

ABSTRACT

INTERVENTIONS UTILIZED TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AMONGST SECONDARY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIORS

Kristen Bronke, Ed.D.
Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations
Northern Illinois University, 2023
Kelly Summers, Director

This study examined the interventions utilized to improve attendance amongst secondary students at a Midwest suburban high school as well as their relationship to the research-based interventions presented in the literature review. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 12 student services faculty members to identify what interventions are being utilized to help students with school refusal, which interventions they felt worked best for returning students experiencing school refusal behaviors to consistent attendance, and in what ways the school district can best support school student services personnel when working with these students.

Developing and maintaining relationships is the key to increasing student attendance and returning a student to regular school attendance. Throughout every interview, participants talked about the web of relationships that exist when supporting students. When school staff members talk about supporting students exhibiting school refusal behaviors, they talk about the layers to relationship building and the interventions reflect those layers.

The intention of this research was to shed more light on what interventions are being implemented daily in a school compared to the interventions provided in the literature review. It was determined through the interviews that relationship building is key to the development of an

intervention for students who are struggling. This research is important because it highlights the important work student services personnel do to help students and families.

Keywords: school refusal behavior, attendance, school avoidance, student mental health, attendance intervention, school climate, student services, chronic absenteeism

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DE KALB, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2023

INTERVENTIONS UTILIZED TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AMONGST SECONDARY
STUDENTS EXPERIENCING SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIORS

BY
KRISTEN BRONKE

©2023 Kristen Bronke

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, AND
FOUNDATIONS

Doctoral Director:
Kelly Summers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Kelly Summers for her never-ending support of this study. I am incredibly fortunate to get to work with you. Thank you to Dr. Ben Creed and Dr. Dan Oest for your support as members of my dissertation committee. I appreciate the time the three of you spent supporting me and my work.

Thank you to my family for your support: Mom, Jim, Joel, and Allison. This was a crazy idea and I appreciate your encouragement. To Parker, Lucas, Bennett, and Ashlynn: you are never too old to push yourself and do things that are hard and uncomfortable. I'm looking forward to seeing you grow and supporting your dreams.

Thank you to my best friends, Allie, April, Cyndi, Jenn, and Rachel. The encouraging text messages on Saturday mornings kept me going and hold a special place in my heart. This work would have taken much longer without your support of me.

Thank you to my husband, Christopher, who walked alongside me throughout this whole program. Your encouragement and enthusiasm for learning pushes me to be a better educator and a better person. I am greatly appreciative. Cheers to Drs. Bronke!

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom who showed me the importance of continuing to learn no matter the circumstances and to my Uncle Jack who set the standard for the educators in our family. Decatur Public Schools for the win.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the incredible work done by school student services personnel on a daily basis and to all the people who walk through life with ADHD. Life is tough but we are tougher.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose.....	2
Significance.....	3
Intended Audience	4
My Professional Setting/Positionality Statement	4
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
Defining School Attendance	5
The Importance of School Attendance	7
Defining School Refusal Behavior	10
School Refusal Behavior Student Profile	13
Causes of School Refusal Behavior	15
Mental Health Conditions	15
Bullying.....	18
Home Influences	19
School Climate.....	21
Chronic Health Conditions	23
Identifying School Refusal Behaviors	24
School Interventions	26
Tier 1 Interventions.....	27

Chapter	Page
Tier 2 Interventions.....	29
Tier 3 Interventions.....	33
Situating this Study in the Research	36
3. METHODOLOGY	37
Research Design.....	37
Research Setting.....	37
Research Participants	38
Instrumentation	39
Research Procedure.....	40
Data Analysis Plan.....	40
4. FINDINGS	41
Research Question #1	41
Developing Relationships	42
Home Visits and Communication.....	43
Check In Check Out.....	44
Creating a Sense of Belonging.....	45
Collaboration and Staff Availability.....	46
Utilization of Online Courses for Learning	47
Outside Referrals	48
Utilizing Traditional Disciplinary Consequences.....	48
Social Work Group Participation.....	49
Research Question #2	49

Chapter

Page

Creating Trust and Building Family Support.....	51
Utilizing Outside Supports.....	53
Increasing Student Belonging.....	54
Staff Availability.....	58
Home Visits	59
School Discipline Consequences	60
Research Question #3	62
Intervention Programs.....	62
Weekly Team Meetings	64
Staff Professional Development	66
Attendance Coordinator and Family Coach.....	67
Opportunities for Student Belonging	69
5. DISCUSSION.....	71
Assessment.....	71
The Tiered Intervention Structure.....	72
Online Courses.....	75
Recommendations.....	77
Staffing.....	77
Early Intervention	78
Supporting Student Belonging.....	79
Support for Various Interventions	80
Study Limitations.....	81

	vii
Chapter	Page
Future Research Considerations	81
Concluding Remarks.....	82
REFERENCES	84
APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	94

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of school attendance has evolved significantly throughout America's existence. During the late 1800s, school attendance was expected for five years (Reyes, 2020). Generally, students attended without coercion as it was seen as a societal norm and expectation. While nearly half of the states had attendance laws, schools didn't see a need to enforce them. In the 1920s, bureaucratic expansion within schools encouraged districts to implement comprehensive attendance policies and develop accountability systems. By this time, many states were regularly requiring students to attend high school or secondary school. Post World War II, states were upholding compulsory school attendance laws. There was also a push amongst all states for attendance at elementary and secondary schools as a goal for each student. The increased push for more years of schooling and the inclusion of all students in these schools led to more students being identified as chronically absent or truant. Throughout the twentieth century, school systems and districts across the country developed and refined truancy policies, disciplinary consequences, attendance interventions, specialized paths, and alternatives to traditional day-long schools. These developments were meant to emphasize the importance of daily school attendance and to bring to the forefront students and families that were exhibiting concerns. The late twentieth century saw a rise in the criminalization of truancy and the increase in student non-attendance as both a local school and state issue (Reyes, 2020). The late twentieth century, also, saw an increased awareness in the reporting of mental health concerns as one of

the reasons for not attending school (Keppens & Spruyt, 2017). The increased awareness of the impact of mental health concerns on school attendance has led to an increased need for school professionals to examine how they approach student attendance issues and what interventions they provide to both students and their families.

School attendance is strongly correlated with academic performance and is the strongest predictor of whether a student will drop out and not graduate from high school (Rogers et al., 2017). Students who miss more than 20% of school days significantly reduce their chances of graduating on time and increase the likelihood of dropout (Balfanz & Herzog, 2005). Conversely, students who miss less than a week each semester (approximately one day per month) have a 90% chance of graduating on time (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Purpose

This dissertation focuses on the role secondary school student services professionals play in improving student attendance. Each year, over eight million American school students miss at least 10% of the school year. Attempting to decrease this number by identifying these students and using school-based interventions is an important step in increasing the overall academic success of our student population. The school professionals participating in this study work within a secondary school in a suburban area of the Midwest. School professionals are being interviewed in order to gather their feedback on current interventions being utilized and what additional resources are needed in order to increase average school attendance for students.

The current study examines the interventions utilized to improve attendance amongst secondary students at a suburban high school as well as their relationship to the research-based interventions presented in the literature review. The research questions are:

1. What interventions are school personnel using to improve the attendance of students exhibiting school refusal behavior?
2. What interventions did school personnel find successful for improving the attendance of students demonstrating school refusal behavior due to mental health concerns?
3. How can the system support student services personnel as they work to support students exhibiting school refusal behavior?

Significance

Research shows that when school personnel has varied interventions available to them, they can intervene in student attendance situations and more regularly return to regular attendance. The current study examined which interventions worked best for school personnel and what areas of intervention are still needed to support getting all students to school regularly. This research study asked participants to reflect on their experiences of working with students who had attendance concerns and share what interventions worked best for those students. Participants were also asked to provide their thoughts on the tiered intervention model and what additional interventions are needed.

The results of this study provide guidance for school leaders and administrators on what interventions should continue and what additional interventions need to be added. The results, also, provide guidance to school intervention personnel about what interventions should be prioritized when students are struggling to attend school.

Intended Audience

The intended audience for this study is high school student services professionals, high school administrators, and community-based providers supporting high school students. This study looks at the work student services personnel in a suburban high school are doing to support students exhibiting school refusal behaviors.

My Professional Setting/Positionality Statement

Before continuing, it is important to note that I am currently employed in the district in which this study was done and am an active member of our student services staff. As a Dean of Students, it is my responsibility to review student attendance, actively work with families to maintain regular student attendance, and implement interventions when necessary. Having been immersed in the work of student attendance for over ten years, I recognize that the lens I view the issue of school attendance could be impacted by my role in the district.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Defining School Attendance

An analysis of 2018-2019 U.S. Department of Education school attendance data from Vaughn Byrnes of Johns Hopkins University's School of Education, found that approximately 17% of American students were chronically absent (Attendance Works, 2022). This represents over eight million American students who missed at least 10% of school days that year. Identifying these students and trying to decrease this number impacts student success throughout the United States yet a concrete definition of what is considered acceptable school attendance varies greatly across the United States. While some federal grant funding has attendance requirements tied to it, compulsory school attendance laws are made only at the state level. The United States Constitution prohibits federal mandates on attendance but does direct states to provide education within the tenth amendment (Reyes, 2020). The delegation of education to states creates a situation where each state has developed its own set of standards for compulsory school attendance and consequences for non-attendance. In Illinois, students aged 6-17 are required to attend. Illinois School Code (Illinois General Assembly, 2022) states that you must be in school unless you have "valid cause" to miss which in Illinois includes illness, mental or behavioral health concerns, attendance at a medical appointment or an appointment with a victim services provider, observance of a religious holiday, death in the immediate family, participation in a civic event, or a family emergency that is outside of the control of the student. If students are not excused, their absence is defined as a truancy. Students who miss between 1% and 5% of the

school year are considered truant. Students who miss over 5% of the school year are considered chronically or habitually truant. If a student is identified as truant, the student and their caretaker are expected to work with the school and regional office of education to identify barriers to attendance and implement attendance interventions (Macon-Piatt Regional Office,, 2020). If the student continues to be truant, their caretaker may be expected to attend a truancy hearing where the student may be penalized with community service, expected to attend counseling, receive monetary fines, or have their driving privileges revoked until they are age 18. Additionally, causing a student to miss school or intentionally not providing access to a student so they can attend school may result in caretakers being charged with a misdemeanor. Since governance is done at the state level, each state has its way of handling attendance.

In the neighboring state of Wisconsin, compulsory attendance laws are minimal at the state level and governed more at the local district level. Statewide, students are compelled to attend from age 6 to age 18, one year longer than students in Illinois and caretakers can be held responsible for their students' non-attendance based on Wisconsin state statute (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [WDPI], 2020). Definitions of what is considered excused and unexcused absences are left to the local school board to define which differs from the state of Illinois (WDPI, 2020). Additionally, there is no statewide limit to the number of days a student can miss. Local school districts can implement such expectations. These varying expectations across local municipalities, counties, and states create a challenge when researchers are trying to identify truancy issues and create solutions for school attendance.

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, researchers and attendance intervention specialists began looking at attendance data through a multitude of lenses. While the concept of truancy had been around for quite a long time, researchers also

started to look at students who they deemed “chronically absent.” Attendance Works (2022), an organization focused on reducing chronic absenteeism in the United States, defines a student as being chronically absent when they miss 10% of the school year or two days a month. Looking at chronically absent students means looking at all of the days a student missed school - excused, unexcused, and suspended (Henderson et al., 2014). Chronically absent students are sometimes overlooked because their absences don’t always raise red flags. Many times, they are excused by a caretaker or doctor due to a medical condition or a reason the caretaker rationalizes as being acceptable to stay home. But these students are missing valuable in-class learning time just as if they were unexcused from school. This missed learning time lends itself to several academic and lifelong challenges.

The Importance of School Attendance

Researchers who study chronic absenteeism have varying thresholds for when schools should be intervening. Balfanz (2016) focuses on the need for students to miss less than 10% of each year. Kearney and colleagues (2004) support a need for interventions to begin when a student reaches 15% of school days missed while Rogers et al. (2017) remain focused on 20% of school days missed impacting graduation rates. What they all agree on, though, is that school attendance is key to student success both short-term and long-term.

Hendron and Kearney (2016) report that school absenteeism affects 14-15% of American students. School attendance is strongly correlated with academic performance and is the strongest predictor of whether a student will drop out and not graduate from high school (Rogers et al., 2017). Students who miss more than 20% of school days significantly reduce their chances of graduating on time and increase the likelihood of withdrawing from school without a diploma

(Balfanz & Herzog, 2005). Conversely, students who miss less than a week each semester (approximately one day per month) have a 90% chance of graduating on time (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Allensworth and Easton's work (2007) found that attendance was more important to high school graduation success rates than a student's middle school standardized assessment scores. Looking at specific subject areas, when students miss learning time, there is a greater impact on math achievement because of the need to understand prior material before grasping the current work. Goodman's (2014) research found that the impact of absences on math achievement was a substantial 0.05 standard deviation. Absent students miss the foundational material that they need to keep up with their classmates. This loss of mastery of material impacts long-term learning of math concepts and can impact a student's willingness to attend and engage in math class (Goodman, 2014).

Regular school attendance also contributes to positive mental and physical health gains in students. Kearney's (2021) research supports the notions raised by earlier researchers that strong school attendance provides a more positive outlook on academic achievement, enhanced physical well-being, growth in personal relationships, and increased social-emotional functioning. Students who miss school regularly have more negative outcomes such as academic deficiencies, feeling disengaged with school, and losing out on opportunities for more lifelong earning potential (Kearney, 2021). Notably, students who are absent from school regularly also have less access to non-academic resources such as food and medical care since much of this support can be found in schools through free and reduced meal plans and collaborations with local health departments (Hutt, 2018). These broad positive and negative outcomes demonstrate the need to look at regular school attendance and intervene as quickly as possible. Specific to high schools, Neild et al., (2007) found that student attendance during their first year of high school, grade 9,

was a better predictor of student achievement than previous standardized achievement assessments. Thus, researchers find it important to utilize school attendance as an indicator of future concerns for the student as an adult (Henderson et al., 2014).

Students missing 15% or more days of school are at a high risk of falling behind their classmates and typically need additional support to be successful. Skedgell and Kearney (2016) found that schools should be increasing Tier 2 support for students as soon as they approach the 15% of missed school days marker. Their research found that students in this category started to report that internalizing behaviors such as anxiety and social phobia quickly accelerated. By increasing Tier 2 support at this time, schools could decrease long-term attendance concerns (Skedgell & Kearney, 2016). Additionally, students who missed 15% to 60% of school days displayed more internalizing behaviors than those with higher or lower attendance rates (Skedgell & Kearney, 2016). Those students needed more significant intervention earlier than previously thought. Schools need to monitor attendance data and individual student patterns frequently to identify students who are struggling and head off concerns as soon as possible.

School attendance is considered one of the most important predictors of both successes and challenges later in life (Tobias, 2019). Students in grade 9 who missed 30% of their school days have a 75% greater chance of not completing high school than that of their peers who are in attendance more frequently (Neild et al., 2007). Adults who do not graduate from high school may end up underemployed, less financially stable, and with more health problems than their peers who do graduate (Telfair et al., 2012). There is also well-documented research on the correlation between the amount of schooling one has and one's health concerns later in life. More educated people are likely to exercise and obtain preventative care such as getting vaccines, mammograms, and colonoscopies. They are likely to have lower morbidity rates from

the most common chronic diseases (heart conditions, stroke hypertension, diabetes, asthma attacks) and to have better physical and mental health functioning (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006). Additionally, people who have more education are likely to make more income which allows them access to health care (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006).

Defining School Refusal Behavior

While there can be many reasons a student frequently misses school, one particular reason studied in the literature is school refusal behaviors. Much of the first half of the twentieth-century research on school attendance focused on defining all unauthorized school absences as truancy. But as researchers looked at attendance numbers and studied why students were missing school, they identified new concerns. Hersov (1960) first introduced the concept of school refusal in the 1960s. Since this introduction, there has been growing acceptance for the concept of school refusal that is based on emotional concerns such as anxiety, depression, and other mental health diagnoses (Havik & Ingul, 2021). Students who demonstrate school refusal exhibit behaviors including general anxiety, social phobia, psychosomatic symptoms, depression, fear of attending school, withdrawal from peers, disinterest in attending specific classes, and increased externalizing behaviors (Kearney & Albano, 2004). These concerns were not in line with previous truancy-related absences and are based much more in the realm of social-emotional concerns rather than deviant behaviors sometimes associated with skipping school. Students experiencing school refusal differentiate themselves from students who are truant. Humensky and colleagues (2010) found that students with symptoms frequently associated with anxiety and depression diagnoses are more likely to have school refusal and to have a more severe case of chronic absenteeism. Additionally, students who reported a lack of desire to socialize, or

reported they were lonely or isolated from their peers can turn into school refusal students (Humensky et al., 2010). As new research developed, clinicians and school personnel were unsure how to codify these issues into one term. Research terms including student retention, student school relationship, academic persistence, school phobia, school refusal, school avoidance, truancy, and unexcused absences were all used to describe student reports for non-attendance. This made researching the topic challenging and disrupted attempts at consensus amongst researchers (Kearney & Albano, 2004).

In 1990, Kearney and Silverman presented research designating the term *school refusal behavior* to include those students who were struggling to attend school regularly. The phrase school refusal behavior now encompasses older terminology like school phobia, truancy, and general school refusal that may or may not be tied to emotional reasons (Havik & Ingul, 2021). Kearney and Silverman (1990, 1996) later set specific parameters for different types of school refusal and created a model to help clinicians identify the function of the student's school refusal behavior. The school refusal assessment scale (SRAS) created by Kearney and Silverman in 1993 and updated in 2002 and 2006 (SRAS-R) categorizes school refusal behavior into four factors: (1) avoid school-related stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity (i.e., anxiety and depression); (2) escape school-related aversive social and/or evaluative situations; (3) gain attention from significant others (e.g., caretakers); and/or (4) pursue tangible reinforcement outside of school (e.g., shopping, playing with friends, or drug use). The first two functions relate to negative reinforcement and to school refusal as it was known previous to 1990. Function 3 relates to separation anxiety and attention-seeking behaviors and function 4 is related to the traditional definition of truancy (Havik & Ingul, 2021). Students' behaviors can fall into one or more of these categories. The SRAS-R is utilized in schools, therapeutic and clinical

settings, and research studies as a way to identify the function behind a student's school refusal behavior. When school personnel take time to look at chronically absent students, they tend to identify students who are exhibiting school refusal behavior. By identifying the function of the school refusal behaviors, the student's support team can use research-based interventions to support getting the student back to regular attendance. Kearney and Silverman's (1993) work laid the foundation for defining school refusal behavior. Berg's (1997, 2002) work furthered the emphasis on labeling school refusal behavior by defining and creating operational criteria for school refusal research. Those criteria are (1) school attendance is less than 80% in the classroom during the two weeks prior; (2) the presence of an anxiety disorder; (3) parents are aware of their child's whereabouts during absences; (4) the absence of conduct disorder problems; and (5) parental motivational efforts to encourage their student's school attendance. Berg's research notes that anxiety or emotional distress can be demonstrated by students in a number of ways including physical or psychosomatic forms, behavior forms such as refusing to leave home for school in the mornings, or cognitive forms such as having a panic attack at school prior to a specific task or class.

The use of a school refusal assessment scale and/or identifying the function of a student's attendance behavior, also, has opened up the conversation on the concept of truancy. Does a student who was previously considered truant for choosing not to come to school without a reasonable excuse now need to be assessed for school refusal? Would their behavior fall into a function within Kearney and Silverman's factors of school refusal or Berg's operational criteria for school refusal? These are ongoing questions for researchers and school practitioners.

School Refusal Behavior Student Profile

A large number of students exhibiting school refusal behavior have documented negative attendance patterns lasting two years or more (Kearney et al., 2004). According to research from Carpentieri and partners (2022), students exhibiting school refusal have behavior that typically lasts for multiple days or even weeks despite family and school intervention. They found that caretakers are typically aware that their student is refusing to attend school but are unable to coerce their student to attend. Research from Hansen et al. (1998) indicates that school refusal behavior is reported equally among genders, racial subgroups, and socioeconomic statuses.

School refusal behaviors may be different for each student. Internalizing and externalizing behaviors may be observed (Kearney et al., 2004). Students may exhibit symptoms and/or be diagnosed with general and social anxiety, depression, or other mental health conditions (González et al., 2020). Students may show symptoms of social withdrawal or report not feeling included by their peers. Caretakers may also observe changes in peer groups. Students may also become noncompliant, aggressive, threaten to or choose to run away from home, or have a temper tantrum when told to attend school courses or told to participate in school activities such as homework (Kearney et al., 2004).

Students experiencing school refusal may present with normal, age-appropriate reactions to activities in the evenings and on the weekends. However, in the mornings when they are required to attend school, they may be unable to function including being unable to handle basic functions such as showering and eating. Students may also have multiple psychosomatic symptoms in the morning that they indicate prevents them from going to school. If students *can* arrive at school, they may share that they are having a panic attack, are in great emotional

distress, and/or are unable to attend class. Some students who report school refusal do not demonstrate anti-social behaviors and are willing to be around their peers at times of their choosing (Carpentieri et al., 2022).

Students who are demonstrating school refusal behaviors may also be exhibiting characteristics that are frequently associated with the traditional term of truancy from the mid-twentieth century. How a student's behavior is defined may determine the interventions that are utilized by school personnel. Students who are marked as truant typically see more disciplinary consequences and may be referred to juvenile judicial services due to their non-attendance while school personnel who believe a student is exhibiting school refusal behaviors will try to implement interventions based on social-emotional support.

The varied paths for supporting students are impacted by the absence of a clear definition of truancy and a clear definition of school refusal (Keppens & Spruyt, 2017). Hersov (1960) noted that students labeled as truant presented as not being interested in school, wishing to defy their caretakers and/or school authority, having behavior difficulties, and/or lacking fear or anxiety about school. Maynard et al. (2018) noted that students who are labeled as truants are characterized by their intentional acts to refrain from attending school and doing so without parental knowledge or consent. Heyne et al. (2019) focused on the student's intent and concealment as components of truancy. While researchers are attempting to define truancy, they are also exploring the thought that school refusal behaviors and truancy contain much overlap. Egger et al., (2003) find that a lot of student truancy may be linked to mental health concerns such as depression and oppositional defiant disorder and emphasizes the need to look at the student's mental health as part of reviewing their school refusal behavior.

Causes of School Refusal Behavior

Kearney's (2001) research found that up to 28% of students could be impacted by school refusal behavior at some point during their school career while Carpentieri and research partners (2022) found that 1-2% of the general student population has attendance that is impacted by school refusal behaviors on any given day. As noted earlier, Kearney and colleagues (1990, 1996) have attempted to categorize school refusal behavior into four factors. Within those four factors, there are more categorized explanations for why students exhibit school refusal behavior. While there is no specific list or even agreed-upon reasons for school refusal, the most widely researched causes for school refusal behavior are student mental health, peer conflict and bullying, home influences and functioning, and school climate (Heyne et al., 2019; Kearney, 2021).

Mental Health Conditions

Mental health concerns in adolescent students have increased greatly and state Boards of Education have begun to take note. In the United States, currently, 12 states have addressed the need to prioritize student mental health by allowing mental health to be considered an "excused" absence within their school code (Atkins, 2022). Illinois allows students five mental health days per year and schools cannot require a doctor's note to be provided (Illinois General Assembly, 2022). While providing this excused absence option is important, it also highlights the impact of mental health on school absenteeism. Students needing to miss school due to their own mental health concerns contribute to chronic absenteeism data because chronic absenteeism rates include excused and unexcused absences. Research published around the impact of mental health

as a contributing factor to school refusal frequently differentiates between students who have already been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and students who demonstrate symptoms of a mental health disorder. The studies return similar findings regardless of diagnosis status.

Havik and Ingul (2021) draw attention to the subgroup of school refusal students who do not have a formal mental health diagnosis by noting that students with school refusal behaviors are still likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for generalized anxiety, social anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, and/or depression. Students with an absentee rate of at least 15% missed school days have mental health screening scores that show significantly greater levels of separation anxiety, general anxiety, panic, social phobia, compulsive thoughts, and/or depression compared to peers who missed 0-14% of school days (Skedgell & Kearney, 2016).

Lawrence and colleagues (2019) studied students who report already having a mental health diagnosis such as anxiety disorder or major depressive disorder. Their work found that study participants were significantly more likely to miss school than their neurotypical peers. During secondary school years, one-fifth of male students and one-third of female students with a mental health disorder missed at least twenty days of school while only one in ten of their neurotypical peers missed a similar amount of school (Lawrence et al., 2019).

A systematic review of 15 studies by Leduc and colleagues (2022) found students and their caretakers who reported school refusal behaviors were more anxious and some were more depressed than their peers without school refusal. Additionally, they found that the studies they reviewed generally agreed that anxiety is present in most students who are referred for school refusal therapeutic treatment (Maynard et al., 2018). In the reviewed studies, not all youth had official diagnoses for anxiety or depression, but researchers found characteristics that exemplify both disorders (Leduc et al., 2022). Consistent with the symptoms of a generalized anxiety

disorder or major depressive disorder, students with school refusal shared heightened concerns about their academic work, family relationships, interpersonal life, as well as more negative social thoughts and thoughts about failure. Additionally, Humensky and colleagues (2010) found students demonstrating school refusal behavior and reporting depressive symptoms indicate that their symptoms disrupt their ability to concentrate in class, complete homework, attend class, and interact with their peers.

Students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and/or diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) constitute a segment of the chronically absent student population that struggles specifically with school refusal behavior. Students diagnosed with both ASD and ADHD are 7.58 times more likely to refuse to come to school and students diagnosed with ADHD only were 4.81 times more likely to refuse to come to school when compared with their peers without ASD and/or ADHD (McClemont et al., 2021). Students diagnosed with ASD and/or ADHD have more externalizing behaviors than their peers. These students also tend to have a harder time making friends and maintaining relationships with peers and staff members (McClemont et al., 2021). These struggles and resulting school refusal may be associated with students feeling less connected to their school, peers, and/or teachers (Adams, 2022). In order to increase connectedness, it is important to have inclusive classrooms where all students are learning together. Research from Gottfried and colleagues (2019) found that students with disabilities who were in classrooms with their neurotypical peers were more present in school and had fewer days of absenteeism.

Students with specific diagnoses are more likely to be bullied and more likely to miss school due to it. Students with ASD and ADHD are at least 43% more likely to be the victim of bullying than their peers and thus significantly are more likely to have ever refused to attend

school due to bullying (McClemont et al., 2020). Kloosterman and research partners (2013) observed that the social communication deficits and repetitive behaviors that are observed in students with ASD can increase the risk of bullying victimization. Taylor and colleagues (2010) found that externalizing behaviors and emotion dysregulation among students with ADHD increased the rate of bullying within this student group.

Bullying

Negative school experiences contribute to chronic absences among students (Chang et al., 2018). Bullying is a negative school experience and is defined as behavior that is 1) aggressive or intended to harm; 2) carried out repeatedly and over time; and 3) occurs in an interpersonal relationship where a power imbalance exists (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005). Bullying can take place in person or electronically. Bullying is considered one of the leading causes of school refusal behavior (Havik et al., 2015). In their review of a nationally-representative sample of high school students who took the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Steiner and Rasberry (2015) found that one quarter (25.2%) of students reported experiencing a form of bullying in the past 12 months. Within this group of students, Steiner and Rasberry (2015) report that there was an increased likelihood of missing school due to their concerns for personal safety and/or concerns related to negative peer interactions that may be forthcoming. Gastic (2008) found that 22% of bullying victims were chronically absent versus 15% of non-victims in their study. This equates to 58% greater odds of being chronically absent, which is significant.

Ladd et al. (2017) studied the long-term impacts of bullying from kindergarten through high school and the propensity of victims to avoid school. Students who were chronically bullied throughout their schooling showed chronic stress about school and their school avoidance was

significantly higher than their peers who had experienced a low amount of bullying at any point in their school career. Their research found, though, that if the bullying is addressed, students can recover from the school avoidance and their tendencies to miss school decreased (Ladd et al., 2017).

Students who are experiencing bullying behavior may choose to avoid a particular class or unstructured portion of their school day such as the bus or lunchtime or may refuse to come to school until that specific period has passed in their day or, they may refuse to come at all. Hutzell and Payne (2018) found that students who reported bullying victimization were more likely to avoid a particular location in or around school due to a fear of an attack on them or harm being done. Their study looked at students who reported overall bullying, being made fun of, having rumors spread about them, being excluded from activities, being threatened with harm, or being pushed or shoved. Additionally, Hutzell and Payne (2012) found that students with poor academic achievement and students in public schools were more likely to engage in avoidance behaviors. This reported avoidance may contribute to chronic absenteeism either for a particular class or a full school day.

Home Influences

Strong family engagement and involvement have consistently been linked to increased student attendance, higher student achievement, and lower dropout rates among other positive outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Conversely, caretakers who are struggling themselves negatively impact their students' attendance. Chockalingam and partners (2022) reviewed eight studies that explored caretaker factors associated with student school refusal. They found that caretaker psychopathology, family functioning, and maternal overprotection were statistically

significant factors in student school refusal. Caretakers who reported high depressive symptoms or high anxiety levels were more likely to have students with school attendance concerns.

Guevara and colleagues (2012) found similar results - students are more likely to miss school if they have a caretaker who reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms in the past month.

This may be due to health conditions the caretaker has or the inability to access or utilize preventative health services or therapy for themselves (Guevara et al., 2012). Family units where the home environment has high levels of conflict, lacks quality interest and concern for the wellbeing of one another, struggles with organization, has poor standards for behavior, and/or struggles with communication are also prone to contribute to students who refuse to attend school (Bernstein et al., 1999, as cited in Chockalingam, 2022; Hersov, 1960 as cited in Chockalingam, 2022; Lyon & Cotler, 2009, as cited in Chockalingam, 2022). Students living in situations where caretakers are less involved in the school are, also, more likely to exhibit attendance issues. These students are more likely to have less supervision at home especially when it comes to school attendance and discipline and may live in a single-caretaker household where the caretaker is less available to participate in school activities (Hendron & Kearney, 2016).

Students also need age-appropriate autonomy to make their own decisions in order to grow and develop. Parents can contribute to school refusal and attendance behaviors if they ask too many questions (leading their students to believe they don't trust them), expect their students to talk through every decision with them, or make an attempt to overshadow their students' beliefs. (Chockalingam et al., 2022). Being overprotective may decrease a student's self-confidence and reinforce their anxiety and depressive thinking, which could contribute to chronic absenteeism (Bögels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006).

When specifically looking at students with ASD, Adams (2022) found that caretakers' employment status significantly impacted their student's attendance. Students with ASD have an increased risk of non-attendance if they have a caretaker who is unemployed and staying at home. The risk of non-attendance increased by 80% for full-day absences and by 90% for half-day absences. Adams (2022) theorizes that caretakers who have paid employment have fewer emotional or practical resources to allow a student to stay home.

It should be noted that researchers have had many discussions about the transmission of mental health conditions from parent to child, perhaps through a genetic propensity for these conditions (Chockalingam et al., 2022). The transmission of these symptoms can also move from child to parent. Attendance issues and school refusal create a hard situation for caretakers and may initiate adult mental health difficulties, stress, and family conflict (Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006). Regardless, resolving student attendance and school refusal concerns would be difficult without the cooperation and involvement of caretakers (Elliott & Place, 2019).

School Climate

A final area to consider when looking at chronic absenteeism and school refusal behavior is school climate. Research on school refusal behavior has grown to include looking at the school's climate as an impact on school avoidance behaviors (Van Eck et al., 2017). School climate consists of the quality of teacher-to-student relationships, the interpersonal relationships among students, school connectedness, students' feelings of safety when at school, the effectiveness of instructional methods and academic engagement, and physical resources (Hendron & Kearney, 2016; Wang & Degol, 2016).

Hendron and Kearney (2016) administered the School Climate Survey Revised Edition to 398 middle and high school students and found statistically significant inverse relationships between school climate and absenteeism severity. Findings supported the hypothesis that student opportunity, order and discipline within the school, peer relationships, student-to-teacher relations, and/or caretaker involvement impact absenteeism severity and school refusal behavior. Hendron and Kearney's (2016) research was focused specifically on youth referred for problematic absenteeism. The students participating were recruited from family courts and a truancy diversion program and missed an average of 43% of the school days during the past academic year. Daily and research colleagues (2020) reviewed data for middle school and high school students in 26 middle schools and high schools in West Virginia and had similar findings to Hendron and Kearney (2016). Their analysis of three school climate sub-scales (positive student-teacher relationships, order and safety, and opportunities for student engagement) showed positive relationships with academic grades and school satisfaction and a negative relationship between school climate and missing school. Karlberg et al. (2022) studied 101 Swedish schools and found that a positive school climate and high teacher expectations were associated with better attendance among students.

While it might make intuitive sense that if a student does not like the overall vibe of a school, they may avoid school, there is contradictory research on the impact of school climate. Hamlin (2021) reviewed student responses in a large data set ($N = 823,753$ students at $n = 1,045$ schools) from New York City Public School's Learning Environment Survey administered in 2011 and 2012. The survey data were linked to administrative data for student absences and sociodemographic characteristics. Hamlin (2021) found only small associations between student attendance and school climate. At the individual level, when a student's perception of safety

increases, the likelihood of the student being chronically absent decreases by 4% (Hamlin, 2021). Similarly, when a student reports being more academically engaged, the likelihood of the student being chronically absent decreases by 8% (Hamlin, 2021). When Hamlin (2021) reviewed school-level data, there was no statistical association between schools that saw a positive increase in students' feeling personally connected and students' absenteeism rate. The same findings were reported for academic engagement. Given the robust nature of this study, it opens up questions about how much school climate impacts student attendance, school refusal behavior, and school avoidance. Hendron and Kearney (2016) focused on students who were already identified as having school refusal behaviors, which differs from the more general student population studied by Hamlin (2021) which may provide an explanation as to why their two outcomes differ.

Chronic Health Conditions

As noted throughout this research review, there are many reasons why kids miss school. Chronic health conditions and lingering health issues present a barrier to student attendance and an additional reason for student school refusal. The longer that students are out of school, the more challenging it is to get them back to regular attendance. Health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, obesity, oral health, and seizure disorders can keep students from attending school, especially if the conditions are unmanaged or access to quality health care is unavailable (Henderson et al., 2014). These students have lower attendance than their peers. While this is documented, typically students who have these disabling conditions are not missing because they are refusing to go to school. They are missing because they are sick, which is not the focus of my

dissertation. In this dissertation, I focused on students with health concerns that impact their school refusal.

Identifying School Refusal Behaviors

School personnel identify that a student is struggling to come to school through various avenues. The information could come from an attendance administrative assistant who recognizes a pattern in a student's attendance. It could, also, come from a parent contacting school staff about their struggles at home to get their student to attend or a student reaching out to a staff member to discuss why they are uncomfortable. Conversely, it could come from an examination of recent attendance data that a school administrator reviews (Railsback, 2004). As school refusal behaviors have increased, school staff members have wrestled with a systematic way to identify these behaviors, categorize them, and find solutions to their students' struggles (Kearney & Silverman, 1993). Schools have looked to researchers for recommendations and to organizations such as Attendance Works for ways to assess behavior and increase attendance.

A student's transition to a new school environment is a time when school refusal behavior is most common. Students entering kindergarten/first grade, middle school, and high school are more prone to having school refusal concerns (Kearney et al., 2004). These changes typically involve a change in the physical building they're attending, a change in the supporting staff surrounding them daily, and in some states, a change completely in the school district in which they are attending. This transition period has been observed as a critical time for chronic absenteeism and grade failure (Hamlin, 2021). Allensworth and Easton (2007) found that student attendance in grade 9 is a better predictor of academic success than previous standardized test scores. Additionally, absences compound after grade 9 as students fall behind more academically

and then have an increased risk of dropping out (Neild et al., 2007). Due to the critical nature of these transition times, it is imperative that school staff partner together to share information about attendance and create positive environments that welcome their new students.

An additional school response that is important to identify the function between school refusal problems and behaviors is the use of an assessment tool. The International Network for School Attendance (2022), an organization that promotes school attendance and responses to school attendance problems, provides multiple questionnaires that can be used by school staff. Researching which questionnaire works best for your school needs or your particular student can be helpful. Kearney and Silverman (1993) developed their School Refusal Assessment scale (SRAS-R) as a tool to go with their functional model of school refusal behaviors. The assessment scale was revised most recently in 2006. The scale is widely used as a response to reported school refusal behaviors in order to identify the function behind the behavior. SRAS-R has a student questionnaire and a caretaker questionnaire that should be completed to fully evaluate a student's school refusal behavior concerns. This two-part assessment consists of 24 questions for each person and could provide a clearer picture of the school refusal behaviors that are present. School personnel can then take the function conclusion and use Kearney and Silverman's suggested interventions to help return the student to regular attendance. But it may not be best for all students. Orm and fellow researchers (2022) found that SRAS-R is adequate for assessing school refusal behaviors for students diagnosed with ADHD but not for students diagnosed with ASD. Students with ADHD have more similar school refusal behaviors to their neurotypical peers than those with ASD which means that the metrics that are derived from the SRAS-R are more valid for students with ADHD than those with Autism (Orm et al., 2022). Thus, having multiple questionnaires available is key for school administrators and school mental health

providers. Heyne and colleagues (2019) felt that the SRAS-R did not go far enough at evaluating the functions of the behavior so they created SNACK, the School Non-Attendance CheckList. Their assessment screens for the presence of truancy, school refusal, school withdrawal, school exclusion, as well as non-problematic absenteeism (Heyne et al., 2019). When the SNACK assessment is administered, a list of a student's absences for the last four weeks is provided to the student's caretaker, and the caretaker is asked to use a chart to identify the reason behind why a student was absent for a particular day. The chart has 15 reasons and caretakers are asked to include a reason for each day. The distribution of the responses into the five categories previously listed helps school personnel identify the function behind the absences. SNACK differs from SRAS-R in that it is specifically focused on helping schools quickly identify the type of school refusal problem or behavior. SNACK does not provide specific interventions for each of the functions identified although Heyne and colleagues have written extensively on the topic in their research work.

School Interventions

Regardless of the assessment method that school personnel use, identifying the function behind the school refusal behavior is key to developing interventions for a student. Regular use of school refusal assessments can, also, help schools develop a "go-to" list of interventions and provide data that supports the need for these interventions to be funded and continued. Interventions are sometimes grouped into tiers such as the tiers used in a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) model. MTSS provides a way to systematically review student data and implement interventions.

Tier 1 Interventions

Tier 1 approaches are focused on general messaging to increase current school attendance rates, prevent chronic absenteeism, reduce dropout rates, and are often implemented school-wide through mass communications like school signage, email communications, and community partnerships (Kearney, 2021). Tier 1 approaches are used for all students. The focus of this messaging is positive with an emphasis on creating an inviting school climate, preventing bullying, increasing family partnerships with the school, and revising policies that previously led to exclusion (Graves et al., 2019).

Within the Tier 1 umbrella of support is the use of clear communications to students and caretakers about a student's attendance and academic progress. Communicating to caretakers the school's expectations regarding attendance and making attendance messaging an integral part of social media posting sends a consistent message that attendance is important (Balfanz, 2016). This communication is done via text message or email can have a large impact on student success. Rogers and Kraft (2014) found that a weekly one-sentence message from teachers about a student's schoolwork increased students' academic success including the number of students who passed classes, improved student attendance, and encouraged more dialog between caretakers and students about school. Additionally, Rogers and colleagues (2017) found that sending home a postcard to caretakers with a message about improving student attendance reduced absences. Their research found that using this "nudge" drew family attention to the issue regardless of how detailed the information was on the postcard. Robinson et al. (2018) found that just a simple notification about attendance was not enough. School personnel needs to combine their notification efforts with targeting parents' misconceptions about how much school time

other students miss compared to their student and targeting parental beliefs about the importance of school (Lara et al., 2018).

Programs focused on student mental health, social-emotional learning, and substance abuse prevention are key components to intervening at the Tier 1 level (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Utilizing character education programs to teach life skills and core values helps to enhance attendance through personal development and promoting social competence (Graczyk et al., 2000). Snyder and colleagues (2010) saw lower absenteeism and higher reading and math scores after the implementation of a social-emotional and character development program focused on self-concept, physical and intellectual actions, social and emotional actions, interpersonal skills, integrity, and self-improvement.

Tier 1 approaches, also, recognize good attendance and celebrate improved attendance. This recognition supports the positive messaging mentioned earlier which is that daily attendance is important, the staff wants students present in class, and being absent is noticed (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013). This can be done with simple public praise and public recognition or it can include incentive programs with material or monetary rewards. Behavior intervention systems like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program (PBIS) have grown in popularity as a Tier 1 intervention to reinforce behavior expectations and incentivize students to change their behavior (Molina et al., 2020). The research on the effectiveness of incentive programs is mixed. Allen & Fryer (2011) found incentive programs that focused on students doing activities that contributed to their learning such as reading grade-level books, completing math assignments that were focused on areas of struggle, and attending school were more successful than incentive programs that focused on students earning specific grades or achieving specific scores on standardized assessments.

Tier 1 work also includes reviewing supervision within the school campus and reviewing school policies to support decreasing bullying. Locations on school campuses that have been found to have the highest incidents of bullying include school playgrounds or athletic fields, classrooms without a supervisor such as during a passing period or a time with a teacher steps out of the classroom, school hallways or common spaces and bus stops (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Improving supervision within these spaces and increasing positive messaging are important to reducing the risk of bullying taking place. School districts, also, are required to have specific bullying prevention policies in place and to follow them. Illinois school districts are required to have publicized procedures for how students and families can report bullying and procedures for how bullying will be investigated (Illinois General Assembly, 2022).

Finally, as part of Tier 1 interventions, school personnel should be looking for early warning signs and monitoring data to identify students who may need additional support. Identifying students who need Tier 2 support may begin with the work of the school's attendance team. Attendance teams review and analyze attendance data, identify trends, and identify students who are chronically absent to assess their needs (Lavigne et al., 2021).

Tier 2 Interventions

Tier 2 interventions are for emerging or acute cases of school refusal and focus on relationship-building with students to increase school attendance. These students may also be previously identified as being "at-risk" for attendance concerns. Tier 2 absenteeism may demonstrate such behaviors as skipping individual classes regularly, having partial or complete absences from school, or showing distress before or throughout the school day which results in the student requesting to not attend classes (Skedgell & Kearney, 2016). In addition to the work

of the attendance teams during Tier 1, school personnel may recognize a growing attendance situation on their own or a student or family member may report a concern. School personnel may then use a school refusal assessment mentioned previously in order to identify the function behind the students' attendance struggles. Following the assessment, school support team members work with caregivers and the student to identify interventions that will work best to support the student. Team members are working to both identify areas of support and the barriers that need to be removed in order to increase attendance. These personalized interventions may be school-based or may include working with community-based healthcare providers to partner with students and caregivers to reduce absences (Railsback, 2004).

Check-In, Check-Out (CICO) is a Tier 2 intervention that pinpoints one person that a student sees daily or weekly. CICO is one of the most widely used interventions across the country (Hawken et al., 2014). CICO is also known as Check and Connect. This person develops a mentor relationship with the student and helps ensure that the student has everything they need to be successful at school. The mentor, also, serves as a connector to other interventions within the school. Obtaining much-needed academic intervention support may reduce academic anxieties that the student has and may open up a path for more regular school attendance by reducing the desire for the student to avoid a specific class or portion of their school day. The designated CICO person, also, works with family members to identify barriers outside of the school building which may be impacting a student's absenteeism. The mentor helps family members, then, with removing those barriers. Hawken and colleagues (2014) did a systematic literature review summarizing the outcomes of numerous students on CICO. Their findings indicated that in ten studies conducted at the secondary level, the intervention showed negligible effect and that 50% of the individual students who participated were somewhat responsive to the

CICO intervention. This would be consistent with the MTSS tiered model of intervention. Tier 2 interventions such as CICO are targeted towards approximately 15% of the students in a school. Of those students, a little less than half will need Tier 3 interventions which is consistent with these findings (Hawken et al., 2014).

CICO is synonymous with mentoring roles within schools. Another format for mentoring within schools is the use of small support groups to help students. Creating groups led by school student services personnel that promote attendance and academic and social skill development is an effective way to support students (Weinstein et al., 2021). Students who participate in school counseling sessions miss fewer days of school, have lower discipline and suspension rates, and better student achievement on standardized tests (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). Small support groups within schools can take many formats with regard to the frequency at which they meet and the topics of which they discuss. The regularity of the sessions and the accountability that comes from peers can't be understated (Harris et al., 2020). The cohesion within the group can also foster behavioral change (Harris et al., 2020).

Getting students to walk through the school building's front door may be the first challenge for school personnel when a student is experiencing school refusal behaviors. School personnel may need to visit a student's home to understand the student's struggles better and identify how they can support the student. Home visits are well documented as a Tier 1 intervention at the beginning of the school year to encourage family engagement and draw attention to the school year starting (Chang et al., 2016). Research on the utilization of targeted visits to homes based on chronic attendance concerns is more limited, especially at the secondary level. Research wholeheartedly supports the importance of developing strong parent-school relationships, though, which is at the foundation of any home visit (Adams, 2022; Hendron &

Kearney, 2016; Kearney, 2021). Richmond, VA public school district worked with community partners and local officials to go door-to-door visiting specific families where students had not been attending or had already dropped out. They saw a decrease in their dropout rate from 26% in 2004 to 8% in 2012 (Lara et al., 2018). Another format for home visits enlists someone to help the family regularly. In the United Kingdom, a family coaching model was implemented that included support for students who were experiencing persistent non-attendance. Tobias (2019) found that home visits were successful when the family coach listened to the student, helped identify barriers to attendance, and helped the student to feel safe. This model, though, saw only variable success because coaches struggled to effect change on a regular basis in the family home. While research is scant on the effectiveness of home visits to secondary students, there is strong research that supports the importance of engaging families to reduce chronic absenteeism (Lara et al., 2018).

When schools engage with families, they learn about potential barriers that are preventing regular school attendance. Removal of barriers may call for the intervention of community-based providers. Community-based providers may be called upon to help with physical and mental health needs, transportation, housing concerns, and child care. Community-based providers can conduct individual and group mental health sessions in an effort to diagnose and treat the mental health concerns students may be experiencing. The work of these providers has been shown to be successful in reducing anxiety and increasing school attendance (Henderson et al., 2014). Specifically, students and families may find success in reducing school refusal behavior through cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). Last et al. (1998) and Heyne et al. (2019) found that utilizing CBT produced significant improvements in students' attendance and reduced fear,

anxiety, and depression. CBT, also, returned students to regular school attendance more swiftly (King et al., 1998).

Healthcare professionals can also help caregivers with medical issues that arise that prevent a student from attending and can help quickly return the student to regular attendance (Martin, 2021). Students with chronic absences have more frequent appointments that require more time out of school (Martin, 2021). By coordinating interventions with these professionals, school personnel can increase the time students are present in school.

Tier 3 Interventions

Students needing Tier 3 interventions are students who miss the most school, who have not responded to previous interventions, and who have developed a pattern of sustained school refusal. Students identified as needing Tier 3 support present the most challenges for school personnel because their reasons for absenteeism are the most varied and don't fit into a single profile for school refusal (Cabus & De Witte, 2015). Much of the intervention work for students in need of Tier 3 support includes support or programming that takes place outside of the typical school classroom. Tier 3 interventions are intense and individualized to address the severity and chronic nature of a student's school attendance concerns. Successful Tier 3 interventions include individualized case management with community-based supports, quality online credit recovery options with flexible scheduling, alternative education programs, summer learning programs for re-engaging students, personalized academic instruction, and specialized mental health care (Hahn et al., 2015). Students in Tier 3 may also be referred for a special education evaluation and/or 504 plan.

Tier 3 interventions focus on the individual and potentially their family and how to best support the student in earning a diploma and receiving the support they need to be successful after high school. Individual case management by school personnel such as an attendance interventionist or school social worker or a community member trained to provide intervention may be successful if the student's school refusal necessitates it. Research conducted by Parise and colleagues (2017) in 24 mostly urban, low-income high schools across two states found that having intensive case management by a trained community professional improved students' connections to the adults in their homes and the adults they engaged with at school and improved the quality of their peer relationships and helped students maintain regular attendance at school. This study, though, did not focus specifically on students who were experiencing school refusal behavior.

If schools can engage the student who is exhibiting school refusal behavior in academic work, the best way to do that may be through the use of an online credit recovery program. Students who are absent are more likely to become credit deficient (Hendron & Kearney, 2016). This Tier 3 intervention provides a more personalized academic experience. Online credit recovery options support students who are struggling with attending school regularly because of their ability to be accessed by students at various times in the day. Online credit recovery programs take a variety of shapes which is what makes them an ideal option for school refusal students. Online credit recovery can be done in or out of the school building utilizing a web-based academic program. Using online credit recovery as an intervention tool has a positive effect on graduation rates and decreases the likelihood of a student dropping out (Levine et al., 2017). Utilizing online credit recovery programs, also, allows for differentiation and more intensive 1:1 intervention for motivation and attendance support (Levine et al., 2017). Online

credit recovery programs can also provide flexible scheduling options and personalized academic instruction.

Tier 3 supports typically require close monitoring of a student to ensure regular attendance and address academic credit deficiencies. In addition to online credit recovery programs, school personnel may consider alternative education programs that may or may not include online credit recovery. These programs focus on tailoring the student's schedule to their individual needs. Alternative education programs could include immersing a student in a specialized vocational training program to help them earn school credit while also obtaining licensure for future employment or participation in technical skills training (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

Students in Tier 3 support may also be referred for individualized education plans or 504 plans. These plans allow for additional school-based case management, part-time attendance, modifications to class schedules and assignments, escorts to class, specialized transportation, school-based social work services, and regular feedback to parents on attendance and academic performance (Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006).

Students exhibiting severe absenteeism may also be referred to local law enforcement or regional truancy task forces. This Tier 3 intervention may be used to help compel a struggling student to obtain the community-based support they need such as therapy or additional programming. In Illinois, students who are chronically truant are referred to their county regional office of education. This process involves school personnel completing a referral form where they document previous interventions and attendance patterns for the last 180 school days. Each county has its own way of handling these situations after the referral is submitted. Richtman (2007) and Fantuzzo and colleagues (2005) documented success in having local jurisdictions

create “court” within their schools with a local attorney, school social worker or counselor, a local police officer, the student, and their caretaker in attendance. At this meeting, a school attendance plan is created. Referrals to social service agencies, substance use programs, mental health evaluations, and family counseling can be provided to help address the underlying reasons for non-attendance.

Situating this Study in the Research

This study will look to begin to fill three areas of research. The first is to look at what interventions student support personnel in a suburban secondary school are implementing to support students who are exhibiting school refusal behavior. Much of the current research is being done in urban areas or being done using survey data readily available to researchers through large surveys of students and school staff implemented each year (Balfanz, 2016; Kearney, 2021; Lara et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Kraft, 2014). Researchers are drawing conclusions from that survey information. This study will interview student support personnel to better understand their role in supporting those students and then interventions they are providing. Second, this study will attempt to identify what interventions are the most successful for student support personnel working with students exhibiting school refusal behavior and learn better why those interventions are successful. Finally, this study will attempt to identify what additional needs school systems can provide for these staff members working with students struggling to attend school regularly. Kearney and Graczyk (2014), Heyne et al. (2019), and Chockalingam et al. (2022) among others mention the importance of providing school staff with the resources needed to support students exhibiting school refusal behaviors and their families.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This was an exploratory study designed to collect qualitative data on school attendance, school refusal student behaviors, and school-based interventions from student services professionals working in a setting that serves students in grades 9 through 12. Student services personnel include school counselors, school social workers, student services interventionists, school nurses, student interventionists, and deans of students. These professionals work within the same school and collaborate regularly with each other to support students. Choosing to do this study within one school fulfills the researcher's desire to evaluate the work currently being done and the application of research-based strategies in the work of school attendance.

Research Setting

Student Services professionals in this study are all employed by the same school district within the suburban Chicago region. This site was selected because the researcher has access to it through their employment and because the researcher is interested in identifying ways the school could support students who are struggling to attend school regularly. The researcher and their colleagues and administrators have been working to communicate to school community members the importance of being at school regularly and working to try to better support students who are chronically truant. School administrators have, also, been trying to more

quickly identify students who are experiencing school refusal or periodic times of school non-attendance and create new interventions to support these students.

The demographic information that follows comes from the high school's 2021 Illinois School Report Card. The high school has approximately 2,600 students and 292 faculty members. The high school is approximately 67% white, 21% Asian, 8% Hispanic, and 3% Black. The predominant language spoken in the school is English. The English Language Learner population is small at only 1.9%. Approximately 5.5% of the student population is categorized as living in low-income households. Overall, students attend classes regularly and stay within the school boundaries for multiple years. The school has a 97% daily student attendance rate and a very small mobility rate of 2.4%. The district spends \$21,753 per student and is not dependent on state funds as their percent of adequacy for evidence-based funding is 139.10%. The school is regarded yearly as one of the highest-performing schools in Illinois based on state assessments and graduation rates. In 2021, the school was named a National Blue Ribbon school. Yearly, 91% of students at the school matriculate to two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

The school uses a robust student management system, Infinite Campus, that provides for a variety of reports to be pulled which help student support teams identify individual student attendance patterns as well as times of the school year when attendance decreases.

Research Participants

The research participants consisted of members of the school's student services department. Within the pool of research participants are twelve school counselors, six school social workers, two social work interns, three school psychologists, two school nurses, three

deans of students, and three interventionists. The student services personnel work in teams referred to as student support teams (SSTs). Each team includes a school counselor, school social worker, school psychologist, dean of students, school nurse, and interventionist. The team members have remained on the same teams for years. When a team member leaves the school or retires, the person who replaces them is added to the team in their spot.

The total possible research sample included 30 members of the department. The sample was drawn from this group. A formal request for study participants to interview was sent to all 30 members. Of those, 21 people responded that they would be willing to be interviewed. From those respondents, a purposeful sample was chosen in an effort to gather information from people with differing roles and years of experience. By taking a representative sample of the people who responded, an effort was made to avoid saturation of answers.

All research participants' participation was voluntary and was solely based on their willingness to be interviewed on the topics of student attendance, school refusal behavior, and school interventions to support increasing attendance.

Instrumentation

The interview questions for this study can be found in Appendix A. To prepare for the interviews, I did a practice talk-aloud interview with a subject-matter expert with the characteristics of one of the participants. We went through the interview questions to establish whether the answers that were provided would adequately answer the research questions.

Research Procedure

For the purposes of this study, I collected data through individual interviews. The interview structure and development of the interviewer-to-participant relationship were based on the work of Weiss (1995) in his book *Learning from Strangers*. Weiss provides new qualitative researchers with strategies for creating strong relationships during an interview, helping the participant feel comfortable sharing their truths, and suggestions for how to phrase difficult questions. Those foundational skills led to my data collection efforts. I interviewed participants for approximately one hour each. All interviews took place in person in a school office. The participant and I were the only people present for each interview. Each interview was audio-recorded and, also, transcribed as it is being recorded by the iPhone app, Otter AI. After each interview, I re-listened to the audio and revised the transcription for accuracy. I coded interviews to identify themes which were then used to answer the study's research questions. Those themes are identified in the findings section of this paper as well as used in the discussion and recommendations sections.

Data Analysis Plan

The interview analysis was done using an open coding method. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) recommend this method as a “means for sorting the descriptive data that has been collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data” (p. 164). Bogdan and Biklen (2016) note that “developing a list of coding categories after the data has been collected... is a crucial step in data analysis” (p. 164). As part of my review, I labeled specific pieces of data with codes and then organized the codes into major categories.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The overarching theme that came through in all of the participant interviews was the theme of relationships. Developing and maintaining relationships are the key to increasing student attendance and returning a student to regular school attendance. Throughout every interview, participants talked about the web of relationships that exist when supporting students. The web includes relationships such as student to teacher, student to student, student to student services personnel, student to family, family to student services personnel, family to teacher, student to outside therapist or provider, family to outside therapist or provider, student services personnel to outside therapist or provider and on and on. When school staff members talk about supporting students exhibiting school refusal behaviors, they talk about the layers to relationship building and the interventions reflect those layers. The findings that follow provide answers and responses to the research questions.

Research Question #1

The first research question posed in this study was “What interventions are school personnel using to improve the attendance of students exhibiting school refusal behavior?” Through semi-structured interviews, the following interventions emerged that speak to or answer this research question: relationship development, doing home visits and communication, checking in with students regularly, creating a sense of belonging for students, working with other school staff and staff availability, utilization of online courses for learning, referring

students to outside providers, traditional discipline consequences, and encouraging social work group participation.

Developing Relationships

Consistent with the research mentioned in the Tier 2 Interventions section of this literature review, all participants in this study discussed the need for developing a relationship with a student who is struggling with school refusal and with their family. Participant D shared:

The big thing that I always do is either call parents or have parent meetings. I feel like my biggest results are tracking people down, calling their work, and telling them that they need to come in and it's kind of like I'm asking but it's also me saying we need to meet. Here are the three times I'm available. I feel like the personal connection is really important.

Meetings and phone calls help school staff members gather information and build relationships.

Participant E said:

When we're starting to go down that road of identifying what is really going on, we have to look at the whole family. That's our first intervention. Maybe it's a divorce situation where kids are not living in the same house the whole week. That can be tricky, especially when we are talking about mental health. In that case, you know, it's good to interview both parents and get some feedback on what's going on and how we can help, and sometimes that involves issues like transportation, and sometimes that involves, you know, us problem-solving.

By building those relationships, study participants felt they could get a better handle on what is going on and identify what additional intervention needed to take place.

Multiple study participants talked about the need to help students and families have honest conversations about mental health and how their mental health is impacting their daily functioning. Participant F stated:

I think getting them, the student and the parent, to be honest, is key. We need to have an honest conversation about what is getting in the way and that's the best way to find a way to support the student. But I think that can take a while sometimes until they kind of are

willing to say here's what's going on or Here's what's preventing me from going to a specific class or going to school in general and I don't know what to do about it.

Another study participant, Participant C, talked about the challenges of getting students to admit they are struggling:

It's more of a denial of the problem and an unwillingness to acknowledge that they have an issue, essentially. Instead of saying that they were sick or constantly relying upon physical symptoms - things like headache, asthma, allergies, whatever. Rather than having a conversation with us or a family member and saying they have debilitating anxiety about an assignment or about being in the school in general or about a relationship they have, they just sit and stew. I'll be honest, I haven't had a lot of kids who, initially, are willing to have an open conversation about why they can't come to school. I think that a lot of that has to do with vulnerability, but also probably not having the words or the independent awareness to understand that their refusal to come to school is actually related to their own mental health. They haven't really come to terms with that piece. I just think that that's a skill that probably develops later in life. It's my job to try to develop our relationship so that I can help them see this.

Through conversations and discussions with families, school staff members not only can help identify the function behind the non-attendance but they can also develop a more trusting relationship. That relationship allows for more dialog, more intervention, and more support. That work ultimately leads to a student being more confident in obtaining help and then returning to regular school attendance.

Home Visits and Communication

Part of the relationship-building process may involve visiting a student's home in order to meet with them because they are too anxious to come to school. Within this study, eight of the participants interviewed mentioned home visits as an intervention they've used to support students experiencing school refusal. Home visit protocols for this district involve at least two staff members going to visit a student at their house with the caretaker's permission. Staff members try to go when a caretaker is going to be home so that they can establish or build on

their current relationship with the caretaker as well as the student. Additionally, if the student is willing to come to school at the end of the visit, the caretaker can bring the student to school.

Staff members also have a chance to see the interactions between the caretaker and the student which can help them identify how to better support the family. Participant J said:

Home visits are great for students. I feel like we use home visits more for a student that misses all day. We use that time at home to navigate barriers as to why they aren't coming. We use these visits as quasi-parent meetings to help the family create morning routines and try to set those routines with the family. Often, we initiate home visits after a parent calls us to say I'm really having a hard time getting my student to come to school, I could really benefit from some support.

When talking about home visits, four study participants brought up the use of other types of technology to communicate with students while at home. While these interventions don't specifically have staff members going to the house, staff members are trying to communicate with the student while they're at home. Participant J added:

Additionally, we use the *Remind* app. It's a way to communicate with students on their cell phones because we know that oftentimes our chronically truant students are not looking at their emails. Communicating with them that way is sort of a moot point. Using the Remind app texts directly to their phone and we can, also, call through there. We've had some luck when students are at home using their school-issued Chromebook communicating with them through an app called *GoGuardian*, which allows us to see what they're doing at home.

Study participants recognize that communicating directly with the student is an important start to breaking down barriers with students experiencing school refusal.

Check In Check Out

Another piece to relationship building is the use of a form of Check in Check out (CICO). As mentioned earlier in the research for this study, formally, a CICO system includes a student support team member meeting with the student when they arrive at school each day and when

they leave at the end of each day. It also usually includes an academic component. Study

Participant H talked about this in their interview.

It's like, okay, do we have a plan for making up missed work? No, so sometimes a plan has to be created because the student is coming back from hospitalization or partial day programming. After a week or two of that plan, the student takes some ownership over what they want to work on this first period and then something different the second period and we don't have a problem with that. We try to do it with the kid but sometimes, a student actually enjoys just being told what to do. They don't have to think about it so they can be like, yes, I'm working on bio today and English tomorrow.

In this particular district, participants in this study noted that CICO may happen daily for a period of time and then may reduce to just at the start of the day to every other day, or to weekly. The CICO meeting may or may not have incentives tied to it. This system, though, provides an opportunity for the designated person to check attendance, supports the caretaker in getting the student to come into the school building if needed, and then gauges how the student is doing each day.

Creating a Sense of Belonging

Research on reasons students exhibit school refusal behaviors includes multiple studies on the impact of the school culture and the transition period when a student moves from one school to another. One study participant talked about this in their comments about the need to get students connected to the building. Participant E talked about the value they see in the school club established for transfer students, Ambassador Club.

I love the Ambassador Club so much. Ambassadors are students that are reaching out to students who are at risk because they are new to the school as transfer students. I feel strongly that engagement and peer relationships are so important to getting students to become comfortable here.

Participant E went on to talk about the importance of focusing on all ninth-grade students as an early Tier 1 intervention.

If you targeted ninth graders and you worked on things that would promote them becoming support systems for each other, that would be key. I just feel like kids have gotten really cold and uninterested in each other. I feel like we need to kind of bring that all back here in this community. Teaching students to have a better understanding of themselves and those around them is a helpful way to increase belonging and decrease at-risk factors of school refusal. We are doing that with our Ambassador's Club and I think we should use that same intervention model for all of our incoming ninth-grade students.

Collaboration and Staff Availability

Another intervention raised by all interview participants was working as a collaborative team to intervene and support the student. Each student support team member plays a unique role in intervening and teachers are also a part of that team. Starting from the beginning when a student support team member learns a student is struggling with attendance, study participants talked about the need to wrap around a student and support them. The school nurse, for example, may work with the student's physician or outside therapist to get a note medically excusing the student from physical education for a period of time. This note allows for more time during the student's school day when they can be making up work. The student services interventionist may contact teachers and ask teachers to excuse the student from assignments. Study Participant M stated:

If we have kids that are missing a ton of work, the goal is to knock out as much work as we can so we'll ask teachers for a reduced list of work or modified work just to get them back on track, get academic interventionists in to help the students learn the material, and then once they start to finish assignments and learn the material, their anxiety tends to decrease which is key to returning to regular school attendance.

The collaboration of team members extends to the student services interventionists who have flexible time in their schedule to help students who are struggling to attend regularly. This

particular school has four certified staff members who have flexible schedules with no assigned classes to teach. These staff members work with students all day long in various ways to support the student returning to regular class attendance. Their availability allows student services school personnel to say to a family, “Bring your student in anytime and we’ll have someone waiting to talk with them and support them.” This so helpful because it eliminates a huge barrier for students. They don’t have to go to class immediately and face their teachers and peers. They can meet with an interventionist, talk through concerns, and get support immediately.

Utilization of Online Courses for Learning

When intervening with a student who has missed a period of school such as two weeks, discussions may take place about whether to use an online education program to help the student learn missed material or complete a remaining portion of a class. Team members may talk with the student and their family about whether they should complete all or portions of their graduation requirements moving forward using an online education program. In significant cases of school refusal or prolonged mental health crises, the use of the online education program was mentioned as a way to support a student in getting their coursework completed and staying on track for graduation. One study participant, Participant H, shared how this worked for one student:

One student missed 30 days of math and still wasn’t attending regularly. It was decided that the math interventionist couldn’t possibly catch up with this student who missed 30 days of math so then the next level was to put the student online for math. Then, when the student finished online math, they could go back to their regular math class.

Outside Referrals

All study participants noted the need to provide referrals to outside agencies or to partner with outside services as an important intervention in their interviews. Participants listed the county truancy behavior interventionists as one option. They also noted the need to refer families to mental health providers for individual student and family counseling as well as provide referrals to more intensive mental health programming such as intensive outpatient programs and partial hospitalization programs. The outside partners can work with the family to address concerns that are happening in the household that are impacting attendance and partner with school staff to support the student in returning to regular school attendance. When asked about interventions used frequently, study participant C noted:

Trying to get the student linked up with outside resources, particularly like programming such as a school refusal program, can be key in situations where we recognize that they need more intensive help.

Utilizing Traditional Disciplinary Consequences

During interviews, three study participants talked about utilizing traditional school consequences such as detentions and In-School Supervised Study. The use of these consequences is sometimes the first line of intervention for students who are experiencing attendance challenges. Participant J spoke to this:

Sometimes, I get brought into a school refusal situation after the Dean has already tried school consequences such as detention. At that point, the Dean or parent recognized that the traditional school consequence isn't having any impact and so we need to dig into the situation more. At that point, we need to start to build more of a relationship with the student, identify barriers, and talk with the caretakers about what is going on at home.

Using disciplinary consequences such as detention still works to teach accountability but it, also, can be more anxiety provoking for a student who is already struggling to come to school. The student doesn't want to be labeled as misbehaving or as a "bad" student. Instead, their mental health struggles are impacting their attendance. Attending detention will not change the behavior because it's not addressing the anxiety and school refusal behaviors.

Social Work Group Participation

Finally, five study participants talked about participation in social work groups at school to help students reduce their anxiety and improve attendance. The groups are facilitated by social workers and interventionists in the district and meet weekly. Participant A talked about this group in their interview:

This year, we tried to have an attendance group. As student support staff members, we put together a list of students based on data and anecdotal observations who we felt could benefit from a Tier 2 attendance intervention. The group met weekly and utilized an attendance improvement curriculum. It was a safe space for students to talk with their peers and trained adults about their attendance struggles.

Research Question #2

The second research question posed in this study was "What interventions did school personnel find successful for improving the attendance of students demonstrating school refusal behavior due to mental health concerns?" As part of the research interviews, study participants were asked to define success when working with students who are experiencing school refusal behaviors. Each study participant had their own definition. Some stated numerical definitions such as improvement of attending 5% more periods each week while others defined success as having a student come to see them on their own to let them know they are present. All study

participants noted the importance of getting a student to walk in the building on a more regular basis and all study participants indicated that that started with staff being available to support the student. Participant G stated:

To find success, obviously depending on how chronically absent someone is, you gotta take baby steps. I mean, just getting here every day can be a battle. So that's a big first step then hopefully the student can improve on getting here for the majority of the day, and then maybe all day. But you can't expect a kid who's chronically truant to magically show up 10 periods a day, every single day being on time. You just have to take it step by step. That's where we, as staff, come in - to help them make that progress.

Participant M shared:

I think getting them in the door is key. I've had to go out and get kids from their car and walk them in. If I can get a student to just walk into my space, that is a success.

Participant J added:

So in my role, I feel like I define success when a kid who's struggling will come in before school and say I'm here today. I watch them light up knowing that somebody, me, knows they are here, and somebody would know if they weren't here. I think, obviously, you can look at the data. Obviously, you can look at days attended data, but when students start to see success and start to build on experiences, we need to celebrate those. Rather than a teacher saying Johnny, I haven't seen you in a while, we need to focus on saying "It's really good to see you again." Those two different dialogues make a difference for a student walking into the classroom. It just changes and shifts the more that they experience positive messages coming back to school. I mean, watching the academic success, seeing, you know, seeing them make some strides is important but more so the connection of knowing someone knows that they're there.

These thoughts on success helped set the stage for the themes that emerged throughout the interviews that speak to or answer research question #2: the need to identify and implement any interventions that develop a relationship with the student who is experiencing school refusal and their families, interventions that allow for certified staff members to be available at any point in the school day to support the student, interventions that help caretakers accept and support their student who is experiencing school refusal behaviors, school engagements that help with

holding each other accountable and develop a sense of belonging amongst students, and creative utilization of school discipline consequences.

Creating Trust and Building Family Support

As noted in the previous findings, relationship building is a key intervention for students experiencing school refusal behaviors. When building a relationship with a student and their family, or increasing the engagement within that relationship, school staff members can identify barriers to attendance and help the student and family members address the school attendance concerns. This relationship building can look different depending on the situation. Participant C talked about the value of first assessing the situation as a student support team:

Who is a stakeholder in this student's life? Which student services team member has the best relationship with this student? They can have the strongest amount of impact on them quickly. We need to also think about which factors are going to make which interventions successful or not successful. For example, we may know for a fact that this student is gonna get really upset if we show up at their house or we know for a fact that this student is going to respond really well to adult positive praise from males or maybe females in the building. Those kinds of existing factors and existing knowledge that we already have are important. From there, trying to figure out who wants to be involved in this student's case.

That initial conversation among team members can be key to getting a student to come to school or to, at least, meet with a team member. The pre-work also makes the initial conversation with the student easier if they have a familiar face or are talking with a staff member who already knows about their home situation and/or barriers to attendance.

Along with developing a relationship with the student, school staff members need to develop a relationship with the student's family so they can provide full support and reduce barriers to attendance.

Throughout the interviews of study participants, there were many mentions of the need to provide interventions not just to the student but to the family. As part of the relationship-building process, study participants talked about the need to communicate regularly with caretakers, identify how family structures might be creating barriers to regular student attendance, and provide resources for support outside of school such as therapists and mental health programs.

The importance of communicating with caretakers is a key piece to reducing school refusal behaviors. Participant L talked about the different approaches caretakers take:

There are some parents that when we say we're doing a home visit, the parents will do everything they can to get the student to school because they don't want us there. Then, there are parents who kind of throw their hands up in the air and they're like, please come here every day. I've done all I can do. Some of those parents have really stayed out of it and then left it up to us to help their students. It's not that they don't care. They just truly don't know what else to do. They've done what they can on their part. That's where our ability to build relationships with families is so important. We've had students where we've recommended programming outside of the school. Some parents embrace that and take their student for a school refusal assessment right away and then try to pursue programming but we've had some families who just flat out refuse. The parents that are most helpful are the ones that are calling us every day when they're having trouble and say, here's what's happening, what should I do? We'll walk them through every step of the way. Then those kids, if they can get them in the car, we can go out and get them.

Participant D shed more light on the impact of barriers to school attendance:

I think there is a pretty large correlation between socioeconomic status and the ability to receive treatment or outside support or help for any mental health reason such as preventing students from getting to school anxiety, depression, etc. Having limited access to that due to financial support is a huge barrier or stressor that I see. I think there are oftentimes challenges with getting students to school, maybe not connected directly to socioeconomic status, but when you talk about parents who are working parents versus stay-at-home parents and their ability to have a student coming to school when they're at work versus when they're at home. Also single parents versus a nuclear family. There could be challenges there too. If a student misses the bus, some families don't have another way to get their student to school. Also, I think adult connectedness is a huge factor in regular school attendance. I'm thinking about the parent and child relationship and whether that's healthy or not in a strong or attached relationship versus co-dependent versus strained. I think there's a huge correlation there between the ability to get students to school.

Taking time to learn about the relationships at home and school, the barriers to school attendance, and the resources families have or don't have allows school personnel to create intervention plans that work best and most efficiently.

Utilizing Outside Supports

In addition to developing relationships, school staff needs to help families understand the importance of seeking mental health support. For some families, this is challenging. During interviews, all study participants referenced how it can be hard to get caretakers to understand that a student's attendance struggles could be related to an underlying mental health concern.

Study participant F talked about this in their comments about working with parents:

I have some parents who I think seem really honest in wanting to work with the school to figure it out. They're admittedly at a loss and say they don't know what to do. I don't know how to get them to school. They're receptive and engaged. But, I can, also, think of parents who are highly involved yet are creating a bigger problem. They are trying to make excuses and make sure all the absences are excused and are advocating for teachers to make classes easier for their students. I've also seen families who know their student has mental health concerns and attendance concerns but are still taking them on vacations, or you know, making sure they still get lots of luxuries and fun at home, even when they're not coming to school. They're just not being direct or honest with us about what is going on and they're removing natural consequences.

Participant C shared similar thoughts and, also, talked about a challenge they face when talking with students who are exhibiting school refusal behaviors. Participant C stated:

I've had parents who aren't willing to consider that the attendance issues are related to a mental health concern. They are willing to feed into the psychosomatic part of it but not connect that it is psychosomatic and not just physical ailments. The parents are not willing to force their students to consider a bigger concern. They won't say "Hey, you know, you might be nauseous for reasons other than, like, your body's having an adverse reaction to something you ate." I would like to see more parents engage in those types of conversations with their kids instead of feeding into it being a physical health condition.

Participant M echoed these thoughts:

Sometimes students are at a place where we need to put school aside and we need to focus on their well-being. That means that we, as a school team, really need to get across to families that they need to seek out mental health programming and then, from there, we can help them with the schoolwork. Anxiety is the hardest thing because once you're in that panic attack mode spiral, it's just spirals and you have to get regulated before we can even get you here and able to even understand what the work situation is.

Study participants indicated that they try to connect families with outside providers in order to provide families with another opinion about why the student isn't attending. This can start with one's primary care physician. Participant K stated:

When I talk with caretakers who aren't sure what is going on, I strongly encourage them to seek an appointment with their primary care physician. Their doctor is a great resource and can help families differentiate between physical illness and mental health concerns.

This is a great place for caretakers and students to start. School staff can ask for a release of information from the family so they can speak with the primary care physician if needed in order to share the school's perspective. By partnering together, school staff is helping the student make progress towards regular attendance.

After a student has been diagnosed or a physician suspects there might be a mental health concern, caretakers can seek outside support from community-based therapists or outpatient programming. This is the stage where it is important that school staff, caretakers, and the student are partnering together.

Increasing Student Belonging

A student's sense of belonging came up in every interview done for this research study. All participants talked about the importance of peer interactions and connection to the school as playing an important role in a student experiencing school refusal behaviors returning to regular school attendance. Participant C said:

I think every kid should feel like they have a spot here and they belong in some capacity. Most of the kids that I've had that are school refusal kids are not involved in the school at all. I do think that having those kids feel a sense of belonging and purpose when they're here in this building outside of just being a kid that sits in a chair and a desk in a classroom and goes home afterward is important.

Participant M shared:

I think it's everything. If students don't feel like they have a connection to the building, they don't necessarily want to be here. If you can foster a connection, even if it's with a staff member, that will get them into the building as long as they feel that they are supported, that they have people that they can go to. In some situations, if students didn't have peers that they could at least eat lunch with, they are less likely to want to be coming in on a regular basis.

Another participant, Participant B, took this a step further by sharing an example of a student's experience:

I feel peer and peer engagement is a huge piece of this puzzle. Actually, I have an example that I can bring up. Last year, this student was top 5% of our truancy lists. The student is receiving additional support through an IEP and experiencing mental health difficulties. They had a lot of risk factors with mental health difficulties, educational difficulties, academic difficulties, all of it. We did a lot of interventions and provided individual support, and this year, attendance has increased significantly. While speaking with that student, we asked what was helpful and to give us some feedback. They said that their number one reason for improving their attendance was having peer connections. They were a huge impact on their willingness or desire to come to school. Peers I think are huge - even just one friend. I, also, think involvement, so we're talking clubs, sports, and activities. It can be a tremendous support or encouragement for school refusal students. The confines of my office or a staff support office are one thing but when they can actually be in class with someone who is supporting them or seeing them in the lunch room. I think that's something that's intangible.

Participant B's success with their student demonstrates how intervening in various ways is key to a student's success. As schools are looking at ways to intervene with students who are exhibiting school refusal behaviors, they have to look at how to engage the student in the full school community. The engagement could look different for every student - it could be joining a new

club or sport, becoming part of a mentoring program, or attending a social work group for topics ranging from attendance to social anxiety.

One intervention that this school tried and that was referenced in the research earlier in this paper was the use of small support groups or social work groups to help students with attendance concerns. Research supports using these small groups as ways to develop connections for students. This school used the Attendance Improvement Matters curriculum for a small group of students who were struggling with regular attendance. The group was led by a school social worker and a dean of students. The students chosen for the group were not specifically students struggling with school refusal behaviors but were all students who were identified as having poor attendance patterns. During the study interviews, six participants talked about this intervention. They shared that they didn't find the intervention valuable because of the lack of attendance.

Participant D said:

I would say my kid who was in that attendance group didn't go. I didn't really see the purpose and he didn't either. He didn't attend regularly and wasn't that the point of the group? To help them attend more?

Participant C said:

I think the attendance improvement group that they tried to run this year is something that we do need. It's obviously kind of an oxymoron - run groups for students that don't come to school. But, I do think that it is something to try and help combat school refusal as well.

While the value may have been missed with the use of this particular group, one participant feels that having that peer engagement can be reached through a different method. Participant J shared:

I don't know if an attendance group really makes sense. Our staff ran what you would classify as a Tier 2 intervention. It was an AIM group aimed at increasing specific students' engagement and attendance. But, not shockingly, those students struggled to come to school which is how they were identified. So it feels like maybe doing some peer

pairs in the future might be better or maybe doing some really small groups and not a group of upwards of 8 to 12 kids where over half are not in attendance on a given day. It doesn't feel like that's necessarily the most effective. But I don't think groups are a bad Tier 2 intervention. I just think we could be smarter about pairing students with maybe similar schedules or maybe students in the same supported class supporting study hall to build connection versus using a targeted larger group for attendance.

This thought is consistent with the comments that every study participant made about the importance of a student feeling a sense of belonging. Study participants see value in using interventions that help a student build on their connections to the school community. Participant H talked about the value of creating community within a classroom as an intervention for school refusal behaviors. By creating a safe space for students and finding commonalities amongst students, school staff is increasing that sense of belonging and reducing anxiety. Participant H shared:

I think peer interaction is super important because a lot of our students are so anxious about returning to school. They feel like everyone's looking at them when they've missed school which means there's a lot of anxiety that comes with going back to the actual classroom-type of situation after being in a mental health outpatient program. I took a couple of kids outside yesterday. They started talking. They were from the same town and had the same teachers from one of our sender schools. Now, they actually talk to each other in my room and you can see quickly that that eases their anxiety. They'll get to know the other people in the class and start asking each other about their weekends or how they did in their activities the previous day. That brings a certain level of accountability, too, to a student who has school refusal. They want to be able to be a part of that conversation. I would say for a lot of our kids, they don't want to be in a classroom environment but they still want to feel good when they're here. They still want to feel supported by adults and have people to talk to. Some of the students have actually become friends which is great for us and for attendance.

Student participation in school clubs and sports, also, plays a role in both increasing a student's sense of belonging to the school community and holding the student accountable for their school attendance. Club sponsors and team coaches can help intervene when students are struggling

with attendance by tying attendance to participation in club or team activities. Participant G talked about this in their interview:

This [attendance] is not just the Dean's job. It's not one person's job. It's kind of everybody's job to get the kid to show up. If you're starting centerfielder is not coming to school every day, the coach needs to step in and talk with the player. I'm looking directly at activities and sports because we have a policy that says you need to be in attendance all day to participate in sports practices, participate in extracurricular activities, and play in games. By engaging those additional adults, perhaps even more trusted adults for that student, we can work more quickly to either return the student to regular school attendance or identify what the next level of intervention is that's needed for the student if they are still not attending.

Staff Availability

During interviews, ten study participants talked about the value of having staff with flexible schedules available to support students experiencing school refusal behaviors when they are ready to return to school. Participant J's comments above highlight this theme. This particular school is very fortunate in that they have four certified staff members who have flexible schedules within their intervention programs which means they are available to support students daily. These four staff members have roles that allow them to work individually with students throughout the day. Depending on the student's situation, such as whether they are returning from a mental health program, a student who is experiencing school refusal behaviors may be directed to one or two of these staff members for support. These staff members help by putting together academic plans and doing the individual CICO work needed to see the student return to regular attendance. Participant E noted:

I do think that one of the things that helps us so much with kids that haven't been here is to have an academic plan in place to get them to feel less overwhelmed with their return. The work our Student Success Center, Excel 3 [Achieve] staff, and our Student Success Coordinator is doing, I think, is game-changing for so many kids because if they can at least step in, and get help and support, it makes the next steps so much easier. Without

those kinds of supports in place, I think returning to regular school attendance would be very hard for students to accomplish after a period of absence.

Participant F shared:

I think what I can see that's been helpful is offering that bridge. The kid who's avoiding school, just asking what can we do to increase your getting into the building? Are you willing to come to sit with somebody for a little bit first? Helping them with the plan is important. I think those kids who are avoiding are sitting at home saying, well, now I've missed so many days, I can't face my teacher. But, when we're able to coordinate an academic makeup plan and help show the student they're making progress, it makes attendance so much better.

Schools with interventionists and staff members in roles who can be flexible and meet a student where they are at, so to speak, have more opportunities to intervene quickly and support students in their return to school.

Home Visits

Utilizing home visits to intervene when a student is exhibiting school refusal behaviors had mixed reviews amongst study participants. While eight study participants mentioned it as an intervention that they've used when a student is exhibiting school refusal, five included it as an intervention that's been successful in helping students return to regular attendance. Study participants noted the impact of being in the student's home which they felt demonstrated to the student how important the student is to staff. When asked why they felt home visits were helpful,

Participant L stated:

Because students are mortified when you show up at their home. A parent calls and we show up and the parent says "I can't get them out of their bedroom." The student usually responds with "Oh my God, you are in my house and you are by my bedroom door knocking." I think they're embarrassed but they see our persistence. We don't just do that once. We don't make one phone call. We don't send one message. I think showing students that we care and we're not going away is really the most successful thing and home visits help accomplish that.

Participant E shared similar thoughts as Participant L. They saw the benefits in talking with the student and caretaker and using the home visit as a way for school staff to identify appropriate interventions or consequences. Participant E said:

I do think home visits are great because not only does it let the student know that we're not playing around, but it also gives us context as to what is really happening, what it looks like at home. We can actually come up with good plans based on our visit. One home visit I went on, the mom was actually not home in the morning and when we arrived, we found the student was playing a video game and not attempting to get ready for school like they should have been. We can identify things that the student said that are not actually happening and address those issues.

Participant B was a little less enthusiastic about their experiences with home visits. They shared:

I'm tempted to say home visits are my least effective intervention but I also think that they can be helpful. I think we just overuse them at times. I think they can be helpful because we can talk to the parent about how to make the home environment less friendly in the morning for the student and make it more uncomfortable so they don't want to stay home but I think we use them too much as a default to checking a box. At the end of the day, we want them coming to us and not us repeatedly going to them.

The benefits of doing at least one home visit may outweigh the time needed to do the visit as it can provide valuable information for student support team members and can help identify what additional interventions are needed to move forward.

School Discipline Consequences

Study participants' views on the use of school disciplinary consequences such as detentions and in-school supervised study (ISS) as successful interventions for students experiencing school refusal behaviors are mixed. Like much of the conversation on interventions for students experiencing school refusal behaviors, study participants talked about the importance of identifying interventions and using consequences on a case-by-case basis.

Participant B stated:

For one of my students this year, consequences actually were helpful. The student was removed from a class because they hadn't been attending. Do I think that would work for everyone? Absolutely not. But in that case, that was helpful. Sometimes, our team talks about and issues consequences to see if that will help with behavior changes. If not, that is usually a sign to look at other programming and interventions. For my kids who end up going to mental health programming, issuing consequences may not have worked for them or changed their behavior because they needed more mental health intervention. A school consequence, like detention, was not going to address the overarching issue.

While Participant B saw some success with consequences, Participant C indicated differently:

For kids with school refusal, consequences like detentions and punishment have not worked. I've never really seen a lot of success from that. It almost leads to more resentment and frustration with the school rather than a change in behavior. I understand why punishment needs to exist. But I also don't think that it's necessarily been very corrective for fixing the problem.

These conflicting accounts underscore the need for student support team members to review the whole student and their situation in order to identify how to address the student's attendance problem.

When considering consequences for students, study participants indicated that they do want to help students understand the impact that their behavior has on their academic success and their experience in the building. Study Participant G talked about the importance of showing students that behavior choices have consequences:

Just talking to a student may not have enough weight. A kid needs to recognize the importance of school attendance, and, obviously, it depends upon why they're missing school. But, I do think it's important to say "Hey, you cut this class this many times, there's going to be some accountability. We're going to call your parents so that they're aware of the fact that you keep cutting this class and I'm going to walk you to class today because I'm not sure if you're going to go." There has to be enough of accountability because, once again, it goes back to how do teenagers learn when their prefrontal cortex isn't fully developed. They have to tie a tangible consequence to the at-risk behavior that they're choosing to engage in.

Along with consequences, study participants said it's still important to hold students accountable but, sometimes, that has to be in the form of setting boundaries or creating new plans. Participant H said

When I'm working with a student, I try not to be too punitive. I would never yell at the student or give them a hard time about not coming to school. Of course, I'm disappointed that the work we put in to create a makeup work plan didn't pan out and they are not coming to school but I'm not going to be negative. If a student tells me I'm going to show up here tomorrow and I'm going to take that test with you because we prepared for it and then they didn't show up and it was for no reason, then I will hold them accountable. I will have them create a new plan and tell me what they're going to do to remedy the issue. That's just to show actions have consequences but I would never yell or scream.

Research Question #3

The third and final research question posed in this study was “How can the system support student services personnel as they work to support students exhibiting school refusal behavior?” Through semi-structured interviews, the following themes emerged that speak to or answer this research question: regular meeting times for student support teams, the need to continue to have individualized support programs available staffed by certified teachers and interventionists, consideration for the addition of an attendance coordinator and family coach, the need to offer professional development on how to support students exhibiting school refusal, and continuing to develop students' sense of belonging within the school community.

Intervention Programs

During interviews, ten of the participants noted the importance of continuing the current intervention staffing that is in place that allows for staff members to have more flexible availability. This intervention was overwhelmingly the most talked about and discussed with the

most passion. There are three spaces for students who need intervention, the Student Success Center, Excel 1 & 2, and Excel 3 (soon to be referred to as the Achieve Program). The Student Success Center (SSC) has a certified special education teacher and two paraprofessionals in it to support students. The SSC focuses on students who are struggling with attendance due to medical conditions such as concussion recovery or long-term illness, mental health concerns, and students exhibiting school refusal behaviors. Excel 3 is staffed with a certified teacher and an interventionist who is a certified school social worker. Students in Excel 3 are typically assigned to the space because they are transitioning back from mental health hospitalization or are struggling with attendance which is impacting their academics. Excel 1 & 2 is staffed by two paraprofessionals and the students in this program are usually struggling academically and are not experiencing attendance concerns. All of these programs provide dedicated academic and social-emotional support for individual students at the Tier 2 and Tier 3 level. When asked what supports are key to continuing to support students exhibiting school refusal behaviors, participant F shared:

I think if we can get students in the building, I think having personnel available to work with them is so important. The staff in the SSC, our Student Services Coordinator, and Excel 3 are really helpful. I think as much as the social worker or I may want to meet with students and support them, we may not be available to do it daily. So having people who can help those students and be available when we're saying come in the building makes the transition better for the student. Once they're in the building, if they can't get to class, one of the people in those programs is available immediately to support them.

Participant L talked about how helpful having individual staff available is:

I definitely think staffing makes a big difference. When you've got staff that can interact with the students on a daily basis, it is very helpful. Students may need support at all times of the day and not just their scheduled time with the social worker. Additionally, some students may not need to see their social worker, they may just need a space to decompress and take a deep breath. Our SSC and Excel 3 provide those places. Staff can make that connection, do a quick check-in, and perhaps redirect the student within the supported study hall room.

Like Participant L, participant K talked about not having the time in their role to talk with kids for long periods of time. They appreciated that student support team members can reach out to one of the staff members in the SSC or Excel 3 to follow up with the student and family:

I don't normally have the time to sit with somebody on the phone because I've got a line of students to see. Conversations with some families can take upwards of two and a half hours on the phone. I'm working through with the parent what they're going to say to their student and almost roleplaying that conversation. It takes time to put together a plan with a family of what we're going to do and multiple reassurances of our support. Sometimes, I do not have the time to devote to the reassurance piece but I can call on another staff member to help implement the plan and work with the family to get the student into the building.

The SSC, Excel 3, and Excel 1 & 2 serve very valuable roles in intervening with students who are exhibiting school refusal behaviors. The flexibility they have to support students when they come to school no matter the time of day is key to implementing plans with families and working with them to address any barriers to regular school attendance.

Weekly Team Meetings

When talking about identifying and intervening with students who are struggling with regular attendance, all study participants talked about the importance of the student support team members meeting weekly to discuss students. During this particular school year, the structure of the MTSS program changed and some student support teams were not meeting weekly. Study participants found that they still need and want the dedicated time for these meetings. These team meetings provide a dedicated time during the week for team members to discuss data, discuss teacher concerns, and identify interventions to implement or discuss the progress being made

after intervention implementation. Participant L indicated this time was very valuable during the identification process:

I think the best time for us to talk and review students is in our weekly team meetings at school. Our Deans do a really great job of running attendance reports and reviewing attendance. During the team meetings, we use the information from those reports and other info from teachers or the grade book to ask questions. Is attendance consistent? Was it medically related or if it is school refusal?

Participant C talked about the importance of seeing feedback from other student services members on student situations:

I would say that student services team meetings, whether it's GESST or SESST, would be the main place that I collaborate with the other members of our student teams. I can get ideas from coworkers who have similar roles and might not even be on that student's team. I think that having a case consult space once a week, where you can rely on the expertise of other people for a different set of ideas, is how to go about doing this. I think that's how we problem-solve best.

Participant A shared:

If the student isn't moving forward and improving attendance, I'll put them on our GESST agenda for our meeting. We talk about what we can do. That's where I bring in my colleagues. That's where we discuss what we can implement for the student.

Participant E talked about the need to bring back the weekly meetings:

I wish we had formalized GESST meetings every week like we used to. For a specific student who struggled this year, we did not talk regularly in a group setting. Officially, we had very little documentation of what had happened with the student. I've voiced this concern to everyone. We have kids who are school refusal kids, too, who we have not done the due diligence in a collaborative way. It's very loosey-goosey here this year. I think going back to a more structured weekly meeting that is called GESST is important for working with school refusal students as well as talking about students who are struggling academically.

Going forward, having this dedicated time will be valuable for intervention implementation along with data review.

Staff Professional Development

During interviews, eight of the participants indicated that additional staff development would be helpful. Within those comments, there were two areas of focus for professional development. One area of focus was on professional development for teaching staff and the other area of focus was training for student services staff.

For teaching staff, study participants' suggestions focused on both helping teachers work with all learners and educating teachers on what student services staff does in school refusal situations. Participant C noted that teachers need more support in working with the unique student:

I do think that a larger staff training on school climate would be helpful. I would focus on how to create a school climate that is considerate of all students not just the average or not just the ones that you teach if you're a teacher who only teaches AP and regular classes. I do think that a lot of teachers or staff could use training on how not every kid fits this mold.

Participant L echoed the need to provide more support for staff.

I also think providing support and strategies to teachers would be helpful, because sometimes it's like, they're only missing two classes, so they don't pop up on a report. Whereas if the teachers would have reached out sooner, or if they knew the hallmark signs of school refusal behaviors and patterns, they could flag it for us sooner instead of when it got to the point where it was unrecoverable. I definitely think staff makes a big difference when you've got staff that can interact with the students on a daily basis.

Participant M took a little different path for professional development and talked about the need to help staff better understand what student services staff members are doing and how staff members can help students:

I think that we need to work as a district to educate our teachers on what related services does. I think that we talk about how important mental health is, but we don't really prioritize it. What I mean to say is like, we have a lot of teachers who are very high

achieving themselves, and I think sometimes get focused on “I have to do this by this date” and are really focused more on the curriculum than that individual student in front of them that is struggling. We need to do a better job at getting teachers to understand that it's okay to pump the brakes a little bit. We need to probably provide more homework-free days like homework-free weekends. We offer it to seniors but we don't offer it to anybody else and I just think we need to bring more awareness.

These comments are consistent with the feeling from study participants that we need to intervene early and, by providing education to staff, we are helping them help student services staff members see red flags in students.

Finally, participant F shared that they felt student services staff could use more information on what supports are available from outside the district. Participant F stated:

I'd like to understand better how truancy works. It seems to be not a thing at the county level. It would be helpful to understand better what others outside the district could do to help us. What else can we do if a parent is not getting their student to school or getting them mental health help? Is there any leverage or consequence?

Attendance Coordinator and Family Coach

A small number of study participants talked about their desire to see the district implement an attendance coordinator position who could also serve in the role of family coach for situations where students are experiencing school refusal behaviors and struggling to get to school. Overall, three study participants raised this role as someone who would be valuable to their work. Each participant had a different job description for the role. Participant G stated:

If we valued attendance as much as we said we did, we should have some kind of an attendance coordinator. I don't care if it's for the district or each building or whatever it is, but I feel horrible when I'm super busy. I can really only scratch the surface on so many issues a day. I don't have the necessary time, unfortunately, to support the kid the best that I possibly can. I do feel like for some kids with profound attendance needs and possibly mental health needs, it'd be great if we had a district expert or a building expert that was dedicated just to those kids with profound attendance issues where they can really take the time and jump in and address those kids.

Participant E took the role in a different direction and suggested that it would be helpful to have someone specifically devoted to early intervention, especially with freshmen as they transfer into high school. They felt that the additional role could support early intervention and work to educate caretakers to break bad habits students may have developed in middle school.

Participant E shared:

I think it would be prudent for us to develop a new role with a focus on freshmen only. We could really aggressively address attendance issues that we know some students have struggled with for a long time. Let's wrap around them and try to figure out how to get them engaged here both academically and in the school community quickly and efficiently. Instead of doing this globally with juniors and seniors who've already developed bad habits and skills that are concerning, we should start with the freshmen. When we get a student who we know exhibited school refusal during middle school, that's another red flag. Now, here they are here. It's very rare that all of a sudden a student's behavior flips and changes. In my experience, usually it's directly connected to family dynamics and that's where having a family coach or intervention role for attendance could be really helpful.

Participant D combined two themes when they talked about the potential for an additional role. They talked about the need to have an additional person who would provide caretaker programming. They shared:

Before I got into school counseling, I used to do parenting groups. So to me, we don't need a one-time book presenter to come talk to our parents. Instead, we need someone who is going to help the family regularly. You really could almost treat it as a counseling session, right? I'm going to come out and we're going to talk the four of us. The conversation may not fix it at this time. But, I'm gonna come out for the next three or four weeks. We're gonna work on regular school attendance together.

This additional role could serve a number of functions including providing direct support to the student, providing early intervention, and providing support to families. By helping with creating routines and systems at the house, a student may be able to return to regular school attendance and a family may be able to break the school refusal cycle. This attendance coordinator or family coach could serve a unique role by digging into situations and helping with accountability.

Opportunities for Student Belonging

As noted in the literature review of this paper and in the answers to research questions 1 and 2, a student's sense of belonging means a lot when it comes to regular school attendance. In the literature review, much focus was placed on the school climate as impacting student belonging. Participant D echoed that research work in their comments:

I think when we think about how we can help kids, I think it's about sharing what the school has to offer whether it's clubs or sports. It's about making them want to be in this environment and helping them want to come to school. As you and I said at the start of this conversation, we love it here, right? We love the people that we work with. I want these students to be able to come to school every day and feel as excited as I do about being here. So, I think it's about educating students about all the options that are offered or about creating new offerings to meet our student body's ever-changing needs. I, also, want them to see that they belong here visually, through the music that's played in the hallways, and through the after-school offerings. What if we didn't have a bell and we played one minute of music before the bell rings? What if a specific group of students got to pick the music each week? These little ways that we could make changes to excite kids because I think they want that.

Participant M took these thoughts a bit further and talked about the need to look at the actual school building and its impact on students.

So this might seem silly, but even starting with our colors of red and white. I mean, there are a lot of studies on how people will respond to the color red. It tends to ignite emotion. People have said, and I agree, when you walk into the building, you can feel the stress and tension. I think that we need to evaluate why that's happening and how to fix it. I think the flow of the building is fine. But there's this overall idea that everybody needs to be achieving at a really high level and that everybody needs to be in AP courses and that's just not true. I think we need to talk more about coursework that will lead towards you know, if a student wants to become an engineer, or an electrician, or whatever, like going into the trades. We need to understand that not everybody is going to go to a four-year college and then not everybody's gonna go to an Ivy League for a four-year college.

Participant E raised an interesting point in their interview when talking about the school climate which is similar to Participant M's thoughts. They talked about the challenges students face coming into a school that has very high academic traditions.

I think the one characteristic of our school climate that could be an issue for students is this idea of academic intensity, some of the mythological talking out in the community about what expectations kids have to meet to be successful. I think that induces a lot of anxiety. It's not the reason for all of our school refusing kids, but it certainly ramps up unnecessary anxiety for our kids. So, I wish we could speak to those myths a little more.

Participant B agreed with those thoughts and, also, highlighted how minoritized student populations can be impacted.

I'd say the culture and the pressure here is so challenging. I think it is huge and is a factor for struggling students. I also think when we are talking about socioeconomic status, I think that that also could play a huge role in knowing that there are students here that are very, very wealthy and others that maybe even are just average, but are comparing themselves to everyone around them.

These comments highlight the struggles students face and also remind school staff members about the importance of trying to break down barriers and create a comfortable environment for all students. Participant M talked about this:

I think this is a community where it is very much insular and people have their core groups. If a student can't break into a group, that is a barrier. It seems like there are students that feel like they don't belong. So how can we make all of our students feel like they belong? And how can we teach our students to be more accountable for how they act? If they aren't being welcomed, they might not even really realize it. How can we bring more awareness about other people? These are questions we need to be asking as a staff. These are teachable moments we need to be emphasizing to our students.

Part of increasing a student's sense of belonging to the school community rests in their feeling of connectedness to the people in the community. School staff need to continue to push for more opportunities for students to create connections amongst themselves and with staff as well as identify times during the school day when teachable moments can take place.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the interventions utilized to improve attendance amongst secondary students at a suburban high school. This study specifically looked at how high school student services personnel work with students experiencing school refusal behaviors to help them return to consistent attendance. Study participants highlighted the importance of building relationships with students and families in order to help identify how to best support the student. Participants also emphasized the need to check in with students daily, work with outside providers to help the family at home and increase students' sense of belonging in order to help them feel more comfortable in the building. Additionally, study participants highlighted the need to regularly meet together as a team in order to best help students and emphasized the importance of the district continuing to support certified staff in full-time roles that have a flexible schedule to support the neediest situations. After completing the interviews and reviewing answers to the research questions, there were three topics that were incongruent with the research studies in my literature review. Those topics, assessment, the tiered intervention structure, and the use of online courses, are discussed below.

Assessment

Several studies found during the literature review focused on the importance of identifying the function of school refusal behavior through the use of a rating scale. Kearney and Albano (2004), Heyne and colleagues (2019), Havik and Ingul (2021), and Maynard and

colleagues (2018) all reference the use of rating scales or assessments when discussing school refusal behaviors and school attendance problems. The use of a rating scale is linked to assessment and prescriptive-treatment strategies and the functional information that comes out of the assessment can help predict helpful interventions as well as interventions that may be less effective (Kearney & Albano, 2004). However, interestingly, in this study, only two participants mentioned that they would utilize an assessment for school refusal situations. As part of this study, I wanted to compare the interventions talked about in research with what was actually being done in practice. I am left to ponder why a school refusal assessment is not used more often. School social workers are the most likely people to administer rating scales so perhaps the other study participants who are not licensed school social workers are not familiar with the assessments. I also question whether the years of experience of school student services personnel allows them to gather enough background knowledge to feel like they can identify the function of school refusal behavior without needing to have the student and caretaker do a formal assessment. Does the time spent with the student and their family during the initial meeting or phone conversation provide enough information to school staff that a formal assessment is not needed? These thoughts and questions present an interesting discussion for school personnel and administrators. Would the use of a school refusal assessment more regularly provide better data for future intervention development? Would the data be helpful when defending the interventions already being utilized? These questions could make for interesting future research.

The Tiered Intervention Structure

It should be noted that there are two ways to look at the tiered interventions of support for this topic. One could look at the students and identify the top 20% of students who are struggling

with attendance and consider them students needing Tier 2 support and then look at the top 5% of students and place them in the Tier 3 support level. Conversely, one could look at the different interventions available and categorize the interventions into tiers and then utilize the tiers to match a student to their appropriate need. For the purposes of this discussion and based on how the study participants talked, I looked at interventions by tier and not students by tier. This is an important distinction because I was focused on students who were exhibiting school refusal behaviors and not all students experiencing attendance concerns. That larger group could include students with long-term health issues or issues outside of the school's control.

While reviewing the literature for this study, I noted that several researchers focused on the implementation of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions to help students. Graves and colleagues (2019) focused on the importance of positive messaging as a way to create an inviting school climate, develop more positive student-to-student relationships, and increase partnerships between the school and its families. Balfanz (2016) speaks to the importance of communicating clear attendance expectations to families through Tier 1 strategies. Rogers and Kraft (2014) found that providing weekly communication home to all families about their student's school work increases academic success and encouraged more dialog both between the family and student as well as between the family and the school. Yet, when asked about the benefits of utilizing Tier 1 supports such as positive full-school messaging, rewards for good attendance, and a curriculum that reaches all students, all study participants noted that they did not feel like Tier 1 interventions were helpful for a student experiencing school refusal behaviors. One participant noted that they are likely as effective as they can be but that by nature, Tier 1 interventions are not going to meet the needs of all students. Graczyk and colleagues (2000) noted that utilizing character education programs to teach life skills and values helps to enhance

attendance and Snyder and colleagues (2010) found that implementing social-emotional and character development increased attendance. The programming they are discussing in their studies is still key for the benefit of all students and may be able to keep a student who is bordering on struggling with attendance to continue to come regularly but more research would need to be done on those situations.

One participant in this study noted that they felt that Tier 1 interventions do a good job of reminding students of the importance of coming to school and keeping them focused on the goal of graduation. This is an important revelation as it is consistent with the benefits of Tier 1 interventions like recognizing good behaviors (regular or improved attendance in this case) and continuing to increase a student's sense of belonging.

A Tier 2 intervention utilized at this particular school, the attendance monitoring group, was met with mixed reviews. Study participants noted that it is hard to have a group for students who do not attend school regularly. This makes sense and is a challenge but as Harris and colleagues (2020) noted the accountability that comes from peers cannot be understated. The impact that peer relationships and peer accountability have on students who are struggling to attend regularly can encourage behavioral change without the need for school staff members to meet with each student individually. The challenge with Tier 2 interventions is that they typically are prescriptive times such as a weekly group meeting. For a student who is not attending regularly, it can be challenging to gain knowledge from the intervention if they are not present.

Things get a little more confusing when we talk about Tier 2 versus Tier 3 interventions. Researchers like Hahn and his colleagues (2015) classify Tier 3 interventions as individualized interventions that take place mostly outside of the school, such as case management through community-based supports, the use of online credit recovery courses, alternative education

programs, and hospital-based mental health programming. This differs from the way that the participants in this study viewed Tier 3 supports. Study participants at this site viewed Tier 3 interventions as interventions that are individualized in nature, whether they are within the school building or not. This presents a few challenges when discussing the findings of this study. For the purpose of this discussion, I am going to reference Tier 3 supports as the study participants did. School staff members that were interviewed for this study were more intent on assisting students at the individual level to provide quality care confidentially. Railsback (2004) noted in their research that personalized interventions such as working with a school-based mental health provider or a community-based provider are a way of reducing absences. While this is usually met with a very positive response from students and caretakers, this puts a significant strain on school resources. Continuing to provide individual support for each student who is struggling to attend school regularly may not be sustainable. As several study participants noted, time is a barrier to them helping students. My study participants focused much more on individualized interventions at the Tier 3 level such as individual meetings as their best way of seeing success with students. This presents interesting challenges because school personnel have time constraints within their day to meet the needs of all students. Utilizing strong Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports could be a way to reduce the load on school staff.

Online Courses

When asked about interventions used to support students experiencing school refusal behaviors, several participants noted the use of online courses to assist a student. The courses are used in a spectrum of ways from providing additional support to a student who missed one unit and needs to learn that particular content to having a student take an entire semester of classes

through the online course provider Edgenuity. One study participant felt that using online coursework to help a student was sometimes counterproductive because it gave a student an excuse not to return to a traditional classroom setting. They also were concerned that the school was not fully meeting the obligation to educate the student. This is an interesting concern and is the opposite of a different study participant who saw great benefits to having this flexible option for students who need it. They felt that the integrity established within the program allowed for students to successfully recover courses online which helped students remain on track for graduation despite their attendance struggles. These two opinions and the opinions of other study participants speak to the challenges that schools face when working with very “grey” situations. How do you help students develop coping skills for being in the classroom or the school building while also accomplishing the goal of getting the student to high school graduation? As Levine and colleagues (2017) noted, utilizing online credit recovery programs allows for differentiation and more intensive 1:1 intervention and has a positive effect on graduation rates. Using online courses for credit recovery as an immediate intervention for students struggling with regular attendance is a good first step but may not be the right permanent solution. School staff members can use the online courses to create flexibility and personalize academic instruction but also need to work with the student and family to identify barriers to returning to traditional in-class instruction.

Recommendations

Staffing

Woven throughout many of the answers to research question #3 concerning how the system can support student services staff members were comments about having an adequate number of staff members with flexible time to support students in crisis, providing intervention programs that truly meet the needs of students who are struggling, and having time for staff to meet weekly to collaborate. Study participants found these to be essential areas where district administrators and those with fiscal decision-making power should focus in order to support the needs of students struggling with school refusal behaviors. Parker and Hodgson (2020) noted in their research that it is important for school staff members to have time to get to know students and understand their needs. In Ballin's (2022) research, they noted the importance of creating a supportive environment for both school staff and students which leads to more purposeful teamwork and a better social-emotional state. Continuing to provide intervention programs such as Excel 1 & 2, Excel 3 (Achieve), and the Student Success Center at the current staffing level in addition to the Student Services Coordinator position are integral parts of the intervention system for students with school refusal behaviors. It is important that these staff members and their spaces continue to be available to support students who need a space to decompress. These staff members, also, are key to breaking down the barriers that students have put up that are impacting their ability to return to regularly attending their classroom education. Study participants spoke frequently about the need to be able to call on their colleagues for help with a student in crisis. The flexibility that these interventions and the corresponding staff members have in their day allows for more opportunities for students to incrementally return to regular attendance.

Additionally, numerous times study participants highlighted the need for weekly collaboration time amongst student support teams and within their respective departments. Research from Mrvar and Mažgon (2017) notes that providing time for school counselors and staff to collaborate is a necessity for a student's holistic development. While staff members are talking daily about students, having dedicated time once a week to review attendance data, follow up on previous student concerns, and talk about students who are potentially bordering on school refusal allows staff members to have consistent dialog focused on students needing support. When school administrators are reviewing professional development and school improvement time, it is imperative that they provide specific time for these conversations to take place.

Early Intervention

The time provided to student support team members to review data and discuss student situations is important for early intervention, as well. Several study participants talked about the importance of intervening early and knowing historical attendance patterns for students. This matches up well with the research on how school attendance patterns are developed early in a student's school career and highlights the importance of communicating with previous schools students have attended as well as developing relationships with families quickly. Skedgell and Kearney (2016) as well as Allensworth and Easton (2007) reference the importance of addressing poor attendance patterns at their earliest emergence. Additionally, they highlight that attendance patterns can be of concern for multiple grade levels as well as during times when the student has attended different schools. All districts should identify ways to share information amongst their schools so that student attendance concerns can be addressed quickly.

Creating a mentor program for ninth-grade students that meets regularly during a study hall or extended lunch period or implementing a homeroom for all students would be two ways that interventions could be implemented to identify students who are struggling earlier and provide more wrap-around services. Working with ninth-grade students at the Tier 1 intervention level may be a good way to engage the students, increase their sense of belonging, provide positive messaging, and decrease the anxiety that can lead to school refusal.

Supporting Student Belonging

In addition to intervening early, developing a student's sense of belonging at school was highlighted by study participants as a key piece of regular school attendance. This is consistent with research from Daily and colleagues (2020), Karlberg and colleagues (2022), and Hendron and Kearney (2016). Students who felt they were in a positive school environment, had peer relationships, and had many student opportunities were less likely to miss school. Continuing to support programs that increase belonging with personnel and money will be important going forward in order to decrease school refusal among students. Students need clubs and activities that represent them and their interests. They need staff members who share similar cultural and racial backgrounds. They need space to hold meetings and opportunities to share their values with other students in their school community safely and without feeling like they will be patronized. This support helps reduce barriers to school attendance and increases the likelihood of academic success.

Support for Various Interventions

Finally, when looking to reduce the number of students experiencing school refusal behaviors, all school staff members need to remember that each student experiencing attendance concerns is different. Students exhibiting irregular attendance can't be classified into just one or two categories such as school refusing or truant (Bools et al., 1990). After developing a relationship with the student and identifying barriers to attendance, school staff members need to be willing to use traditional school consequences such as detention as an intervention and, also, need to be open to looking at newer interventions like online credit recovery. Hansen et al. (1998) pointed out that evaluating only a student's behavior and addressing that does not provide enough instruction to school staff as to what is causing the attendance change. Chronically absent students have many reasons for missing school. Identifying the function behind the behavior is key to identifying how to support the student and their family moving forward. School staff members need to keep in mind that detention may be the right answer for one student and the wrong answer for another. Sometimes, trial and error is needed to find what is going to best reduce the barriers for the student. Kearney (2007) notes that school staff members who are working with these students need to consider negative and positive reinforcers that impact students' school attendance. Additionally, school staff members need to be creative in their thought processes and open to seeking out suggestions from community-based health providers, researchers in the area of school attendance, and each other. A team-based approach allows for multiple relationships to be developed and increases the likelihood that the student will get the support they need to return to consistent school attendance.

Study Limitations

This research is subject to limitations. One limitation of this study was that all of the interviews were conducted with participants from only one suburban high school. All participants work with the same demographic of students and have similar resources. It is unclear whether the results of this study would be the same at other high schools where the socioeconomic status and academic accomplishments differ greatly from this site. It is also unclear whether conducting this study in a rural setting would impact the results. Additionally, the literature referenced in this study came from research across all grades, not just high school-aged students. This may impact the comparison of interventions to research because some research was based in younger aged settings. A second limitation of this study is that I am a member of the same student services department as the study participants. This could have impacted the way study participants answered their questions. I took care to interview people who do not work on the same team as me but there was some overlap since the interventionists work with all staff members.

Future Research Considerations

This study examined the interventions study participants used and interventions they found helpful when working with students experiencing school refusal behaviors. This research was focused on one high school in one school district in suburban northern Illinois. It is recommended that future research expand on this study to include multiple schools, schools with contrasting demographics to the school in this study, and schools in different parts of the county, state, or country. A larger scale study comparing interventions amongst different schools would

be helpful in increasing the research on how school student services staff members are implementing the evidence-based interventions talked about in the literature review.

Another worthwhile area of research would be to investigate the practicality of using a school refusal assessment tool for every student who is struggling to maintain regular school attendance. If the tool were used more regularly, what would school staff members learn about their students? How could this knowledge inform the research being done by researchers? How could this inform the data-driven decision-making being done in schools around the country?

Finally, it is recommended that future research studies include interviewing building administrators, district administrators, board of education members, and students and families who have had experience with school refusal behaviors in order to gain more perspectives. Those interviews could shape research on helpful interventions as well as support the financial cost of all of the interventions taking place.

Concluding Remarks

During this study, 12 school student services personnel were interviewed to identify what interventions are being utilized to help students with school refusal, which interventions they felt worked best for returning students experiencing school refusal behaviors to consistent attendance, and in what ways the school district can best support school student services personnel when working with these students. This study highlights the work of educators in high school specifically which is unique in comparison to other studies. The intention of this research was to shed more light on what interventions are being implemented daily in a school in comparison to the interventions provided in the literature review. It was determined through interviews that relationship building is key to the development of an intervention for students

who are struggling. The research from this study highlights how research-based interventions are used in high school and which interventions are most helpful. This research is important because it highlights the important work student services personnel do to help students and families. It is, also, important to district administrators who determine staffing levels for student services departments.

REFERENCES

- Adams, D. (2022). Child and parental mental health as correlates of school non-attendance and school refusal in children on the autism spectrum. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, (52), 3353-3365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05211-5>
- Allan, B., & Fryer, R. (2011). The power and pitfalls of education incentives. *The Hamilton Project*. https://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads_and_links/092011_incentives_fryer_allen_paper2.pdf
- Allensworth, E. & Easton, J. (2007). What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago Public High Schools. *Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago*. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf>
- Atkins, A. (2022, October 2). More states are allowing children to take mental health days. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/10/02/student-mental-health-days/>
- Attendance Works. (2022, May 31). How many students are chronically absent? <https://www.attendanceworks.org/how-many-students-are-chronically-absent/>
- Balfanz, R. (2016). Missing school matters. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(2), 8–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721716671898>
- Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2013). Meeting the challenge of combating chronic absenteeism: Impact of the NYC Mayor’s Interagency Task Force on chronic absenteeism and school attendance and its implications for other cities. *Johns Hopkins School of Education, Everyone Graduates Center*. <https://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/NYC-Chronic-Absenteeism-Impact-Report.pdf>
- Balfanz, R., & Herzog, L. (2006). *Keeping middle grades students on track to graduation: Initial analysis and implications* [PowerPoint slides]. SlideShare. <https://slideplayer.com/slide/6844906/>
- Ballin, A. E. (2022). Connecting trauma-sensitive schooling and social-emotional learning to promote educational equity: One school’s intentional design. *Children and Schools*, 44(2), 107–115. <https://doi-org.auth.lib.niu.edu/10.1093/cs/cdab032>
- Berg, I. (1997). School refusal and truancy. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 76(2), 90–91. <https://doi.org/10.1136/adc.76.2.90>

- Berg, I. (2002). School avoidance, school phobia, and truancy. In: M. Lewis (Ed.), *Child and adolescent psychiatry: A comprehensive textbook* (pp. 1260-1266). Lippincott, Williams, and Wilkins.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (2016). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Pearson India Education Services.
- Bögels, S., & Brechman-Toussaint, M. L. (2006) Family issues in child anxiety: Attachment, family functioning, parental rearing, and beliefs. *Clinical Psychology Review, 26*(7), 834–856. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2005.08.001>
- Bools, C., Foster, J., Brown, I., & Berg, I. (1990). The identification of psychiatric disorders in children who fail to attend school: A cluster analysis of a nonclinical population. *Psychological Medicine, 20*(1), 171–181. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291700013350>
- Cabus, S. J., & De Witte, K. (2015). Does unauthorized school absenteeism accelerate the dropout decision? – Evidence from a Bayesian duration model. *Applied Economic Letters, 22*(4), 266–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2014.937031>
- Carpentieri R., Iannoni, M., Curto, M., Biagiarelli, M., Listani, G., Andraos, M. P., Mantovani, B., Farulla, C., Pelaccia, S., Grosso, G., Speranza, A. M., & Sarlato, C. (2022). School refusal behavior: Role of personality styles, social functioning, and psychiatric symptoms in a sample of adolescent help-seekers. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry, 19*(1), 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.36131/cnfioritieditore20220104>
- Chang, H. N., Bauer, L., & Byrnes, V. (2018). *Data matters: Using chronic absence to accelerate action for student success*. Everyone Graduates Center/Attendance Works. https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Data-Matters_EXEC-Summary_083118-2.pdf
- Chang, H. N., Russell-Tucker, C. M., & Sullivan, K. (2016). Chronic early absence: What states can do. *Phi Delta Kappan, 98*(2), 22–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721716671901>
- Chockalingam, M., Skinner, K., Melvin, G., & Yap, M. (2022). Modifiable parent factors associated with child and adolescent school refusal: A systematic review. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 54*(4), 1459–1475. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-022-01358-z>
- Cutler, D. M., & Lleras-Muney, A. (2006). *Education and health: Evaluating theories and evidence* (Working Paper No. 12352). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w12352/w12352.pdf
- Daily, S., Smith, M., Lilly, C., Davidov, D., Mann, M., & Kristjansson, A. (2020). Using school climate to improve attendance and grades: Understanding the importance of school satisfaction among middle and high school students. *Journal of School Health, 90*(9), 683–693. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12929>

- Egger, H. L., Costello, E. J., & Angold, A. (2003). School refusal and psychiatric disorders: A community study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(7), 797–807. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.CHI.0000046865.56865.79>
- Eisenberg, M. E., & Aalsma, M. C. (2005). Bullying and peer victimization: Position paper of the Society for Adolescent Medicine. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 36(1), 88–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2004.09.004>
- Elliott, J. G., & Place, M. (2019). Practitioner review: School refusal: Developments in conceptualization and treatment since 2000. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 60(1), 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12848>
- Fantuzzo, J., Grim, S., & Hazan, H. (2005). Project START: An evaluation of a community-wide school-based intervention to reduce truancy. *Psychology in the Schools*, 42(6), 657–667. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20103>
- Gastic, B. (2008). School truancy and the disciplinary problems of bullying victims. *Educational Review*, 60(4), 391–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910802393423>
- González, C., Inglés, C. J., Fernández-Sogorb, A., Sanmartín, R., Vicent, M., & García-Fernández, J. M. (2020). Profiles derived from the School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised and its relationship to anxiety. *Educational Psychology*, 40(6), 767–780. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2018.1530734>
- Goodman, J. (2014). *Flaking out: Student absences and snow days as disruptions of instructional time* (Working Paper No. 20221). National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w20221/w20221.pdf
- Gottfried, M. A., Stiefel, L., Schwartz, A. E., & Hopkins, B. (2019). Showing up: Disparities in chronic absenteeism between students with and without disabilities in traditional public schools. *Teachers College Record*, 121(8), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912100808>
- Graczyk, P. A., Weissberg, R. P., Payton, J. W., Elias, M. J., Greenberg, M. T., & Zins, J. E. (2000). Criteria for evaluating the quality of school-based social and emotional learning programs. In R. Bar-on & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The handbook of emotional intelligence* (pp. 391–410). Jossey-Bass.
- Graves, J., Weisburd, S., & Salem, C. (2019). The ills of absenteeism: Can school-based health centers provide the cure? In M. A. Gottfried & E. L. Hutt (Eds.), *Absent from school: Understanding and addressing student absenteeism* (pp. 137–148). Harvard Education Press

- Guevara, J. P., Mandell, D., Danagoulian, S., Reyner, J., & Pati, S. (2012). Parental depressive symptoms and children's school attendance and emergency department use: A nationally representative study. *Journal of Maternal and Child Health*, (17), 1130-1137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-012-1109-5>
- Gysbers, N., & Henderson, P. (2012). *Developing and managing your school guidance program* (5th ed.) American Counseling Association.
- Hahn, R. A., Knopf, J. A., Wilson, S. J., Truman, B. I., Milstein, B., Johnson, R. L., Fielding, J. E., Muntaner, C. J. M., Jones, C. P., Fullilove, M. T., Moss, R. D., Ueffing, E., & Hunt, P. C. (2015). Programs to increase high school completion: A community guide systematic health equity review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 48(5), 599–608. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.12.005>
- Hamlin, D. (2021). Can a positive school climate promote student attendance? Evidence from New York City. *American Education Research Journal*, 58(2), 315–342. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831220924037>
- Hansen, C., Sanders, S. L., Massaro, S., & Last, C. G. (1998). Predictors of severity of absenteeism in children with anxiety-based school refusal. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 27(3), 246–254. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15374424jccp2703_2
- Harris, P. C., Mayes, R. D., Freeman, C., Eberly, B., Tatby, N., & Wiener, S. (2020). Men passionately pursuing purpose (MP3): A group counseling intervention for Black male student athletes. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 45(2), 146–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2019.1679931>
- Havik, T., Bru, E., & Ertesvåg, S. K. (2015). School factors associated with school refusal and truancy-related reasons for school nonattendance. *Social Psychology of Education*, 18(2), 221–240. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-015-9293-y>
- Havik, T., & Ingul, J. M. (2021). How to understand school refusal. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 715177. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.715177>
- Hawken, L. S., Bundock, K., Kladis, K., O'Keeffe, B., & Barrett, C. A. (2014). Systematic review of the check-in, check-out intervention for students at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 37(4), 635–658. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/556430>
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual synthesis* (ED474521). ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED474521.pdf>

- Henderson, T., Hill, C., & Norton, K. (2014). *The connection between missing school and health: A review of chronic absenteeism and student health in Oregon*. Upstream Public Health. http://schoolhealthteams.aap.org/uploads/ckeditor/files/Chronic-Absence-and-Health-Review-10_8_14-FINAL-REVISED.pdf
- Hendron, M., & Kearney, C. A. (2016). School climate and student absenteeism and internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems. *Children and Schools, 38*(2), 109–116. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdw009>
- Hersov, L. A. (1960). Persistent non-attendance at school. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 1*(2), 130–136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1960.tb01987.x>
- Heyne, D., Gren-Landell, M., Melvin, G., & Gentle-Genitty, C. (2019). Differentiation between school attendance problems: Why and how? *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, 26*(1), 8–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.03.006>
- Humensky, J., Kuwabara, S., Fogel, J., Wells, C., Goodwin, B., & Van Voorhees, B. (2010). Adolescents with depressive symptoms and their challenges with learning in school. *Journal of School Nursing, 26*(5), 377–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059840510376515>
- Hutt, E. L. (2018). Measuring missed school: The historical precedents for the measurement and use of attendance records to evaluate schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 23*(1-2), 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2018.1438899>
- Hutzell, K. L., & Payne, A. A. (2018). The relationship between bullying victimization and school avoidance: An examination of direct associations, protective influences, and aggravating factors. *Journal of School Violence, 17*(2), 210–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2017.1296771>
- Illinois General Assembly. (2022). *Illinois School Code*. <https://ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=010500050K26-2a>
- International Network for School Attendance. (2022). *Questionnaires*. <https://www.insa.network/resources/questionnaires>
- Karlberg, M., Klang, N., Andersson F., Hancock, K., Ferrer-Wreder, L., Kearney, C., & Rosaria Galanti, M. (2022). The importance of school pedagogical and social climate to students' unauthorized absenteeism – a multilevel study of 101 Swedish schools. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 66*(1), 88–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1833244>
- Kearney, C. A. (2001). *School refusal behavior in youth: A functional approach to assessment and treatment*. American Psychological Association.

- Kearney, C. A. (2007). Forms and functions of school refusal behavior in youth: An empirical analysis of absenteeism severity. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(1), 53–61. <https://doi-org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2006.01634.x>
- Kearney, C. A. (2021). Integrating systemic and analytic approaches to school attendance problems: Synergistic frameworks for research and policy directions. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 50(4), 701–742. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-020-09591-0>
- Kearney, C. A., & Albano, A. M. (2004). The functional profiles of school refusal behavior. *Behavior Modification*, 28(1), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445503259263>
- Kearney, C. A., & Bensaheb, A. (2006). School absenteeism and school refusal behavior: A review and suggestions for school-based health professionals. *Journal of School Health*, 76(1), 3–7. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2006.00060.x>
- Kearney, C.A., & Graczyk, P. (2014). A response to intervention model to promote school attendance and decrease school absenteeism. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, (43), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-013-9222-1>
- Kearney, C. A., Lemos, A., & Silverman, J. (2004). The functional assessment of school refusal behavior. *Behavior Analyst Today*, 5(3), 275–283. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100040>
- Kearney, C. A., & Silverman, W. K. (1990). A preliminary analysis of a functional model of assessment and treatment for school refusal behavior. *Behavior Modification*, 14(3), 344–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01454455900143007>
- Kearney, C. A., & Silverman, W. K. (1993). Measuring the function of school refusal behavior: The School Refusal Assessment Scale. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 22(1), 85–96. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15374424jccp2201_9
- Kearney, C. A., & Silverman, W. K. (1996). The evolution and reconciliation of taxonomic strategies for school refusal behavior. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 3(4), 339–354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.1996.tb00087.x>
- Keppens, G., & Spruyt, B. (2017). Towards a typology of occasional truancy: An operationalization study of occasional truancy in secondary education in Flanders. *Research Papers in Education*, 32(1), 121–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2015.1136833>
- King, N. J., Tonge, B. J., Heyne, D., Pritchard, M., Rollings, S., Young, D., Myerson, N., & Ollendick, T. (1998). Cognitive behavioral treatment of school-refusing children: A controlled evaluation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 37(4), 395–403. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199804000-00017>

- Kloosterman, P., Kelley, E., Craig, W., Parker, J., & Javier, C. (2013). Types and experiences of bullying in adolescents with an autism spectrum disorder. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 7(7), 824–832. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2013.02.013>
- Ladd, G. W., Ettekal, I., & Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. (2017). Peer victimization trajectories from kindergarten through high school: Differential pathways for children's school engagement and achievement? *Journal of Education Psychology*, 109(6), 826–841. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000177>
- Lara, J., Noble, K., Pelika, S., & Coons, A. (2018). Chronic absenteeism (Research Brief No. 57) (ED595241). ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED595241.pdf>
- Last, C. G., Hansen, C., & Franco, N. (1998). Cognitive-behavioral treatment of school phobia. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 37(4), 404–411. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199804000-00018>
- Lavigne, H., Caven, M., Bock, G., Zhang, X., & Braham, E. (2021). Exploring implementation of attendance supports to reduce chronic absenteeism in the Providence Public School District (ED614715) ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614715.pdf>
- Lawrence, D., Dawson, V., Houghton, S., Goodsell, B., & Sawyer, M. (2019). Impact of mental disorders on attendance at school. *Australian Journal of Education*, 63(1), 5–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944118823576>
- Leduc, K., Tougas, A-M., Robert, V., & Boulanger, C. (2022). School refusal in youth: A systematic review of ecological factors. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 1-19. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-022-01469-7>
- Levine, E., Johnson, J., Malave, J., & Santaniello, S. (2017). *Online courses for credit recovery in high schools: Effectiveness and promising practices*. Nellie Mae Education Foundation. <https://uj9a82.p3cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Online-Courses-for-Credit-Recovery-Full-Report.pdf>
- Macon-Piatt Regional Office of Education. (2020). *Truancy*. <https://www.maconpiattroe.org/page/truancy>
- Martin, M. (2021). Trends in school attendance for low-income children with chronic health conditions: Results from a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of School Health*, 91(3), 187–194. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12989>
- Maynard, B. R., Heyne, D., Brendel, K. E., Bulanda, J. J., Thompson, A. M., & Pigott, T. D. (2018). Treatment for school refusal among children and adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 28(1), 56–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731515598619>

- McClemont, A., Morton, H., Gillis, J., & Romanczyk, R. (2021). Brief report: Predictors of school refusal due to bullying in children with autism spectrum disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *51*(5), 1781–1788. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-013-1938-0>
- Molina, T., Jones, D., Challoo, L., & Fedynich, L. (2020). A comparative study of positive behavior interventions and supports in middle schools in south Texas. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, *38*, 1-13.
- Mrvar, P. G., & Mažgon, J. (2017). The role of the school counselor in school-community collaboration: The case of Slovenia. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering, and Education*, *5*(1), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.5937/IJCRSEE1701019G>
- Neild, R. C., Balfanz, R., & Herzog, L. (2007). An early warning system. *Educational Leadership*, *65*(2), 28–33. http://mtaarelnwallianceews.educationnorthwest.org/external/pdf/Early_Warning_System_Neild_Balfanz_Herzog.pdf
- Orm, S., Orm, C., Mebostad, M., Dechsling, A., & Nordahl-Hansen, A. (2022). Confirming the validity of the School-Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised in a sample of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Frontiers in Psychology*, (13). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.849303>
- Parise, L., Corrin, W., Granito, K., Halder, Z., Somers, M-A., & Cerna, O. (2017). *Two years of case management: Final findings from the Communities in Schools random assignment evaluation*. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/CIS-Two-Years-of-Case-Management-for-At-Risk-Students.pdf>
- Parker, R., & Hodgson, D. (2020). “One size does not fit all”: Engaging students who have experienced trauma. *Issues in Educational Research*, *30*(1), 245–259. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier30/parker.pdf>
- Railsback, J. (2004). Increasing student attendance: Strategies from research and practice. *Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory*. <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/increasing-student-attendance.pdf>
- Reyes, A. (2020). Compulsory school attendance: The new American crime. *Education Sciences*, *10*(5), 75. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10030075>
- Richtman, K. S. (2007). The truancy intervention program of the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office: A collaborative approach to school success. *Family Court Review*, *45*(3), 421–437. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1744-1617.2007.00157.x>

- Robinson, C., Lee, M., Dearing, E., & Rogers, T. (2018). Reducing student absenteeism in the early grades by targeting parental beliefs. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(6), 1163–1192. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218772274>
- Rogers, T., Duncan, T., Wolford, T., Ternovski, J., Subramanyam, S., Reitano, A. (2017). A randomized experiment using absenteeism information to “nudge” attendance (ED572488). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED572488>
- Rogers, T., & Kraft, M. A. (2014). *Teacher-to-parent communication: Evident from a field experiment* (Faculty Research Working Paper No. RWP14-049). Harvard Kennedy School. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/todd_rogers/files/empirical_in_press.kraft_rogers.pdf
- Skedgell, K., & Kearney, C. A. (2016). Predictors of absenteeism severity in truant youth: A dimensional and categorical analysis. *American Secondary Education*, 45(1), 46–58.
- Snyder, F. J., Flay, B. R., Vuchinich, S., Acock, A., Washburn, I. J., Beets, M., & Li, K-K. (2010). Impact of a social-emotional and character development program on school-level indicators of academic achievement, absenteeism, and disciplinary outcomes: A matched-pair, cluster randomized, controlled trial. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 3(1), 26–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345740903353436>
- Steiner, R. J., & Rasberry, C. N. (2015). Brief report: Associations between in-person and electronic bullying victimization and missing school because of safety concerns among U.S. high school students. *Journal of Adolescence*, 43(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.05.005>
- Taylor, L., Saylor, C., Twyman, K., & Macias, M. (2010). Adding insult to injury: Bullying experiences of youth with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Children’s Health Care*, 39(1), 59–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02739610903455152>.
- Telfair J., Shelton T. L., & Reynolds H. R. (2012). Educational attainment as a social determinant of health. *Positive Behavior Intervention and Support*, 73(5), 358–65. https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/j_telfair_educational_2012.pdf
- Tobias, A. (2019). A grounded theory study of family coach intervention with persistent school non-attenders. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 35(1), 17–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2018.1518215>
- Van Eck, K., Johnson, S. R., Bettencourt, A., & Johnson, S. L. (2017). How school climate relates to chronic absence: A multi-level latent profile analysis. *Journal of School Psychology*, (61), 89–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2016.10.001>
- Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(2), 315–352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1>

- Weinstein, J., Villares, E., & Brigman, G. (2021). The effect of the Student Success Skills small group intervention on factors associated with dropout potential. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 46*(3), 256–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2021.1945175>
- Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Free Press.
- Whitney, I., & Smith, P. K. (1993). A survey of the nature and extent of bullying in junior/middle and secondary schools. *Educational Research, 35*(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013188930350101>
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2020). *Answers to frequently asked compulsory attendance questions*. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/schlattendqa.pdf>

APPENDIX
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Question	Interview Questions
<p>What interventions are school personnel using to improve the attendance of students exhibiting school refusal behavior?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The focus of this study is supporting students who are experiencing school refusal behaviors and thus contributing to our chronic absenteeism rate. *explain school refusal behaviors* ● Start by sharing with me what role you play in supporting students who are exhibiting school refusal behavior. How long have you worked in this role? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you work with other team members to support students? If so, what other team members? ● How frequently are you involved in supporting a student with school refusal behaviors? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are you familiar with the student's mental health diagnosis or if they are even diagnosed? Do you see any trends? ● Tier 1 interventions are interventions that are shared with the full student body - things such as positive messaging about attendance throughout the halls and in school-wide emails, our monthly SEL lessons, and celebrations of good attendance. How much value do you think these have in encouraging attendance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are there ways these interventions could be utilized better? ● What interventions have you utilized or helped implement for a student who is struggling to attend school regularly? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Frequency of the interventions? ○ Time needed to implement ● <i>What impact does peer interaction have on students experiencing school refusal behavior?</i> ● <i>Sometimes, students experiencing school refusal behaviors have barriers to getting to school that include transportation. How have these barriers impacted your work?</i>

Research Question	Interview Questions
<p>What interventions did school personnel find successful for improving the attendance of students demonstrating school refusal behavior due to mental health concerns?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When you observe attendance concerns for a student, how do you develop a plan for intervening? Are there specific people or programs you turn to to get ideas for interventions? ● When you think about the MTSS work we've been doing this year, you've focused on moving through the tiers of interventions. Was there a specific tier of interventions that you found to be most helpful? ● What interventions were most successful in getting students to return to regular school attendance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why do you think these interventions were most successful? ○ Before implementing the intervention, did you think about why you chose that particular intervention? ○ Why or why not? ● What interventions did you find to be least successful? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why do you think that is? ● Do you see intervention patterns based on the diagnosis of the student? ● Describe for me the level of parental involvement you observed when intervening with students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Were there specific things the parents did to support your efforts? Hinder your efforts? ● <i>Are the interventions you are using addressing the barriers you're seeing?</i>

Research Question	Interview Questions
<p>How can the system support student services personnel as they work to support students exhibiting school refusal behavior?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Were there interventions that you thought you wanted to implement but didn't have the time or resources? ● What sort of professional development have you had on school refusal behaviors? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you think there is a need for more professional development? ○ Who should receive that professional development? ● How can the school system as a whole support student services personnel more in their work with students exhibiting school refusal? ● Is there anything about the school climate that needs to be changed to improve student attendance?

Note: Interview questions in italics were added after the practice interview.