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Chronic Absenteeism: Exploring Causes, Impacts, and Interventions in Education

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Arlee Hoag

Abstract

Chronic absenteeism among students presents a significant challenge within the educational landscape, impacting academic performance and contributing to educational disparities. This research delves into the multifaceted issue of chronic absenteeism, aiming to identify its root causes, implications, and potential interventions. The study examines diverse factors influencing student attendance, including socioeconomic barriers, health conditions, transportation challenges, and their subsequent impact on academic achievement. Moreover, it explores the inequities prevalent in absenteeism, aiming to shed light on disparities among student populations.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Chronic absences amongst students are a major concern. Days missed in instruction has a negative impact on a student's grades and can put them at an academic disadvantage compared to their peers. Although missing school impacts all students negatively, issues with transportation, childcare, health conditions and other socioeconomic issues can be difficult to manage and are very real antecedents to absenteeism. Those circumstances make issues with attendance even more complicated.

Importance and Rationale of Project

Addressing chronic absenteeism is crucial for ensuring that all students have an equal chance at academic success, promoting societal well-being, and breaking the cycle of educational disparities. It's an essential step toward fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous society. Attendance is directly connected to academic success. When students miss school regularly, they not only miss out on crucial instruction but also lack the opportunity to engage in discussions, group activities, and hands-on learning experiences. Chronically absent students may face barriers such as limited access to transportation, health issues, socioeconomic challenges, or unstable home environments, hindering their ability to attend school regularly. High rates of absenteeism correlate with lower graduation rates and reduced opportunities for higher education.

Students who consistently miss school are at a higher risk of dropping out, which can limit their career prospects and perpetuate cycles of poverty. This is a wide spread issue affecting students across grade levels, geographical locations and socioeconomic backgrounds. Chronic absenteeism impacts not only individual students but also the wider community. High dropout rates and lower educational attainment can lead to a less educated workforce, affecting community development and overall well-being. Failure to address chronic absenteeism perpetuates educational disparities, diminishes students' opportunities, and negatively impacts their long-term success and contributions to society.

Background of the Project

Chronic absenteeism in education has been a persistent issue with a history deeply rooted in various social, economic, and educational factors. Over time, the definition and understanding of absenteeism have evolved. Historically, absenteeism was primarily seen as a behavioral issue, attributed to individual students lack of motivation or commitment to education. However, as research progressed, it became evident that chronic absenteeism is a multifaceted problem influenced by broader societal and systemic challenges. Socioeconomic disparities, inadequate access to resources, family circumstances, health issues and community factors have all contributed significantly to this issue.

The journey to our present situation with chronic absenteeism involves an evolving understanding of its complexities. It is no longer solely perceived as ab

individual student's problem but recognized as a symptom of larger societal inequalities affecting student's ability to access and engage in education.

Over time, educational institutions, policy makers and researchers have started acknowledging chronic absenteeism as a critical concern that requires a comprehensive approach. Efforts have been made to address the root cause of absenteeism, focusing on creating supportive environments, implementing targeted interventions and fostering collaboration between schools, families and the community. Despite these efforts chronic absenteeism remains a challenge, demanding ongoing exploration and innovative strategies to ensure every student has equal opportunities to engage in learning and achieve academic success.

Statement of Purpose

Researching chronic absenteeism helps uncover the root causes behind this prevalent issue. It allows for a deeper understanding of the various factors contributing to students' prolonged absence from school. Knowing the root cause can help identify the type of interventions needed. This project reviews literature on the subject of absenteeism with the intent of shedding more light on the issue and the long-term impact it has on our students as well as our communities. This paper reviews a collection of resources on the topic but the issue itself it is not unique to certain areas. Chronic absenteeism is an issue that schools everywhere are facing. This paper uses references from 25 different sources but the availability of research on the topic was vast.

Objectives of the Project

This paper aims to contribute to addressing chronic absenteeism by providing a comprehensive analysis of the issue it's causes, consequences, and potential interventions. It aspires to achieve several key objectives. First it is important to understand the root causes of absenteeism. This will be accomplished by delving into various factors that contribute to students missing school (socioeconomic, familial, health related and systemic reasons). Then it discusses the impact and consequences students might face from regularly missing school. It will review how chronic absenteeism impacts a student's academic performance, social and emotional well-being and long-term outcomes.

Ultimately, by combining existing knowledge, identifying gaps and proposing actionable recommendations this paper intends to provide a roadmap for stakeholders to develop comprehensive, effective and sustainable solutions to tackle chronic absenteeism in education.

Definition of Terms

Chronic Absenteeism: In this text, refers to students who miss at least 15 days of school a year.

Socioeconomic: Relating to or concerned with the interaction of social and economic factors.

Truancy: The action of staying away from school without good reason; absenteeism.

Pandemic: A widespread occurrence of an infectious disease over a whole country or the world at a particular time.

Systemic: relating to a system, especially as opposed to a particular part

Scope of the Project

      The scope of this paper encompasses an extensive examination of chronic absenteeism in the United States' education system. It investigates the prevalence, causes, consequences, and interventions related to students missing significant amounts of school. The paper synthesizes various research studies, policy considerations, and strategies aimed at addressing this issue. It explores the impact of chronic absenteeism on academic performance, delinquency, and family dynamics while emphasizing the role of parental involvement and teacher effectiveness. The paper also touches on the historical context, significance, and challenges associated with chronic absenteeism, aiming to propose holistic approaches to mitigate this persistent problem.

      This paper does not delve into highly specific localized interventions or explore the nuanced cultural, regional, or demographic variations in chronic absenteeism extensively. It does not offer immediate, singular solutions applicable to all contexts due to the complexity and diversity of reasons contributing to absenteeism. Moreover, it may not deeply address the psychological aspects or individual experiences of students facing chronic absenteeism, as this often requires more in-depth qualitative research or case studies. The paper also does not cover legislative intricacies or provide policy recommendations at the regional or national level.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Truancy is a persistent issue in the United States' education system, with implications for both students and the broader community. This review examines recent research on truancy, its underlying causes, its impact on academic performance and delinquency, and strategies for prevention and intervention. Additionally, the review explores the crucial role of parent involvement in addressing truancy and improving overall educational outcomes, parents and guardians will play a big role in implementing changes that impact attendance. Truancy and chronic absenteeism persist as significant challenges in American education, affecting students across all grade levels, including elementary school children. This literature review builds upon the previous discussion and incorporates additional research findings and policy considerations to provide a comprehensive overview of these issues and their implications for educational success and family well-being. Several studies have shed light on the prevalence of truancy among American students. The study by Skubick (2023) highlights the alarming rates of truancy in Michigan, where over 500,000 students were identified as chronically absent during the last school year. This trend is not unique to Michigan, as other populous states also grapple with high truancy rates (Skubick, 2023). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated truancy issues, with a significant proportion of students still missing classes as they return to in-person learning (The Economist, 2023).

Causes and Consequences of Truancy

Understanding the causes and consequences of truancy is critical for effective intervention. The study by Gerth (2022) utilizes Situational Action Theory to explore

the truancy-delinquency relationship. Contrary to common assumptions, Gerth's findings suggest that truancy itself does not directly cause delinquent behavior. Instead, it is associated with changes in adolescents' crime propensity and exposure to criminogenic environments (Gerth, 2022). This nuanced perspective challenges traditional notions of truancy as a primary driver of delinquency.

Conry and Richards (2018) investigated the severity of truancy policies across U.S. states and their relationship to chronic absenteeism rates. Surprisingly, they found no evidence that states with more severe truancy policies have lower rates of chronic absenteeism (Conry & Richards, 2018). This raises questions about the effectiveness of punitive measures in addressing truancy and emphasizes the need for more comprehensive strategies. The goal should be to intervene before students reach disciplinary actions due to truancy. By this time, they have already been chronically absent missing countless hours of instructional time.

The research by Skubick (2023) underscores the gravity of truancy in Michigan, where an alarming 39% truancy rate among students has been reported. Similarly, other populous states like New York, Florida, California, Illinois, and Ohio have encountered significant truancy issues, with rates ranging from 30% to 33% (The Economist, 2023). These findings emphasize the nationwide scope of truancy concerns.

Compulsory school attendance policies, as outlined by the State of Michigan (n.d.), require children between the ages of six and sixteen to attend school. However, the enforcement of these policies varies across districts, and some students may face

barriers that lead to chronic absenteeism. The study by Conry and Richards (2018) reveals that the severity of truancy policies differs significantly across United States. With no clear evidence that states with stricter policies have lower rates of chronic absenteeism.

The Impact of Truancy on Academic and Life Outcomes

The consequences of truancy and chronic absenteeism extend beyond the immediate issue of missed classes. Chronic absenteeism is associated with lower academic performance, increased risk of dropout, and potential engagement in delinquent behaviors (Barthelemy et al., 2022; Conry & Richards, 2018). Barthelemy et al. (2022) found that child behavioral problems, educational issues, and parental practices are key risk factors for truancy. However, gender differences in truancy risk factors and service needs appear to be negligible (Barthelemy et al., 2022).

The study by Gerth (2022) challenges conventional wisdom by suggesting that truancy itself may not directly cause delinquent behavior. Instead, it highlights that the relationship between truancy and delinquency depends on factors like adolescents' propensity for delinquency and their exposure to criminogenic settings. This nuanced perspective underscores the importance of addressing the underlying causes of truancy.

The Role of Parents, teachers and policy in Addressing Truancy

Parent involvement in schools is a crucial factor in mitigating truancy and improving educational outcomes. Epstein and Dauber (1991) emphasize the

significance of school and family connections in enhancing student success. Their study identifies five major types of parent involvement integral to comprehensive school programs, including involvement in learning activities at home and decision-making processes (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). The research underscores that teachers' attitudes and practices are pivotal in facilitating parent involvement, regardless of the parents' educational or socioeconomic backgrounds. Michigan's policy of revoking cash benefits from low-income families when their children are chronically absent has raised concerns about its effectiveness and the unintended consequences it may have on family well-being (Levin, 2023). Critics argue that such punitive measures do not consider the complex challenges faced by these families, including poverty, health issues, and a lack of support systems. Instead, experts suggest that addressing the root causes of absenteeism, such as transportation barriers and medical problems, may yield more positive outcomes. Teacher effectiveness plays a pivotal role in influencing student attendance and reducing unexcused absences (Liu & Loeb, 2021). Liu and Loeb (2021) found substantial variation among teachers in their effectiveness at reducing unexcused class absences, which can have a significant impact on students' likelihood of completing high school and pursuing higher academic goals. Effective teachers can motivate students to attend school regularly and actively engage in learning.

Conclusion

Truancy remains a pressing issue in American education, exacerbated by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research suggests that the relationship

between truancy and delinquency is more complex than previously thought, and punitive measures may not be the most effective solution. Instead, addressing the root causes of truancy and fostering parent involvement are essential strategies for prevention and intervention.

Further research is needed to explore innovative approaches that can help reduce truancy rates and support the educational success of all students, especially those in underserved communities. School attendance issues impact schools, students, families and the community. This literature review has highlighted the complicated nature of attendance issues including what can influence absenteeism, the consequences as well as possible interventions to improve attendance. Further research is needed to continue exploring attendance interventions which will help us understand the barriers students face. Overcoming these barriers should help improve attendance and promote a better education for all students.

Truancy and chronic absenteeism remain critical issues in American education, affecting students across the country. While some states have implemented stringent truancy policies, the evidence regarding their effectiveness in reducing chronic absenteeism is inconclusive. The impact of teacher effectiveness on attendance underscores the importance of recognizing educators as key agents of change. Moreover, punitive measures, such as benefit revocation, have been critiqued for potentially worsening the situation for vulnerable families.

To address these challenges effectively, it is crucial to adopt a holistic approach that considers the diverse factors contributing to truancy and absenteeism.

This includes addressing the root causes of absenteeism, providing support to families facing complex issues, and recognizing the role of teachers in motivating and engaging students. Future research and policy efforts should prioritize comprehensive strategies aimed at improving student attendance and, ultimately, enhancing educational outcomes and well-being for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds or individual circumstances.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

Chronic absenteeism is an issue that impacts students all across the United States. This issue poses a substantial obstacle to academic progress, leading to lower grades and educational disadvantages compared to their peers. The identified objectives aimed at addressing this issue include implementing strategies to mitigate transportation, childcare, health, and socioeconomic challenges faced by students. The goal is to bolster attendance rates and subsequently improve academic outcomes for all students, ensuring they have equitable access to education. In this chapter I will discuss the components of my project, how I evaluated the projects effectiveness, the conclusions I have drawn after completing this project as well as how this information can be used by others to positively impact the issue of chronic absenteeism.

Project Components

To address the issue of chronic absenteeism I believe developing a workshop for parents and guardians would have a positive impact. The research shows that there are multiple factors that can impact a student's ability to attend school. Bringing parents and guardians together so we can educate them on the importance of school as well as helping them overcome some of the barriers they might face would address chronic absenteeism at its root causes. Our school counseling department will send an invite to the families of any student who is considered chronically absent letting them

know about an opportunity to get involved and learn more about their student's success. The invitations will ask families to RSVP so that we are aware of how many people we will have show up. Once parents arrive we will discuss the importance of making it to school and how missing instruction time can have a negative impact on students' academic success.

We will talk about how missing school puts them at a disadvantage compared to their peers who have not missed the time. At the end of our first workshop we will ask parents to fill out a survey that will help us understand what barriers they might face when it comes to getting their students to school. The survey will also have a spot they can tell us what types of resources they would like help with. They will also get the opportunity to let us know what they would like to cover in these workshops moving forward. In preparation for our next meeting we will gather resources and create content that will address some of the other reasons parents see as an obstacle.

Workshop frequency will also be determined by feedback given on the survey. We will hold the workshop every two weeks or once a month depending on feedback we collect from the survey we have parents complete.

Project Evaluation

To determine the effectiveness of this workshop we will take parent involvement into consideration. If we continue to have parents show up and engage then we will know the workshops are valued. We will also compare attendance data from before the workshops started to data collected at the end of the school year. In

theory, if parents are making use of resources we provide them the number of student absences should decrease.

Project Conclusion

I think creating an intervention to improve chronic absenteeism is more than a one-person job. In order for this to be successful I need buy in from the student, parent as well as the community. Some students miss school because they just don't want to be there. In those situations, parent involvement is key. If the parent is allowing the student to stay home they are enabling the issue. Other families face socioeconomic challenges that make it difficult to make it to school. Those students don't have a lot of control in their attendance, this is where we need to come together as a community and help provide resources for families that help them overcome these challenges. Attendance is very complex issue that requires a more one on one approach. This workshop would be a great way to get parents involved and connect them with community resources they may be struggling to find on their own. This will be an ongoing project but it will help us address chronic absenteeism at it's root causes which will, in time, implement change.

Plans for Implementation

When a student has issues with truancy typically we can look back and see that this problem has followed them through the years. My suggestion would be to start really implementing interventions as early as we can. The workshop we are planning for our students in the high school where I work could be offered at the middle school or elementary level as well. If we offer the workshops as a district

instead of just specifically at the high school, we can reach more students.

Determining resources for families that can help with things like transportation,

childcare and even mental healthcare is a great way to start closing some of the gaps

associated with chronic absenteeism. The research shows that disciplinary actions

because of truancy don't typically have a positive impact on students, so how can we

fix this problem? We have to work as a team alongside students, parents and the

different places willing to help within our communities. It takes a village and if we all

work together we can show our students the value of an education while teaching

them the importance of working together. To start we will present this idea to our

administrators and get their thoughts on presenting it to the whole school at our

monthly school improvement meeting. Implementation of this program will start

locally in our building, once we get the okay from our administration to move

forward. Once we have data showing that the workshops are beneficial, we can bring

it in front of the board. This will help us get it into the middle school and elementary

schools.

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