

AN ANALYSIS OF FLORIDA'S SCHOOL DISTRICTS' ATTENDANCE POLICIES  
AND  
THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES

by

Ryan Turner Reardon

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
the College of Education  
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Florida

May, 2008

Copyright by Ryan Turner Reardon 2008

AN ANALYSIS OF FLORIDA'S SCHOOL DISTRICTS' ATTENDANCE POLICIES  
AND  
THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES

by

Ryan Turner Reardon

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Department of Educational Leadership, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

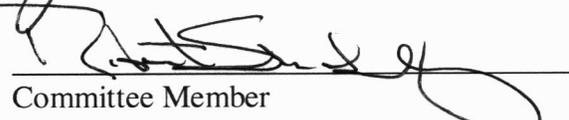
SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

  
Committee Chair

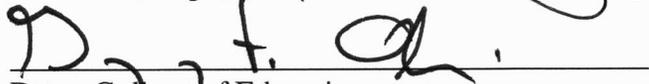
  
Committee Member

  
Committee Member

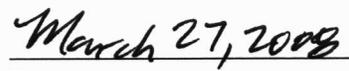
  
Committee Member

  
Committee Member

  
Chairman, Department of Educational Leadership

  
Dean, College of Education

  
Dean, Graduate College

  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey to this moment has been long with many people playing an important role in my reaching this goal. While many others are owed thanks, these are the people who deserve individual attention.

Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski never let me get discouraged and always found the time to meet with me for direction, support, and encouragement. Dr. Harry LaCava allowed me to enter into the administrative profession. You kept your promise of serving as a member of my committee even when you were promoted to the Superintendent of Indian River School District. Dr. Robert Shockley always kept a supportive attitude and was just a phone call away. Dr. Dan Morris made himself available to me whenever I needed help. Never did a question (no matter how trivial) go unanswered (even from an altitude of 35,000 feet). Your support and willingness to guide me is appreciated.

Dr. Joel Herbst, without your guidance this topic never would have come about. Through our conversations (not to mention the pep talk emails and in person talks), you pushed me onward. Your role to me goes far beyond a committee member. You represent what someday I hope to become. Elissa Rudolph, for serving as my “technical director” as well as my set of “eyes” behind the scene, I thank you. Jacqueline Kawarsky, for showing constant patience on many endless Friday nights years ago, you will always have a special place in my heart.

Terry Dunn – your November, 1994, words to me with respect to the game of football being just that – a game – and relating it to the lessons of life (through times of adversity), teaching me to keep things in perspective –those words still ring in my head today. This lesson far outweighed the standard words of other coaches. Deborah Peeples, you have been more than a professional mentor and personal friend to me, and I thank you for helping me become who I am professionally. Adam Baker, my lifelong best friend, you have served in my life through many different phases. Whether our communication drifts or remains constant, know that through your “brotherhood” I have grown. Lisa and Ed Arango, while I may not say it much, I am glad you are a part of my family. To my Grandmother, Marge McNamara, I could always count on you to hold me to a higher level of expectation as compared to others.

To my dad, Ron Reardon, you represent far more than a father. You are the rock of our family, and the stability to our household. From the days of coaching me as a child to mentoring me as a man, you ensured that I was always safe and happy. Your unconditional love and support throughout my whole life makes me think that if I am half the father to my eventual child, he/she will be blessed.

Lastly, to my lifeline, my best friend, and my mother Dr. Michelle Reardon. In 1990 you paved the way when you received your doctoral degree. You then set the stage for me to follow. Having never given up on me (giving me support, unconditional love and friendship too), you watched me grow, let me fall, and picked me back up. Your love for me goes without question. Without you, this dream never would have happened for me. Now that this is over, perhaps we can embark on new educational challenges and perhaps someday mentor the third “Dr. Reardon.”

## ABSTRACT

Author: Ryan Turner Reardon

Title: An Analysis of Florida's School Districts' Attendance Policies and Their Relationship to High School Attendance Rates

Institution: Florida Atlantic University

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year: 2008

The purpose of this non-experimental correlational study was to determine the relationship between the type of attendance policies in the high schools of the 67 Florida school districts, the size of the school district (number of high school students), the socioeconomic status (SES) of the school district, and the average daily attendance rate of the district. Additionally, the study determined if the relationship between policy type and attendance rate was moderated by SES and size.

To test the research questions, high school attendance policies were examined and coded into one of three pre-determined categories: punitive, reward, or affective. The SES level and district size were also examined.

A percentage was calculated for each district with respect to the makeup of attendance policies (by type). Policies that were punitive in nature were found to be most

commonly implemented (mean 81.14 percent). No significant relationships existed among the independent variables policy type, SES level and district size when tested with the dependent variable average daily attendance rate. Furthermore, district size and SES showed no significant moderation effects on the relationship between policy type and average daily attendance rate. An additional analysis of a large urban school district showed that when examining school level average daily attendance rates, school size showed no significant relationship, while school SES level did.

The conclusion of this study was that while a heavy emphasis was placed on the implementation of punitive policy, when measured at the district level, average daily attendance rates were not significantly related to the variables of policy type, SES level, or district size, nor was the relationship between policy type and average daily attendance rate moderated by SES or district size.

Recommendations for future research, school leaders, and policymakers were to assess the effectiveness of using reward and affective policies in conjunction with punitive policies, to conduct an assessment of policy effectiveness using school level data as the unit of analysis, and while attendance policies are typically created at the district level, schools should be given the autonomy to create and implement attendance programs conducive to their individual needs.

For Michelle and Ron Reardon

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	2
Purpose .....	4
Research Questions .....	5
Null Hypotheses .....	6
Significance of the Study .....	6
Assumptions .....	7
Limitations .....	7
Delimitations .....	7
Definitions .....	8
Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study .....	8
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	10
Chronic Absenteeism .....	10
Significance of Attendance Rates .....	12
Negative Effects of Chronic Absenteeism .....	14
Academic Achievement Compromised .....	14
School Discipline Problems and Delinquency .....	16
Dropping Out of School .....	18
Factors to be Considered in the Development of Attendance Policies .....	19
Three Primary Types of Attendance Policy .....	20
Punitive Policy .....	20
Reward/Incentive Policy .....	23
Affective Policy .....	26
Combination of Attendance Policies .....	29
Factors Affecting Attendance .....	30
Effects of Socioeconomic Status (SES) .....	31
Size of District .....	32
Effects of District Size With Socioeconomic Status (SES) .....	33
Chapter Summary .....	35
3 METHODOLOGY .....	36
Sample .....	37
Data Collection Procedure .....	37

Data Analysis .....	38
Statistical Methods .....	40
Chapter Summary .....	40
4 RESULTS OF THE STUDY .....	41
Results .....	42
Descriptive Statistics .....	42
Research Question Analysis .....	44
Hypotheses Testing .....	44
Additional Analyses: One School District Examined .....	49
Chapter Summary .....	52
5 CONCLUSION .....	54
Discussion of Findings .....	55
Conclusion .....	59
Recommendations .....	60
REFERENCES .....	63
APPENDIXES	
A Florida Compulsory Attendance Law .....	77
B Type of Attendance Policy .....	80
C Examples of Truancy Definitions .....	82
D Email Correspondence .....	87

## LIST OF TABLES

### TABLE

1	Variable Labels and Names .....	42
2	Descriptive Statistics of All Tested Variables .....	43
3	Correlations of Independent Variables and ADA Dependent Variable .....	45
4	Moderation Effects of SES and SIZE on the PUN and ADA Relationships.....	47
5	Moderation Effects of SES and SIZE on the AFF and ADA Relationships .....	48
6	Moderation Effects of SES and SIZE on the REW and ADA Relationships.....	49
7	Comparison of One Florida School District to Statewide Data .....	50
8	One District Test: Matrix of SIZE and SES and ADA as Dependent Variable .....	52

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Student absenteeism is a problem encountered by many school districts throughout the United States. Improving attendance rates and preventing student absenteeism have always been areas of concern for educators. Chronic student absenteeism is generally considered a major risk factor for dropping out of school and subsequent delinquent behaviors and serious problems in adult life (Walls, 2003). The Gallup Poll (Gallup & Elam, 1999) states that chronic absenteeism is one of the 10 most serious problems facing schools and communities today. With no easy solution, the causes of student absenteeism are complex (Eldrid & Inman, 2005; Kearney, Eisen & Silverman, 1995; Kreps, 1999; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2002; Starr 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). In reaction, state departments of education and school boards across the country have developed policies, procedures, and programs aimed at reducing and preventing student absenteeism (Redick & Nicoll, 1990).

The absence rates are disturbingly high and, according to research conducted by Bauer (1996), have increased drastically over the last 30 years. A national survey by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (Rapp, Carrington, & Nicholson, 1986) showed that of the high school seniors surveyed, 13.4 percent said that within a four-week period they were absent from classes for at least one day for reasons other than illness. Across the nation, absence rates have reached as high as 30 percent in some cities (DeKalb, 1999). Many large cities report staggering high rates of truancy (Baker,

Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001) with larger high schools reporting even higher rates (Puzzanchera et al., 2003). The U.S. Department of Education (2003) reports that there are 50,000 pupils a day missing school without permission, contributing to the estimated 7.5 million school days missed each year. Garry (1996) states that in New York City alone it has been estimated that 150,000 out of 1 million public school students are absent on a typical day. Boston's superintendent of schools reported that the student absentee rate is as high as 20 percent in some city high schools (Starr, 2002). Ingersoll and Lebouf (1997) report that Detroit's 40 public school attendance offices investigated 66,440 truant complaints during the 1994-1995 school year.

Absenteeism is a detriment to academic progress (Roby, 2004). Absenteeism interferes with learning and results in students' failure to acquire skills (Blasik, 2005; Brokowski & Dempsey, 1979; California State Office of the Attorney General, 1982; De Leonibus, 1978; Levanto, 1975; Ohio State Department of Education, 1983).

Researchers state that absenteeism reduces the school standing for academic achievement. It causes concern for educators who are professionally committed and required by law to educate all young people. In short, it can jeopardize the school's legitimacy as an institution of learning (California State Office of the Attorney General, 1982; Levanto, 1975; Ohio State Department of Education, 1983).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Florida, the site of this study, recognizes poor academic performance is associated with non attendance; thus schools are required to take an active role in enforcing school attendance as a means of improving academic performance. It is Florida law that each

district's school superintendent be responsible for enforcing the state's compulsory attendance laws (Appendix A) in recognition of the implied impact on student learning.

Student absenteeism also has a significant fiscal impact on schools. In many states, including Florida, there is a budgeted cost for office personnel and computer programs that are used to track attendance (Landsberg, 2007; Starr, 2002;). It is costly when looking at the ramifications of students with chronic absences (Bauer, 1996; Christie, 2006). If students are absent on the days used for the state count, monies that a school district receives for the year are negatively affected by the funding formulas used in many states, including Florida (Bafile, 2007).

Florida has 67 school districts that upon examination are different in their approach to dealing with student absenteeism. Each district has the freedom to adopt its own attendance policies derived from the state's statutes. Not only do they have the power to create the policies, but Florida's statutes (1003.21, Appendix A) are very clear in giving the responsibility of implementation and enforcement to these 67 disparate and varying districts. Therefore, within the state a myriad of different policies, implementations, and enforcements can be documented. These differences will add in the categorization of various policy types.

Many states have conducted research on attendance policies; however, the emphasis has been on the increasing rates, the correlation between attendance and achievement (Landin, 1996; Roby, 2004), drop-out rates (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Schwartz, 1995), delinquency (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), or crime (Baker et al., 2001). Few have focused on the differences between policies and the effectiveness of each type (Baker et al.). Bauer (1996) conducted a study comparing

different policies in Illinois, but limited his sample to only three high schools. Other information and recommendations found in the research are compiled from primarily anecdotal information from practitioners (Dougherty, 1999; Epp & Epp, 2001; French, Gullledge, & Cox, 1998; Rood, 1989). Vaishnav (2005) examined pre-post average daily attendance after punitive and incentive policies were implemented; however, only one high school was used.

Florida's 67 school districts, working under one state statute but having the freedom (at the district level) to create their own policies to reduce student absenteeism, provide an ideal opportunity to examine the effectiveness of individual district efforts. Yet the state does not track district attendance policies to monitor what each district's policy is, nor has research been done to examine if any type of policy leads to better attendance rates. Thus, the objective of this study is to discern the effectiveness of attendance policies and to differentiate the factors affecting their success or failure that will allow policy makers, both state and local, as well as school administrators to address these challenges.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this non-experimental correlational study is to determine the relationship between the type of attendance policies in the high schools of the 67 Florida school districts (punitive, reward, or affective), the size of the school district (number of high school students), the socioeconomic status of the school district (percentage of students receiving the free or reduced price lunch program), and the average daily attendance rate of the district (ADA). Additionally, the study will determine if the relationship between policy type and attendance rate is moderated by SES and size. Three

independent variables are generally defined as type of attendance policy, size of the school district, and socioeconomic status of the district. One dependent variable is generally defined as the average daily attendance rate (percentage of the students who attended school versus could attend school) for each district.

### *Research Questions*

This study examines:

1. What policy type is used in each school district at the high school level? All district policies are identified as punitive, reward, or affective.
2. Is there a relationship between the type of policy used within a school district at the high school level and the high school average daily attendance rate of that school district?
3. Is there a relationship between the high school average daily attendance rate of the district and the variables:
  - a. Size of the Florida school district (number of high school students)
  - b. Socioeconomic status (SES) percent of the district?
4. Is the relationship between the type of attendance policy and the attendance rate at the high school level moderated by the variables:
  - a. Size of school district
  - b. SES percent of the district?

### *Null Hypotheses*

Ho1: There is no relationship between attendance rate and attendance policy type.

Ho2: There is no relationship between attendance rate and district size.

Ho3: There is no relationship between attendance rate and SES level.

Ho4: The relationship between attendance policy and attendance rate is not moderated by district size.

Ho5: The relationship between attendance policy and attendance rate is not moderated by SES level.

### *Significance of the Study*

Florida, the site of this proposed study, has 67 separate school districts, each of which has the freedom to adopt its own attendance policy. With the conflicting reports from the research as to the effect of district size, SES, and different policy elements, and their effect on high school attendance rates, school district policy makers can benefit from this study. By examining the effectiveness of school district attendance policies, district policy makers can benefit from knowing the relationship of the type of attendance policy that school districts use and the high school attendance rate of the school districts. In addition, the moderation effects of the district size and socioeconomic status on the policy type and attendance rate relationship will assist in future individual district attempts in the creating of attendance policy with respect to makeup of their respective district.

### *Assumptions*

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions are made:

1. High school personnel followed the attendance policy as outlined by their county.
2. Individual high schools in each county did adhere to their county's attendance policy.
3. The high school personnel responsible for collecting and reporting attendance data did so accurately.

### *Limitations*

1. The data collection for this study was limited to one school year (2005-2006).
2. The sample in this study was limited to attendance data at the high school level. Only high schools which are labeled as such by the Florida Department of Education were examined.
3. The data in this study was collected at the high school level per district and did not examine policies or programs within individual high schools in each district.
4. The data did not reflect attendance rates in charter schools.
5. Currently, the state does not monitor the fidelity of policy implementation within each school district.

### *Delimitations*

1. The examined average daily attendance rates were those of high schools.
2. All high schools were located in the state of Florida.

## *Definitions*

For the purpose of this study, terms are defined as follows:

*Attendance Policy* – Rules and regulations that have been adopted by a local school district in an effort to reduce absenteeism.

*Average Daily Attendance Rate (ADA)* – Calculation done by state school districts in which the number of students in school is divided by the total number of students in the district.

*Excused Absence* – An absence from school or class for reasons qualifying as legal and/or excused under state codes or school districts' attendance policy.

*Habitual truant* – A student who has 15 unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge or consent of the student's parent.

*Regular school attendance* – The actual attendance of a student during the school day by law and rules of the State Board of Education.

*Unexcused Absence* – An absence from school or class for reasons not qualifying as legal and/or excused under state codes or school districts' attendance policy.

## *Chapter Summary and Organization of the Study*

In summary, chronic student failure and dropping out of school are at the very core of education today. These problems are exacerbated by student absenteeism which has been increasing since the 1970s. Thus, the need to examine the relationship between what type of policy is superior in reducing student absenteeism is warranted.

Chapter 2 will review relevant literature related to the size of the absentee problem, the different policy types currently used to reduce the problem, and conclude with a focus on SES and district size.

Chapter 3 will describe the methodology of the study and include the following elements: research design, sample, data collection, data coding, and data software.

Chapter 4 will detail the results of the statistical analysis.

Chapter 5 will provide a thorough discussion of the findings from the perspective of the research questions and hypotheses. Additionally, the final chapter will offer conclusions from the researcher and recommendations for further research in the field of school leadership.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

This literature review examines research regarding chronic student absenteeism and effects including (a) academic achievement, (b) school discipline problems, (c) delinquency, and (d) dropping out of school. Additionally, the literature review addresses: (a) approaches included in the development of attendance policies, (b) studies regarding intervention programs and their findings, (c) types of attendance policies, and (d) how socioeconomic status and district size affect attendance.

#### *Chronic Absenteeism*

The magnitude of the chronic student absenteeism problem is increasing. Each year, across the nation, children miss five million days of their education by missing school without the knowledge of their parents (Inman, 2002). Baker et al. (2001) report that everyday throughout the United States hundreds of thousands of students are absent without an excuse. Still many more students are missing school with the knowledge and approval of their parents (Bauer, 1996; Garry, 1996; Heaviside, Rowland, Williams, & Farris, 1998).

While chronic absenteeism has been a much studied phenomenon nationally, there has been little consistency in even defining much less alleviating it. Nationwide, chronic absenteeism is often a poorly defined, loosely applied term referring to absence from school without an acceptable reason whether or not the parents have knowledge or given permission (Christie, 2006). Research also indicates that districts cannot

differentiate between the excused and unexcused absences because absences are reported in terms of average daily attendance rate (ADA) or just how many students are in school on a given day. To further indicate the disparity in the terms truancy, absent, chronic absenteeism, and habitual truancy, Zinth (2005) designed a list of 18 states (Appendix C) to display the differences that are evident. The one thing most states do agree on, however, is the difference between an unexcused (without valid reason) and excused absence (valid reason and parent knowledge plus consent).

Bauer (1996) stated that in order to study chronic absenteeism it must be defined. He stated that while some absences are legal and excused, chronic absenteeism is generally defined as an absence from school or class for reasons not qualifying as legal and/or excused under state codes or school districts' attendance policies. A chronic absentee is one who is absent without a valid cause for 18 or more days (Bauer).

There is not a clear method, however, to identify the chronically absent student. In Florida the chronically absent student, or a student with a pattern of non-attendance, is one who has 10 unexcused absences within 90 days, with or without parent knowledge and consent (Florida Compulsory Attendance Law, § 1003.21, 2005, Appendix A). The habitually truant student is one who has 15 unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without justifiable consent of the child's parent. The average daily attendance rate (ADA) used in Florida School District reports, however, does not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. Additionally, to further complicate the situation are those students who come to school but do not attend all classes (Garry, 1996; Inman, 2002).

### *Significance of Attendance Rates*

Attendance rates (ratio of students present in school to total number of students) are routinely calculated in most schools across the nation because districts and states require this information. While attendance rates do not always enable school/district personnel to determine whether a student is chronically absent, excused absent, unexcused, or truant, the information does enable district personnel to determine those who are in school. Attendance rates are important for a variety of reasons such as budget and in some states the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of a school.

Attendance rates are considered important by many educators because students' presence in the classroom affects student opportunities to learn. "You can't educate an empty chair" (DeKalb, 1999). While a few students seem to learn even when they have poor attendance, the majority of students will not learn what they have not been taught. Logic would dictate that being present during demonstrations, group activities, lectures, and experiments would increase students' understanding of material and improve their understanding of curriculum; thus, the students' grades would improve.

Cavron, Nemerofsky, Rock, and Kerins (1996) found that higher attendance at lectures and discussion groups related to higher grade point averages. The United States Department of Education (2003) recognizes the effect of school absenteeism on student academic achievement. Students who are in school participating in discussions, doing hands-on activities, hearing lectures first hand, and having the opportunity to ask questions if they do not understand material have better academic achievement. Thus, attendance rates are significant because low attendance adversely affects the achievement of the students and the overall school.

Although academics are certainly a driving force for improving attendance rates, it is not the only concern. In many states, not Florida, the core of how schools are funded is based on average daily attendance (ADA). Thus budgets for most school districts are determined by student attendance and enrollment (DiMassa, 2004; Kabbang, 2006). In the U.S., school districts are given money per full time equivalency (FTE) per student. For example, during the development of a California school district's 2003-2004 budget, improved student attendance was identified as an area that could enhance revenue. Incentives were even given to the top schools for improving their ADA during the period in which FTE was computed because the monetary incentives given (\$1,000 to \$2,000 per school) would be more than offset by the additional state revenue generated.

In the state of Florida, schools receive a student base allocation of approximately \$4,134 per student. Students must be in attendance one of the 11 pre-selected days in October and again in February. If a student is absent for this timeframe, the school will not receive the funding. Through personal communication with this researcher, it is often that administrators and other school personnel in Broward County, Florida, are asked to encourage students to come to school (even at least one day during this period). Thus, the attendance rate is significant because districts and schools with low attendance can risk losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in their yearly budgets.

Attendance rates are very important because they are included in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) (2001) as an indicator to determine a state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the term given to a school if it meets the qualifications set by the state (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The NCLB Act requires – through public policy –

that public schools be held accountable to a measurable product. The NCLB reiterates the importance of attendance including it as an indicator to determine AYP in some states. For example, Oregon has a target attendance rate of 92 percent; Alaska has a target rate of 85 percent, while other states like Washington focus on the unexcused absence rate. However, NCLB allows each state the freedom to calculate their Adequate Yearly Progress. Each state defines what constitutes a full academic year, sets the rigor of state standards for math, language arts, reading, and science, selects the assessments to be used, determines which “other academic indicators” will be used, and sets the performance standard for each.

Zinth (2005) states that 37 states, not Florida, use attendance rates as an academic indicator for their elementary and middle schools (high schools usually use graduation rates, such as a one percent increase must be attained). Christie (2006) states that the target attendance rate varies from 80 percent to 95.8 percent, but some states simply require any improvement over the previous year as valid to reach Adequate Yearly Progress. Washington stipulates that a reduction in unexcused absences is needed. So while there is variation, it is obvious that attendance is an issue both at the state and the national levels (Christie).

#### *Negative Effects of Chronic Absenteeism*

*Academic achievement compromised.* The product of schools is education and the prevailing way to measure the process of educating students is to examine academic achievement as measured by grades and test scores. One factor that has been found to impact on this process of educating students is chronic absenteeism.

Chronic absenteeism has a negative effect on student achievement. Educators have long related the importance of class attendance to student achievement. The most extensive research on absenteeism looks at the relationship between academic achievement and chronic absenteeism (Blasik, 2005; Landin, 1996; Roby, 2004). Results indicate a consistent positive relationship between high attendance and achievement. Only in the classroom does the student hear the teacher's presentation, participate in class discussions and partake of the school's primary charge of education and socialization (At-risk youth in crisis: A handbook for collaboration between schools and social services, 1991; Rood, 1989). It comes as no surprise that students with high absence rates typically earn lower grades than students with better attendance (Redick & Nicoll, 1990).

School districts in Ohio were researched with the focus on one variable, average daily attendance (ADA), and results showed that the positive impact of good school attendance was greater than historically thought (Roby, 2004). Landin (1996) found a relationship between student attendance which positively correlated to standardized test performance. Franklin and Crone (1992) also found that student achievement in Los Angeles schools was directly related to average daily attendance. Researchers identify absenteeism as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for educational failure (Bell, Rosen & Dynlacht, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990; Hulzinga, Loeher, & Thornberry, 1995; Rohrman, 1993). Dynarski and Gleason (1999) state that students with the highest chronic unexcused absence rate have the lowest academic achievement.

Additionally, state and national test scores have been shown to be affected by attendance rates. Crone's (1993) study showed that student attendance is an important indicator of the academic success of schools in Los Angeles. Attendance rates yielded a

very high relationship to assessment instruments, and were the strongest predictors for passing the Graduation Exit Exam. Belluck (2006) reported that a principal cited test scores as significantly higher due to improved attendance. In Broward County, Florida, the sixth largest school district in the nation, Blasik (2005) stated in the *Annual School Report* that the importance of regular attendance was underscored by data that revealed that greater numbers of unexcused absences were associated with low state standardized test scores.

*School discipline problems and delinquency.* Chronic absenteeism not only creates problems at the school level; it also is a major factor leading to later delinquency. In a 1996 national review of discipline issues, school principals reported that student absenteeism, truancy, class cutting, and tardiness were their top discipline problems. School related crimes and misconduct create a resultant increase in juvenile court involvement. This increase in court involvement has been found to be a result of chronic absenteeism as seen in truant students (Cavron et al., 1996). Puzzanchera (1999) states that truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity.

The U.S. Department of Education (2003) states that children who are not in school are most vulnerable, easily drawn into crime and anti-social behavior, and are likely to be unemployed after leaving school. The Annual Youth Justice Survey of Young People showed that those who are truant are more likely to offend than those that are not, with two-thirds (65 percent) of truants having offenses versus less than a third (30 percent) of those who were not truant. A recent San Bernardino, California, District Attorney's Office study (California . . . , 2002) reported that in that state 78 percent of

prison inmates cited chronic student absenteeism as the main reason for their first involvement with the judicial system. The most likely juvenile recidivists were those whose first referrals included truancy, burglary, motor vehicle theft, or robbery and 57 percent of violent crimes committed by juveniles occurred on school days.

In several jurisdictions, law enforcement officials have connected high rates of truancy to daytime burglary and vandalism (Baker & Jansen, 2000). In Tacoma, Washington it was reported that one-third of burglaries and one-fifth of aggravated assaults that occurred between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on weekdays were committed by juveniles (California . . . , 1982). In Contra Costa County, California police reported that 60 percent of juvenile crime occurring between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on weekdays. Recent studies, such as the Office of Juvenile Justice Program's (OJJJ) Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency (Kelley, Thornberry, & Smith, 1997), indicate that truancy may be a precursor to serious nonviolent offenses and that the connection between truancy and delinquency appears to be particularly acute among males (cited in Kelley, Loeber, Keenan, & DeLamarte, 1997). In addition, findings from the OJJJ's Study Group on Very Young Offenders indicate that chronic truancy in elementary school is linked to serious delinquent behavior at age 12 and under (cited in Loeber & Farrington, 2000).

The effects of truancy are not only seen in school age individuals. Decades of research have also identified a link between truancy and later problems such as violence, marital problems, job problems, adult criminality, and incarceration (Catalano, Arthur, Hawkins, Berglund, & Olson, 1998; Dryfoos, 1990; Robins & Ratcliff, 1978; Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). Further, adults who were frequently truant as teenagers are much more

likely than those who were not to have poorer physical and mental health, lower paying jobs, an increased chance of living in poverty, more reliance on welfare support, children who exhibit problem behaviors, and an increased likelihood of incarceration (Bell et al., 1994; Dryfoos; Ingersoll & LeBouf, 1997; Rohrman, 1993).

*Dropping out of school.* Chronic absenteeism has a negative effect on students, impacting their decision to drop out of school. In findings from a national study, school dropouts were more likely to have had higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness, along with behavior and disciplinary problems while in school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). Studies of dropouts show that these students began at an early age to distance themselves from school, often through non-attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Blum, Beuhring and Rinehart (2000) state that poor attendance and chronic absenteeism are excellent predictors of school dropouts. Bell et al. (1994), Dryfoos (1990), Huizinga et al. (1995), and Rohrman (1993) concur, stating that truancy is a major risk factor for dropping out of school.

There also is a social and financial impact due to truancy. Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates and they have the highest dropout rates as well (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). The consequences for these students who drop out of school are well-documented. School dropouts have significantly fewer job prospects, make lower salaries, and are more often unemployed than youth who stay in school (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). According to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001, p. 16), “6.0 percent of workers with a high school diploma were in poverty in 1999, considerably lower than the proportion of those who had not completed high school which was 14.3 percent.” High

school dropouts are also more likely to depend on welfare, experience unstable marriages, and serve time in prison than those who complete their schooling (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Thus the consequences of truancy can be seen throughout a person's life.

### *Factors to be Considered in the Development of Attendance Policies*

Students report a variety of reasons for not attending school, resulting in their being chronically absent. Attendance policies should encompass the major reasons identified as leading to attendance problems.

According to the literature, the general causes of truancy are separated into four categories (Baker et al., 2001). They are:

1. Family factors—poverty, domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse, lack of parental guidance or supervision, lack of understanding of attendance laws.
2. School factors—safety issues, school size, attitudes of teachers and school administrators, inconsistent procedures for dealing with absenteeism, inflexibility in addressing needs of diverse students.
3. Economic influences—type of employment opportunities for parents, employed students, single parent homes, high mobility rates, lack of affordable transportation, and child care.
4. Core Student variables—drug and alcohol abuse, lack of social competence, mental or physical health difficulties, poor academic performance.
5. A fifth category, community context, must be considered since community factors significantly influence the above (Cash & Duttweiler, 2006). School attendance is

influenced by community issues such as socioeconomic levels, community cohesiveness, recreational facilities, delinquent peers, street gangs, and interracial tensions.

### *Three Primary Types of Attendance Policy*

Attendance policies focus on school absenteeism and determine consequences/rewards for actions. Every year states and school districts across the country announce new or revised initiatives designed to entice, counsel, motivate, threaten and coerce students into attending school. Sound and reasonable attendance policies can set clear standards and high expectations for students (French et al., 1998). Attendance policies, according to recent studies (Bauer, 1996; McMillan, 1991; Ola, 1990) fall into three main groups: (a) punitive, (b) incentive/reward, and (c) affective/support. The groups are established by distinguishing characteristics or components of each policy type (Appendix B). Yet while policy types can be identified, research regarding outcomes has produced inconclusive results.

*Punitive policy.* Among the list of successful student absenteeism intervention practices identified by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is the use of sanctions or punitive measures to produce the desired behaviors (cited in Baker et al., 2001). Punitive attendance policies punish or impose sanctions for absenteeism. Many states have adopted the punitive approach and enacted laws that impose penalties for student attendance. Sanctions, traditionally used to respond to truancy and absenteeism, frequently mirror the punitive steps taken against other undesirable behaviors: detentions, petition to juvenile court, denial of credit, loss of points, denial of privileges, and similar measures. In 2004 a revision to Maryland's attendance law allowed complaints to be filed against truant children with the parents facing fines and jail time if they do not get their

child to school (DeVise, 2005). Gullant and Lemoine (1997) report that truancy-reduction policies and programs must include stringent laws and regulations such as parental sanctions, zero credit, suspensions, police interventions and in-school programs. According to Gullant and Lemoine, effective policies spell out a series of escalating consequences as the number of unexcused absences increases. Those consequences should be immediate, consistent, and impartial.

Punitive attendance policies that allow a maximum number of absences per semester and have negative consequences when the limit is reached have been in place for 20 years with mixed results. Brokowski and Dempsey (1979) measured the effects of a punitive attendance policy (that limited the number of absences per semester before negative consequences) at a Connecticut high school. They found that juniors and seniors with low academic abilities demonstrated the greatest improvement in attendance and the policy was an effective deterrent to student absenteeism.

Bryne (1981) developed an attendance policy in 1977 at Cinnaminson High School in New Jersey that limited the number of absences per year long course to 12 before various negative consequences (i.e., loss of credit). Average daily attendance improved to 95 percent. Ellison High School in Killee, Texas adopted a similar policy in 1980. When students exceeded seven absences during a quarter, they lost credit for each class (Carruthers, 1980).

During the 1982/1983 school year, the Austin, Texas School District adopted a policy that allowed only 10 absences (excused or unexcused) per semester before loss of course credit. That year, attendance increased to 93.5 percent (Gullant & Lemoine, 1997). Kovas' (1986) study compared two urban high schools. One school enforced a punitive

policy; the other did not. It was found that the punitive policy curbed absences Semester I but not Semester II. Petzko (1991) found that excessive absence policies in which students lose credits after a predetermined number of absences increased attendance. Belluck (2006) reported that in the Chelsea, Massachusetts School District attendance rates went down to as low as 85 percent from 90 percent because students were no longer getting grade-point reductions for unexcused absences or having grades withheld if they had more than two unexcused absences per quarter. After one year of having the punitive policy removed, administrators, teachers, and students in Chelsea agreed that it was clear that punitive measures were needed. In Tulsa City, Oklahoma, a program utilizing “Family Outreach” police officers was implemented. For three years after the policy was implemented, these officers investigated unexcused absences. The drop-out rate decreased and the average daily attendance rate was significantly higher which also increased the district’s funding (Wilson, 1993).

Pellerin (1999) found that in general, students had the best attendance record in authoritative schools – those who provided strong sanctions against behaviors such as truancy, cutting classes and chronic absenteeism. The worst attendance records were found in lenient schools – those that make few demands and provide few consequences or sanctions.

Policies that have harsh consequences may have the opposite intended effect. Punitive policies such as suspensions and detentions do not have a positive impact on attendance (Epp & Epp, 2001; Shannon & Bylsma, 2003; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Instead, the idea of in-school suspensions where students are given academic support rather than sent home is a better solution. Also important were consequences for poor

attendance such as Saturday school programs (Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, 2002).

*Reward/incentive policy.* Meaningful incentives for school attendance were identified by Baker et al. (2001) as key components of promising truancy programs. Incentives used in this type of policy have to be recognition – based but may also include special experiences or even monetary rewards. Incentive or rewards are used as motivators for school attendance and are often available to both students and their parents. Some examples of incentives include movie passes, food coupons, car lotteries, shopping sprees, laptop computers, and prepaid credit cards. Incentives could also be extra credit points, recognition pizza parties or praise.

Malbon and Nuttall (1982) stated that school officials who use positive reinforcement would notice some improvement in attendance rates of truants. Copeland, Brown, Axelrod, and Hall (1972), in an earlier study, reached a similar conclusion when the school principal praised parents for sending their children to school. The parents perceived that the school was interested in their children. Parents could check on their children's absence by calling a special number (Bittle, 1977). In this school, students could earn an opportunity to attend a school social contingent on the number of days in attendance during the preceding month. Average monthly attendance improved approximately five percent.

VanSciver (1986) developed a reward system to improve school attendance at Pocomoke High School in Maryland. This system utilized personal contact with the principal as well as peer pressure to improve attendance. Using positive notes, phone messages, and t-shirts for good attendance, PHS maintained an average daily attendance

rate of 93 percent. The goal of the program was to promote perfect attendance utilizing homerooms, thus changing patterns that students had developed in school attendance.

Callaghan (1986) described an absentee attendance program at a rural lower class, mostly white, elementary school. The majority of the student population (722 students) had a history of high truancy. Students were told they were expected to attend school every day and their attendance would be monitored. Failure to attend would not result in punishment but consistently high attendance would be rewarded. Every Friday was a special rewards day with ice cream, parties, pizzas, picnics, swimming trips to the local lake and other similar compensations. Attendance improved significantly in the beginning of the project. After six months, overall school attendance, especially among those students who had been identified as having a history of high truancy, was much improved.

Incentives policies utilizing more costly rewards have also been implemented with mixed results. During the school term 1994-1995, the St. Louis Public Schools boosted their overall attendance rate to 89.5 percent, a full percentage point increase over the prior term, resulting in an additional \$2 million in state aid for the next school year. School officials praised the “Be There” Program sponsored by the Meritz Company. Students with good attendance were allowed to select prizes from the company catalog. Other rewards granted to students included being first in the daily lunch line and having their names place on school bulletin boards. This program demonstrated a proactive approach toward attendance improvement even though the rewards were not necessarily a cause for the students to internalize school related values (Filicetti, 1998).

Dowdle (1990), principal of Dowling High School, West Des Moines, Iowa, utilized a weekly attendance lottery with donations (gift certificates, merchandise, etc.) solicited from local businesses. Once a week, a student from each grade level had his or her name drawn for a prize for achieving perfect school attendance during the preceding week. Since initiating the program, the school's average daily attendance rate increased to 95 percent.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) state that rewarding students for good attendance significantly correlates with reducing chronic absenteeism. Belluck (2006) reported that across the country schools have begun to offer extravagant incentives like cars, iPods, and even a month's rent for perfect attendance. In Chicago Public Schools, students with perfect attendance for the first three months of the year were eligible to win sizable dollar amounts towards food or rent. School districts feel these incentive programs benefit them as well, stating if they paid students and attendance increased, then districts would receive increased state funds for having a higher average daily attendance (ADA).

Moorman and Haller (2005) predicted that more outlandish incentives devised by administrators, educators and school board members would improve attendance. They stated that students would not only be offered food, money, cars, and computers but would also be offered vacation packages, clothes, and free dorm space in future college years.

Some experts say incentive programs are not a good idea and state that other strategies must be infused with reward policies (Wagstaff, Combs, & Jarvis, 2000). Plummer (1985) investigated the effectiveness of mandated incentive programs in junior high schools in Washington, DC. Findings indicated that attendance incentive plans were

useful for obtaining the goal of improved attendance, but were insufficient as a single means toward that goal. Junior high schools with written attendance plans, attendance teams, and administrators who were actively involved in the implementation of the attendance incentive plans were more successful in achieving attendance gains.

Temecula School District in California promised students big prizes (cameras, trips, and cars) for excellent attendance and as a result 43 more students come to school everyday. This netted the district an extra \$228,000 for their 2006 budget (Kabbang, 2006).

Belluck (2006) does not like paying students to come to school and as noted with an incentive only approach, the attendance rates plummeted in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Others feel if it works – do it! While the results have been mixed, however, Reimer and Dimock (2005) found that unless the incentives are meaningful, relevant and significant to motivate students to come to school, reward policies will not be effective.

Baker et al. (2001) state that effective programs to combat truancy need a “carrot” and a “stick.” Students and families need incentives contained in incentive policies to attend school (the carrot) and meaningful sanctions or consequences – contained in punitive policies (the stick) for chronic non-attendance. Additionally, however, other assistance is needed to address the underlying issues including affective policies or supportive components.

*Affective policy.* Affective policies are based on the belief that chronic absenteeism is a red flag – a symptom – that may signal any number of problems in a student’s home. These problems include isolation, disengagement, family economic problems, poverty, mental health issues, chemical abuse and physical abuse. Rather than

punishment or rewards the affective policy provides guidance and supportive mentoring services (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Wagstaff et al., 2000).

In Marion, Ohio, the Community Service Early Intervention Program focused on potential truants identified during their freshman year of high school. The students were required to attend tutoring sessions, to participate in community service projects, and to share their experiences with other referred students. Parents were also required to participate in the program. Of 28 students who took part in the program during the second semester of 1995, 20 had improved attendance records and were expected to pass their freshman year. One-hundred ninth graders were referred to the program for 1996 (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, 2003).

Testerman (1996) reported that school-based student interaction efforts using teacher advisors focused on keeping marginal students in school through a positive relationship and counseling were being implemented throughout the United States with a degree of effectiveness in reducing truancy. Gullant and Lemoine (1997) state that affective truancy policies should include strategies that bring students together. Schools should require one on campus extra curricular or service activity each semester that provides an opportunity for students to interact/socialize with new friends. Furthermore, Gullant and Lemoine state that instead of sending habitual truants to counseling or community service organizations “sentence” them to tutoring programs, online courses, and Web based tutorials.

Kreps (1999) utilized a weekly peer group as a behavioral approach with students who were at risk for truancy. The intervention program included the following components: (a) bi-weekly group meetings during homeroom, (b) student contract daily

attendance sheets, (c) discussion sessions regarding issues of non-school attendance and goal setting for academic achievement, and (d) on-going contact with parent and community liaison personnel. Success was measured by comparing baseline attendance data across 10 weeks of program implementation. Increase in motivation to attend school was determined by administration of post program questionnaires. Analysis of the data revealed that the use of peer group sessions resulted in a reduction of unexcused absences for all students involved. Intervention coupled with the Truancy Response Team caseworker achieved positive results. Parental response in reporting their child's absence has been supportive and more frequent.

Baker and Jansen (2000) provided group counseling during which elementary students who were chronically absent met with school social workers. The main goal was to improve attendance by providing a support group while building friendships and encouraging positive relationships between students. Parents were also assisted in finding community resources such as day care and health care. The intervention was very positive (99 percent had better attendance). The sample size, however, was very small (14).

In Pearia, Arizona a program, "Operation Save Kids," utilizing an affective approach was implemented. In this program school officials contact the parents of students with three unexcused absences. Parents are expected to report back to school officials steps they have taken to ensure their children regularly attend school. To avoid criminal penalty parents are required to enroll in an intensive counseling program, and parents must attend a parenting skills training program. After two years these

affective/supportive interventions resulted in a 50 percent reduction in truancy (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Gerrard, Burhans, and Fair (2003) report that affective interventions (such as the ones discussed) have provided evidence of their effectiveness such as giving students mentors, family counseling, family services and providing strong relationship opportunities with teachers work in reducing truancy (DeSocio et al., 2007). Cash and Duttweiler (2006), however, report that one policy does not provide all the answers. They state that creating incentives for parents and students while including appropriate sanctions is also necessary.

*Combination of Attendance Policies.* The following studies suggest that one policy is not enough. Chelsea High School in Massachusetts reports that after a year of an incentive only policy (the punitive policy was removed) attendance decreased (Belluck, 2006). Bauer (1996) in his study of three high schools in Illinois reports that incentive/reward policies unified with punitive and support programs produced the highest attendance rates. Ola (1990) reports that the only elements within the attendance policies in his study of 62 districts was school-to-home contact, not incentive or punitive elements. Smith's (1998) study of a small district in Virginia showed that an intended supportive program (Saturday Redemptive Program) had no effect on increasing attendance. Fort (2004) found in his study of one Midwestern high school that a punitive policy of loss of credit affected only two groups—African Americans and those students on free and reduced lunch programs. Petzko (1991) found, however, that a punitive policy where students lost credit seemed to have a positive effect on attendance. Railsback's (2004) review of the literature also reiterates these conclusions when she

reports finding little research that definitely answered the question: Do some attendance policies and strategies work better than others? While these studies indicate that some strategies seem to be more or less effective, the research is inconclusive and limited due to reasons including the fact that some utilized a small sample size, such as Bauer (1996), Smith, and Fort.

Comprehensive models that target the reduction of risk factors associated with truancy have been found to be the most promising in addressing absenteeism and truancy. The correlates of chronic truancy are holistic in nature and include family, school, economic, and student variables (Bauer, 1996; Catalano et al., 1998; Dryfoos, 1990; Schorr, 1997). The models that combine key components such as parental involvement, meaningful sanctions or consequences for truancy, meaningful incentives for school attendance, on-going school based truancy reduction programs, and support services such as mentoring, tutoring, and counseling may fare better. No one type of policy provides all the answers. Hernandez (2007) states that policy models do not have to be either/or in nature. Various policies and approaches have merit.

#### *Factors Affecting Attendance*

There are several well-established risk factors associated with student non-attendance in school, including the socioeconomic status of the school district and the size of the district. Corville-Smith et al. (1998), and Dynarski and Gleason (1999) state that impoverished living conditions are often related to non attendance. However, Howley, Strange, and Bickel (2000) found that smaller districts, while more costly to maintain, provided personalized instruction and were more able to negate the effect of poverty on student achievement, attendance and completion rates (Howley, 1994).

*Effects of socioeconomic status (SES).* As Horace Mann stated, “Education is man’s greatest invention – the balance wheel of social machinery” (Heidenreich, 1972). Yet in reality the socioeconomic status of students is an issue that often impedes their learning. Children from financially sound families have an advantage states Reid (1999). No worries interfere with the homework concentration and no focus has to be given to a growling stomach. Reid states it is fair to say the socioeconomic status of students have a significant role and is a risk factor related to student absenteeism.

Heaviside et al. (1998) state that, generally, absentee rates are highest in public schools where a large percentage of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch – schools with lower SES. Crone’s (1993) study showed that schools with the lowest attendance rates were the schools with the lowest SES. Landin’s (1995) study showed that the socioeconomic status of the student negatively affected attendance and achievement rates.

Bell et al. (1994) report that although the relationship between overall income and truancy is not firmly established, students from low income families generally have higher truancy rates. Woolfolk (1995) states that although low SES is not a high risk factor in itself for truancy, when combined with other risk factors, the risk of truancy dramatically increases. These other risk factors include low self-esteem, learned helplessness, and resistance culture. Some children from families with low SES have low self-esteem because of their economic situation, which leads them to believe that they are not good at schoolwork. These same children become victims of learned helplessness (Woolfolk). They see family members working hard, but never getting ahead. Soon, they come to believe that it is a hopeless situation and drop out of school, which is a normal

family pattern. Woolfolk cited a study conducted by Bennett in 1990, which reported that the school dropout rate for children from low income families is about one in four.

Another social risk factor associated with low SES is resistance culture, which is defined as group values and beliefs to adopt the behaviors and attitudes of the majority culture (Woolfolk). This means that some low SES students will do whatever it takes to keep their group identity and not rise above poverty. They reject the behaviors that would make them successful in school – studying, cooperating with teachers, even coming to class (Woolfolk).

Other studies showed similar results that low SES has a negative affect on attendance while students with a higher SES have less truancy. Pellerin's (1999) study showed that higher SES status groups had less truancy and a lower drop-out rate than lower SES students. He stated that a school in New Jersey reported that students in 2002/2003 with a low SES missed 10 days per year versus 7 days for students with high SES. Mora (1997) states that students who attend schools with peers in relatively high SES positions were more likely to attend and remain in school. Additionally, the Massachusetts Department of Education (2003) reports a higher drop-out rate and lower attendance rate for low SES students than for high SES. Railsback (2004) concurs stating that students from low income homes historically have had higher drop-out and lower attendance rates than higher SES students. Additionally, according to Toutkoushian and Taylor (2005), socioeconomic factors account for a large portion of the school level outcomes (test scores and ADA rates) they found in New Hampshire schools.

*Size of district.* Although the findings regarding the effects of district size and attendance are mixed, the size of a district is a key component to consider when

examining student absenteeism because it is the main factor in determining school size (Williams, 1990). The largest schools can usually be found within the largest districts (Walberg, 1992). Numerous studies suggest that students generally have better attendance and performance in smaller schools than larger ones (Abbott, Joireman, & Stroh, 2002). The small schools are usually located in the smaller districts.

The research findings on district/school size and its impact on attendance is a complex one. There are numerous factors that might interact with district size to account for variation in student and school performance. In a 2005 study of the school districts in Pennsylvania, Gong researched the effect of district size on a number of variables including student attendance based on district size. Statistical analysis concluded that district size had no direct effect on student achievement. Rather, school district SES was a more significant predictor of student academic achievement and attendance rates. Therefore, policy makers at the state level did not gain empirical evidence as to whether or not to combine smaller districts into larger ones.

Another important analysis of district size conducted by Driscoll, Halcoussin, and Svorney (2003) examined district size, school size and class size. This study found that district size has a negative effect on student performance as measured by standardized test scores and on attendance rates for elementary and middle school, but was statistically insignificant at the high school level.

*Effects of district size with socioeconomic status (SES).* Bickel and Howley (2000) studied the joint effects of school and district size in Georgia while controlling for SES by using a multi-level data analysis procedure. While the results of this study were not consistent for all grade levels, Bickel and Howley did find that, overall, small schools in

small districts showed the strongest achievement scores for less affluent students, while large schools in large districts were most beneficial for more affluent students.

In a replication of Bickel and Howley's Georgia study, Abbott et al. (2002) reported that large district size is detrimental to achievement. Further, they stated the negative relationship between school poverty and achievement is strong in larger districts. In other words, where there is a low SES, children perform better in smaller districts. Howley et al. (2000) write that smaller districts provided personalized instruction and according to some studies, negate the effects of poverty on achievement. There are many distractions in large, low SES, urban schools, whereby some students are worried about getting a meal, their safety, and making money for their family (Sweeney, 2007).

The pattern of findings of school outcomes favoring small schools continues with research on student attendance. Students in small schools have higher attendance rates than those in large schools (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Gregory, 1992; Howley, 1994; Kershaw & Blank, 1993; Walberg, 1992). As previously stated, school district size is the most significant factor in determining school size (Williams, 1990).

In a recent study conducted by the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center at the University of Maine (2003), however, no correlation was found between the size of the school district and the scores on the state's assessment, high school drop-out rate, school attendance rates or the number of seniors who go on to college.

Yet, in a 2003 session of the Arizona State Legislature when the issue of district size was addressed, it was reported that there was a significant correlation between size of district, test scores and other outcomes. The problem with this Arizona study,

however, was that the study did not account for the fact that the urban districts which are larger and have larger schools generally have a lower SES. Thus, there are conflicting reports from the research as to the effects of district size on high school attendance rate, the effects of SES on high school attendance rates and the effects of various policy types on high school attendance rates.

### *Chapter Summary*

Chapter 2 examined the effects of chronic absenteeism on student academic achievement, discipline problems, delinquency, and dropping out of school. An examination of various types of attendance policies including punitive, incentive/reward, and affective/support followed. The final section focused on SES and district size.

With many different approaches to reduce student absenteeism (both nationally and in Florida), Chapter 3 will present the research design to determine if policy type, district size and SES level are related to the district attendance rate.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

This non-experimental correlational study is designed to determine the relationship between the type of attendance policies in the high schools of the 67 Florida school districts (punitive, reward, or affective), the size of the school district (number of high school students), the socioeconomic status of the school district, (percentage of students receiving the free or reduced price lunch program), and the average daily attendance rate of the district (ADA). Additionally, the study is designed to determine if the relationship between policy type and attendance rate is moderated by SES and size. Three independent variables are generally defined as type of attendance policy, size of the school district, and socioeconomic status of the district.

The study is conducted in Florida's 67 school districts using each of the districts' policies. This study examines:

1. What policy type is used in each school district at the high school level? All district policies are identified as punitive, reward, or affective.
2. Is there a relationship between the type of policy used within a school district at the high school level and the high school average daily attendance rate of that school district?
3. Is there a relationship between the high school average daily attendance rate of the district and the variables:
  - a. Size of the Florida school district (number of high school students)

- b. Socioeconomic status (SES) percent of the district?
4. Is the relationship between the type of attendance policy and the attendance rate at the high school level moderated by the variables:
- a. Size of school district
  - b. SES percent of the district?

*Sample*

The sample for this study included all of the Florida public school districts. According to the Florida Department of Education (2006), the number of school districts in the state was 67. This study examines the current policies and practices of all the Florida school districts with respect to their high schools. At the end of the 2004/2005 school year the state of Florida had 1,227,602 elementary school students, 600,586 middle school students, and 774,775 high school students.

*Data Collection Procedure*

Data was collected for each of the tested variables with the following procedures:

*Policy Type.* For this study, the 2005-2006 attendance policies from 67 Florida school districts were examined. While required to stay within the limits of the state compulsory attendance law (Appendix A), school districts varied in the amount and type of policy in use. Many school districts posted their attendance policies on their website, either through policy manuals or student code of conduct books. All electronic documents were obtained via the Internet. For those districts who did not publish their district attendance policies online, communication was made with the office of student services and hard copies of their policies were requested.

*District Size.* The number of high school students (grades 9 through 12) was obtained via Email from a Director of the Florida Department of Education.

*SES.* The percentage of high school students receiving free and reduced lunch was obtained via Email from a Director of the Florida Department of Education.

*Attendance Rate.* The average daily attendance rate of each state high school was obtained via Email from a Director of the Florida Department of Education. Each high school's total days attended were added together to get a total district days of attendance. This result was then divided by the total possible days of attendance. The result was the average daily attendance rate of the district as a whole (with respect to high schools)

#### *Data Analysis*

Once all data was collected for each of the tested variables, the analysis was performed as follows:

*Policy Type.* Each school district attendance policy was reviewed and scored to the degree it manifests a predetermined set of criteria of punitive, affective and reward. A template (Appendix B) of policy types was used based on the following definitions (Bauer, 1996; Carruthers, 1980; Ola, 1990;):

*Punitive Policy:* A policy which punishes the student for missing school.

*Reward Policy:* A policy which provides an incentive for a student to attend.

*Affective Policy:* A policy that offers services (opportunities) to the truant student and/or the parent.

To ensure rater reliability of the coding, all policies were first examined and coded by this researcher and then given to a second rater. This second rater was required to have a doctoral degree from an accredited university, and be willing to review the

literature on the different types of attendance polices. The second rater was asked to code all polices.

Upon completion of the coding, in the event that any conflicts existed, they were to be discussed, analyzed against relevant research, and agreed upon. This study had 100 percent agreement in coding policy. Once placed into one of the three predetermined categories (punitive, reward, or affective), the data was organized.

The number of policies within each district was recorded. A percentage was calculated (ranging from 0 to 100) by dividing the number of polices within that category by the total number of polices within the district. These percentages (percent of punitive polices, reward polices, and affective polices) were then recorded for statistical analysis for the first research question, Ho1, Ho4, and Ho5.

*Size of district.* The size of the school district was determined by taking the student enrollment numbers from high schools in each of the Florida school districts. The sum of these four grade levels (9-12) were recorded and entered into a computer for statistical analysis to test Ho2 and Ho4.

*SES.* The socioeconomic status was determined by taking the number of students enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program divided by the number of students in the district. This percentage was recorded into a computer for statistical analysis to test Ho3 and Ho5.

*Attendance rate.* The attendance rate for each school district, with respect to high school enrollment, was calculated by taking the total number of non-absences divided by the total number of possible days (180). This number of students who attended school

during the 2005-2006 school year versus the number of students who could have attended school was calculated as percentage and used for statistical analysis and used to answer the first research question and all five null hypotheses.

### *Statistical Methods*

Bivariate correlation was used to determine if any relationship existed between each independent variables (district policy type, size of district, and SES level) and the dependent variable of Average Daily Attendance Rate. Multiple Regression was used to determine if any moderating effects existed between the independent variables of district size and socioeconomic status and the relationship between policy type and average daily attendance. For the moderator analysis, all variables were centered to decrease the effect of collinearity. The alpha level was set at .05.

### *Chapter Summary*

Chapter 3 outlined and discussed the procedures used in the collection and analysis of the data, and the statistical methods with respect to all variables. Chapter 4 will reveal the findings of the analyses.

## Chapter 4

### Results of the Study

This study determined the relationship between the type of attendance policies in the high schools of the 67 Florida school districts (punitive, reward, or affective), the size of the school district (number of high school students), the socioeconomic status of the school district (percentage of students receiving the free or reduced price lunch program), and the average daily attendance rate of the district. Additionally, the study determined if the relationship between policy type and attendance rate was moderated by SES and size. Three independent variables were generally defined as type of attendance policy, size of the school district, and socioeconomic status of the district. One dependent variable was generally defined as the average daily attendance rate (percentage of the students who attend school versus could attend school) for each district.

Table 1 outlines the dependent and independent variables and their abbreviations used for this chapter.

Table 1

*Variable Labels and Names*

---

Label/Acronym	Full Name/Title
SES	Socioeconomic level of district
SIZE	Number of high school students in district
ADA	Attendance Rate of district (high schools)
PUN	Punitive Policy Percentage
REW	Reward Policy Percentage
AFF	Affective Policy Percentage

---

Results

*Descriptive Statistics (SIZE, SES, and ADA)*

With the large number of Florida school districts (67), an examination of the maximum, minimum, mean, and standard deviation of all tested variables was performed.

Table 2 outlines the results of these descriptive statistics.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of all Tested Variables*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Percent Getting SES Program (SES)	67	17.83	80.20	48.04	12.40
Number of High School Students (SIZE)	67	301.00	111189.00	11855.09	19600.74
PUN Percentage	67	20.00	100.00	81.14	23.19
REW Percentage	67	.000	25.00	1.59	5.41
AFF Percentage	67	.000	80.00	17.27	22.45
Average Daily Attendance Rate (ADA)	67	87.48	97.06	92.61	2.00

*Note.* Decimal values rounded to the hundredth place.

*Size.* The smallest district examined had 301 students as compared to the largest district having 111,189 students. The mean of variable SIZE was 11,855.09 and the standard deviation was 19,600.74. The wide range coupled with the large standard deviation shows evidence of the vast difference in school district size across the state.

*SES.* The lowest percentage of students receiving the free or reduced lunch program was 17.83 percent as compared to the highest percent 80.2 percent. This shows the clear widespread difference in the percent of students receiving free or reduced price lunch programs across districts.

*ADA.* The lowest average daily attendance rate for a school district was 87.48 percent as compared to the highest rate of 97.06 percent.

## Research Question Analysis

### *Research Question 1: Type of policy implemented in each district.*

This study determined the type of high school attendance policy used in each of the Florida school districts. A percentage was calculated for each of the three pre-determined categories (Appendix B). The results were as follows:

*PUN.* The lowest percentage of punitive policy implementation within a school district was 20 percent as compared to the highest 100 percent. The mean percentage for district implementation was 81.14 percent. This high percentage shows that this type of policy is often used in Florida; thus its effectiveness is easy to examine.

*REW.* The lowest percentage of reward policy implementation within a school district was zero percent as compared to the highest percent, 25 percent. With the small range, thus small standard deviation, it appears as though this type of policy is rarely used in Florida; thus the effectiveness is difficult to examine.

*AFF.* The lowest percentage of affective policy implementation within a school district was zero percent as compared to the highest percent, 80 percent. The mean percentage for district implementation was 17.27 percent and the standard deviation was 22.45 percent. With this large range and standard deviation coupled with the low mean, the use of this type of policy in Florida varies and it is difficult to examine.

### *Hypotheses Testing*

Bivariate correlation tests were conducted using an alpha level of .05 to determine if any relationship exists between the independent variables (SIZE, SES, PUN, AFF, and REW) and the dependent variable (ADA). Table 3 represents the correlations matrix illustrating the relationships that exist.

Table 3

*Correlations of Independent Variables and ADA Dependent Variable*

Independent Variable	Pearson Correlation	p
SES	-.143	.250
SIZE	.007	.958
PUN	-.183	.139
REW	.142	.250
AFF	.154	.212

*Note.* The number of school districts tested was 67.

*Hypothesis 1 (Relationship between POLICY TYPE and ADA).* The results indicated that there was not a significant relationship ( $p=.139$ ,  $p=.250$ , and  $p=.212$ ) between any policy type implementation and the attendance rate of a district. Therefore, the null  $H_01$  cannot be rejected. Thus, there is no evidence that the type of policy a school district implements is related to the attendance rate of a district.

*Hypothesis 2 (Relationship between SIZE and ADA).* The results indicated that there was not a significant relationship ( $p=.958$ ) between the size of a school district and the attendance rate of a district. Therefore, the null  $H_02$  cannot be rejected. Thus, there is no evidence that the size of a school district is related to the attendance rate of a district.

*Hypothesis 3 (Relationship between SES and ADA).* The results indicated that there was not a significant relationship ( $p=.250$ ) between the socioeconomic status of a school district and the attendance rate of a district. Therefore, the null  $H_03$  cannot be rejected. Thus, there is no evidence that the socioeconomic status of a district is related to the attendance rate of a district.

*Hypotheses 4 and 5 (Moderation of SES and SIZE on POLICY TYPE and ADA).*

Multiple regression was used using a level of significance of .05 to determine if the relationship between policy type and attendance rate was moderated by the variables SES and SIZE. All independent variables were centered (mean subtracted from the variable) to lessen the effects of collinearity. Table 4 represents the moderation effect of SES and SIZE on the relationship between PUN and ADA.

Table 4

*Moderation Effects of SES and SIZE on the PUN and ADA Relationships*

		Coefficients(a)						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF**
1	(Constant)	92.606	.243		380.719	.000		
	Percent SES*	-.025	.020	-.157	-1.264	.211	.972	1.029
	Percent PUN*	-.017	.011	-.195	-1.558	.124	.952	1.051
	Product PUN* and SES*	2.05E-005	.001	.004	.028	.978	.932	1.073
2	(Constant)	92.608	.246		376.960	.000		
	SIZE*	-3.87E-007	.000	-.004	-.030	.976	.977	1.024
	Percent PUN*	-.014	.011	-.168	-1.294	.200	.913	1.096
	Product PUN* and SIZE*	3.81E-007	.000	.051	.391	.697	.892	1.120

a Dependent Variable: Average Daily Attendance Rate

\* Variable is centered

\*\* VIF's are small; thus there were no collinearity problems

Given the results (Beta values .004 and .051) and p values (.978 and .697), the null hypotheses of no moderation cannot be rejected. Thus there is no evidence that SES or SIZE moderated the relationship between punitive policy and attendance rate.

Table 5 represents the moderation effect of SES and SIZE on the relationship between AFF and ADA.

Table 5

*Moderation Effects of SES and SIZE on the AFF and ADA Relationships*

		Coefficients(a)					Collinearity Statistics	
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	p	Tolerance	VIF**
1	(Constant)	92.607	.244		378.87	.000		
	Percent SES*	-.024	.020	-.151	-1.213	.230	.975	1.026
	Percent AFF*	.015	.011	.170	1.333	.187	.933	1.072
	Product AFF* and SES*	.000	.001	-.020	-.155	.877	.914	1.094
2	(Constant)	92.602	.245		378.32	.000		
	SIZE*	-.024	.020	-.150	-1.218	.228	.997	1.003
	Percent AFF*	.052	.047	.141	1.113	.270	.951	1.051
	Product AFF* and SIZE*	.001	.004	.040	.313	.750	.952	1.050

a Dependent Variable: Average Daily Attendance Rate

\* Variable is centered

\*\* VIF's are small; thus there were no collinearity problems

Given the results (Beta values -.020 and .040) and p values (.187 and .750), the null hypotheses of no moderation cannot be rejected. Thus there is no evidence that SES or SIZE moderated the relationship between affective policy and attendance rate.

Table 6 represents the moderation effect of SES and SIZE on the relationship between REW and ADA.

Table 6

*Moderation Effects of SES and SIZE on the REW and ADA Relationships*

		Coefficients(a)						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	Collinearity Statistics	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF**
1	(Constant)	92.602	.245		378.321	.000		
	Percent SES*	-.024	.020	-.150	-1.218	.228	.997	1.003
	Percent REW*	.052	.047	.141	1.113	.270	.951	1.051
	Product REW* and SES*	.001	.004	.040	.313	.755	.952	1.050
2	(Constant)	92.620	.252		367.992	.000		
	SIZE*	4.36E-006	.000	.043	.286	.776	.698	1.434
	Percent REW*	.060	.051	.163	1.171	.246	.802	1.247
	Product REW* and SIZE*	1.91E-006	.000	.050	.314	.754	.616	1.622

a Dependent Variable: Average Daily Attendance Rate

\* Variable is centered

\*\* VIF's are small; thus there were no collinearity problems

Given the results (Beta values .040 and .050) and p values (.755 and .754), the null hypotheses of no moderation cannot be rejected. Thus there is no evidence that SES or SIZE moderated the relationship between reward policy and attendance rate.

#### Additional Analyses: One School District Examined

Given that Florida's 67 school districts yielded no significant relationships across any of the tested variables, it was decided to examine one south Florida school district to

determine if by changing the unit of analysis (to individual schools) any relationship would emerge. Table 7 represents a comparative analysis of the descriptive statistics (school size and school SES level) of a large south Florida metropolitan school district (with individual schools considered as the unit of analysis) to the aggregate state data. Policy type (intervention program) data was not considered, as access to this school data was limited and permission was not obtained.

Table 7

*Comparison of One Florida School District to Statewide Data (Descriptive)*

Category	One Individual District*	Statewide Data (67 District)**
Percent Getting SES Program (SES Maximum)	68.82	80.20
Percent Getting SES Program (SES Minimum)	7.80	17.83
Percent Getting SES Program (SES Range)	61.02	62.37
Percent Getting SES Program (SES Mean)	37.97	48.08
Percent Getting SES Program (SES Standard Deviation)	18.03	12.40
Number of High School Students (SIZE Maximum)	5,060	111,189
Number of High School Students (SIZE Minimum)	1,183	301
Number of High School Students (SIZE Range)	3,877	110,888

*(table continues)*

Table 7 (continued)

Category	One Individual District*	Statewide Data (67 District)**
Number of High School Students (SIZE Mean)	2,537.00	11,855.09
Number of High School Students (SIZE Standard Deviation)	75.00	19,600.74
Average Daily Attendance Rate (ADA Maximum)	94.43	97.06
Average Daily Attendance Rate (ADA Minimum)	86.84	87.48
Average Daily Attendance Rate (ADA Range)	7.59	9.58
Average Daily Attendance Rate (ADA Mean)	90.72	92.61
Average Daily Attendance Rate (ADA Standard Deviation)	2.15	2.00

\*Individual schools as unit of analysis

\*\*School district as unit of analysis

The descriptive statistics of one school district (using individual schools as the unit of analysis) and statewide data (using entire school districts as the unit of analysis) were similar. Bivariate correlation was used to determine if any significant relationship existed among the two independent variables (SES and SIZE) and one dependent variable (ADA) within that one selected school district. An alpha was set at .05. Table 8 shows the results.

Table 8

*One District Test: Matrix of SIZE and SES and ADA as Dependent Variable*

Independent Variable	Pearson Correlation	p Value
SES	-.588	.001
SIZE	.057	.778
PUN	N/A	N/A
REW	N/A	N/A
AFF	N/A	N/A

*Note.* The number of school districts tested was 1.

There existed a significant relationship between the SES level at the school level and the ADA ( $p=.001$ ) in the analysis of one school district. In addition, this relationship between SES and ADA was negatively correlated ( $r=-.588$ ) meaning the higher the SES level the lower the ADA. There did not exist any relationship between the variables of school size and ADA ( $p=.778$ ) when examining the individual school size.

#### Chapter Summary

This study identified the type of policy used in each of the 67 Florida school districts (punitive policy the most often used). In addition, it was determined that no relationship existed between the type of attendance policy (punitive, reward, or affective), the SES level of the school district, the number of high school students, and the average daily attendance rate. Lastly, this study found that the relationship between policy type and average daily attendance was not moderated by the variables SES and SIZE.

An additional analysis was conducted to compare the descriptive statistics of one south Florida district (size and SES) to the state as a whole in order to determine if, by changing the unit of analysis to individual schools, any relationship would exist. A test of bivariate correlation determined that a significant relationship existed between the SES level and ADA in the one Florida district; however no relationship was found at the district level test.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Student absenteeism is not new to education. It has existed for as long as there have been students in schools. Consequently, student absenteeism presents a complex educational dilemma which often results in school districts creating punitive, reward, or affective policies to increase the attendance rate. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the type of attendance policy (punitive, reward, or affective) in the high schools of the 67 Florida school districts, the size of the school district (number of high school students), the socioeconomic status of the school district (percentage of students receiving the free or reduced price lunch program), and the average daily attendance rate of the district. Additionally, the study determined if the relationship between policy type and attendance rate is moderated by SES and size.

This non-experimental correlational study involved three (3) independent variables (policy type, SES level and district size) and one (1) dependent variable (average daily attendance rate). Five (5) null hypotheses were tested. Bivariate correlation, Pearson product moment correlation ( $r$ ), and multiple regression were used in the treatment of the data.

The attendance policies in Florida, once coded, were placed in three pre-determined categories: punitive, reward, or affective. An overwhelmingly high emphasis on the punitive policy was observed. The five null hypotheses were not rejected. Three hypotheses tested centered on the premise that there were no significant relationships that

existed between policy type and attendance rate, SES percent and attendance rate, and district size and attendance rate. Furthermore, two additional hypotheses were not rejected that centered on the premise that no significant moderation effects existed between the variables district size and SES on the relationship between policy type and attendance rate. An alpha level of .05 was set.

### *Discussion of Findings*

*Punitive is most popular district high school attendance policy.* Across Florida's 67 school districts, different policy types existed. Each individual district policy was placed into one of three pre-determined categories: punitive, reward, and affective. The type of policy most used was punitive (mean of 81.14) as compared to reward (mean of 1.59) and affective (mean of 17.27). It is interesting to note that with such a high value placed on punitive policy, Florida also had a high overall average daily attendance rate (92.6 percent) which would suggest that high punitive policy implementation yields high attendance rate, although that was not established by this study.

This finding follows prior research. The research has stated that the most widely used policy type is punitive in nature (Baker et al., 2001; Gullant & Lemoine, 1997; Wilson, 1993) which parallels the finding in this study. The research also states that punitive policies have a positive effect by raising a district's attendance rate (Baker, et al.; Gullant & Lemoine; Kovas, 1986; Petzko, 1991).

While the study shows the implementation of a preponderance of punitive policies, no significant relationship with attendance rates existed at the district level. In addition, the low implementation of non-punitive policies (reward and affective) did not allow for their effectiveness to be fully addressed. There is research supporting the

effectiveness of both reward and affective type policies (Belluck, 2006; Cash & Duttweiler, 2006; DeSocio et al., 2007; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), yet Florida school districts, for the most part, did not implement these types of policies. The question still remains as to what level the average daily attendance rate of Florida schools would have risen or fallen to had more non-punitive policies been implemented.

*No significant relationship identified between attendance rate and attendance policy type.* This study examined the policies used in high schools across the 67 Florida school districts and found that no significant relationship existed between the type of policy implemented and the average daily attendance rate.

This study shows that no one type of attendance policy is significantly related to the district average daily attendance rate. Punitive policy was shown to have the highest correlation with attendance rates ( $p=.139$ ) as compared to reward policy ( $p=.250$ ) and affective policy ( $p=.212$ ). It was not possible, however, to establish any significant relationships.

Some previous studies that focused on policies and the effectiveness of each type had similar findings (Baker et al., 2001). Bauer (1996) conducted a study that compared different policies in Illinois and also found no difference in effectiveness but limited his sample to three high schools. Similarly, Vaishnav (2005) examined pre-post average daily attendance rates after punitive and incentive policies were implemented and found no significant difference in the effect of policy type; however, only one was high school was used. While Bauer's and Vaishnav's studies had findings similar to this study, their studies used individual schools as the unit of analysis as opposed to this study which examined whole district data.

Yet, other studies as discussed in Chapter 2 reported findings that various policies were more effective than others (Belluck, 2006; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fort, 2004; Gullant & Lemoine 1997; Ola, 1990; Pellerin, 1999). These studies, however, had small samples and eventually showed mixed results over time.

*No significant relationship identified between attendance rate and district size.*

This study found that attendance rates were not significantly related to the size of the school district. The finding concurs with Driscoll et al.'s (2003) analysis of district size which found that while district size has a negative effect on attendance rates for elementary and middle schools, it was statistically insignificant at the high school level. Gong (2005) also concluded that district size had no direct effect on attendance rates.

This study examined a larger number of districts (67) as compared with Gong's 2005 study or Driscoll et al.'s 2003 study. The districts ranged in size from 301 to 111,189 students. With that disparity in district size, it was surprising that the differences between a large urban district and a small rural district were not reflected in the average daily attendance rate.

*No significant relationship identified between attendance rate and SES level.*

Attendance rates were not significantly related to the socioeconomic status of the school district. This finding is contrary to prior research. Crone (1993), Heavside et al. (1998), and Landin (1995) stated that, generally, absentee rates are highest in schools with a low SES. Pellerin's (1999) study showed that higher SES groups had less absenteeism than lower SES groups across public high schools. Additionally, the Massachusetts Department of Education (2003), Railsback (2004), and Toutkoushain and Taylor (2005)

concluded that socioeconomic factors negatively affect attendance rates and school level outcomes.

The districts in this study had a wide range in SES level (17.8 to 80.2 percent); yet in the analysis of SES impact on attendance rates, no statistical significance was found. This researcher believes that despite the wide variation amongst district SES levels, when tested with the small variation of the attendance rates, the predictability is lessened. This was evidenced when an additional analysis was conducted of an individual school district using individual schools as the unit of analysis and a significant relationship between SES and the average daily attendance rates (Table 8) was found. The finding thus indicates the need to use a smaller unit of analysis instead of an entire school district in order to measure the relationship between SES and attendance rate.

*Relationship between attendance policy and attendance rates not moderated by district size.* The relationship between the type of policy a school district implements and the attendance rate of the district was not moderated by the independent variable of district size. This finding concurs with research that supports that while policy type and district size have minimal effects on the attendance rate at the high school level, the size of the school does have an effect. As previously discussed, this study, however, did not consider the size of individual schools which proved to be a major limitation.

Prior research states that district size is the most significant factor in determining school size. Smaller schools are typically found in smaller school districts (Williams, 1990). Additionally, statistical outcomes favor small districts over larger districts when examining attendance rates for high school students (Fowler, 1995; Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Gregory, 1992; Howley, 1994; Kershaw & Blank, 1993; Walberg, 1992). Given

that the range of district sizes in this study was large (between 301 and 111,189 high school students) as was the standard deviation (19,600), it was surprising that the variable of district size did not moderate the relationship.

*Relationship between attendance policy and attendance rates not moderated by SES level.* The relationship between the type of policy a school district implements and the attendance rate of the district was not moderated by the independent variable of SES. Fort's (2004) study found that a punitive policy seemed to have a positive effect with students with a low SES. The sample size of Fort's study was small (one high school) and data collected was exclusively at the school level. This study did not consider the SES level of individual schools; thus the determination as to which SES level school works best with which policy type was not measured. The need to examine this is great.

### *Conclusion*

The study culminates in one conclusion adding to the body of scholarship on school attendance policy development and implementation, and informs educational leadership. Primarily, this research study discovered that no significant relationship existed between the implemented attendance policy and the attendance rate at the district level. The results of this study show that when measured at the district level, the effect of policy type cannot be easily determined. While this research showed a heavy emphasis placed on the implementation of the punitive policy type, the intended effect was not truly found, therefore, warranting the examination of additional policy types to be used in conjunction with the punitive type at the individual school level.

As explained in Chapter 2, researchers, such as Gullant and Lemoine (1997), Petzko (1991), and Belluck (2006) all conducted studies exploring how the policy types

relate to attendance rates over time. While the results of these studies showed an increase in attendance rates over time, this study did not account for longitudinal data analysis across any tested variable. Thus, future examination of school districts across the United States and in other countries using longitudinal data could prove useful for policy makers.

The results of this study add to the research on district size and SES by showing that no significant relationships exist between the number of high school students in a district, the district SES level, and the attendance rate. While a plethora of research exists on the correlation of individual school size, SES and student absenteeism, studies using district size and district SES levels are scarce. This indicates how difficult it is for policy makers to know how to combat student absenteeism. School leaders, district personnel and school boards would be wise to consider the option of drafting attendance policy to help minimize high school absenteeism at the school level.

### *Recommendations*

Based on findings of this study, recommendations for future research, school leaders, and policymakers are presented:

1. While punitive policy was the most commonly used policy across the 67 Florida school districts, no significant relationship was found at the district level; therefore there is a need to assess the implementation of reward and affective policies in conjunction with the punitive policies. The fidelity or degree to which the punitive policy was implemented, as well as the measures chosen by schools in punitive policy implementation (for example, a grade reduction used for an unexcused absence, a student parking permit revoked, or a Saturday detention issued), were not examined. Although it is assumed that each school within a district adheres to policies set forth by that district,

there is a need for more detailed attendance policy analysis of individual school programs and closer examination of the degree of policy implementation.

2. An investigation of the relationship between a school's individual policy, size, SES level, and the attendance rate (using the school as the unit of analysis) should be conducted. This examination should include in depth interviews with school administrators to understand better the up close picture as to what is occurring at the "ground level." The variation in SES and school size between individual high schools within a district could warrant school level, not district level policies. This researcher believes the results showing that no significant relationships existed between the tested variables and no moderation effects existed upon the policy type/attendance relationship at the district level should be reviewed with school districts as they plan implementation of attendance policy and procedures within each district. This information can assist school policymakers by prioritizing what type of policy their respective school district should or should not use relative to their values and beliefs. The lack of significant relationships could allow district personnel the freedom to develop and modify current policies as needed and use school level data (attendance rates) to determine effectiveness.

3. The overall attendance policy is created at the district level; however, each school should be granted the authority to design and implement individual programs which directly relate to student needs and motivation, school culture, and personnel of that school. Each school's policy can follow the parameters of the district policy but would be individualized. The policies used (punitive, reward, and affective) should be clearly outlined at each school site. The process of implementation should be delineated,

personnel responsible trained, and daily attendance rates available for data based decision making.

In closing, while not providing the definitive answer as to what policy type will produce the highest average daily attendance rate, this study has added relevant research to the leadership field with respect to school district size and SES levels and their effects or lack of effect when developing district attendance policy. No significant relationships were identified for three essential variables and student absenteeism. The lack of significant relationships between the different policy types, SES level, and district size have been closely examined with respect to 67 district attendance rates and the question related to improving student attendance in school remains unanswered. Therefore, the future regarding this issue lacks clarity. The individual school level appears to hold the most promise as the focal point of policy development.

Across the nation and in Florida, the site of this study, there continues to be a substantial number of students missing school each day. While the tactics and policies implemented by school districts vary, the common goal of students attending school everyday persists. The need to solve the student absenteeism problem remains a challenge and it is hoped that through additional study of high school and district attendance policy and practice, policies can be created that invite and inspire students to come to school daily.

## References

- Abbott, M., Joireman, J., & Stroh, H. (2002). *The influence of district size, school size, and socioeconomic status on student achievement in Washington: A replication student using hierarchical linear modeling*. Lynwood, WA: Washing School Research Center, Seattle Pacific University.
- At-risk youth in crisis: A handbook for collaboration between schools and social services*. (1991). Albany, OR: Linn-Benton Education Services District.
- Bafle, C. (2007). Triumph over truancy: Tips for improving student attendance. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from [www.education-world.com/attendance](http://www.education-world.com/attendance)
- Baker, D., & Jansen J. (2000). Using groups to reduce elementary school absenteeism. *Social Work in Education, 22*(1), 46-53.
- Baker, M. L., Sigman, J. N., & Nugent, M. E. (2001). *Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Bauer, B. A. (1996). *An analysis of high school policies and practices on truancy and attendance rates within educational service 9*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from *ProQuest Digital Dissertations* database. (Publication No. AAT 9702457)
- Bell, A. J., Rosen, L. A., & Dynlacht, D. (1994). Truancy intervention. *The Journal of Research and Development in Education, 57*(3), 203–211.

- Belluck, J. (2006, January 19). And for perfect attendance Johnny gets a car. *New York Times*, p. A1.
- Bickel, R., & Howley, C. (2000). The influence of scale on student performance: A multi-level extension of the Matthew Principle. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(22).
- Bittle, R. G. (1977). Recorded telephone messages: A technique for reducing absenteeism. *Educational Technology*, 17(69), 49-51.
- Blasik, K. (2005). *Student absences in Broward County public schools 1998-99 to first semester 2003-04*. Fort Lauderdale, FL: School Board of Broward County.
- Blum, R. W, Beuhring, T., & Rinehart, P. M. (2000). *Protecting teens: Beyond race, income and family structure*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Center for Adolescent Health.
- Brokowski, W. M., & Dempsey, R. (1979). Attendance policies and student performance. *The Clearing House*. 53(3), 129-130.
- Bryne, R. (1981). Capturing the elusive student. *NASSP Bulletin*, 65, 29-33.
- California State Office of the Attorney General. (1982). *Truancy reduction: The hooky handbook*. Sacramento, CA: School Safety Center. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. Ed 232287)
- Callaghan, R. K. (1986). *The development and implementation of an absentee improvement program*. Thesis Practicum, Nova University, Fort Lauderdale, FL.
- Carruthers, R. (1980). An attendance policy that works. *NASSP Bulletin*, 64, 440, 117
- Cash, T., & Duttweiler, P.C. (2006). Planning, collaboration, and implementation: Strategies for truancy programs. *National Dropout Prevention Center*, 3, 22.

- Catalano, F. R., Arthur, M. W., Hawkins, J. D., Berglund, L., & Olson, J. J. (1998). Comprehensive community- and school-based interventions to prevent antisocial behavior. In R. Loeber & D. Farrington (Eds.), *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions* (pp. 31-43). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cavron, D. T., Nemerofsky, A., Rock, E. E., & Kerins, M. (1996). Risk of unsuccessful program completion for students with serious emotional/behavioral disorders: An epidemiological risk analysis. *Behavioral Disorder, 21*, 172-189.
- Christie, K. (2006). Counting the truants. *Phi Delta Kappan, 87* (7), 485.
- Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (2002). *Youth out of school: Linking absence to delinquency*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved October 1, 2005, from [www.coloradofoundation.org/donnorreport2.pdf](http://www.coloradofoundation.org/donnorreport2.pdf)
- Copeland, R., Brown, R., Axelrod, E., & Hall, V. (1972). Effects of a school principal praising parents for school attendance. *Educational Technology, 57-59*.
- Corville-Smith, J., Ryan, B. A., Adams, G. R., & Dalicandro T. (1998). Distinguishing absentee students from regular attendees: The combined influence of personal, family, and school factors. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 27*(5), 629-640.
- Crone L. (1993). *An examination of attendance in Louisiana Schools*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 365735)
- De Leonibus, N. (1978). Absenteeism: The perceptual problem. *The Practitioner, 5*(1), 1-12.
- DeKalb, J. (1999). *Student truancy*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. 125. ED 429334)

- DeSocio, J., Vancure, M., Nelson, L., Hewitt, G., Kitzman, H., & Cole, R. (2007). Engaging truant adolescents: Results from a multifaceted intervention pilot. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(3), 3-11.
- Devise, D. (2005). MD tries putting truants on spot. Retrieved May 23, 2007, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A5241-2005Jan12.html>
- DiMassa, C. (2004, December 2). District takes tough track on truancy. *Los Angeles Times*, p. B4.
- Dougherty, J. W. (1999). Attending to attendance (Fastback No. 450). Bloomington, IN: *Phi Delta Kappan International*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED454571)
- Dowdle, J. (1990). Keeping kids in school. *NCA Quarterly, 64*(3), 470-472.
- Driscoll, D., Halcoussin D., & Svorney, S. (2003). School district size and student performance. *Economics of Education Review, 22*, 193-203.
- Dryfoos, J.G. (1990). *Adolescents at risk: Prevalence and prevention*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dynarski, M., & Gleason, P. (1999). *How can we help? Lessons from federal dropout prevention programs*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematic Policy Research, Inc.
- Ekstrom, R. B., Goertz, M. W., Pollack, J. M., & Rock, D. A. (1986). Who drops out of high school and why? Findings from a national study. *Teachers College Record, 87*(3), 356-373.
- Eldrid, P., & Inman, K. (2005). *Bunking off*. Retrieved November 1, 2006, from <http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/F/family/problems/truancy.html>

- Epp, J. R., & Epp, W. (2001). Easy exit: School policies and student attrition. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 6(3), 231-247.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308-318.
- Filicetti, F. J. (1998). Truancy in the Buffalo public schools: A study of compulsory attendance policies at the beginning and end of the twentieth century. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 58, 11A.
- Florida Compulsory Attendance Law. (2005). Statute 1003.21. [All]. Retrieved July 5, 2007, from [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov)
- Florida Department of Education (2006) *Florida's districts and schools*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from [http://www.fldoe.org/schoolmap/flash/district\\_list.as](http://www.fldoe.org/schoolmap/flash/district_list.as)
- Fort, D. A. (2004). A study of the effectiveness of a modified attendance policy at a medium-sized high school in the Midwest. Retrieved January 28, 2008, from *ProQuest Digital Dissertations* database. (Publication No. AAT 3154262)
- Fowler, W. J., Jr. School size and student outcomes. (1995). *Advances in Educational Productivity* 5, 3-26.
- Fowler, W. J., Jr., & Walberg, H. J. (1991). School size, characteristics, and outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 13(2), 189-202.
- Franklin, B., & Crone, L. (1992). *School accountability: Predictors and indicators of Louisiana school effectiveness*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 3514261)

- French, D., Gullledge, S. A., & Cox, N. D. (1998). *Advisory: Definitions, descriptions, decisions, directions*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Gallup, A. M., & Elam, S. M. (1999). The 19th-21st annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, (1), 69-71
- Garry, E. M. (1996). *Truancy: First step to a lifetime of problems*. *Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Gerrard, M. D., Burhans, A., & Fair, J. (2003). *Effective truancy prevention and intervention*. Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research Center. Retrieved November 1, 2006, from [www.wilder.org/research](http://www.wilder.org/research)
- Gong, Y. (2005). The size effect of school district on fiscal management, administrative leadership, and student achievement a comprehensive analysis of school districts in rural Pennsylvania using PSSA and CCD data. Retrieved January 28, 2008, from ProQuest Digital Dissertations database. (Publication No. AAT 3174323)
- Gregory, T. (1992). Small is too big: Achieving a critical anti-mass in the high school. In *Source book on school and district size, cost, and quality* (pp. 1-31). Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 361 159)
- Gullant, D., & Lemoine, D. (1997). Truancy: What's a principal to do? *American Secondary Education*, 7-12. (ERIC Digest EJ527489)
- Heavyside, S., Rowand, C., Williams, C., & Farris, E. (1998). *Violence and discipline problems in U.S. public schools: 1996-97*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of

Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Educational Statistics.

Heidenreich, R. R. (1972). *Urban education*. Arlington, Texas: College Readings.

Hernandez, M. (2007, April 30). Keeping kids in the classroom: Area school systems tackling the issue with a focus on prevention and stronger enforcement. *The Washington Post* (Final Edition), p. B.2

Howley, C. (1994). *The academic effectiveness of small-scale schooling (an update)*. Charleston, WV: Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. ERIC Digest. (ED 372 897)

Howley, C., Strange, M., & Bickel, R. (2000). *Research about school size and school performance in impoverished communities*. WW: Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED448968)

Huizinga, D., Loeber, R., & Thornberry, T. (1995). *Urban delinquency and substance abuse: Initial findings*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Ingersoll, S., & LeBouf, D. (1997). *Reaching out to youth out of the educational mainstream*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention.

Inman, K. (2002). *Bunking off*. Retrieved December 16, 2006, from <http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/F/family/problems/truancy.html>

Kabbang, J. (2006, June 3). District's attendance campaign nets \$228,000. *The California/North County Times*, p. 6.

Kearney, C., Eisen, A., & Silverman, W. (1995). The legend and myth of school phobia. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 10(1), 65-85.

- Kelley, B. T., Loeber, R., Keenan, K., & DeLamarte, M. (1997). *Developmental pathways in boys' disruptive and delinquent behavior*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Kelley, B. T., Thornberry, T., & Smith, C. (1997). *In the wake of childhood maltreatment. Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Kershaw, C., & Blank, M. (1993). *Student and educator perceptions of the impact of an alternative school structure*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association. Atlanta, GA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 360729)
- Kovas, M. (1986). A comparison of secondary attendance school student performance in attendance and achievement with relationship to the use or non-use of a restructure and punitive administrative control policy for attendance. (ERIC Digest ED278120)
- Kreps, R. (1999). *A behavioral peer group approach to combat truancy in the middle school*. Retrieved June 6, 2005, from (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 435875)
- Lan, W., & Lanthier, R. (2003). Changes in students' academic performance and perceptions of school and self before dropping out of schools. *Journal of Education for Students Place at Risk*, 8(3), 309-393.

- Landin, D. (1995). Testing for the effect of school size on student achievement within a school district. *Educational Economics* 3(1), 33-42.
- Landin, D. (1996). Evidence of student attendance as an independent variable in education production functions. *Journal of Educational Research*, 89(3), 155-62.
- Landsberg, M. (2007, March 21). L.A. United keeping tabs in its truants. *Los Angeles Times*, p.3
- Levanto, J. (1975). High school absenteeism. *National Association of Secondary Schools Principals Bulletin*, 59(393), 100-104.
- Loeber, R., & Farrington, D. (2000). Young children who commit crime: Epidemiology, developmental origins, risk factors, early interventions, and policy implications. *Development and Psychopathology*, 12(4), 737-762.
- Malbon, L. C., & Nuttall, R. L. (1982). A promising approach to absenteeism in the secondary school. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 64(1), 36-38.
- Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center at the University of Maine. (2003), Retrieved July 22, 2007, from <http://www.umaine.edu/mcsc/Research.htm>
- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2003). Retrieved online: October 26, 2007 from [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu)
- McMillan, N. C. (1991). Secondary school attendance policies in Indiana, attendance and withdrawal percentages, and other selected factors a multi-variate analysis. Retrieved January 28, 2008, from *ProQuest Digital Dissertations* database. Publication No. AAT 9134357)
- National Center for Educational Statistics*. (2002). Retrieved June 30, 2006, from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol\\_4/4\\_4/q2\\_2.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_4/4_4/q2_2.asp)

- No Child Left Behind Act.* (2001). Retrieved June 3, 2006, from  
<http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplans03/index.html>
- Ohio State Department of Education. (1983). *Improving attendance: Minimum standards Implementation Series.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 252 942)
- Ola, J. (1990). *Attendance polices: Are they effective in reducing student absenteeism?*  
Retrieved January 28, 2008, from ProQuest Digital Dissertations database.  
(Publication No. AAT 9106778)
- Pellerin, L. (1999). Urban youth and schooling: The effect of school climate on student disengagement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 441883)
- Petzko, V. (1991). School characteristics and attendance rates: What is their relationship? *NASSP Bulletin*, 75(538), 121-125.
- Plummer, F.L. (1985). A descriptive study of the impact of the mandate of the attendance plans of junior plans of junior high schools of the District of Columbia public schools. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 46, 6A.
- Puzzanchera, C. (1999). National Center for Juvenile Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, July 2003.
- Puzzanchera, C., Stahl, A., Finnegan, T., Snyder, H., Poole, R., & Tierney, N. (2003) *Forthcoming: Juvenile court statistics report.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Railsback, J. (2004). *Increasing student attendance strategies from research and practice.* By request. Portland, Or: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

- Rapp, J. A., Carrington, F., & Nicholson, G. (1986). *School crime & violence victims' rights*. Malibu, CA: National School Safety Center.
- Redick, M., & Nicoll, R. (1990). *Final evaluation of the 15 day attendance policy (P.1)*. Mt. Diablo United School District. Retrieved June 3, 2006, from <http://www.mdusd.k12.ca.us/>
- Reid, K. C. (1999). Alienation and persistent school absenteeism. *Research in Education*, 26(4), 32.
- Reimer, M., & Dimock, K. (2005). *Best practices and model truancy programs*. Truancy Prevention in Action. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED491287)
- Robins, L. N., & Ratcliff, K. S. (1978). *Long-range outcomes associated with school truancy*. Washington, DC: Public Health Service.
- Roby, D. (2004). Research on school attendance and student achievement: A study of Ohio schools. *Education Research Quarterly*, 28(1), 3-16.
- Rohrman, D. (1993). Combating truancy in our schools—a community effort. *NASSP Bulletin* 76(549), 40–51.
- Rood, R. E. (1989). Advice for administrators: Writing the attendance policy. *NASSP Bulletin*, 73(516), 21-25.
- Schargel, F., & Smink, J. (2001). *Strategies to help solve our school dropout problem*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Schorr, L. B. (1997). *Common purpose: Strengthening families and neighborhoods to rebuild America*. New York: Doubleday.

- Schwartz, W. (1995). *School dropouts: New information about an old problem* (ERIC/CUE Digest No.109). New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 386515)
- Shannon, G. S., & Bylsma, P. (2003). *Helping students finish school: Why students dropout and how to help them graduate*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Retrieved October 1, 2005, from [www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/dropoutreport2003.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/research/pubdocs/pdf/dropoutreport2003.pdf)
- Skiba, R. J., & Knesting, K. (2001). Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of school disciplinary practice. In R. J. Skiba & G. G. Noam (Eds), *Zero tolerance: Can suspension and expulsion keep schools safe?* (pp. 17-43). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, W. K. (1998). *An evaluation of the attendance policy and program and its perceived effects on high school attendance in Newport News public schools*. Retrieved January 28, 2008, from *ProQuest Digital Dissertations* database. (Publication No. AAT 9831671)
- Snyder, H. N., & Sickmund, M. (1995). *Juvenile offenders and victims: A national report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Starr, L. (2002). *Tackling teen truancy*. Retrieved March 3, 2007, from [www.educationworld.com/a\\_issues/issues300.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_issues/issues300.shtml)
- Sweeney, E. (2007, January 28). Schools go all out to cut truancy. *Boston Globe*, p. 1.
- Testerman, J. (1996). Holding at risk students. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(2), 364.

- Toutkoushian R., & Taylor C. (2005). Effects of socioeconomic factors on public high school outcomes and ratings. *Journal of Educational Research, 98*(5), 259
- U.S. Department of Education, (1993). *Conditions of education: 1993 (Indicators 32 and 34)*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- U.S. Department of Education, (1996). *Manual to combat truancy: 1996*. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from [www.ed.gov/pubs/Truancy/index](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Truancy/index)
- U.S. Department of Education, (2003). *Truancy sweeps: 2003*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance/truancysweeps/index.cfm>
- U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2001). *A profile of the working poor, 1999. Report 947*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Vaishnav, A. (2005, July 30). Chelsea youths find school does pay off: Perfect attendance yields cash rewards. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved June 3, 2006, from [http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2005/07/30/chelsea\\_youths\\_find\\_school\\_does\\_pay\\_off/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2005/07/30/chelsea_youths_find_school_does_pay_off/)
- VanSciver, J. (1986). Use rewards to boost student attendance. *Phi Delta Kappa, 58*(4), 23-27.
- Wagstaff, M., Combs, L., & Jarvis, B. (2000). Solving high school attendance problems: A case study. *Journal of At-Risk Issues, 7*(1), 21-30.
- Walberg, H. J. (1992). On Local Control: Is Bigger Better? In *Source Book on School and District Size, Cost, and Quality* (pp. 118-134). Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs; Oak Brook, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 361 164)

- Walls, C. (2003). *New approaches to truancy. Prevention in urban schools*. ERIC Digest ED48916
- Williams, D. (1990). *The dimensions of education: Research on school size*. Working Paper Series. Clemson, SC: Clemson University, Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 34700)
- Wilson, K. (1993). Tough on truants. *American School Board Journal*, 180, 43-46 ERIC Digest EJ461151
- Woolfolk, A. E. (1995). *Educational psychology*. U.S.: Allyn and Bacon. (Original work published 1980)
- Zinth, K. (2005). *Truancy and habitual truancy: Examples of state definitions*. Retrieved June 30, 2006, from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/61/16/6116.htm>

Appendix A

Florida Compulsory Attendance Law

## Florida Compulsory Attendance Law

Florida's compulsory school attendance law (Statute 1003.21, 2005) states that students between the age of six (6) years and sixteen (16) must attend school regularly. Furthermore, it is the responsibility (Statute 1003.26, 2005) of each individual school district to have policies and procedures in place to ensure that schools respond in a timely manner to every unexcused absence or absence for which the reason is unknown. The Statute states that each district must require each parent of a student to justify each absence, and that justification will be evaluated on the adopted district school board policies that define excused and unexcused absences. The policies must provide that schools track excused and unexcused absences and contact the home in the case of an unexcused absence from school, or an absence from school for which the reason is unknown, to prevent the development of patterns of nonattendance. The statute states that the Legislature finds that early intervention in school attendance matters is the most effective way of producing good attendance habits that will lead to improved student learning and achievement. Each public school (Statute 1003.26, 2005) shall implement the following steps to enforce regular school attendance:

(a) Upon each unexcused absence, or absence for which the reason is unknown, the school principal or his or her designee shall contact the student's parent to determine the reason for the absence. If the absence is an excused absence, as defined by district school board policy, the school shall provide opportunities for the student to make up assigned work and not receive an academic penalty unless the work is not made up within a reasonable time.

(b) If a student has had at least five unexcused absences, or absences for which the reasons are unknown, within a calendar month or 10 unexcused absences, or absences for which the reasons are unknown, within a 90-calendar-day period, the student's primary teacher shall report to the school principal or his or her designee that the student may be exhibiting a pattern of nonattendance. The principal shall, unless there is clear evidence that the absences are not a pattern of nonattendance, refer the case to the school's child study team to determine if early patterns of truancy are developing. If the child study team finds that a pattern of nonattendance is developing, whether the absences are excused or not, a meeting with the parent must be scheduled to identify potential remedies, and the principal shall notify the district school superintendent and the school district contact for home education programs that the referred student is exhibiting a pattern of nonattendance.

(c) If an initial meeting does not resolve the problem, the child study team shall implement interventions that best address the problem. The interventions may include, but need not be limited to:

1. Frequent communication between the teacher and the family;
2. Changes in the learning environment;
3. Mentoring;
4. Student counseling;
5. Tutoring, including peer tutoring;
6. Placement into different classes;
7. Evaluation for alternative education programs;
8. Attendance contracts, or
9. Referral to other agencies for family services.

## Appendix B

### Type of Attendance Policy

Type of Attendance Policy (Carruthers, 1980; Ola, 1990; Bauer, 1996)

Affective Policy: A policy that offers services (opportunities) to the truant student and/or the parent. Examples would include but not be limited to:

- a. individual school counseling being offered to each student with more than a certain number of days absent.
- b. family counseling being offered to all those related to the student if necessary.
- c. assignment of a peer mentor / peer counselor to the truant student.
- d. the implementation of an individualized contract allowing the student to express the reasons he/she does not attend school.

Punitive Policy: A policy which punishes the student for missing school. Examples would include but not be limited to:

- a. any grade percentage deduction as a result of an unexcused absence or tardy.
- b. the giving of a “0%” in place of all (any) missing assignments given that day.
- c. a student not being allowed to make up work for an absence/tardy.
- d. a student not being allowed to attend a school function for missing school.

Reward Policy: A policy which provides an incentive for a student to attend school. Examples would include but not be limited to:

- a. the addition of any percentage points given to students for having good attendance.
- b. the chance for students to be exempt from final exams based upon the attendance of the student.
- c. the opportunity for students to win a prize (i.e. money) for good attendance.
- d. the opportunity for a student to earn privileges of his/her choice if he/she attends school for a pre-determined amount of days.

## Appendix C

### Examples of Truancy Definitions

Truancy and Habitual Truancy  
 Examples of State Definitions  
 Updated by Kyle Zinth  
 April 2005

For the most part, compulsory attendance laws do not specify the number of times a student must be truant before sanctions (also part of the compulsory attendance laws) are enforced. A number of states require districts to set attendance policies and sometimes ask that districts identify the number of absences that constitute “truant” or “habitual truant” in those policies. Others, as reflected below, set the standard for truancy at the state level. The following states do not constitute a comprehensive listing, but do provide some examples of policy for others to consider:

State	Definition of Truancy	Definition of Habitual Truancy
Arizona	Truancies are unexcused absences for at least one class period during the school day (ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 15-803).	Habitually truant students are truant for at least five school days within a school year (ARIZ. REV. STAT. § 15-803).
California	<p>Any pupil subject to compulsory full-time education or to compulsory continuation education who is absent from school without valid excuse three full days in one school year or tardy or absent for more than any 30-minute period during the school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year, or any combination thereof, is a truant and shall be reported to the attendance supervisor or to the superintendent of the school district (CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48260).</p> <p>Any pupil who has once been reported as a truant and who is again absent from school without valid excuse one or more days, or tardy on one or more days, shall again be reported as a truant to the attendance supervisor or the superintendent of the district (CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48261).</p>	A student is deemed an habitual truant if the student has been reported as a truant three or more times in one school year. No student will be deemed an habitual truant unless an appropriate district officer or employee has made a conscientious effort to hold at least one conference with a parent or guardian of the pupil and the pupil himself, after the filing of either of the reports required by CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48260 or CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48261 (CAL. EDUC. CODE § 48262).
Colorado		A student between seven and 16 years old having four unexcused absences from public school in any one month or 10 unexcused absences from public school during any school year is habitually truant. Absences due to suspension or expulsion are considered excused (COLO. REV. STAT. § 22-33-107).

*(table continues)*

State	Definition of Truancy	Definition of Habitual Truancy
Connecticut	Truants are children age five to 18, enrolled in a public or private school with four unexcused absences from school in any month or 10 unexcused absences from school in any school year (CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-198A).	Habitual truants are children age five to 18, enrolled in public or private schools, with 20 unexcused absences within a school year (CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-200).
Delaware	Truant means a student who has been absent from school without valid excuse for more than three school days during a school year (DEL. ST. TI. 14, § 2721).	
Florida		An habitual truant is a student who has 15 unexcused absences within 90 calendar days with or without the knowledge or consent of the student's parent and is subject to compulsory school attendance (FLA. REV. STAT. § 1003.01).
Illinois	A truant is a child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without valid cause for a school day or portion thereof (ILL. REV. STAT. CH. 105, PARA. 5/262A).	A child subject to compulsory school attendance and who is absent without a valid excuse from school for 10% or more of the previous 180 regular attendance days is a chronic or habitual truant (ILL. REV. STAT. CH. 105, PARA. 5/262A).
Kentucky	Any student who has been absent from school without valid excuse for three or more days, or tardy without valid excuse on three or more days, is a truant. Being absent for less than half of a school day is regarded as being tardy (KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 159.150).	<p>Any child who has been reported as a truant two or more times is an habitual truant (KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 159.150).</p> <p>Any child who has been found by the juvenile court to have been reported as a truant two or more times during a one-year period is an habitual truant (KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 600.020).</p> <p>Per annotations: “While ‘habitual truant’ is defined differently in KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 159.150 and KY. REV. STAT. ANN. § 600.020, the statutes may be reconciled in their application by district courts and pupil personnel directors.”</p>
Louisiana		A student shall be considered habitually absent or habitually tardy after (1) all reasonable efforts by the principal and the teacher have failed to correct the condition after the fifth unexcused absence or fifth unexcused tardy within any month or (2) if a pattern of five absences a month is established (LA. REV. STAT. ANN. § 17:233).

*(table continues)*

<b>State</b>	<b>Definition of Truancy</b>	<b>Definition of Habitual Truancy</b>
Maine	A person required to attend school or alternative instruction under Maine’s compulsory school attendance law is truant when an absence of a half day is not excused (ME. REV. STAT. ANN TIT. 20-A, 3272).	A person is habitually truant if they are required to attend school or alternative instruction and have attained the equivalent of 10 full days of unexcused absences or seven consecutive school days of unexcused absences during a school year (ME. REV. STAT. ANN TIT. 20-A, 3272).
Minnesota		An habitual truant is a child under the age of 16 years who is absent from school without lawful excuse for seven school days – if the child is in elementary school – or for one or more class periods on seven school days if the child is in middle, junior high or high school. A child who is 16 or 17 years of age who is absent from school without excuse for one or more class periods on seven school days and who has not lawfully withdrawn from school is an habitual truant (MINN. REV. STAT. § 260C.007).
Nevada	A pupil who has one or more unapproved absences from school is considered truant (NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 392. 130).	Any child who has been declared a truant three or more times within one school year will be declared a habitual truant (NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 392.140).
New Mexico	Truant means a student who has accumulated five unexcused absences within any 20-day period (N.M. STAT. ANN § 22-12-9).	A student who has accumulated the equivalent of 10 or more unexcused absences within a school year is an habitual truant (N.M. STAT. ANN § 22-12-9).
Pennsylvania		Habitually truant means absence for more than three school days or its equivalent following the first notice of truancy given under PA. STAT. ANN. TIT. 24, § 13-1354 (PA. STAT. ANN. TIT. 24, § 13-1333).
Texas		A student commits an offense if he is required to attend school under Texas’ compulsory school attendance law and fails to attend school on 10 or more days or parts of days within a six-month period in the same school year or on three or more days or parts of days within a four-week period (TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.094).

*(table continues)*

State	Definition of Truancy	Definition of Habitual Truancy
Utah	Any school-age minor who is subject to the state's compulsory education law, and who is absent from school without a legitimate or valid excuse, is truant (UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A-11-101).	Any school-age minor who has received more than two truancy citations within one school year from the school in which they are or should be enrolled and eight absences without a legitimate or valid excuse or who, in defiance of efforts on the part of school authorities to resolve a student's attendance problem, refuses to regularly attend school or any scheduled period of the school day is an habitual truant (UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A-11-101).
Wisconsin	Truancy means any absence of part or all of one or more days from school during which the school attendance officer, principal or teacher has not been notified of the legal cause of the absence by the student's parent or guardian. It also means intermittent attendance carried on for the purpose of defeating the intent of Wisconsin's compulsory school attendance law (WIS. REV. STAT. § 118.16).	A student who is absent from school without an acceptable excuse for part or all of five or more school days during a school semester is considered habitually truant (WIS. REV. STAT. § 118.16).
Wyoming	An unexcused absence is the absence – as defined in the policies of the local board of trustees – of any child required to attend school when such absence is not excused to the satisfaction of the board of trustees by the parent or guardian (Wyo. Stat. Ann. § 21-4-101).	Any child with five or more unexcused absences in any one school year is an habitual truant (WYO. STAT. ANN. § 21-4-101).

Resources:

ECS State Policy Database:

<http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecscat.nsf/WebTopicView?OpenView&RestrictToCategory=Attendance--Truancy>

*Kyle Zinth, assistant researcher in the ECS Clearinghouse department, updated this report.*

Appendix D  
Email Correspondence

Hi Ryan,

Below is permission to use the report from Mary Ann Strombitski, who heads up our communications department. Please let me know if we can be of further assistance.

Best,  
-Kyle

----- Forwarded by Kyle Zinth/ECS/US on 01/02/2008 03:25 PM -----

Yes, you can pass along that he has my permission.  
Thank you, Kyle.  
Mary Ann

**Kyle Zinth/ECS/US**

To Mary Ann Strombitski/ECS/US@ECS  
Subject Fw: Material Request

[Redacted]

Hi Mary Ann,

I spoke with this gentleman today on the phone. Would you be able to grant him permission to use the report?

Thanks,

Kyle

----- Forwarded by Kyle Zinth/ECS/US on 01/02/2008 03:14 PM -----

**"Ryan T. Reardon"**  
<[ryan.reardon@browardschools.com](mailto:ryan.reardon@browardschools.com)>

To [kzinth@ecs.org](mailto:kzinth@ecs.org)  
cc [pmaslin@fau.edu](mailto:pmaslin@fau.edu)  
Subject Material Request

[Redacted]

Hello Mr. Zinth,

Thanks for speaking with me today by phone!

As discussed, I am interested in including your report (as an Appendix) Truancy and Habitual Truancy (Examples of State Definitions) - April 2005- in my dissertation at Florida Atlantic University.

I would like to obtain your permission to do so before using and/or referencing this list of the multiple truancy definitions that exist.

Thank you in advance!

Ryan T. Reardon

This email correspondence grants permission for the use of the K. Zinth report.