008). School characteristics that influence student attendance: Experiences of students in a school avoidance program. *High School Journal, 91*(3), 12–24. doi:10.1353/hsj.2008.0005
- Yonezawa, S., & Jones, M. (2009). Student voices: Generating reform from the inside out. *Theory into Practice, 48*, 205–212. doi:10.1080/00405840902997386
- Zalkind, C., Coogan, M., & Sterling, R. (2016). *Showing up matters: The state of chronic absenteeism in New Jersey, 2nd Annual Report*. Retrieved from Attendance Works website: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/evidence-based-solutions/>

APPENDIX A

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPORTING GUIDELINES

According to the New Jersey Department of Education Guidance for Reporting Student Absences and Calculating Chronic Absenteeism (2017), each student's absentee rate is calculated based on the fields of Cumulative Days Present (CDP) and Cumulative Days in Membership. Cumulative Days in Membership (CDM) is an element in NJ SMART (2017), which monitors and tracks data submitted for the student. CDM is defined as the number of school days in session in which a student is enrolled or registered during the annual reporting period from July 1 through June 30. Data collection commences the first day the student is expected to start, even if the student does not actually attend that day. A student's Absenteeism Rate (AR) is calculated by subtracting the Cumulative Days Present (P) from the Cumulative Days in Membership (M), divided by the Cumulative Days in Membership (M) or $(M-P)/M = AR$. A student is considered chronically absent if the Absentee Rate (AR) is equal to or greater than 10 percent.

APPENDIX B

STUDY SITE DISTRICT ABSENTEEISM POLICY

When a student is absent from school, he/she must bring a parent or doctor's note indicating the reason for the absence to the Attendance Office before the start of the school day. Students are responsible for contacting their teachers and going to the Homework Portal for making up missed class work or tests. In case of an anticipated absence, the assignments should be obtained in advance and completed upon the student's return to school. Parents are responsible for their son/daughter's daily attendance to high school. If the student is going to be absent from school, a parent/guardian must notify the school by calling the attendance office prior to the start of the school day on the day of the absence. However, this does not excuse the absence. Parental notes must include the student's first and last name, the date(s) of absence, the reason for the student's absence, and the parent's signature. If the nurse sends a student home, a parental note is not necessary for that day.

The Principal and the Attendance Review Committee may consider the nature of any absences and the reasons for which some of the absences may have occurred in deciding whether credits should be awarded or denied in cases in which the threshold number of absences is exceeded. Absences due to Out of School Suspension(s) (OSS), In School Suspensions (ISS), or early dismissal because of athletic department school trips will not be considered as part of school absences. In NJSA 18:38:2.6 legal (excused) absence from school is defined as: student illness with a doctor's note; death in the family (three days) (documented); religious holy days; verified driver's license test appointments; documented college visitations (5 days total); verified medical or dental appointments; and court appearances with proper documentation. In addition, absences from school due to school sponsored educational activities will be considered excused

at the discretion of the administration. Doctor's notes should be provided on the day the student returns to school from an illness. Any note from a doctor must be on doctor's stationary and must be turned into the Attendance Office within five school days of an absence. Notes submitted in excess of five days for the absence in question will not be accepted.

Vacations and family travel are not excused absences. If students are absent, they may not be on school premises any time during the day. Students may not pick up any students. Students who are absent from school are not permitted to participate in any school-sponsored sport or activity on that date, unless they have a verified excuse in accordance with the published attendance policy as stated. Students who are absent from school and are found on school grounds are subject to disciplinary action. Furthermore, they may not attend high school functions, practices, games, etc. To be eligible to participate in school sponsored athletic activity or events, students must be in attendance for a minimum of four hours. Students who are not present in school for a minimum of four hours will be considered absent from school for the full day.

Attendance letters are posted on the Parent Portal on a monthly basis, enabling students to keep track of all absences from school. Excessive absence from any given class will result in no credit for that class. Students will lose credits for courses in accordance with Board Policy if the unexcused absences exceed sixteen days in a full-year course, twelve days in a three-quarter course, eight days in a half-year course, or four days in a quarter course. Unexcused late arrivals to school resulting in missed individual classes due to late sign-in will be considered unexcused absences in those classes. This is also true for unexcused early dismissals. For cumulative absences of 16 days or more, parents will be notified of loss of credits by mail by the respective grade level administrative office. When the number of absences results in loss of credits, an

appeal may be filed with the Principal or his/her designee. Those students who lose credits due to excessive absences must remain in the scheduled class for the remainder of the course in order to be eligible for summer school.

Notification procedures related to possible loss of credits are in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.8. In addition to the attendance policy for course credit as outlined in the student/parent handbook, there are additional attendance requirements. For up to four cumulative unexcused absences, the school shall make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents prior to the start of the following day; investigate the cause of the unexcused absence; develop an action plan designed to address patterns of unexcused absences and to return the child to regular attendance at school; contact DCPD if abuse or neglect is suspected; and cooperate with law enforcement and other agencies, as appropriate. When a student has accrued between five and nine cumulative unexcused absences, the school shall make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents prior to the start of the following day; investigate the cause of the unexcused absence; evaluate the appropriateness of the action plan; revise the plan if needed and establish outcomes based upon student needs and necessary interventions. To address cumulative unexcused absences of ten (10) or more, the school shall make a mandatory referral to the court; make a reasonable attempt to notify the parents of the mandatory referral; continue to consult with a parent and any involved agency to support the student's return to regular attendance; cooperate with law enforcement and other agencies as appropriate; and compel attendance at school in accordance with the statutory and administrative means available, including proceeding to court. Lastly, the high school guidance counselor will be notified to call student's parent to discuss possible failure(s) due to excessive absences.

Students are considered late to school/class when they arrive after the bell without a pass from a staff member. Unexcused late arrivals to school result in missed individual classes that result in unexcused absences in those classes, which could result in loss of credits. Four (4) late arrivals to school will warrant a phone call from school to the parent/guardian. After eight (8) late arrivals the parent/guardian will receive a letter and will receive a phone call from school. The parent/guardian will receive a letter and a phone call from school to set up appointment with the Principal after twelve (12) late arrivals to school. After sixteen (16) late arrivals the parent/guardian will be required to attend a mandatory meeting with the principal after receiving a letter, a phone call from school, and a student referral on truancy to the Police Department. After twenty (20) late arrivals to school the parent/guardian will receive a letter and will receive a phone call from school. The student will incur a possible loss of school trips and school events and mandatory Saturday Community Service.

The district also has a policy for cutting class that eliminates credit for a high school class and can result in a failure for the class. A cut is defined as missing an entire class, or portion of a class (this includes, but is not limited to 10 or more minutes unexcused late), without the permission of the teacher of that class. When a student receives a pass to report to any office during a scheduled class period he/she must present that pass to classroom teacher before reporting to the appointment. Failure to follow this procedure may result in the absence being considered a cut. Teachers will contact the parent/guardian before submitting the disciplinary referral. A fourth cut in a full year course will result in an automatic failure and removal from that class. For Physical Education (a three-quarter course), a third cut will result in an automatic failure and removal from class. For a semester course, a second cut will result in an automatic failure and removal from class. For Health (a quarter course) a second cut will result in

automatic failure and removal from the class. Students will receive a WF for the course grade and will be removed for the remainder of the year. Any student removed from class will be assigned a Study Hall for the remainder of the year.

The district's high school adheres to the New Jersey state law that governs truancy. A student is considered truant if the student is absent from school without the knowledge and consent of his/her parent/guardian. A district high school student who is truant is required to meet with his/her report to the grade level assistant principal with his/her parent/guardian upon return to school. A student who is under 16 years of age may have a complaint filed against him/her in the municipal court. The student and the parent may have to appear before the court and may be fined up to \$100/day for each day of the truancy. Students who are 16 years of age and older will be dropped from the rolls upon 10 or more consecutive unexcused absences. Any student who is found to be truant shall receive an "F" for all of his/her classes and any missed work may not be made up.

Eighteen-year-old students are considered adults in New Jersey. However, the district's high school reserves the right to control the conduct of all students regardless of age, and all students must adhere to school rules and regulations. Eighteen-year-old students may sign their own dismissal notes but must complete a sign out form before leaving school grounds. In cases of a doctor's appointment, adult students must identify the doctor, the doctor's phone number, and the time of appointment. An Assistant Principal must approve the notes before the students submit them to the Attendance Office. Upon returning to school, students must supply the Attendance Office with a verification note from the doctor or be subject to disciplinary action for cutting. Eighteen-year-old students may also write excuses for their tardiness or absence from school. However, an Assistant Principal must first approve these notes before they are submitted

to the Attendance Office. If this procedure is not followed, the student will be charged with an unexcused tardy to school. Eighteen-year-old students may sign their own field trip permission slips, exemption forms, and physical forms without prior approval of school authorities but are subject to all other regulations according to school policy.

APPENDIX C

STUDENT RECRUITMENT LETTER

As a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University's College of Education and Human Services' Education Leadership Management and Policy Department, I am conducting research to better understand chronic absenteeism at your school. I am going to interview students, their administrators, and school absentee officers.

I would like you to be a part of this study. If you are interested and your parents / guardians are willing to let you participate in the study, I will host individual interviews in a quiet and comfortable place within the school setting. Each interview will take about 45 minutes, and follow-up interviews will be scheduled, as needed. With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded, to be used as transcripts by no one other than myself, as the researcher. I am committed to maintaining your confidentiality and comfort level. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to give a fictitious name in order to protect your identity. The use of a fictitious name will help to make sure you will never be associated with any presentations or publications related to this project. All information provided through the interview process will be kept confidential with exception to anything I am required to report by law.

If you would prefer not to participate in this research project, it will in no way affect your services or support provided by the school. If you choose to participate, you have the right to decline any questions and the right to stop the interview at any time.

Please complete and sign the included consent forms, keeping one for your records. The second copy can be returned to me in the included self-addressed stamped envelope. Once I have received the signed form, I will contact you to schedule an interview. Please complete and sign the included consent forms, keeping one for your records. The second copy can be returned to me in the included self-addressed stamped envelope. Once I have received the signed form, I will contact you to schedule an interview.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, Patricia George, by email at patricia.george@student.shu.edu or by phone at (732) 998-3321. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. George

APPENDIX D

STUDENT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS OVER THE AGE OF 18

I am willing to participate in this research project.
I am willing to have my interview digitally recorded.

Yes No
Yes No

PRINTED NAME

STUDENT SIGNATURE

DATE

APPENDIX E
PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How old are you?

2. How long have you been taking ESL classes?

3. How many years have you been in the USA?

4. Which ESL courses are you taking now?

5. Which languages do you speak at home?

6. Which languages do you speak with friends?

7. How comfortable / confident are you speaking English to others?

8. What do you think is the main reason for your absences from school recently?

9. Do you know how many days you have been absent in the past?
 - a. week _____
 - b. month _____
 - c. year _____
10. Do you want to meet during lunch or study hall period?

11. Do you want me to text, call, or email you to confirm interview days and times?

12. Cell number / Email address:

APPENDIX F

PARENT/GUARDIAN RECRUITMENT LETTER

As a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University's College of Education and Human Services' Education Leadership Management and Policy Department, I am conducting research with high school English learners to better understand their experiences with chronic absenteeism.

I would like your child to be a part of this study. If you are willing to let your child participate in the study, I will host individual interviews in a quiet and comfortable place within the school setting. Each interview will take about 30-40 minutes, and follow-up interviews will be scheduled, as needed. With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded, to be used as transcripts by no one other than myself, as the researcher. I am committed to maintaining your child's confidentiality and comfort level. If your child agrees to participate, he or she will be asked to give a fictitious name in order to protect his or her identity. The use of a fictitious name will help to make sure your child will never be associated with any presentations or publications related to this project.

All information provided through the interview process will be kept confidential with exception to anything I am required to report by law. If you would prefer not to have your child participate in this research project, it will in no way affect his or her services or support provided by the school. If you choose to have your child participate, you have the right to decline any questions and the right to stop the interview at any time. Please complete and sign the included consent forms, keeping one for your records. The second copy can be returned to me in the included self-addressed stamped envelope. Once I have received the signed form, I will contact you to schedule an interview.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, Patricia George, by email at patricia.george@student.shu.edu or by phone at (732) 998-3321. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. George

APPENDIX G

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS UNDER 18 YEARS OLD

I am willing for my child to participate in this research project.

Yes No

Printed parent/guardian name

Parent/guardian signature

Phone number/email address

Date

APPENDIX H

SCHOOL PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT LETTER AND CONSENT

Understanding English Learners' Chronic Absenteeism is a qualitative case study that seeks to understand the experiences of high school English learner students identified with chronic absenteeism. As a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University's College of Education and Human Services' Education Leadership Management and Policy Department, I am conducting research to understand absenteeism through interviews with students, administrators, and absentee officers in the district.

At this time, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. If you agree, I would like to conduct individual interviews in a quiet and comfortable location within the school setting. I anticipate each interview will take approximately 45 minutes, with follow-up interviews to be scheduled, as needed. With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded, to be used solely for the purpose of transcription by no one other than myself, as the researcher. As the researcher, I am committed to maintaining the utmost confidentiality and your comfort level. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym as a means to protect your identity. The use of a pseudonym will ensure you will never be associated with any scholarly presentations or publications related to this project. Also, please understand you have the right to decline any questions and the right to stop the interview at any time.

Please complete and sign the included consent forms, keeping one for your records. The second copy can be returned to me in the included self-addressed stamped envelope. Once I have received the signed form, I will contact you to schedule an interview accordingly.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, Patricia George, by email at patricia.george@student.shu.edu or by phone at (732) 998-3321. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. George

APPENDIX I

SCHOOL PERSONNEL CONSENT FORM

School Leaders and Absentee Officers Consent Form

I am willing to participate in this research project.

Yes No

I am willing to have my interview digitally recorded.

Yes No

Print name

Signature

Phone number

E-mail address

Date

APPENDIX J

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee – pseudonym:

(Briefly describe the project & interview procedures, ensure confidentiality, and remind the interviewee, he or she has the right to decline questions and/or the right to stop the interview at any time.)

Interview Questions

(Initial questions are to put the student at ease.)

Getting to Know the Student

Tell me a little about yourself.

Who do you currently live with?

Do you have other family members not living in the U.S.? Who?

What language(s) do you speak most at home? What about at school?

How do you spend your time when you are not in school?

Do you work?

Where do you work?

When (hours)?

How many hours a week?

School Background

How long have you been a student at this school? Do classmates also speak (student's 1st language)?

Do teachers also speak (student's 1st language)?

Was this the first school in the USA that you attended?

(Yes) What was it like when you first started at this this school?

What was hard?

What did you like?

What helped you to adjust to this school?

(No) What other schools have you gone to in the USA?

How do you other school(s) compare to this one?

How is this school different from schools in (USA and / or Country of Origin)?

How is this school the same as schools you attended in the past?

What is the thing you like best thing about this school?

What is the thing you do not like about this school?

Getting to School

What time do you have to be at school?

What time do you wake up?

How do you get to school every day? (walk / bike / drive / bus / get a ride with a friend)

How long does it take you?

Do you feel safe getting to school?

Why or why not?

How often do you miss the bus or a ride with a friend?

What happens if you miss the bus or a ride?

Do you have another way of getting to school?

Can you take a taxi/Uber?

School Absence

What happens when you miss school?

Do you tell your parents or guardians?

If not, how do they know you are not at school?

Do you call the office?

Do your parents call?

When you miss school, does someone at school call home or email your parents?

What do your parents say or do when you miss school if you are not sick?

Are there consequences at home if you are not sick?

What does the school do when you miss school?

Are there consequences at home if you are not sick?

Does someone at school keep track of the days you missed?

Does someone tell you how many days you have missed? If so, how often do they let you know your total days absent?

Monthly?

What are some of the reasons you might be absent from school?

Think about the last time you were absent

Why did you miss?

Were you contacted by someone at school about not being there?

What did the teacher say when you came back?

Think about last few weeks/months.

Did you miss any days?

What happened on the day(s) you missed school?

What do school counselors, leaders, or teachers do to help you try not to miss school?

What else could they do to help you?

How do you make up school work when you have missed school?

What challenges do you face in getting the work done?

How does your absence affect your grade?

School Day

What time are you dismissed?

Do you take the bus/drive/walk/get a ride?

Do you go home at dismissal?

Are you in clubs/sports?

Which ones?

What do you think would be the ideal schedule for you to start and end the school day?

Would you like to start later/earlier?

How would that help you get to school?

Do you have any other ideas for what your parents, teachers, or school staff can do to help students like you miss fewer days of school?

APPENDIX K

SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Protocol

Tentative School Leader(s) and Attendance Officer(s) Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee – pseudonym:

(Briefly describe the project & interview procedures, ensure confidentiality, and remind the interviewee, he or she has the right to decline questions and/or the right to stop the interview at any time.)

Interview Questions

(Initial questions are to put school leaders at ease.)

How long have you been an administrator/leader/teacher?

How long have you been an administrator/leader/teacher at this high school?

Attendance Policies, Practices, and Strategies

How would you describe your school's attendance policies and practices?

Who is responsible for addressing student attendance concerns in your school?

What are his/her responsibilities?

Describe the current attendance practices in your building as they do or do not relate to any attendance policies that are in place.

Which student attendance strategies do you feel are effective in reducing chronic absenteeism among English Learners in your district?

Do you believe the district and/or high school has created a balance between incentives for progress and punishments for failure to comply?

Student Attendance

How would you describe the overall attendance of the students in your school?

How would you describe the attendance of English learners in your school?

How and when are English Learners notified when absences are reaching chronic levels and by whom?

Are translators available for all of the students to ensure they understand fully?

How are consequences implemented?

Stakeholder Involvement

How do you see your role in responding to student attendance concerns?

How does the district and/or school communicate awareness to ensure that parents, students, schools, agencies, and related officials clearly understand the system's student attendance policy?

How does the district and/or school engage the greater community (e.g., parents, officials, agencies, and students) to prevent and reduce chronic absenteeism?

Has the district and/or school held public meetings?

Do parents/guardians receive written notification when student absenteeism is approaching chronic levels?

Is there coordination and cooperation among school leadership and parents/guardians to reduce the number of unexcused absences from school?

Has the district and/or school developed a parental involvement process to help identify and rectify the underlying cause(s) of truancy?

School Attendance Review Committee

Is there an active school attendance committee at the high school?

How was the school attendance committee developed?

How many committee members are actively involved?

How were members selected?

Were parents and/or students invited to participate?

How often do members meet?

Is the committee tasked with identifying causes and solutions?

How does the committee implement and monitor the attendance policy?

Is there a process to evaluate and revise the district's and/or school's attendance plan as needed?

Conclusion

In what ways, if any, do you think you and your staff can better address student attendance concerns?

Is there anything further you would like to add?

APPENDIX L
CONTACT SUMMARY FORM

Contact type: _____

Site: _____

Contact date: _____ Today's Date: _____

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?

2. Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.

Question

Information

3. Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?

4. What new (or remaining) target questions do you have in considering the next contact with this site?

CONCERN(S):

APPENDIX M

STUDENT RECRUITMENT FLYER

**RESEARCH STUDY SEEKING
STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

What: Interviews with high school students

Who: 9th to 12th grade English learner high school students who have been absent 15 or more days during their enrollment in high school, whether this year or in the past two years.

When & Where: Interviews will take place in person at a location that works best for participants, either at the high school or using Skype/Facetime. Interviews should take approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted in English.

Why: To share information about what might make it hard for you to get to school every day and ideas for what could be improved.

****Participants will receive a \$20 gift card for the interview.**

Please return your signed consent form to the designated locked box by **October 15, 2018**. Participation in this study is confidential. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Patricia George, graduate student at Seton Hall University by email patricia.george@student.shu.edu.

APPENDIX N

SCHOOL PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT FLYER

**RESEARCH STUDY SEEKING
SCHOOL PERSONNEL PARTICIPANTS**

What: Interviews with school personnel.

Who:

- Principals / Deans / Vice Principals / Guidance Counselors / Attendance Review Committee Members of current 9th to 12th grade students at risk of or with a history of chronic absenteeism.

When & Where: Interviews will take place in person at a location that works best for participants. Interviews should take about 45 minutes and will be conducted in English.

Why: To share information about your role in implementing the policies, procedures, and practices related to chronic absenteeism and share your ideas for how to improve student attendance.

Please return your signed consent form to the designated locked box by **September 15, 2018**. Participation in this study is confidential and will not be shared with anyone at the school or district. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Patricia George by email at patricia.george@student.shu.edu.

APPENDIX O

PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT STUDY

██████████ TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Administrative Offices:

██████████
Superintendent of Schools

██████████ Office
Fax
E-Mail: superintendent@██████████

April 30, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

██████████ Public Schools grants permission for Patricia George to conduct a research study, Understanding High School English Learners' Chronic Absenteeism and has permission to recruit students from ██████████ Township High School.

This approval is contingent upon the following:

- All participating students must have a signed release from parent/guardian
- The individual study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous
- Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented
- No costs will be incurred by either the school district or the individual participants

If you have any questions or concerns please call me at ██████████.

Sincerely,



Brian Zychowski, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

BZ/lc