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# Addressing Absenteeism through a Positive Reinforcement Intervention

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Addressing Absenteeism through a Positive Reinforcement Intervention

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Literature Review	6
Importance of Addressing Chronic Absenteeism	6
School Attendance as an Administrative Issue	6
School Attendance as an Academic Issue	7
Absenteeism Described	7
Gender and Cultural Considerations	8
Leading Causes	9
Medical Causes	9
School Environment	10
Anxiety	11
Family	13
Intervention Methods	14
Response to Intervention	14
Family-Based Interventions	15
Community-Based Interventions	17
School-Wide Interventions	17
Individual Interventions	18
Summary of Information and Aims of the Study	19
Method	20
Research Design	20
Participants	20
Sampling Procedures	21
Process of Participant Selection	22
Instruments	23
Process of Data Collection	24

ADDRESSING ABSENTEEISM	3
Ethical Considerations	25
Results	26
Participant Flow and Recruitment	26
Threats to Validity	27
Absenteeism Rates after Intervention	27
Grades after Intervention	29
Correlation between GPA and Absenteeism Rates	29
Discussion	30
Threats to Validity	31
Limitations and Suggested Solutions	32
Similarities to Other Studies	34
Unexpected Findings and Implications for Future Research	35
Conclusion	36
Appendix A	38
Appendix B	42
Appendix C	47
Appendix D	47
References	48

### Abstract

Chronic absenteeism within a school setting is defined as missing 10 percent or more of a school year. Additionally, school attendance is often correlated with academic success. This research study aimed to address the effect of positive reinforcement on school absenteeism and raw GPA percentages in chronically absent middle school students. Chronically absent students met weekly with the researcher during a 5 week period to receive the agreed upon positive reinforcement strategy. Students received a motivator only if he or she did not miss any school during that week. Absenteeism rates and raw GPA percentages were recorded at the start and completion of the study, and were compared to determine the effectiveness of positive reinforcement on improving absenteeism and GPA rates. Final results suggested that the positive reinforcement intervention decreased absenteeism rates by 2.37% overall, and increased overall raw GPA percentages by 2.13%. Additionally, raw GPA percentages were suggested to have a direct, inverse correlation with absenteeism rates.

*Keywords:* Chronic absenteeism, school nonattendance, absenteeism percentage rates, GPA percentages, positive reinforcement intervention

## Addressing Absenteeism through a Positive Reinforcement Intervention

### **Introduction**

Chronic school absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of a school year as a result of any variety of reasons. Absenteeism, or school nonattendance, is an international issue affecting most primary and secondary schools to some degree. School nonattendance can affect the productivity of the school environment as well as the emotional, academic, and career success of non-attending students. Additionally, absenteeism is often a symptom of a larger issue, and generally this issue is the barrier to school attendance. Existing research tends to address absenteeism by utilizing an intervention method that is grounded in the larger issue thought to be the cause of absenteeism. For example, if the factor causing absenteeism is thought to be family-related, a family-based intervention would be used to address absenteeism. Similarly, if there are school-based issues that are seemingly affecting attendance rates, school-based interventions are implemented (Pellegrini, 2007; Shultz, 1987). The method of addressing the greater issue related to attendance is effective because it treats absenteeism as a symptom and not the main problem. By addressing the greater issue, the symptom of absenteeism decreases. Despite this strength, this method of addressing absenteeism is not always generalizable, easily implemented, or readily accessible to all those struggling with school attendance (Pellegrini, 2007; Shultz, 1987).

Presently, there is a lack of research that examines the effects of an intervention that addresses absenteeism across all variables leading to attendance issues. The following research study examined chronic absenteeism in a middle school setting in attempts to provide a nonattendance solution that could be implemented regardless of the causing factor of absenteeism. The researcher aimed to determine whether a positive reinforcement intervention

could be effective in addressing chronic absenteeism. Secondly, the research aimed to establish whether a correlation between grades and attendance rates exists. Data was collected through one-on-one meetings with students struggling with chronic absenteeism as established by school-wide accessible attendance documents. These students were not receiving any other support services within the school setting and might have ordinarily been overlooked. Ideally, this intervention could help students to be more successful and keep the school in good standing in accordance with New York state attendance laws and regulation.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review will discuss the importance of addressing absenteeism, the leading causes of absenteeism, commonly used interventions, and areas in which the current research is lacking. Additionally, the relationship between absenteeism and academic achievement is explored. This comprehensive overview of school nonattendance aims to inform the current research study.

### **Importance of Addressing Chronic Absenteeism**

**School attendance as an administrative issue.** School attendance is an important topic to dedicate attention to because it can impact a variety of facets. When students are chronically absent from school, there are negative implications for both the school community and the individual student. Absenteeism is an administrative concern because it affects the status and productivity of the school. Schools with higher rates of absenteeism can lose their school ranking status or other prestigious recognitions (P12, NYSED, 2015). School nonattendance can also be indicative of greater issues within the school environment. School non-attenders have higher rates of family, medial, anxiety, economic, and school related issues. Students who are chronically absent from school are at higher risk for delinquent behavior or trouble with the law,

which can impact the community at large. Addressing absenteeism at the administrative level can have positive impacts on the overall success and functioning of the school community.

**School attendance as an academic issue.** In order to address the research question regarding grades and attendance, this section will explore the effects of school attendance on grades. Absentee students tend to have overall worse outcomes than their school-attending peers. Students missing school frequently do not achieve as well academically due to missing instruction and other comorbid concerns. Being in school is directly linked to succeeding in school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). If a student is chronically absent during one year of school, he or she is at risk for chronic absenteeism in years to follow. Since the information learned in school tends to build on itself, missing vital information can lead to academic difficulty in later years (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Chronic absenteeism can explain achievement gaps at any grade level. Research specifically acknowledges the impact of school attendance on math achievement and standardized test scores. One study even found a correlation between 6<sup>th</sup> grade attendance and high school graduation rates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Chronically absent students often fail classes, are held back, or drop out of school. Due to the high correlation of academic success and school attendance, absentee students overall do not have as positive of life trajectories (Balanz & Byrnes).

### **Absenteeism Described**

According to Schultz (1987), many terms exist to describe absenteeism, including school nonattendance, truancy, school avoidance, school refusal, school phobia, and chronic absenteeism. Though these words are often used interchangeably, some have underlying connotations and characteristics that must be identified (Pellegrini, 2007; Schultz, 1987). First, truancy is often used to describe absences from school deemed unexcused. Generally, these



absences are without parental consent. Chronic truancy identifies students missing large percentages of the school instruction due to unexcused absences. Schultz (1987) states that truancy is often considered a deliberate and delinquent absence behavior. School phobia is used when describing students whose absences are due to school related anxiety. School avoidance is often used when describing absences caused by avoiding unpleasant stimuli within the school environment.

School absenteeism and school nonattendance are often use to describe a general lack of school attendance (Pellegrini, 2007). Chronic absenteeism is described as missing 10 percent or more of a school year. The term chronic absenteeism is critical for this study as its definition provides the parameters for participant selection. For the purpose of this literature review, absenteeism will be addressed using the terms school absenteeism and school nonattendance. These terms are used in an effort to discuss the general concept of school absences, across variables and factors.

### **Gender and Cultural Considerations**

Current research in the area of school absenteeism varies in regards to cultural considerations. Some studies suggest that absenteeism is heterogeneous in nature, while others suggest that there are distinct gender, socioeconomic, and cultural differences. Teasley (2004), suggests that absenteeism is significantly affected by socioeconomic status (SES). The research implies that higher rates of absenteeism are associated with lower SES. It is suggested that the increase of stressors in low socioeconomic homes plays a contributing role to low attendance rates. Other studies mirror the results of Teasley, (2004).

Supplemental data suggests that low levels of education and parental unemployment are indicators of higher absentee rates (Uppal et al., 2009; Ingul et al., 2012). According to Teasley

(2004), ethnic minorities can also be indicators of school absenteeism. Specifically, absenteeism rates are higher in urban areas, predominantly occupied by people of Hispanic and African American heritage.

In addition to the socioeconomic and cultural differences, some research indicates that there is a gender differential for absenteeism. A study by Uppal et al., (2009) suggests that males tend to be absent more frequently. However, a study by Havik et al (2014) suggests that male and female students miss school equally but for different reasons. Males are more likely to miss school for considerably truant reasons, while females tend to miss school for more nonattendance reasons. More specifically, males are more deliberate about missing school, and females tend to experience higher somatic symptoms leading to school absence. The previously mentioned areas of cultural differences are important to take into consideration when addressing absenteeism, however, the following sections of this literature review will attempt to address school nonattendance on a more generalized platform (Havik et al., 2014).

### **Leading Causes**

This next section aims to identify the leading causes of absenteeism. Each cause is broken down into a category that best encompasses that particular attendance factor.

**Medical causes.** One of the leading causes of absenteeism is medical illness. Medical reasons for missing school are the most legitimate reasons for school nonattendance (Havik, 2015). Though medical issues range in severity, even the simplest of illness can lead to absenteeism. Each school has its own set of rules regarding illness and when to miss school. Most schools are in agreement that a student with a fever should not attend school until after 24 hours of the fever subsiding. Influenza out breaks as well as other contagious viruses can be spread quickly and result in a large number of absences (King, Beckett, Snyder, Cummings,

King & Mader, 2012). One study in particular determined that the flu vaccine can decrease the number of school absences significantly. More specifically, a 20 percent increase in flu vaccinations leads to a 4 percent decrease in school absences (King et al., 2012).

Other studies look at more severe medical issues and their contribution to school non-attendance. A study by Rappaport, Daskalakis, & Andrel (2010), examines obesity as a predicting factor for school absenteeism. This study suggested that students struggling with extreme obesity were observed to have significantly higher rates of school nonattendance than their non-obese peers. Additionally, this study suggested that students considered overweight but not obese only had slightly higher levels of absenteeism than their non-overweight peers. Though this particular study did not find a significant rate of absenteeism in overweight students, it did find significant differences in absenteeism for students considered obese. Despite their findings, the researchers indicate that it is worth examining attendance rates in students struggling with body weight. This is because there is still a correlation, though not significantly found in this study (Rappaport et al., 2011). This obesity research serves as another example of how medical concerns can play a role in absenteeism.

**School Environment.** Another contributing factor to school nonattendance is the school environment. The term school environment is an all-encompassing term for any school related concerns that might contribute to absenteeism. Bullying, curriculum, student-teacher relationships, and other peer issues are all categorized as school environment concerns (Gastic, 2008; Lannegrand-Willems, Cosnefroy, Lecigne, 2011; Teasely, 2004). Each concern, if unaddressed, can be a factor in absenteeism. One study discussed how some students choose not to attend classes when they believe that a class is irrelevant or that the teacher is not adequately prepared or competent in that area of education (Enea & Dafinoiu, 2009). Lannegrand-Willems,

Cosnefroy, and Lecigne (2011), support these findings by stating that absentee students often feel that they lack control over their education. Often these students feel that they are not capable of controlling their success, view the school as an unjust system, and turn to absentee behaviors.

Research suggests that students who feel more connected to the school, teachers, and faculty are less likely to be frequently absent from school than their disconnected counterparts. Ingul et al., (2012) states that in order for students to value school and attend, they must feel supported and safe. In addition, Teasley (1987), discusses how the size of the school and the type of community environment both play a role in absenteeism. Absenteeism rates are higher in rural, urban, and larger school districts. Schools that handle absenteeism inconsistently also tend to have higher levels of school nonattendance (Pellegrini, 2007).

Perhaps the most noted in school environment related absenteeism research was the role that bullying played on school nonattendance. There are varying opinions on the role that bullying plays on school attendance. Some research suggests that bullying is not the leading cause of absenteeism, though many parents assume that it is (Pellegrini, 2007). Contrary to this information, other researchers claim that bullying is not the leading cause of absenteeism, though it can play a role (Ingul et al., 2012; Gastic, 2008). Though bullying does increase the possibility for chronic absenteeism, it is not the main cause. In all areas of school environment-related absenteeism, connectedness to faculty was a preventative factor (Ingul et al., 2012; Havik et al., 2014; Teasley, 1987). All of the aforementioned school environment concerns can contribute to absenteeism. At the base of most school environment concerns is the anxiety that can be attributed to those school safety issues.

**Anxiety.** Anxiety is another key factor in school nonattendance, and is linked closely with other variables such as the school environment and other mental health concerns (Kearney

& Graczyk, 2013). Anxiety can play a role in daily life, therefore it can also impact school attendance. In regards to attendance, anxiety is a risk factor predominantly because of the innate human desire to avoid stressful or anxiety provoking situations (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). For the average student without anxiety concerns, school can still provide a number of stressful situations. For students with anxiety, however, these stressors are often the root of anxiety. Anxiety can be seen in a number of ways in the school setting. For example, students struggling with social phobia might have a harder time in school due to the social nature of being surrounded by hundreds of their peers (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Test anxiety and performance anxiety also occur at high frequencies in school settings. For some students, generally at the elementary level, separation anxiety can cause students to struggle leaving their parents to attend school. Lastly, generalized anxiety can cause students to worry constantly about everything all day (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013; Pellegrini, 2007). While some students struggle with only one or two of these anxiety types, others struggle with anxiety across the board. When anxiety is a constant factor for a child at school, it can lead students to avoid the negative stimulus, therefore becoming frequently absent from school (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013; Pellegrini, 2007).

The anxiety faced by students can be so severe that it leads to somatic symptoms as well. Somatic symptoms are the physical appearance of anxiety. For example, highly anxious students may report suffering from headaches, stomachaches, or overall achiness (Ingul et al., 2012). These physical symptoms of anxiety often mimic medical illness, and so anxious students do not attend school because they are “sick.” Though being absent from school offers a retreat from anxiety stimuli, absence can also cause anxiety to increase. Students who miss a substantial amount of school also miss school work and information that must be completed upon return.

Especially in anxious students, making up work can be overwhelming, and can become another anxiety stimulus to avoid (Ingul et al., 2012).

**Family.** It is critical to examine the influence families have on a student's attendance behaviors as there are a number of family related factors that contribute to this issue (Teasely, 2004). Research on family issues as they relate to attendance have been somewhat inconsistent. Some studies suggest that being from a single parent household is associated with higher rates of absenteeism, however, other studies say that this is not the case (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Despite these inconsistencies, most research does suggest that low socioeconomic status (SES) is commonly correlated with school nonattendance. Though low SES is associated with lower attendance rates, it is important to note that low SES is not the *cause* of absenteeism. Families with lower SES are more likely to experience certain barriers to attendance and different life stressors than their higher SES counterparts. As a result of these barriers and stressors affecting low SES families, there are higher levels of school nonattendance in students from lower SES families. However, this does not mean that families with higher SES cannot experience these stressors or barriers.

One barrier that commonly affects families with low SES is parental education. Often, finances and education levels carry over from generation to generation. Therefore, lower SES is often associated with lower levels of parental education. The lower a parent's level of education, the less likely the parent is to value and push education for their child (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). In addition, low income families face barriers to adequate childcare. Often, caregiving and household responsibilities are given to older siblings while parent(s) are at work. It is also suggested that low SES is associated with low parental involvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Research suggests that parents who work closely with their children and are involved in their

education, motivate their children to attend school and be successful. When parents do not involve themselves in a child's educational career, absenteeism can be the result (Teasley, 1987).

Another familial issue that can contribute to school nonattendance is the presence of hostility, fighting, violence, and abuse in a household. (Havik et al., 2014). Students who are exposed to conflict and instability in their family miss more school because it becomes challenging to set routines for going and being picked up from school. Kids who are maltreated or experience hardships within the family system struggle with attendance (Morrissey et al., 2013). As discussed in this section, barriers and stressors that affect family often have a high impact on school nonattendance. A common thread between those barriers is often lower SES, but these barriers do not always discriminate between socioeconomic statuses. When addressing family-related attendance issues, researchers should remember that lower SES is simply more significantly correlated with school nonattendance; it is not a causing factor (Havik et al., 2014).

### **Intervention Methods**

In the previous sections of this literature review, some leading causes of absenteeism were addressed in an effort to show the wide spectrum of attendance-related concerns. Students who are frequently absent from school experience absenteeism for at least one of the aforementioned reasons. In an effort to address absenteeism and the related factors, researchers have attempted to implement a variety of interventions. Some interventions are used to target a particular factor causing absenteeism, while others attempt to address absenteeism on a general level. The following sections of this literature review address absenteeism interventions and their effectiveness. It is important to note that while each intervention method has its own set of strengths, a comprehensive approach to school nonattendance is the most effective.

**Response to intervention.** Response to Intervention, also known as RTI, is a model for addressing student issues on school, community, familial, and individual levels (Kearney &

Graczyk, 2013). RTI models place student needs in three tiers based on need. Tier one reaches the majority of students. Intervention methods at the tier one level address issues on a community or school-wide level. For attendance, a tier one model might be an assembly at the beginning of the year for all students about the importance of coming to school. Following tier one are tier two students. Students who fall under this second tier are students who either need additional exposure to information in order to comprehend a lesson, or they are students who are starting to exhibit potential behavior concerns (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Students at this level who are at risk for attendance issues might meet one-on-one with a teacher, administrator, or counselor to set up a behavior plan. In addition to the information given to all families at the tier one level, families of tier two students will receive more individualized attention or information. At tier three, students receive high levels of interventions to aid their academic and attendance success. These interventions might include finding alternative school settings or other extreme solutions (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013).

A response to intervention model is not an intervention in and of itself. It serves as method for organization and structure of all behavior interventions (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). In the following sections of this literature review, more specific interventions for attendance are explored. Different interventions can be used at one, some, or all intervention tiers. Though the interventions might not fit simply one tier, the RTI model can still serve as a framework for comprehending the severity of a student's attendance needs and the nature of their particular intervention.

**Family-based interventions.** Family-based interventions attempt to address attendance issues at the familial level and generally fall under tier two or tier three of the RTI model. Often times, students who struggle with attendance originate from families who struggle in one or more



ways (Shultz, 1987). For example, some families are hurting financially or live in rough neighborhoods. Other families have structures, values, attitudes, and behaviors that negatively impact school attendance. In order to address these family-rooted attendance issues, researchers have implemented a number of family-based intervention methods (Shultz 1987; Pellegrini, 2007; Teasley, 2004, Sheldon, 2007; Epstein & Sheldon, 2010; Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2013).

Some examples of family-based interventions are parenting skills groups, family therapy, interdisciplinary team strategizing meetings, criminal prosecution, and community referrals (Sheldon, 2007; Epstein & Sheldon, 2010; Maynard et al., 2013). Parenting skills groups are suggested to be effective in some studies while others dismiss their effectiveness. Parental training can be particularly useful for parents of students who are bullied or highly anxious. In addition, parent training can be useful to teach disciplinary methods for deliberately non-attending students (Maynard et al., 2013, Sheldon, 2007; Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Family therapy has been suggested by most researchers to be a positive step towards improving school nonattendance (Maynard et al., 2013; Pellegrini, 2007; Shultz, 1987; Teasley, 2004). Team strategizing meetings are effective especially when the meetings increase parental knowledge of their child's performance, attendance, and disciplinary measures. Community referrals will be discussed in a following section, but can also be effective if implemented accurately. Criminal prosecution is not thought to be effective for decreasing absences long-term, but it can have short term benefits. Most family-based interventions are effective in decreasing attendance, however, they are often more effective when used in collaboration with other interventions, such as community based interventions (Maynard et al., 2013; Sheldon, 2007).

**Community-based interventions.** Community-based interventions are most always used in collaboration with family-based interventions as they tend to support each other. Despite the frequent simultaneous use of family and community-based interventions, there are some community-based interventions that can be effective alone (Sheldon, 2007; Maynard et al., 2013; Epstein & Sheldon, 2010; Teasley, 2004; Schultz, 1987). Community-based interventions are used with higher frequency in low-income neighborhoods. Low-income neighborhoods are often populated by single parent, low education, and high risk households. Often there are many barriers to attendance in these neighborhoods, so a comprehensive, community approach is needed. In order to get kids to school, community members, organizations, and agencies must all be on board and supportive (Teasley, 2004). Having the community's support is a preventative measure and would be considered a tier one intervention according to the RTI method.

An example of a community-based tier two or tier three intervention for absenteeism is the Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) program. The ACT program uses community members as buddies for students struggling with chronic absenteeism. Students are rewarded with time with their buddy, a fun activity, and access to the community center when they attend school. Though this is but one example of a community-based program, many more exist and have been suggested to be effective in decreasing school nonattendance (Sheldon, 2007).

**School-wide interventions.** School-wide interventions generally fit under the tier one level of the response to intervention model and are most effective when used in collaboration with family and community-based interventions (Teasley, 2004; Freeman, Simonsen, McCoach, Sugai, Lombardi, & Horner, 2015; Maynard, Kjellstrand, & Thompson, 2013; Pelligrini, 2007). Schools are a unique entity that can serve as the center for other intervention methods and generally spark the initiative of such programs. A preventative school approach would be to

address the importance of school attendance to all students and faculty. An effective school based program educates teachers about school nonattendance and how they can combat it within the classroom (Maynard et al., 2013; Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Teachers can also learn how to identify students at risk for school absenteeism and when to address the issue. School-wide interventions that emphasize zero tolerance or harsh disciplinary action for school nonattendance are not effective. Research suggests that a strong school-based intervention method is balanced, addresses student needs and disciplinary actions equally, and focuses on improving school improvement over time (Teasley, 2004; Freeman et al., 2015; Maynard et al., 2013; Pelligrini, 2007).

**Individual Interventions.** Individual interventions for school nonattendance are usually assigned to school faculty members as part of a comprehensive school-based approach. As part of the RTI model, individual interventions are generally part of tier two or tier three. Some examples of individual intervention for absentee students are individual counseling, positive reinforcement, and mentor or peer support programs (Teasley, 2004; Enea & Dafinoiu, 2009). Some interventions worked with students using a positive reinforcement method. Students were rewarded for school attendance, and research suggested that this was effective in improving school attendance. Other studies found that individual counseling, such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy, was effective in decreasing absence rates (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). In addition, some research suggested that peer or faculty mentors could be effective in decreasing school nonattendance. The common thread between most of the individual interventions is that they can help students address the root of their attendance issues. As counselors or other mentors become aware of the primary issue, the child can be provided with support for those concerns as well.

Often, the primary issue is a huge component to school nonattendance, and when addressed, decreases absenteeism accordingly (Teasley, 2004).

### **Summary of Information and Aims of the Study**

There are a few common threads of information existing in current school nonattendance research. First, absenteeism can be the result of family, medical, school environment, or anxiety related issues. Secondly, the researchers tend to address attendance issues through the framework provided by the factor causing the absenteeism. For example, absenteeism related to family concerns might be addressed through a family-based intervention. Lastly, it is widely thought that addressing school absenteeism is a critical piece in insuring the academic, emotional, and career success of students. For all of the aforementioned reasons, this researcher chose to examine absenteeism in a middle school setting. Additionally, research suggests that confronting absentee issues at the middle school level can have positive benefits on high school absenteeism rates (Kieffer et al., 2014). Working with absentee middle school students can aid these students in the development of many skills necessary for high school success, such as attendance habits, study and academic strategies, and coping mechanisms (Kieffer et al., 2014). Currently, the research lacks data regarding individual interventions used in the school setting. More specifically, the research does not have much information about individual intervention methods that can assist absentee students across nonattendance variables. This study's purpose is to analyze the effectiveness of a positive reinforcement intervention on the attendance rates of chronically absent students. The study aims to answer two questions:

1. What is the impact of positive reinforcement on school attendance in chronically absent students?
2. Does a change in attendance rates indicate a change in academic success?

## **Method**

The following section discusses the methods used in the current research study.

### **Research Design**

This was a quantitative, mixed methods research study that followed both action-research and correlational designs. The first research question, “what is the effectiveness of a positive reinforcement intervention for addressing chronic absenteeism,” was studied using an action-research design. This question was addressed using the action-research design because it was implemented within a school setting, identified a problem, identified a population, implemented a possible solution to a problem, and then analyzed the results. Specifically, the researcher identified chronic absenteeism as a problem, pinpointed students struggling with absenteeism, implemented a positive reinforcement intervention, and then analyzed the results using descriptive statistics. In order to address the second research question, “what is the correlation between absenteeism and GPA,” the researcher utilized a correlational design. Ultimately, the researcher aimed to determine whether a positive reinforcement intervention could decrease absenteeism rates, and whether absenteeism rates were correlated with GPAs.

### **Participants**

15 seventh and eighth grade school students, between the ages of 12 and 13 were recruited for this research study. Of the 15 students approached, six students, two female and four male participated. All but one of the participants were Caucasian American. One participant identified as Latina. All the participants were in general education classes and were not receiving any other support services within the school setting. Support services included, IEP resources, mentor services, and individual or group counseling. The students' grade point averages (GPA) in percentages were as follows: 56.8, 64.8, 67.8, 76.6, 82.4, and 83. To be considered for the

study, participants had to have missed ten percent of the school year by the starting date of the study. When research began, there had been 110 days of school. Therefore, to be included in the study, students had to have missed 11 or more days of school. Both excused and unexcused absences were counted in the determination of absentee numbers. In order for students to participate, both parental consent and student assent had to be obtained.

The intended or ideal sample size was 15 students. The ideal sample size was established based on the researcher's existing obligations as a school counselor. While providing the intervention, the researcher needed to maintain her caseload of 20 students per week, attend weekly interdisciplinary staff meetings, and be available to respond to crisis situations if needed. An example of a crisis situation was a report of a child with suicidal ideation or self-injurious behavior who the counselor had to meet with. The researcher determined that more than 15 research participants would have been difficult to manage while also maintaining her other roles as a school counselor at the research site. Additionally, many of the students struggling with absenteeism were already receiving support services within the school, so this limited the number of students in need of an attendance intervention. As previously mentioned, the actual or achieved sample size was six participants. The difference between the intended and actual sample size can be attributed to two factors. First, only ten families returned consent forms to the researcher. Secondly, three of four of these students decided against being in the study despite obtained parental consent. As a result of the aforementioned factors, the intervention was implemented with the actual sample size of six students.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Before research could begin, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval had to be obtained. The IRB proposal included several sections. These sections were a brief literature

review, risks/benefits, confidentiality, incentives, recruitment information, parent and child consent letters, verbal scripts, permission of school administration, and CITI training certification. The whole IRB process spanned across three months, from November of 2015 to January of 2016. This process contained three rounds of corrections from the IRB staff at The College at Brockport. The IRB examined proposals under three categories: Exempt, Expedited, and Full Review. Proposals considered exempt posed the least amount of risk. Often these proposals were strictly analysis of existing data or literature. Full review proposals posed the most risk to participants, and required a full presentation to the review board before research could begin. A proposal considered expedited posed minor risks but was often used when working with a higher risk population, such as minors. For these reasons, the present study was considered expedited.

There were some barriers to immediate IRB approval, specifically pertaining to the language used in the parental consent and minor assent forms. The explanation of possible benefits of participation were considered possibly coercive. Language used should be straight forward and only state benefits directly associated with the study. In addition, the proposal should be carefully edited for grammatical errors in order to decrease corrections and time between submission and research approval.

**Process of participant selection.** There were several steps involved in the process of participant selection. First, a list of students missing a substantial amount of school was created using the school-wide tool, Infinite Campus. All school staff have access to the attendance data on Infinite Campus, however, only the school nurse and the school attendance secretary can run specific searches and create lists using different criteria. For this reason, the school attendance secretary developed a list of students missing 11 days of school or more. 11 is based on the

number of school days at the start of the research study and represents ten percent of the school-year as defined by chronic absenteeism. The school attendance secretary then gave the list of names to the researcher.

After the researcher received the attendance list, the researcher reached out to school administrators and personnel, and asked for a list of students with whom they were working with either on an individual or group basis. In order to decrease the number of variables that could affect the study's outcome, students receiving any other support services by any school administrators or personnel were excluded from the study. When the researcher received the lists of names from the previously stated school staff members, she removed those students from the potential list of participants.

Once a final list of 15 eligible participants remained, the researcher sent home consent forms to the students' legal guardians. In addition to the consent forms, forms explaining the purpose of the study were sent to participants. The legal guardians of the potential participants were asked to return the consent form via mail or by sending it to school with their son or daughter. The researcher received ten consent forms back from the families. When the researcher met with the students who received consent, 6 out of the 10 students signed assent forms and agreed to be part of the study. See Appendix A for the adult consent form and minor assent form.

### **Instruments**

One of the instruments used in this study was the Forced-Choice Survey. The student-completed Forced-Choice survey was used to determine what type of reinforcement would best motivate each participant. The Forced-Choice Survey had 35 questions that, when scored, broke down into five categories of motivation: adult approval, peer approval, competitive approval, consumable reward, and independent rewards. The researcher chose to use the Forced-Choice



Survey to determine what style of positive reinforcement would be most effective for each student. Additionally, it was determined that using a survey to establish a positive-reinforcement method would create greater consistency across participants, therefore eliminating one of the possible threats to internal validity. See Appendix B to view the Forced-Choice Survey in its entirety.

The second instrument used for data collection was the Infinite Campus Tool available to all school administrators and personnel. Infinite Campus gives school personnel access to each students' grades, attendance records, behavioral reports, demographic information, and specialized educational needs. For the purpose of this study, Infinite campus was used to gain access to each participant's grades and number of absences both prior to and after the implementation of the positive reinforcement intervention.

### **Process of Data Collection**

The researcher met with participants, and data were collected in a middle school counseling office. When students met with the researcher to sign assent forms, they were explained the terms of the study and agreements. After students agreed to participate, they completed the Forced-Choice Survey described in the Instruments section. Of the seven participants, six were determined to respond best to adult approval, and one participant responded best to peer approval. The positive reinforcement method selected for those students motivated by adult approval was a note from the researcher praising his or her weekly accomplishments. These notes consisted of any improvements in grades, and recognized his or her attendance rates. The student best motivated by peer approval received a "special lunch" with a friend each week that he did not miss school. The student chose to receive a lunch from Subway for him and a friend, but this motivator could vary depending on the interest of the

participant. Completed Forced-Choice Surveys were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the school counseling office. During this first meeting, the potential benefits of attendance improvement were explained to the participants as was the potential risk of missing class time to meet with the researcher. An example of a potential benefit was grade improvement. Examples of risks associated with missing class time were missing classroom instruction or missing opportunities to socialize with peers. Lastly, the students were told about the certificate of completion they would receive given he or she participated in the study.

After each student signed assent and completed the Forced-Choice Survey, the researcher hand recorded the student's current grades in each class and number of current absences. Each week that a student did not miss any school, the researcher would provide the participant with his or her motivator. The researcher recorded the students' attendance records for the week and would indicate whether or not a motivator was given. If a motivator was not given, the researcher would record the reason why that student was absent and on which date. At the end of a five week period, the researcher recorded each participant's grades in each class and total number of absences accumulated during the five-week intervention. Then the participants all received certificates of completion.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All meetings with the students followed the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) ethical standards. Specific standards addressed include A1e, A2, A9f, and B1. The ethical standard A1e, promotes the welfare of students. The researcher promoted the welfare of participants by providing support services. ASCA ethical standards under heading A2 all refer to confidentiality. When meeting and working with the participants, the researcher adhered to all necessary confidentiality standards. Standard A9f refers to the counselor's responsibilities when

using an assessment instrument. The researcher ensured that the Forced-Choice Survey was used ethically and was an appropriate instrument to administer. The survey was deemed appropriate because it can be used across cultures and was at reading level appropriate for all students. Lastly, the researcher observed standards under B1, *rights to parents and guardians*. The researcher obtained consent from parents while maintaining the appropriate level of confidentiality to the students.

## **Results**

### **Participant Flow and Recruitment**

In the following section, the results of the present study are discussed. A list of students who met criteria for chronic absenteeism was created using Infinite Campus. The students who met all inclusion criteria and provided adult and minor assent were accepted as participants in the study. Using the Infinite Campus tool, grades and absenteeism rates were examined during the third marking period of the academic school year. The positive reinforcement intervention discussed in the method section was implemented halfway through the third marking period based on the IRB approval timeline, but could be implemented at any point in the year. The five-week mark was considered halfway through the marking period because marking periods were all ten weeks in length. The researcher recorded each participant's five-week grades and number of absences found on Infinite Campus and implemented the intervention for five weeks. After five weeks, the researcher recorded each student's final grades and number of absences. The purpose of recording this data was to address both of the research questions, which are as follows:

- 1.) What is the impact of a positive reinforcement intervention on absenteeism rates in chronically absent students?

2.) What is the correlation between absenteeism rates and grade point average in chronically absent students?

In order to address the effectiveness of the positive reinforcement intervention, the researcher recorded pre and post-intervention absenteeism rates. Then, pre and post-intervention grades were compared with pre and post-intervention absenteeism rates to determine any possible correlations. In order to calculate results, the researcher used descriptive statistics (mean, median, and range).

### Threats to Validity

Prior to addressing the data analysis and results in more detail, it should be noted that the analysis was conducted by hand, and was therefore susceptible to human error. Additionally, the small sample size minimized the validity, and results cannot be considered statistically significant.

### Pre and Post Intervention Results for Absenteeism Percentages and Raw GPA Percentages

Variables	Average Before	Average After	Median Before	Median After	Range Before	Range After
Average Absenteeism Percentage Rates	11.4 %	9.03%	6.2%	10.75%	31%	16.7%
Average Raw GPA Percentages	71.9%	74.03%	72.2%	74.9%	27%	20.4%

\* Appendix C. Mean absenteeism rates and GPA percentages

### Absenteeism Rates after Intervention

The above chart shows the combined mean GPA percentage for all of the participants, both before and after the intervention. It also shows the combined mean for absenteeism percentages for all of the participants both before and after the intervention. Combined means for both absenteeism rates and GPAs were used to show an overall trend of improvement across all

participants. Though there were some participants who were outliers and did not change or improve, this chart shows that, on average, participants' absences decreased and GPAs increased over the span of the positive reinforcement intervention.

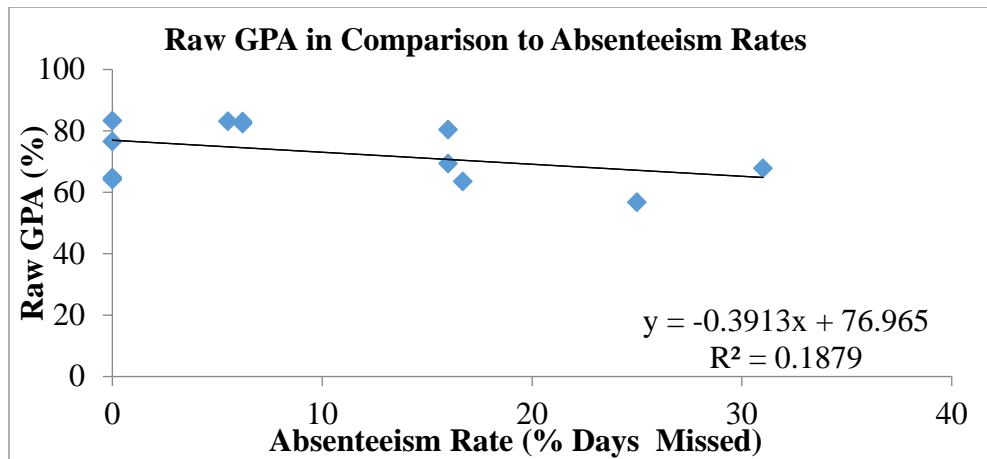
The researcher used the school calendar to determine how many school days were in the first 5-weeks of the marking period and the last 5-weeks of the marking period. The researcher took each student's number of absences in the first 5-weeks and divided it by the number of days in the first half of the marking period. The resulting number represented absenteeism rates by percentage for each student. The researcher then found the average absenteeism percentage rate between all of the participants by adding together their individual percentage rate of absences and then dividing by the number of participants. The combined participant average for absenteeism percentage rate pre-intervention was 11.40 percent. Using the same method, the researcher calculated absenteeism percentage rates for each student and the average absenteeism percentage rate after the intervention. The average absenteeism percentage rate was 9.03 percent. The difference between the absenteeism percentage rate averages suggested that the intervention may have been effective in decreasing absenteeism rates. Though the intervention was effective for the participants as a whole, there were some participants who did not have a change in absenteeism rates. One participant's absenteeism rate increased. The median absenteeism rate for the entire group of participants increased as well from 6.2 percent before intervention to 10.75 percent after intervention. The range of absenteeism percentage rates for the entire group decreased from 31 percent to 16.7 percent. Since the range is the differences between the highest and lowest numbers in a set, a lower post-intervention range suggested an overall decrease in absenteeism percentages.

### **Grades after Intervention**

Using Infinite Campus, the researcher recorded each participant's grades for their core classes (English, Math, Social Studies, Science, and Foreign Language) at the 5-week point in the third marking period. The researcher developed a raw GPA percentage for each student by averaging together his or her core-class grades. If a teacher did not provide a 5-week grade for a student, the researcher used the student's final grade from the second marking period. Then the raw GPA percentages for each participant were averaged together to provide an overall pre-intervention average GPA. At the end of the 5 weeks of intervention, the researcher used the same method with final grades to calculate post-intervention raw GPA percentages per student and overall. The average raw GPA percentage for all participants prior to intervention was 71.9 percent and was 74.03 percent after intervention. This 2.13 percent increase showed that students' grades improved over the span of the intervention. The pre-and-post-intervention medians were also calculated. The middle number in the GPA set point prior to intervention was 72.2 percent and was 74.9 percent afterward. A difference between the range numbers was also calculated and showed a decrease from 27 before intervention to 20.4 after intervention. This 7.6 percent decrease suggests that overall grades improved. These findings address the first research question that asks, "What is the effectiveness of a positive reinforcement intervention on absenteeism rates." The above findings suggest that the positive reinforcement intervention was effective in decreasing absenteeism rates in chronically absent students.

### **Correlation between GPA and Absenteeism Rates**

The following section discusses the second research question, "what is the correlation between GPA and absenteeism rates?" The correlation is first demonstrated through the following graph.



\* Appendix D. Correlation between raw GPA and absenteeism rates

The above chart represents the correlation between raw GPA percentages and absenteeism percentage rates of students. In order to correlate students' GPA and absenteeism rates, the researcher used Microsoft Excel. The researcher inputted each participant's raw GPA percentage and absenteeism percentage for both pre and post-intervention. Both the pre and post percentages for raw GPA and absenteeism rates were used to increase the amount of data sets and demonstrate a clearer correlation. As the chart shows, there was a direct, inverse relationship between absenteeism percentage rates and raw GPA percentages. Specifically, as students' absenteeism percentage rates increased, their raw GPA percentages decreased. Simply put, as students began attending school with higher frequency, their GPAs increased. The findings of the above graph address the second research question because it demonstrates the correlation between raw GPAs and absenteeism rates.

### Discussion

The hypotheses of the study were reflected in the results of the intervention. It was hypothesized that absenteeism rates would decrease as a result of the positive reinforcement intervention, and that absenteeism and GPA would be inversely correlated. Over the span of the

5-week intervention, absenteeism rates decreased in chronically absent students from an average of 11.4 percent to 9.03 percent. Additionally, the average raw GPA percentages increased from 71.9 percent to 74.03 percent. When compared to each other, a direct, inverse, yet statistically insignificant relationship was found as was represented by the  $R^2$  number of .1879. The results did show changes between the pre and post-intervention averages for absenteeism rates and raw GPA percentages. Additionally, a small correlation was found between GPA and absenteeism rates. However, the results in both categories were not statistically significant.

### **Threats to Validity**

One potential threat to the validity of this study is the small amount of data collected. According to Lingard and Rowlinson (2006), if a researcher gathers an inadequate amount of data, making inferences about a population of people is not valid. In regards to the present study, the limited collected data do not adequately represent the population of chronically absent students. Therefore, a major threat to this study's validity is the lack of data. Though the results of the present study did suggest that a positive reinforcement intervention can effectively decrease absences, and that grades are correlated with absenteeism, the insufficient amount of data makes it invalid to generalize to a population.

In addition to inadequate amount of data, the limited sample size of 6 participants was considered a threat to validity. According to Lingard and Rowlinson (2006), the sample size can make a difference when running data analysis, and could affect the validity of a study. Lingard and Rowlinson (2006) made reference to other researchers' views on the importance of sample size with data analysis. Though there were some varying views on valid sample sizes for running analysis, the average minimum sample size suggested was 100 participants. Lingard and Rowlinson (2006) further stated that a small sample size can lead to analyses that misrepresent



information or wrongly represent a population. For the aforementioned reasons, this researcher did not run data analysis on SPSS to determine the results of the study. Though the use of SPSS may have minimized human error, the resulting analysis would not have been valid due to the small sample size and the inability to accurately depict a population.

Another possible threat to validity was missing data. One participant did not have a five week grade for a class recorded. The researcher used the final grade from the previous marking period as a pre-intervention grade. The reasoning behind this decision was that the final grade was relatively consistent between each marking period for this student in this particular class. Another possible threat to validity was the way in which GPAs were calculated. The researcher only used core class grades to calculate GPAs. A more accurate GPA percentage might have included elective classes, such as Music, Art, Physical Education, Technology, or Family and Consumer Sciences. Elective classes were not included in the raw GPA percentages because students did not all take the same elective courses and elective teachers often did not provide updated progress grades.

### **Limitations and Suggested Solutions**

There were a number of limitations to this study. First, there was limited time to implement the study, partially as result of the time needed in the IRB approval process. Originally, the researcher intended to implement the positive reinforcement intervention of a ten-week span. Once IRB approval was obtained, there was limited time remaining for the researcher to implement the intervention, analyze the data, and present the results of the study at a predetermined graduate capstone research presentation event. For this reason, the researcher only conducted the study for a five-week period. Since the study was conducted for less time, less data could be collected, and that could have impacted the results of the study. Running the study

for only five-weeks is considered a limitation because it does not provide as much data points to analyze. Additionally, the longer the intervention was implemented, the more possibility to see trends in absenteeism and GPA rates. To address this limitation in future research endeavors, the researcher suggests that future researches should first be more proactive about the IRB application process. Simply stated, researchers should make sure that their IRB proposals are well composed and edited carefully before submitted for approval. Researchers should also account for the time the IRB will need to approve research proposals when planning the time-span of the research study. Secondly, researchers should plan for a longer time period in which to implement the positive reinforcement intervention. The researcher suggests at least ten weeks so that grades and absenteeism rates can be tracked over an entire marking period. The above solutions are important because they address the limitation of time. Having ample time to conduct a study is important because it can allow for more data collection and more time to analyze the findings of a study.

Another limitation was the nature of the research: Chronic Absenteeism. By definition, to be chronically absent means to miss 10 percent or more of a school year. Supporting participants struggling with chronic absenteeism is difficult as participants are often not in school to receive support services. Ideally, once students began to receive the positive reinforcement intervention they would attend school more often and could, therefore receive support services. However, before the effects of the positive reinforcement intervention could be felt, students were frequently missing school and could not receive support/the intervention. In other words, if students were not in school, they could not receive support for attendance related issues, and this limited the effectiveness of the intervention.

In order to address the above limitation, the researcher suggests making the amount of days a student has to be in school to receive his or her motivator shorter. During this study, the researcher provided participants with their reinforcements once a week. For some students, attending school for one week was not as challenging, and so they received their motivators right away. This provided those students with an immediate reminder that their school attendance would result in a motivator of their choice. For other students, not missing school for a week was more challenging. Those students would then not receive their reinforcement for two weeks, or until they could go a whole week without missing any school. This meant that those students were not given an immediate reminder that their school attendance would be rewarded. Minimizing the number of days a student had to be in school to receive his or her motivator would, in theory, maintain student engagement throughout the span of the intervention.

### **Similarities to Other Studies**

One of the reasons the researcher chose to address absenteeism using a positive reinforcement intervention was because there was not much existing literature on using this method to address absenteeism. Using a positive reinforcement intervention addressed absenteeism across variables considered causes of absenteeism, and positive reinforcement has been suggested to be effective when used to address other issues. One study did mention that chronically absent students tend to need immediate rewards and incentive to attend school with higher frequency. This idea aligned with the findings of the present study for two reasons. First, the results of this study suggest that positively reinforcing student attendance can lead to better attendance rates. Secondly, the limitations of this study suggest that the reward system used might not have been immediate enough to ensure student engagement and interest.

Another similarity of the current study to the existing literature is that grades are correlated with attendance rates (Freeman et al., 2015; Kieffer et al., 2013). Though not statistically significant, the results of the present study suggested that as attendance rates improved overall for participants, GPAs overall improved for participants. Other research notes this direct correlation between grades and absences as well. Regardless of the interventions used to improve school attendance, most researchers found that grades improved in conjunction with attendance improvement (Freeman et al., 2015; Kieffer et al., 2013). This aligns with the findings of the present study.

### **Unexpected Findings and Implications for Future Research**

During the implementation of the positive reinforcement intervention, some unexpected findings were discovered. First, attendance records found on Infinite Campus suggested, a direct, positive, correlation between a higher rate of full-day absences with higher rates of tardiness and early dismissal. Though the researcher did not include early dismissals or tardiness as school absences, there is relevance in knowing that there is a correlation between absences and these other variables. For this particular study, this unexpected finding holds less relevance, but it is important for future research. Future researchers might choose to include tardiness or early dismissals as absences when deciding whether participants should receive their motivators or not.

Another unexpected finding was that participants often shared what their barriers to attendance were, even though they were not asked. When barriers to attendance were discussed, they were in alignment with reasons suggested in the literature. For example, one participant mentioned that family issues affected her absenteeism rate. Two other participants mentioned lack of motivation or not seeing the value in education as barriers to attendance. Family related

issues and lack of motivation were both addressed in the literature (Uppal et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2007). In regard to the present study, information about the barriers to attendance holds less relevance because the researcher aimed to find a solution to absenteeism that was effective across all barriers. However, this unexpected finding is relevant for future researchers looking to address absenteeism. Student-reported information about barriers to attendance is important to note because it provides insight into the population of students struggling with absenteeism. Knowing the barriers to attendance might help school personnel and administrators to identify and better support students at risk for chronic absenteeism.

### **Conclusion**

Though the results of the present study were not statistically significant, small changes in absenteeism rates indicate the possible effectiveness of a positive reinforcement intervention for addressing absenteeism. If addressing absenteeism through a positive reinforcement intervention is effective, this method could be generalizable to other students struggling or at risk of struggling with attendance. Perhaps this method could be used as a preventative measure to work with students who met criteria for chronic absenteeism during the previous year. The results indicating that there was a correlation between grades and absenteeism rates mirrored the results of preexisting literature; the more a student attends school, the better his or her grades (Kieffer et al., 2014).

As a researcher, the primary goal of this study was simply to explore the effectiveness of a positive reinforcement intervention for addressing absenteeism. To that end, further research examining the effectiveness of this type of solution for absenteeism is needed. However, as a counselor, the researcher hoped that these findings, in conjunction with the existing literature, would emphasize the importance and the impact of aiding chronically absent students. Students

struggling with absenteeism are often struggling in more than one facet of life. Therefore, addressing absenteeism becomes a channel through which we can provide support and encouragement to students in need.

## Appendix A



The College at  
**BROCKPORT**  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

### Addressing Absenteeism through a Positive Reinforcement Intervention

Your son or daughter is invited to be in a research study of that examines the effects of positive reinforcement on attendance. It also will examine the relationship between attendance and grades. Your student was selected as a possible participant because his/her attendance records suggest that he/she is at risk for reaching a chronic number of absences for the year. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing ten percent or more of the school year. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to let your student be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Jillian Malley, Counseling Intern, student in the Department of Counselor Education at The College at Brockport.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The purpose of this study is to address whether positive reinforcement can decrease the number of absences in students. In addition this study attempts to identify a relationship between school attendance and grades. The research will reward participants for weekly attendance with a positive reinforcement of their choice.

A maximum of [30] students will take part in this study. The results will be used for a Master's Action Research Project and Capstone requirement. In addition, the results will be used to identify a potential strategy for working with students struggling with attendance in the future. [Click here to enter text.](#)

#### PROCEDURES:

If you agree to let your student be in this study, I would ask that your student do the following:

Your student will meet with the primary researcher, Jillian Malley, to discuss what it means to be absent from school and how this can affect their performance as a student. Then the student and researcher will choose a motivator for attendance. Each week that the student does not have any unexcused absences, they will receive their motivator on that Friday. This process will occur for 10 weeks. At the end of ten weeks, the student will meet with the researcher to receive their final motivator, debrief from the study, and receive their certificate of completion.

#### COMPENSATION/INCENTIVES:

Your student will receive a certificate of completion at the end of this study as a way to thank him/her for participating.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY**

The study has one inherent, minimal risk. That risk is that your student may miss a few minutes of class time. Your student will have to meet with the researcher at the start of the study for 10 minutes and then once a week for a few minutes throughout the study. This may take the student away from instruction or social time. The researcher aims to only meet with students during study halls and lunches when possible in order to avoid any adverse effects on the student's education. It will be explained to your student that they may terminate their participation in the study at any time without the permission of staff or legal guardian.

The direct benefits to participation are: that your student might increase his or her attendance to school. This can be beneficial for their social and emotional development as well as academic success. Grades may increase with increased attendance. Students with high school attendance rates are less likely to become involved in "high risk" behaviors. The student will also receive a positive reinforce which can be a positive experience of its own. They will also receive a certificate of completion which could benefit self-esteem.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

The records of this study will be kept private and your student's confidentiality will be protected. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

Research records will be stored securely and only the primary researcher will have access to the records. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within the school counseling office that is only accessible by the researcher. All study records, including approved IRB documents, data, intervention plans, and consent forms, will be destroyed by shredding three years after the completion of the study.

### **VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your student to participate will not affect your current or future relations with The College at Brockport, Merton Williams Middle School, or the Hilton Central School District. If you decide to participate, you are withdraw your student from this study at any time without penalty. You may also choose to allow your student to participate without being included in the results

In order to allow your student to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. If you wish to allow your student's participation in the project and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided. Your signature indicates your understanding of the content in this document as well as your consent to your child's participation. Again, you may change your mind at any time and withdraw your student from the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.

### **Contacts and Questions:**



The researcher conducting this study is: Jillian Malley. If you have questions presently or at a later date, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher at the Merton Williams Counseling Office, by phone or by email. Additionally, you may contact Pat Goodspeed, the researcher's faculty advisor by phone or by email. Maureen Rundle may also be contacted as she is the primary researcher's on site supervisor. She may be contacted via phone or email.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to my student's participation in the study.

[Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_]

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Please have your child return this form to the counseling office or mail it to the following address:

Attention: Jillian Malley, Counseling



The College at  
**BROCKPORT**  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

**STATEMENT OF MINOR ASSENT**

**Addressing Absenteeism through a Positive Reinforcement Intervention**

My name is Miss Malley. I am one of your school counseling interns, but I am also a student at The College at Brockport. I am working on a project for school and would like to invite you to take part in a study about improving school attendance.

If you decide that you want to participate, you will meet with me and decide on a type of reward that will motivate you to come to school. We would meet for about 10 minutes to talk about your attendance at school and what would motivate you to work on your attendance to school. After, that we would meet each week for you to earn your motivator. Those meetings will be fast and will just be about you getting your reward for coming to school. At the end of the study you will meet with me to get a certificate of completion.

Your school and your parent or legal guardian have already said that it was okay for you to participate in my study, but you do not have to if you do not want to.

If you decide to be a part of my study, but do not want to come see me every week, that is okay. If you decide to start participating and then change your mind, that is okay too. You can stop at any time. No one will treat you differently or get upset with you. Also, no one has to know about you being a part of this study unless you tell them. Any records or forms taken from you during this study will only be seen by me and will not have your name on them. The only time I would have to tell someone else something you told me during this study is if I hear about something happening in your life puts you in immediate or serious danger. If this happened, I would have to talk to other professional and your guardian, but I would talk to you about this first.

You can ask questions now or while you are doing the questionnaire. If you have questions after completing the questionnaire, you can contact the researcher, Miss Malley by coming to see her in her office or calling her on the phone. If you would like, you can also contact her project advisor, Pat Goodspeed, by phone or by email with any questions/concerns. Maureen Rundle may also be contacted as she is the primary researcher’s on site supervisor. She may be contacted via email or phone.

Would you like to participate in this study?     Yes     No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant (under 18)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Birthdate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness (18 years of age or older)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary researcher	Faculty Advisor
Name: Miss Malley	Name: Pat Goodspeed

## Appendix B

**Forced-Choice Reinforcement Survey****Name:**

In order to identify possible classroom reinforcers, it is important to go directly to the source, namely, you the student. Below is a paragraph that provides instructions for completing a series of "controlled choice" survey items about individual reinforcement preferences. Please read the following paragraph carefully:

"Let's suppose that you have worked hard on an assignment and you think that you have done a super job on it. In thinking about a reward for your effort, which one of the two things below would you most like to happen? Please choose the one from each pair that you would like best and mark and "X" in the blank that comes in front of it. Remember, mark only one blank for each pair."

1.    \_\_\_\_\_    Teacher writes "100" on your paper. (A) Be  
      \_\_\_\_\_    first to finish your work. (CM)
2.    \_\_\_\_\_    A bag of chips. (CN)  
      \_\_\_\_\_    Classmates ask you to be on their team. (P)
3.    \_\_\_\_\_    Be free to do what you like. (I)  
      \_\_\_\_\_    Teacher writes "100" on your paper. (A)
4.    \_\_\_\_\_    Classmates ask you to be on their team. (P)  
      \_\_\_\_\_    Be first to finish your work. (CM)
5.    \_\_\_\_\_    Be free to do what you like. (I) A  
      \_\_\_\_\_    bag of chips. (CN)
6.    \_\_\_\_\_    Teacher writes "100" on your paper. (A)  
      \_\_\_\_\_    Classmates ask you to be on their team. (P)
7.    \_\_\_\_\_    Be first to finish your work. (CM) Be  
      \_\_\_\_\_    free to do what you like. (I)
8.    \_\_\_\_\_    A bag of chips. (CN)  
      \_\_\_\_\_    Teacher writes "100" on your paper. (A)
9.    \_\_\_\_\_    Classmates ask you to be on their team. (P)  
      \_\_\_\_\_    Be free to do what you like. (I)
10.    \_\_\_\_\_    Be first to finish your work. (CM) A  
      \_\_\_\_\_    bag of chips. (CN)
11.    \_\_\_\_\_    Teacher writes "A" on your paper. (A)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Be the only one that can answer a question. (CM)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A candy bar. (CN)
- 12.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to sit with them. (P)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to go outside. (I)
- 13.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "A" on your paper. (A)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to sit with them. (P)
- 14.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be the only one that answers a question. (CM)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to go outside. (I)
- 15.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A candy bar. (CN)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "A" on your paper. (A)
- 16.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to sit with them. (P)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be the only one that can answer a question. (CM)
- 17.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to go outside. (I)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A candy bar. (CN)
- 18.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "A" on your paper. (A)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to sit with them. (P)
- 19.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to go outside. (I)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be the only on that can answer a question. (CM)
- 20.

- \_\_\_\_\_ A candy bar. (CN)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Perfect" on your paper. (A)
- 21.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have only your paper shown to the class. (CM)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A can of soda. (CN)
- 22.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Classmates ask you to be class leader. (P)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to play outside. (I)
- 23.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Perfect" on your paper. (A)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Classmates ask you to be class leader. (P)
- 24.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have only your paper shown to the class. (CM)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to play outside. (I)
- 25.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A can of soda. (CN)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Perfect" on your paper. (A)
- 26.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Classmates ask you to be class leader. (P)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have only your paper shown to the class. (CM)
- 27.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to play outside. (I)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A can of soda. (CN)
- 28.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Perfect" on your paper. (A)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Classmates ask you to be class leader. (P)
- 29.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to play outside. (I)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have only your paper shown to class. (CM)
- 30.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A can of soda. (CN)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Excellent" on your paper. (A)
- 31.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have your paper put on the bulletin board. (CM)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A pack of gum. (CN)
- 32.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to work with them. (P)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to work on something you like. (I)
- 33.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Excellent" on your paper. (A)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to work with them. (P)
- 34.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have your paper put on the bulletin board. (CM)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to work on something you like. (I)
- 35.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A pack of gum. (CN)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Excellent" on your paper. (A)
- 36.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to work with them. (P)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have your paper put on the bulletin board. (CM)
- 37.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to work in something you like. (I)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A pack of gum. (CN)
- 38.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher writes "Excellent" on your paper. (A)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Friends ask you to work with them. (P)
- 39.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be free to work on something you like. (I)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Have your paper put on the bulletin board. (CM)
- 40.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A pack of gum. (CN)

Other suggestions about classroom rewards:

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.**

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### **Reinforcement Inventory**

#### **Scoring Key**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Adult Approval (A)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Competitive Approval (CM)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Peer Approval (P)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Independent Rewards (I)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Consumable Rewards (CN)

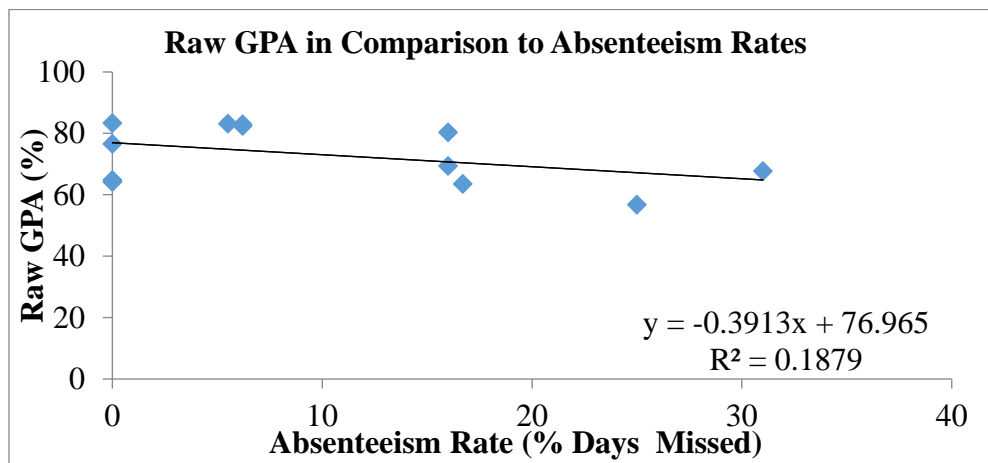
Appendix C

**Pre and Post Intervention Results for Absenteeism Percentages and Raw GPA Percentages**

Variables	Average Before	Average After	Median Before	Median After	Range Before	Range After
Average Absenteeism Percentage Rates	11.4 %	9.03%	6.2%	10.75%	31%	16.7%
Average Raw GPA Percentages	71.9%	74.03%	72.2%	74.9%	27%	20.4%

\* Appendix C. Mean absenteeism rates and GPA percentages

Appendix D



\* Appendix D. Correlation between raw GPA and absenteeism rates



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