PERCEIVED BEST PRACTICES USED IN LOW-SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, HIGH-ATTENDANCE HIGH SCHOOLS

By

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I dedicate my work to my mom. She always told me that anything I wanted to know could be found in a book. Little did I know that one day I would write a "book" so others might learn. I love you, Mom.

Abstract

PERCEIVED BEST PRACTICES USED IN LOW-SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, HIGH-ATTENDANCE HIGH SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this study was to identify best practices perceived and used by principals in low-SES high schools to achieve high annual attendance rates.

The study was an applied qualitative design, which used interviews for data collection and an emergent approach to data analysis. It involved a combination of criterion and extreme sampling to identify and interview eight principals from low-SES high schools (grades 9–12) in West Virginia with an annual attendance rate over 90%. Coding and data analysis processes involved in vitro and structural protocols.

The following best practices emerged from the research in order of most to least used: offering incentives and student recognition; establishing a positive school culture with high expectations for students to come to school; holding meetings with parents, students and an administrator; having personalized communication between students and an adult within the school; telephoning families of absent students; consistently following established district and state policies for attendance; and picking up absent students at their homes.

All the approaches revealed could be characterized as aspects of one overall best practice: developing a positive culture within the school. The ensuing specific best practices were actions and policies consistently applied and enforced.

Improved attendance results in improved performance and college- and career-readiness. Approaches similar to those revealed in this study of high-attendance, low-SES

West Virginia high schools may help to improve attendance and achievement in other high schools, not just in West Virginia, but throughout the United States.

Keywords: attendance, strategies, low-socioeconomic status, high schools, principals

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On the front page of the June 15, 2016 West Virginian *Charleston Gazette-Mail* was the headline "School daze, 14% of students chronically absent." The article went on to report recent federal information that "About 14 percent of West Virginia's Studies—40,000 out of 283,800 pupils in kindergarten through 12th grade—missed at least 15 days of school in the 2013–2014 school year" (Quinn, 2016, p. A1). The writer of the article reported that 6.5 million, or about 13% of students attending public schools nationwide, missed at least 15 days of school in 2013–2014, according to the results from the U.S. Education Department's Civil Rights Data collection. Fifteen days of absence from school is the minimum number of absences for students to be considered chronically absent, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2016).

For a number of years, I have been the principal of a school that includes students from preschool to grade 12. In my role, my priority is always student achievement. Although cliché, I do want students to be all that they can be when they graduate. One of the obstacles that I have faced in maximizing student achievement is poor student attendance. The students who struggle the most with the graduation requirements set forth by the state are often those who miss the most school. The students who miss the most school are often from the low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) subgroup. (For simplicity, throughout this dissertation, schools with a high rate of low-socioeconomic status students will be referred to as low-SES.) In Grant County, WV, during the 2014–2015 school year, 73% of the students with greater than 10 unexcused absences were low-SES (personal communication, Grant County Schools, State of the County Address 2016, PowerPoint slide 34). A student is defined as low-SES if he meets the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) income eligibility guidelines for free or

reduced-price meals. Although West Virginia policy concentrates primarily on unexcused student absences, it is my belief that any type of absence is detrimental to student learning.

Statement of the Problem

Missing 20% of a 180-day academic year is equivalent to being absent 36 days. After 5 years of missing 20% of school, a student has missed almost one year of instruction. A student who begins a pattern of chronic absenteeism in kindergarten could easily be a year behind at the end of fifth grade. If the average student attends school for 13 years, the absences equal over two years of school.

The incidence of chronic absenteeism—missing 15 days or more of school in a year—increases as students progress from elementary to high school. For example, during the 2010–2011 school year, the chronic absenteeism rates reported for the 10% of schools with the highest absenteeism in Maryland for elementary, middle, and high schools were 24%, 41%, and 67% respectively (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Twenty-eight of these schools are high schools, in which it is the norm for as many as one-half to two-thirds of students to be chronically absent. A school district such as Baltimore City Public Schools with a chronic absenteeism rate of 25% means that 17,796 students are not in school at any given time (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). At a national level, of the approximately 50 million students enrolled in public school, 5 to 7.5 million are not attending regularly (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Using Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) survey data, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reported that in the 2008–2009 school year the percentage of West Virginia students who were chronically absent in sixth grade was 20%; for those in grade 12, it was 32%.

It is intuitive that attendance would influence student achievement. One measurement of achievement is grade point average (GPA). Students who consistently attend school have higher GPAs than those who attend irregularly (Bracht, 2010; Gottfried, 2010; Roby, 2004; Strickland, 1998). Student achievement is also measured by state assessment results. Research confirms another straightforward yet important relationship between regular attendance and test scores (Clement, 2006; Crone, Glascock, Franklin, & Kochan, 1993; Parke & Kanyongo, 2012; Roby, 2004).

Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) analyzed longitudinal information from the ECLS-K study. They found a strong correlation between poverty and chronic absenteeism. Race did not appear to be a factor: both White and Black students of low-SES had significantly lower attendance rates when compared to similar students who were not low-SES (Parke & Kanyong 2012). Students from low-income families are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers, possibly because they face challenges in getting to school, which may include unreliable transportation, lack of access to health care, community violence, and unstable housing (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014).

One year of chronic absence continues to have a negative influence on student performance in reading and math for the next two consecutive years. Low-SES children who were chronically absent in kindergarten had the lowest performance in reading and math in fifth grade (Chang & Romero, 2008).

Administrators who desire to make gains in overall school student achievement can do so by focusing on the group in which most gains can be made, low-SES students. To increase achievement, improve attendance. Improved attendance leads to higher

student achievement, increased high school graduation rates, and a rise in college attainment.

Accountability was a major focus of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which became void August 1, 2016 due to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), defined as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA still makes accountability, as measured by student performance, a focus. States are allowed to determine how they will measure and report performance, and how they will use federally-required testing for accountability purposes. States must include federally-required tests in their accountability systems, but are able to determine the weight of those tests in their systems. ESSA also requires schools to include, as measures of accountability, graduation rates, one other measure of postsecondary education or workforce readiness, and English proficiency for English learners (National Conference of State Legislatures, n.d.).

West Virginia incorporated the requirements of ESSA in the July 2016 update to Policy 2320, *A Process for Improving Education: Performance Based Accreditation System*, an accountability system designed to give parents and communities an annual update on multiple components and measures of success providing an overall view of how well students are learning, growing, and achieving. Each school receives a letter grade of A through F based upon the total score of these measures, calculated via a composite score weighting the factors of attendance, high school graduation rates, and evidence of college- and career-readiness, combined with student achievement, measured by the West Virginia General Summative Assessment. This score, the most heavily weighted of all factors in the composite school rating, is a test of student ability in the

subjects of reading and math (grades 3–11), and science (selected grades vary). Eighty-three percent of each school's A–F grade is determined by student performance metrics, and 17% by non-performance items, such as attendance, graduation rates, and passage of Advanced Placement exams and dual-credit courses (West Virginia Board of Education, 2016). The 83% student performance weight is measured by both academic growth and proficiency.

Effective schools produce students who achieve, regardless of their demographics. Lezotte and Snyder (2011), after compiling research about effective schools, developed a list of seven characteristics, or correlates, that successful schools share:

- high expectation for success;
- strong instructional leadership;
- clear and focused mission;
- opportunity to learn/time on task;
- frequent monitoring of student progress;
- safe and orderly environment; and
- positive home-school relations (pp. 1-2).

Collectively, these correlates can be used to define effective schools and to compare one school to another. Individually, correlates can be analyzed by a school in order to identify specific areas of improvement. Opportunity to learn and time on task are affected by attendance. Chapter 2 presents research from multiple studies which affirm the relationship between attendance and achievement, especially among low-SES students. Improving low-SES students' attendance will enhance their achievement.

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The problem is maximizing student attendance. Students with higher attendance rates have higher GPAs than those with lower attendance rates (Bracht, 2010; Gottfried, 2010; Roby, 2004; Strickland, 1998). Research reveals a relationship between school attendance and test scores: higher attendance rates correlate with higher test scores (Clement, 2006; Crone et al., 1993; Parke & Kanyongo, 2012; Roby, 2004). Student achievement is important because it is associated with increased high school graduation rates and a rise in college attainment. Student attendance is additionally important because, under the requirements of ESSA, it can be considered one of the nonacademic factors for evaluating high schools such as those in West Virginia.

Second to the classroom teachers, school leadership is the most influential factor in improving student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). It is the influence of the school leader that determines the effectiveness of any school improvement efforts, including those associated with attendance.

The purpose of this study was to identify perceived best practices used in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates. The research question that I posed was:

What are the best practices perceived and used by principals in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates?

I explored what low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates did that influenced students to attend school. From this research, I was able to develop a list of best practices—strategies that have been found to improve overall student attendance in these low-SES schools.

The phrase "best practices" is defined in this study as strategies or actions effective in producing desired results. A best practice is contextually specific. A best practice in the medical profession is different from a best practice in education. A best practice in a low-SES school could be different from a best practice in a high-SES school. The Educational Opportunity Association (EOA) defines best education practices as "the wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmic approaches to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behaviors" (Arendale, 2016, para. 2). Munro (2005) describes best practices as those activities, strategies, and techniques that have been developed by educators over time, found effective, and shared with others.

Significance of Study

The United States strives to be a world leader in economics and political influence. Producing academically competent students who can compete globally is a measure of a nation's competitive leadership. Per the World Economic Forum, in 2011 the United States ranked fourth in global economic competitiveness. In 2015, the United States ranked fourteenth in education attainment when compared to 40 other countries (Rice, 2015). In the United States, West Virginia is not a leader in economic growth, ranking 49th in WalletHub's analysts' comparison of the economic performance of the 50 states and the District of Columbia across three key dimensions: Economic Activity, Economic Health and Innovation Potential (Sharf, 2016).

As the educational and administrative leader of my school, it is my responsibility to oversee the instruction of the students so that they are prepared for post high school experiences—either employment or college. I want my school to do well when it is evaluated using the new A–F rating system. The two most substantially weighted factors

determining a school's rating are student achievement and improvement on the annual West Virginia General Summative Assessment. Attendance affects both measurements.

Chronic absenteeism can become truancy, which is a step in the process of a student's decision to drop out of school. Dropouts hurt themselves and the general economy. The United States is one of comparatively few countries facing the challenge of school truancy, which is largely limited to developed countries (Reid, 2008).

The significance of this study is that, once principals' best practices leading to high attendance in low-SES high schools are identified, they can be widely promoted and utilized to improve student achievement on both local and national scales.

It is my intent to fill a gap in existing research, targeting specifically the attendance of low-SES high school students. The potential impact of this study will be actualized through maximized student achievement, increased graduation rates, and enhanced college- and career-readiness, not only in West Virginia but throughout the United States, as a result of developing and disseminating to principals a composite of best practices found effective in achieving high attendance rates in low-SES schools.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model used in this study assumes that attending school fosters cognitive development in children. The connection between school attendance and learning is supported by Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context: one learns from one's social environment. People learn from one another by observation, imitation, and modeling. The school is the major social environment providing students the setting for learning. Students acquire knowledge in the classroom through observation and modeling of

teachers and other students; therefore, presence in the school environment is central to student learning. Consequently, students who do not come to school cannot achieve as well as those who do come to school.

Research Design Overview

I conducted an applied qualitative design, using interviews for data collection and emergent approach to data analysis—my findings emerged from my investigation. The purpose of my applied research study was to develop a list of perceived best practices that low-SES schools use to improve attendance. "Applied research is conducted in a field of common practice and is concerned with the application and development of research-based knowledge about that practice" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 13). I used an emergent approach because "the procedure for coding and categorizing is less structured and prescribed" (p. 347). As I progressed in my study, I was increasingly able to recognize, describe, and understand best school practices. "Such studies are most frequently employed to investigate natural variation, to study phenomena to see what can be learned" (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005, p. 3).

Interviewing principals of 100% low-SES high schools with high annual attendance produced information applicable to all low-SES schools, not just those in West Virginia, but throughout the United States.

Research Question

The question that I explored was:

What are the best practices perceived and used by principals in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates?

I explored measures taken by low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates to influence students to attend school. I developed a list of potential strategies to recommend for low-SES high schools, to improve overall student attendance.

Philosophical Assumptions

The theoretical perspective underlying this study was pragmatism, which, as defined by Creswell (2009), "arises out of actions, situations, and consequences" (p. 231) with a concern for applications, for what works, and for solutions to problems. The focus was on outcome, with emphasis on addressing and solving a research problem. Like defined pragmatist researchers, I examined the "what" and "how" to complete my research, based upon my intended results—the development of a list of best practices promoting attendance in low-SES high schools.

Limitations

The limitations of this investigation were:

1. The study was geographically limited to public high schools within West Virginia.
2. Interview bias may have influenced the interviewees.
3. The interviewer may have influenced the interpretation of the interview results.

Delimitations

The time of the study was February 2017 through March 2017. Only West Virginia high schools serving grades 9–12 were asked to participate. The schools selected had student populations considered to be 100% low-SES. Finally, these high schools had the highest annual attendance rates in West Virginia for the 2014–2015 school year. If

there was more than one administrator in a school, I interviewed the one most involved in overseeing student attendance.

Definitions

In this study, certain key terms are used, defined here for agreement in the author's intended meaning and the reader's understanding.

Attendance rate: The number of days students are present in school, divided by the total number of days in a given school year, multiplied by 100. The same formula applies to both individual students and specified groups.

Best practices: The strategies or actions that effectively bring about desired results.

Chronic absenteeism: The missing of 15 or more days of school in one year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Excused absence: An absence with written notification from a parent to the school justifying the absence with a reason that meets the requirements of state or local policy.

Grade Point Average (GPA): The culmination of grades received resulting from completion of courses. The process for the calculation of grade points may vary by district, school, and teacher. The GPA is the average obtained by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of credits attempted.

Low-socioeconomic status (low-SES): Financial situation in which a student meets the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-price meals.

Low-socioeconomic status percentage for a school: The number of low-SES students divided by the total number of students in the school, multiplied by 100.

Regular attendance: Missing 5 or fewer days of school per year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Truancy: Excessive or chronic unexplained absences by a student who is still enrolled in school and has not officially dropped out.

Unexcused absence: An absence for which the school has received no written explanation, or for a reason not in keeping with state guidelines for excused absences.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides a statement of the problem, background of the study, purpose and rationale of the study, significance of study, theoretical framework, research design overview, research question, philosophical assumptions, limitations, delimitations, definitions, and describes the organization of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature addressing the history of school attendance; a theoretical framework; attendance and absenteeism by grade level; students' reasons for attending and not attending school; and absenteeism's effects on student achievement in the areas of student graduation, GPA, and test performance. It presents research examining three influences on student attendance: student socioeconomic status; family; and school culture and climate, with emphasis on school leadership. It considers strategies for improving attendance in schools and concludes with analysis of the described research.

Chapter 3 provides the research design, research question, population and sample, instruments developed to gather the data, data collection and analysis procedures, methods of the verification, role of the researcher, and measure of ethical protection.

Chapter 4 includes findings of the study related to the collection of the data with first cycle and second cycle coding. The data are applied to the research question, and explanations for the findings (best practices and principal perceptions) and conclusions are synthesized.

Chapter 5 includes the summary of the study, discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future practice and research on student attendance

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature related to school attendance. The review is divided into 10 sections. It provides general information about the history of school attendance; a theoretical framework for the study; research about attendance and absenteeism by grade level; reasons for attending and not attending school; how absenteeism affects student achievement; the influence of socioeconomic status on attendance and achievement; family influence on absenteeism; relationships between school culture, climate, and attendance; and, strategies for improving attendance. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the literature reviewed.

History of School Attendance

Attendance is managed at the school level, yet monitored at the state and federal levels. The first compulsory attendance law was enacted in Massachusetts in 1853. New York had one a year later. Almost all of the states had a compulsory attendance law in effect by the end of the nineteenth century. Thirty-two states had them by the beginning of the twentieth century (Alexander & Alexander, 2012). All states have laws to define the age by which a child must begin school and determine the age until which a child must remain in school.

Although student achievement, measures of it, and accountability for it have been important issues to American society since the time of Horace Mann, an influential advocate of public education in the mid-1800s, there has been little to no direct federal policy concerning attendance rate requirements for students. Increased federal government involvement in school accountability began with the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Federal funding allocated to schools

in need provided a mechanism for holding schools accountable and increasing equality in education at the national level. Title I of the Act (formerly known as Chapter 1) detailed the necessary provisions to allocate federal funding. The purpose of Title I is to provide funds for improved educational programs for children designated as educationally deprived (Spring, 2014). A school with more than 40% of its students classified as low income by the US government qualifies for Title 1 designation.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) required states to track student improvement on state-created assessments for the calculation of adequate yearly progress (AYP). Additionally, high schools must meet state graduation rate standards and at least one non-test-based academic indicator. Attendance rate was one of those specified indicators.

NCLB became void August 1, 2016, due to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), referred to as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA continues to require student performance as a focus of accountability. States are allowed to determine how they will measure student performance, but must include achievement tests along with other measures of accountability. Required measures for postsecondary education are graduation rates, a measure of workforce readiness, and a measure of English proficiency for English learners (National Conference of State Legislatures, n.d.). States report these, and their selected other measures of student performance, to the public and explain how they will use federally-required testing for accountability purposes. Weighting of measures is determined by states.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model used in this study employs Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which substantiates the connection between school attendance and learning. The theory asserts that people learn from each other by observation, imitation, and modeling, School, a major part of a student's social environment, provides all of these elements in an ideal setting for learning. Students acquire knowledge in the classroom through observation and modeling of teachers and other students. Public school students' achievement is facilitated by the social environment of the school; therefore, that environment is central to student learning. Consequently, students who do not come to school cannot achieve as well as those who do.

Attendance and Absenteeism by Grade Level

Attendance rates are calculated as the number of days a student is present in school divided by the total number of days that have passed in the school year, multiplied by 100. Several studies demonstrate that the occurrence of chronic absenteeism follows a predictable pattern throughout the various grades of school. A student generally misses the most days during first year of school (either preschool or kindergarten). No research was available to explain this phenomenon. These excessive absences could be attributed to families' unfamiliarity with establishing a school routine or to young students having not yet built immunities against germs found in a large social environment. **S**tudent attendance rates improve after the first year, but then subsequently decrease in each grade level, and often reach their lowest rate at grade 12 (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In a study of attendance patterns in a Florida school system, the number of students who missed more than 15 days of school increased with the grade level: 15% at the elementary level,

23% at the middle school level, and 29% for high school students (Clement, 2006). Another study comparing elementary and secondary school students confirms this pattern: elementary school students have higher attendance rates (95%) than do secondary school students (92%) (Crone et al., 1993).

Parke and Kanyongo (2012) calculated attendance rates for the 2001–2005 school years for grades 1–12 in an urban district with approximately 32,000 students. They defined stable attenders as those who were absent less than 5% of the school year and remained in the same school throughout the academic year. Eighty percent of first grade students were identified as stable attenders compared with 40% of grade 12 students; grade 12 students were one-half as likely to be stable attenders (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012).

Clement's (2006) 5-year longitudinal study of Howard County, Maryland Public Schools students, conducted from 1998–2003, affirms other studies' findings. Clement (2006) examined attendance data for all students in elementary, middle, and high school, analyzing patterns of excused of unexcused absences. Findings revealed that the number of excused, compared to unexcused, absences is greater for elementary than for high school students. An excused absence is one with written notification from a parent to the school explaining the reason the student missed school. The explanation meets state or local policy requirements. An unexcused absence is an absence for which the school has received no written notification or the reason fails to meet established guidelines. In high school the number of unexcused absences is significantly greater than the number of excused absences. Possible explanations for the increase in unexcused absences in high school are lack of family support associated with academic success or missing school

without parental knowledge. Clement observed that students missed more school during the second half of the school year than during the first half. No explanation for this was provided. Studies of reasons why students do not attend school offer some insight and are the topic of the next section.

Reasons for Attending and Not Attending School

Reasons for not attending school are numerous and interrelated. Six studies addressing reasons for not attending school are highlighted in this section. The first is a multivariate analysis completed in Canada. In that study, six variables surfaced with predictability to determine if a student was an attender or an absentee. Attenders and absentees were each matched with a peer of similar grade and sex in the same school. Each student completed a number of measurements assessing personal characteristics, family relations, and school variables (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998). In rank order of strength, the variables most affecting attendance were: students' perceptions of school; perceptions of parental discipline; parental control; students' academic self-concept; perceived family conflict; and students' social competence in class. The study suggests that students who miss excessive school "are less likely to perceive school experience favorably, are more likely to perceive parental discipline as lax or inconsistent, are more likely to perceive stronger attempts by parents at control, feel inferior academically, experience family conflict, and are less likely to be socially competent in their relations in class" (p. 631). The Canadian study affirms five other less-structured studies reporting similar reasons students missed school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bracht, 2010; Henry, 2007; Klerman et al., 1987; Reid, 2008).

Students reported non-health related issues slightly more often than health related issues as the reason for missing school, 51% compared to 48% (Klerman et al., 1987). Answers remained consistent when Bracht (2010) asked students why they did not come to school. She learned that home-initiated factors (doctor's appointments, travel out of town, transportation) were significant occasions for students not to attend school. Dislike of school and poor relations with teachers were cited by two studies as reasons students do not attend (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Klerman et al., 1987). These two studies also cited conditions at school, like bullying or feeling unsafe, as discouraging students from attending. Low value placed on education by students or their families is also a reason for non-attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bracht, 2010).

In her study of eighth and tenth graders, Henry (2007) identified family characteristics associated with higher truancy. Truancy refers to students who have excessive or chronic absences, but have not officially dropped out of school. The probability of truancy increases when students and families have low academic aspirations. "As students accumulated more school disengagement risk factors, the likelihood of dropping out of school dramatically increased" (p. 162). The probability of truancy increased with student drug use and decreased if a student's mother or father graduated from college. Other factors associated with a lower probability of truancy included participation in religious services, quality of home supervision, participation in college-readiness coursework, academic success, the expectation of graduation from high school, and the prospect of going to college.

In 2007, Reid worked with British principals, teachers, and social service workers to form a common list of reasons why students miss school. These professionals observed

that students did not attend school for multiple reasons, including dislike of school, home difficulties, and psychological issues. The dislike of school is attributed to learning difficulties, poor student-to-teacher relationships, and type of curriculum. Home factors contributing to absenteeism included poor parenting skills and parents who condone absenteeism or contribute to it (Reid, 2008).

Absenteeism Effects on Student Achievement

Student achievement is adversely affected when students do not go to school. The research presented in the following three subsections addresses achievement in the areas of high school graduation, performance on state and national assessments, and student grade point averages.

Failure to graduate. Graduation from high school is a measure of student achievement. Six studies have examined the relationship between graduation and attendance since 1986: Kieffer, Marinell, and Neugebauer (2014); Rumberger (2011); Stern, Cattreall, Alhadeff, and Ash (1986); Allensworth and Easton (2007); and Balfanz and Byrnes (2012). Findings from these studies are presented and have a common theme: missing school contributes to dropping out and failing to graduate.

Variables other than attendance—such as credits earned, courses passed, grade point average, annual attendance rate, and state testing performance—have a positive association with graduation. Kieffer et al. (2014) used these variables to develop an on-track-to-graduation indicator. They observed that students in a top quartile were predicted to graduate at a rate of 92%, while those in the bottom quartile had 7% chance of graduation. These variables represent occurrences over a number of years.

Dropping out of high school is a process, not an event (Rumberger, 2011). This process takes place over time during a student's career. Rumberger (2011) reports that the final departure of a student, dropping out, is a culmination of multiple events. A student is considered a dropout when he or she no longer attends any school without having received a high school diploma. Dropping out can occur when a student officially withdraws, does not enroll in a school after moving to a new school district, or just fails to report to school.

The effects of dropping out are numerous, as are the reasons for concern, as described by Rumberger (2011). Economically, persons who drop out of school have more difficulty finding employment, earn less income, and have poorer health and higher rates of mortality than those who graduate. Dropouts are more likely to engage in criminal behavior and be incarcerated. They are more likely to require public assistance; they pay less state and federal tax; and are less likely to vote. The United States is not alone in dealing with dropouts. Rumberger (2011) reported from the Organization for Economic Co-operative Development (OECD) that in other member countries, the average graduation rate in 2008 was 83%. The United States' average was 77%; Germany had the highest with 97%.

Dropping out of high school is not a new phenomenon or a new concern. A 1986 California report analyzed dropout information for that state and compared its student data with other national statistics. Consistent with other research, the results showed that students who dropped out of school had a history of frequent absences and low achievement. Stern et al. (1986) noted that dropouts were often from low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) families, households without a father, and/or in families which

frequently moved. The reason most often given as to why students dropped out was that they did not like school. Minority students were more likely to report poor grades, economic reasons, and pregnancy or marriage (females) as explanations for leaving school before graduation.

Chronic absenteeism can lead to dropping out of school, but so can even moderate absenteeism. In a longitudinal study of high school freshmen, students who missed just one or two weeks of school per semester faced a reduced probability of graduating. Of one cohort studied, only 63% of students who missed 5 to 9 days graduated, compared to 87% of those who missed less (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Students with 10 to 14 missed days were 41% more likely not to graduate. Course attendance in freshman classes was found to be eight times more predictive a factor than eighth grade test scores for dropping out of high school.

Two groups of factors that predict student drop-out, according to Rumberger (2011), are individual factors associated with the student and contextual factors found in families, school, and the community. Individual factors include absenteeism, misbehavior, lack of engagement, and failing courses. Family background contributes to success in school in that "socioeconomic status most commonly measured by parental education, and family income is a powerful predictor of school achievement and dropout behavior" (Rumberger, 2011, p. 9). Contextual factors found related to dropping out include school demographic composition, structural characteristics, school resources, policies, and practices. However, of all factors, chronic absenteeism is the strongest predictor of dropping out Balfanz and Byrnes (2012).

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) used longitudinal data from Florida to study a cohort of all first-time sixth graders beginning in the 1997–98 school year and followed them over the course of 7 years. They used the National Center for Education Statistics Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002). The national survey asked students about their absences during the past school year. Based on the ELS: 2002 survey, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reported that only 6 of every 10 students with 10 or more absences in the tenth grade graduated from high school, compared to 9 of every 10 of the entire cohort. The students were three times more likely to drop out of high school when they had 10 or more absences.

Patterns of absenteeism beginning prior to high school and continuing throughout a student's school career are predictors of high school nonattendance and the eventual failure to graduate. In one study of fourth grade students from a New York cohort, almost all demonstrated a decrease in attendance by eighth grade. Eighth grade had the greatest decline in attendance when compared with the other grades (Kieffer, Marinell, & Neugebauer, 2014). Using their indicator of graduation, they determined that a student who falls academically behind in the middle school grades has a 57% chance of going on to graduate, compared with 75% for a student who maintains grade-level achievement expectations, including maintaining a passing grade point average. Grade point average is the next topic addressed in relation to attendance.

Grade point average. Student GPA, the culmination of grades received resulting from course completion, is a measure of academic performance. The calculation of course grades may vary by district, school, and teacher practices. Some grade computations include attendance, homework completion and, consciously or

unconsciously, may reflect teacher bias. GPA is an accepted measure of student achievement and is part of a student's permanent record. Although GPA is affected by attendance at all grade levels, attendance is more strongly correlated with higher student GPAs as students advance through years of schooling (Roby, 2004). At least five studies have examined the relationship between GPA and attendance since 1998: Roby (2004); Strickland (1998); Gottfried (2010); Bracht (2010); and Morrissey, Hutchison, and Winsler (2014). Findings from these studies are presented below and have a common theme: attending school positively influences student GPA.

The data collected from a small sample of 32 Chicago high school students, tracked during their junior and senior years, indicated that attendance positively correlates with GPA. In the first year of study, among juniors there was a statistically strong correlation (r = .824) at the .05 level of confidence between days present and GPA. The second year showed a moderate correlation (r = .486). No explanation was provided by the researcher for the decrease in correlation (Strickland, 1998).

In a comprehensive, longitudinal study of elementary and middle school students from the Philadelphia School District, Gottfried (2010) suggests that attending school is correlated with a higher GPA. Students who were present more days had higher GPAs. The Gottfried study used three methodological approaches. The first was a baseline approach which used a contemporaneous specification of student outcomes, in which the numbers of days present was compared with GPAs. Again, attending school correlated with higher GPA, with a stronger correlation for students in middle school. The second approach used a lagged measure of achievement as a predictor of current achievement. A third approach, an instrumental variable strategy, was used with the intention of

controlling for possible unobservable factors that affect student attendance and achievement. Geographical distance from school was the unobservable variable used in the Gottfried study. Gottfried used student data for those who lived within 10 miles of school, which incorporated 99% of the student population. He concluded that the farther away a student lived from the school, the more attendance decreased, for both the elementary and middle school students (Gottfried, 2010).

Bracht (2010), in her study of attendance and student achievement in a St. Louis, Missouri high school, found a weak negative correlation between attendance and achievement (r = -.36). Students were surveyed in the middle of the first semester of the 2009–10 school year. GPA and attendance rates were calculated at the end of the semester. Bracht's results imply that, in some cases, students with a high number of absences have a low GPA, but also that some students with a high number of absences may have a high GPA. These results suggest that GPA may be more strongly linked to other variables that were not addressed in the Bracht study, such as instructional and grading practices, school policies and procedures for completing assignments when absent, school culture, students' work ethics, study habits, and motivation to complete assignments.

In a longitudinal study using data from the Miami School Readiness Project (MSRP) to examine the relationship of family income, student achievement, and attendance, information was extracted only for kindergarten through grade four students who received free or reduced-price lunches. The Miami study did not find statistically significant results regarding relationships between family income and school attendance or achievement. Both random-effects (RE) models and within-child fixed-effects (FE)

regressions were used. Morrissey et al. (2014) reported that poorer attendance and persistent low income independently predict low grades, with low income being less influential than attendance. Consistent with other research, an increase in the number of days a student was absent within a school year was associated with lower grades and test scores: "the strength of associations between absences and grades grew as children advanced through elementary school" (Morrissey, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2014, p. 751). Students can miss up to five days of school without affecting achievement; grades begin to be affected negatively after five or more absences in a year.

Test performance. Attending school has implications for state-created standardized test performance. Only three studies compared a national standardized test with attendance: Crone et al. (1993); Ginsburg Jordan, and Chang (2014); and Gottfried (2010). Eleven other studies in this section compare the relationship between state-created standardized assessments and attendance since 1998: Balfanz and Byrnes (2012); Bracht (2010); Clement (2006); Gemellaro (2013); Green et al. (2012); Jones (2010); McBride (2009); Minneapolis Public Schools, Hennepin County, University of Minnesota: CURA and CAREL, and the Family Housing Fund (March 1998); Parke and Kanyongo (2012); Roby (2004); and Strickland (1998). Findings from these studies are presented below and have a common theme: attending school positively influences state-created standardized test performance.

Not attending school is related to assessment scores regardless of ethnicity. Students who identified as being Black or White with better attendance rates performed higher on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments in mathematics than their counterparts with low attendance rates (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). Attendance was found

to have a strong association with all Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) attainment rates (Crone et al., 1993). The LEAP is a criterion-referenced test given in grades 3, 5, and 7. For the Graduation Exit Examination portion of the LEAP, attendance had a stronger relationship to the school-level percent passage rate than any other school variable, including socioeconomic indicators (Crone et al., 1993). This was the only study that included an analysis of American College Testing (ACT) scores and attendance, and it showed a strong relationship between attendance and higher scores on the ACT.

The Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development, as part of the Kids Mobility Project, completed a quantitative analysis of Minneapolis Public Schools student data. During the process of learning about the impact of frequent relocation on student achievement, attendance data were examined. "Attendance proved to be a strong predictor of performance for students in the study, a correlation found in other local national research reviewed by the Kids Mobility Project" (Minneapolis Public Schools, Hennepin County, University of Minnesota: CURA and CAREL, & the Family Housing Fund, 1998, p. 7). Students with nearly perfect attendance outperformed those who attended school less than 80% of the time by almost 20 points on given assessments. Students who only attended school 85% of the time or less, missing about 27 days of school, lost ground, while students with nearly perfect attendance made significant one-year gains.

Using whole-school attendance instead of specific grade-level attendance rates, Roby (2004) demonstrated that there is a statistically significant relationship for attendance in grades 4, 6, 9, and 12 and student achievement as measured by Ohio Proficiency Tests. Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients for the four grades were .57, .54,

.78, and .55, respectively. The strongest relationship was with attendance and test scores in grade 9. Roby compared the students in the four different grades who ranked in the top 10% in achievement scores to those at the bottom 10%. Differences in attendance rates between high- and low-ranked students were observed by Roby as follows:

- fourth grade, 96% and 93%;
- sixth grade, 96% and 90%;
- ninth grade 95% and 83%; and
- twelfth grade 96% and 92%.

The top-ranked students had better attendance rates. Roby also studied fourth grade proficiency information of six urban Ohio districts to examine the relationship between performance and attendance. Schools with higher proficiency scores had higher attendance rates.

Clement (2006) investigated the correlation between absences and student performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), in the subtests of reading and math. Consistent with the findings from other studies, Clement observed that the greater the number of absences, the lower the FCAT scores. Unlike other researchers, Clement segregated the scores according to type of absence, excused and unexcused. The number of excused absences was unrelated to FCAT scores, while unexcused absences were negatively correlated. Because Florida policy for making up missed work benefits the excused-absence student, "these data suggest academic performance suffers when a student is absent for reasons that disallow make-up work" (Clement, 2006, p. 26).

In a previously described study, Gottfried (2010) analyzed the relationship between attendance and student achievement with Philadelphia middle and elementary

school students. Although the primary focus was on GPA, he also examined the relationship between attendance and performance of elementary students for grades 3 and 4 on Stanford Achievement Test Ninth Edition 9 (SAT9). He found there was a positive, statistically significant coefficient for each testing subject in relation to attendance. There was a stronger relationship to math than to reading (Gottfried, 2010).

In a district in Texas, a number of variables and their relationship to attendance in high school students were examined in a correlational research design intended to measure the predictability of two or more variables. These variables included graduation rates, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores in mathematics, reading, and science; and size of school enrollment. These variables were measured in relationship to rates of attendance. McBride's (2009) findings revealed that TAKS scores in each of the three subjects were positively related to the attendance rate of high school students. Math scores were most highly correlated, with a coefficient value of .85. Next was the coefficient value of science, with .84, followed by reading with a coefficient value of .80. Graduation rates were positively related to attendance rates, with a .78 correlation value. There was no significant relationship between the enrollment size of the school and the attendance rate of high school students.

As the percentage of students missing more than 15 days of school increases, whether excused or unexcused, the percent of students passing reading and math decreases. Jones (2010) analyzed data for 445 middle schools taking the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (Georgia CRCT) in reading and math, and correlated test scores with attendance data. The relationship was stronger in math than in reading. When comparing types of schools—rural, suburban, or urban—Jones found that

rural schools had the lowest mean performance in both mathematics and reading, and the highest percent of students missing more than 15 days of school.

Although more supportive of the influence of student engagement and self-concept on achievement, the model of student behavior studied by Green et al. (2012) included the impact of attendance. In Green at al.'s model, academic motivation and self-concept predicted attitudes toward school. In turn, positive attitudes toward school predicted successful class participation and homework completion; negative attitudes predicted absenteeism, which predicted poor test performance.

In another multi-variate study, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) analyzed Florida ninth grade student data to study the relationship between attendance and test performance. Using a regression model, they controlled for multiple factors: ethnicity, special education designation, English language learner status, receipt of free/reduced-price lunch, and over-age-for-grade status. Balfanz and Byrnes concluded there is a linear relationship between performance on state tests and the number of missed days: test scores decrease as the number of missed days increases. In reading, the relationship continued through the first 20 days of missed school and then leveled off. One day missed from school resulted in a three-fourths point drop in the reading score. However, the association between math scores and the number of days of missed school continued not only beyond the first 20 days, but through 40 days of absence. The average decrease in test scores for each day of missed school was greater than 1 point; for these students there was a 40-point decline in test scores.

Using attendance and combined reading and math assessment information of tenth grade student data for 3,410,873 students during the 2001–2002 school year from the

National Center for Education Statistics ELS 2002 national survey, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found a relationship between attendance and achievement. When the results of combined math and reaching achievement were divided into quartiles, students who were absent 10 or more days from school were disproportionately represented in the lowest performing quartile: 37% compared to 24% of the students who missed less. At the highest end of the spectrum, only 15% of students with more than 10 absences scored in the top quartile, compared to 26% of those who missed fewer than 10 days of school.

Attendance rate was a factor influencing scores of fifth-graders on both the math and language arts subtests of the New Jersey Assessment Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK), a standards-based assessment. Students with higher absenteeism had lower scores (Gemellaro, 2013).

The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) is given to all fourth and eighth graders in all 50 states every two years. The test is used to assess the reading and math skills of students. Students are required to reply to a series of questions, one of which asks how many days of school they missed in the month prior to the test. In their analysis of the 2013 results, Ginsburg et al. (2014) defined poor attendance as missing three or more days in that period (the month prior to the test) regardless of whether they were excused or unexcused. They had three key findings: (1) Poor attendance is a national challenge, with one in five students from both fourth and eighth grades reporting three or more absences in the month prior to testing; (2) Student attendance matters for academic performance, as students with three or more absent days scored 11 to 18 points below their peers who missed no days (10 points is considered one grade's worth of skills). (3) Poor attendance contributes to the achievement gap for students who are

eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and those of some minorities. Low-income fourth grade students were 30% more likely to have missed three days of school, while low-income eighth graders were 40% more likely.

Socioeconomic Status Influence on Attendance and Achievement

Student receipt of free or reduced-price lunch is a way to determine low income status. A strong positive correlation exists between students who do not receive free lunch and their attendance rate (Lamdin, 1996). When Lamdin (1996) controlled for multiple school variables, his results strongly suggested that attendance did have a positive influence on student performance on the California Achievement Test for the subjects of reading and math. Student socioeconomic status also positively correlated with attendance and achievement as reported by Crone et al. (1993). Attendance differences in Louisiana schools were 94% in high-SES schools and 92% in low-SES schools for the group of Caucasian students. No differences were noted for African-American students.

Schools with the highest concentration of low-income students also have the highest percentage of students who have dropped out of school. Neild and Balfanz (2006) obtained information from the Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS) to follow cohorts of Philadelphia public school students from 2000–2005. The intent was to identify factors—student characteristics, demographics, and graduation rate measures—for use in the development of future policy, with the intent to improve the city's graduation rate. In high schools categorized as having very high poverty—75% or more of the school population being comprised of low-income students—17% of students became dropouts.

Students from schools described as moderate poverty—less than 40% of student were comprised of low-income students—had a dropout rate of 6% (Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

Daugherty (2008) compared eighth-grade absences and reported that low-SES students were absent not only more than other students in the same grade, but, on average, more than students in the school as a whole. The mean score for passing on the Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) state test was the lowest for the low-SES subgroup of eighth grade students. The special education student subgroup was second lowest. The eighth grade data showed that after the 16th day away from school, scale scores dropped below the state standard. The difference in mean scale scores was greater for math than for English, 23 points and 19 points respectively. The data for the tenth grade were very similar: on the 16th day of missed school, English scores dropped, while math scores dropped on the 14th day.

The effects of chronic absences are most often observed in consecutive grades and are two times greater for students from low-income families. For example, kindergarten absences are associated with lower achievement in first grade. Children from low-income families who were chronically absent in kindergarten had the lowest levels of achievement in reading and math in fifth grade (Chang & Romero, 2008).

At the elementary level as well, socioeconomic status appears to contribute to student GPA. Students from geographic areas with lower percentages of poverty had GPAs that were higher than of those students from areas with higher percentages of poverty (Gottfried, 2009). Gottfried, in his study of Philadelphia students, demonstrated that numerous demographic characteristics indicated a high association with the number of days present. However, Gottfried reported that free lunch recipients and behavior

problems were statistically significant and negatively associated with attendance. The results were less significant with students in higher grades.

In their analysis used to build upon the of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports, Cataldi and KewalRamani (2009) drew from the annual October Current Population Survey (CPS), the annual Common Core of Data (CCD) collections, and the annual GEDTS statistical reports. Students from households with incomes in the bottom 20% of the sample had a dropout rate of 9%, while students from households in the top 20% had a dropout rate of 1% (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009).

The relationship between math assessment scores and attendance for seventh grade Georgia students was the focus of a study completed by McCrary (2010). Students from three middle schools were identified as either non-truant (missing 15 days or less) or truant (missing 16 or more). Students who were truant had a 4% lower average on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Jones (2010) completed a more in-depth analysis of middle-school Georgia CRCT data and attendance. Jones used all middle school scores from 2007 to 2009, specifically correlating scores with student attendance. Better attendance was associated with better mathematics and reading performance as measured by the CRCT and "there is a significant amount of variance explained by attendance and other variables such as socioeconomic status and students with disabilities for Georgia middle schools" (p. 98).

Ready (2010), completing an analysis of nationally representative data, reported that chronically absent children gain 14% fewer literacy skills in kindergarten, and 15% fewer literacy skills and 12% fewer mathematics skills in first grade, when compared with children who had average attendance. However, low-income students who had good

attendance gained more literacy skills than peers from higher-income families during kindergarten and first grade.

Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students and those in special education classes. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) analyzed information from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) study for the 2010–2011 school year. They found a strong correlation between poverty and chronic absenteeism. For example, in Maryland, for students who received federal free and reduced-price lunch, the chronic absentee rates for elementary, middle, and high school were 11%, 16%, and 31% respectively.

Baltimore pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students who were chronically absent often continued the pattern in later school years, were more likely to have lower achievement, and were more likely to be retained in grade level in the pre-kindergarten to third grade years. Twenty-six percent of chronically absent students were retained, compared to 9% of students who were not chronically absent (Connolly & Olson, 2012). Of the students who were chronically absent in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, 51% were chronically absent in first grade and 45% were chronically absent in third grade. The students who were chronically absent were more likely than their peers to receive free and reduced- price meals. The Stanford Achievement Test, 10th Edition (SAT10) scores were lower, especially in math, for second graders who had had lower attendance in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten. However, students who were no longer chronically absent seemed to overcome the influence of their earlier absence rate on achievement.

Gemellaro (2013) analyzed many factors to determine their connection with student performance for both of the math and language arts subtests of the New Jersey

Assessment Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK), a standards-based assessment. These factors included the following: students receiving free lunch; student-to-faculty ratio; instructional minutes; attendance; teachers holding doctoral degrees; and faculty mobility. Of these factors, he found that receiving free lunch was the most predictive of student scores.

Analysis of tardiness in relationship to absences reveals a small but significant association between the receipt of free and reduced-price lunch, greater attendance, and days tardy (Morrissey et al., 2014). Tardiness is defined as arriving at school after the official school start time. In a current year, absences and days tardy were associated with lower grades and test scores, increasing in strength as children progressed through elementary school. The Morrissey et al. research results "do not provide evidence that school attendance attenuates links between family income and achievement in a meaningful way" (p. 751). A possible explanation was that the sample population, although identified as eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, may have been close in socioeconomic status to their peers who did not quite qualify, despite family income close to that of the sample.

Family Influence on Absenteeism

Family influence is a factor contributing to student absenteeism. Perhaps a devaluing of education, or at least an undervaluing of attending school, has occurred in society. I have observed that generational patterns of truancy often exist. Klerman et al. (1987) studied a sample of high school students and their parents. Both were asked the same questions about reasons for not attending school. The 544 students, defined by the study as being excessively absent, were enrolled in four Boston inner-city schools and

were all considered economically deprived. Parent and student responses were grouped into two main categories: health-related and non-health-related, with slight differences. Parent response that their students missed school for non-health-related reasons was 48%, compared with the student response for non-health-related reasons at 51%. The parents' responses as to why their students did not attend school were more likely to reflect negative attitudes toward education (22%) than their children's (8%).

Students who reside in low-SES households are not automatically doomed to fail. Other family processes, like parent education and family background indicators, may indirectly affect student achievement. Davis-Kean (2005) used data from the 1997 Child Development Supplement of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID-CDS). The correlations from her study provided some "evidence that parent education and income are moderate to strong predictors of achievement outcome" (p. 297). Parents with more education possibly have higher expectations for their children and provide a home environment conducive to homework completion, library use, or museum visits. Correlations were stronger for families of European American heritage than for families of African American heritage.

Swartz (2015) interviewed high school students' parents to gain a better understanding of how they experienced the school environment when dealing with issues relating to their children's attendance. It was generally not a single negative experience that led to a break-down in the school and parent relationship, but the compilation of a number of them, specifically

> deficiencies in the opportunities and options available to their children, a general lack of communication, a lack of caring adults, adults indifferent to student or

> family needs, educational environments that failed to meet the needs of their children, and a failure by school personnel to identify and address the learning deficiencies of students (p. 186).

Swartz (2015) had a small sample, six parents, but her report of their views was consistent with the investigations by other researchers. Not only is the relationship between student and school required for positive student attendance, but the relationship between the parent and the school can also have an effect.

School Culture, Climate, and Attendance

> School climate refers to the school's effects on students, including teaching practices; diversity; and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students. School culture refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2016, para. 1-2).

A school's culture and climate both influence whether or not a student attends. School leadership contributes to both by setting high expectations for student and teacher performance, using multiple forms of school data to drive decision-making, and following through on school processes. Student perception of classroom teachers and student connection to school are part of school culture. The following subsections provide information about the impact of the principal on school climate and culture and, therefore, student attendance, as reported by Parrett and Budge (2012); Leithwood et al. (2004); Ferguson, Hackman, Hanna, and Ballantine, (2010); The Wallace Foundation (2013); Lezotte and Snyder (2011); Sadlier (2011); Ekstrand (2015); Brockmeier, Green, Nobles, and Tsemunhu (2012); Meece (2011); Measures of Effective Teaching Project,

2010); Niehaus, Rudasill, and Rakes (2012); Parrett and Budge (2012); and Marchetti, Wilson, and Dunham (2016).

School leadership. Parrett and Budge (2012) studied seven low-performing poverty schools that transformed themselves to become what they referred to as high-performing poverty schools. Poverty schools were those with a large percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The percentage of low income students in poverty schools varied from 44 to 94%. With this statistic, along with information collected about other successful poverty schools, they were able to develop their framework. Critical to school improvement were actively-involved leaders, supporting the statement that "significant student gains will not be sustained without effective leaders who serve as catalysts for the specific actions that in turn drive the success of these schools" (Parrett & Budge, 2012, p. 33). Principals from these high-performing high-poverty schools consistently employed comprehensive systems with specific practices that were central to their school's improvements. Practices included monitoring student attendance, tracking individual student performance, and providing mentoring and free tutoring opportunities to struggling students.

Leithwood et al. (2004) completed an intensive research review of leadership influences on student learning. They concluded that school leadership is the second most influential factor, after the classroom teacher, in improving student achievement. It is the influence of the school leader that determines the effectiveness of any school improvement efforts, including those associated with attendance. "The chance of any reform improving student learning is remote unless district and school leaders agree with its purposes and appreciate what is required to make it work" (p. 4).

Administrators' skillful and relentless implementation of school improvement plans was one of the steps identified during a 2009 conference at Harvard University with 15 high school leaders. The high schools had been identified because of student achievement progress on standardized state exams. The purpose of the conference was to define specific steps taken to make the schools exemplary. Skillful and relentless implementation, one of the steps, describes the administrator as one who skillfully and relentlessly implements plans, monitors quality, and provides appropriate supports and incentives (Ferguson, Hackman, Hanna, & Ballantine, 2010). Throughout the report, emphasis on high expectations in the goals established by the school leadership was "non-negotiable."

For more than a decade The Wallace Foundation has focused research defining the actions of effective school principals who provide leadership for schools that improve student achievement. The Wallace Foundation (2013) reported five interdependent key practices of effective principals as follows:

- Shaping vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards.
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision.
- Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost.
- Managing people, data and processing to foster school improvement (p. 6).

Effective principals incorporate all the practices to influence student success within their buildings. They have high standards or high expectations in a data-driven decision-making positive school environment.

Principals create a positive school culture by developing an effective and timely data management system and ensuring all are trained in data-driven decision-making processes. Lezoatte and Snyder (2011) identify frequent monitoring of student progress as one of the seven correlates of effective schools. Frequent monitoring means using data to guide instructional decisions and effective use of data depends on how well the school principal guides the process. "It is up to the leaders to initiate and nurture a school culture that embraces data as the way to improve school learning" (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011, p. 96). Strong and effective leadership creates the culture based upon the basic underlying assumptions, the unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, of the school (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011).

Principals have the potential to impact all aspects of school policy and play a major role in creating a school climate, transforming schools into emotionally, psychologically, and physically safe areas for students. Sadlier (2011) studied the climate at an urban school whose principal took steps to support a culture that created and maintained a respectful school climate. Sadlier's interview and survey findings supported the importance of the principal's role in creating the school climate and culture.

Lyle Kirtman (2013) developed seven competencies for effective leadership that Fullan (2014) uses to describe the necessary skills for principals who want to become change agents. One component is for principals to build trust through clear communications and expectations. Leaders not only master directness and honesty about

performance expectations, they also follow through with actions on commitments made to ensure clear understanding of the expectations. Leaders create a commonly owned plan for success which includes monitoring that tracks the relationship between school actions and desired results.

School climate and culture. A safe and orderly environment is one of the seven correlates of effective schools reported by Lezotte and Snyder (2011). Principals who create "an orderly, purposeful, and businesslike atmosphere free from the threat of physical and emotional harm" (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011, p. 101) produce a school culture and climate conducive to learning.

Ekstrand (2015) noted the importance of school culture after analysis of 155 peer-reviewed research articles. The schools are the most significant factor; the school is also the authority that can implement incitements that engage students. "Relations and feelings in education and learning situations are by far more valuable than registration, control, and measures of absenteeism" (Ekstrand, 2015, p. 472). A school culture characterized by good relations, a positive school climate, respectful treatment, and opportunities to bond with adults creates pupil motivation and their desire to learn.

The school must be organized through specific procedures, programs, practices, and processes to support what is or purported to be important to the school culture or underlying beliefs and assumptions. A survey of elementary and middle schools using The Quality School Assessment Instrument (QSAI) and School Culture Survey was completed by Brockmeier et al. (2012). Schools assessed as effective culturally were also higher performing based on state achievement measures. A strong correlation between the presence of effective school criteria and the organizational structures to support these

criteria demonstrated the interdependency of these two constructs (Brockmeier, Green, Nobles, & Tsemunhu, 2012).

Meece (2011) focused on teacher and student perceptions of their school environment, climate, and the principal's role in shaping the culture of civility within the school. In this mixed method, comparative study, Meece used several surveys, interviews, and school data to inform her study of two California high schools. Of the two high schools, the one rated as having a healthier culture consistently outscored the other high school in student achievement. A positive school culture values and fosters communications and relationships, and strengthens everyone's sense of belonging. The students reported that "the relationship with their teachers and the principal motivates them to do better" (p. 122). The findings from this study suggest that higher levels of civility in the high school culture can produce higher levels of student achievement.

Students who do well academically perceive their teachers care about them. The Measures of Effective Teaching Project (2010) sponsored the completion of a student perceptions survey based on a decade of work by the Tripod Project for School Improvement. The Tripod questions are gathered under seven headings, or constructs, called the Seven C's: Care, Control, Clarify, Challenge, Captivate, Confer and Consolidate (Measures of Effective Teaching Project, 2010, p. 6). The approximately 3,000 secondary classrooms were divided into two groups based on percentile of students in achievement categories 75% and above or 25% and below. Student responses showed an alignment between classes scoring at high percentile and teachers receiving high ratings on selected statements tied to the Seven C's framework for students in those classes. For example, 73% of the students in the higher percentile group responded that

their teachers "Care" compared to 40% of those students from the lower group. (Measures of Effective Teaching Project, 2010).

Student perception of school connectedness, feeling supported and connected in their relationships with classroom teachers, was a predictor of student grade point average. "Students who reported less decline, or growth, in school support across the year earned higher grades in the sixth grade than students who reported greater declines in school support" (Niehaus, Rudasill, & Rakes, 2012, p. 456). Generally, more successful students perceived connectedness with all adults at the school.

In their report about the actions of high-performing, high-poverty schools, Parrett and Budge (2012) found these schools purposely created a culture that helped to build a bond between students and school. The actions included fostering caring relationships between adults and children and setting high expectations, then providing the support needed to meet these expectations. The schools provided "opportunities for meaningful involvement" (Parrett & Budge, 2012, p. 121) with specific strategies such as student clubs and other extracurricular opportunities.

In one Kentucky high school, low-SES juniors who met the reading and math benchmarks on the American College Test (ACT) were more likely to be involved in extracurricular activities (Marchetti, Wilson, & Dunham, 2016). The extracurricular activities were not defined but were thought generally to be sports and band. Possible reasoning for the results was that those who want to participate must meet academic eligibility requirements, and extracurricular supervising adults naturally provide mentoring encouragement for participants. "Students have developed a sense of belonging and connection to the school" (Marchetti et al., 2016, p. 14).

Strategies for Improving Attendance

Because dropping out of school is a process more than an event (Rumberger, 2011), the approach to prevention should include multiple strategies that address both individual and institutional factors. Attendance, or rather lack of it, is a major part of the dropout process. The following section provides research on strategies for improving attendance.

Student motivation. Use of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards with students is complicated because they are specific to students in individual schools. School personnel need to understand the characteristics of their schools and implement programs that fit with motivators of students in individual schools. Common sense ideas, such as asking pupils to stay in at break to complete work, have the potential to lead to negative responses from pupils in relation to both their behavior and their task-based work. Students who received tangible rewards from another person showed less subsequent intrinsic motivation than students who self-rewarded (Dollinger & Thelen, 1978). As students progress through school, intrinsic motivation decreases as observed by Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar (2005). Levels of reported intrinsic motivation are highest for the younger students and lower for older students. Both grade point averages and standardized test scores proved to be positively correlated with intrinsic motivation and negatively with extrinsic motivation. "It may be quite adaptive for students to seek out activities that they find inherently pleasurable while simultaneously paying attention to the extrinsic consequences of those activities in any specific context" (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005, p. 191). They found a strong negative correlation between intrinsic

motivation and preference for easy work (r = -.47) that supports high expectations and push for achievement.

Bowman (2007) offers suggestions on how educators can design schools and classrooms using both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to motivate students. Educators should say thank you to reveal genuine care and respect for students and their work. Public recognition or praise signals to other students that their contributions also will be noticed and appreciated. Educators who foster positive expectations produce students who will act in ways that are consistent with teachers' expectations of them.

A survey administered to students in grades 5 through 12, identified student adolescent preferences for praise and rewards for academic behavior. Students were asked to rank 10 options of rewards for doing their best work. Top ranking results indicated that students preferred free time, the receipt of snacks, coupons, or prizes, and wanted more opportunity for choice in school day processes (Fefer, DeMagistris, & Shuttleton, 2016). Also addressed from the student point of view was the value of receiving any form of praise from the classroom teacher. Students indicated a class or school reward and teacher praise as more preferred than praise from peers or a letter home to parents. Quiet praise from teachers was ranked as most preferred; however, all forms of praise from teachers were ranked highly.

Student suggestions. When developing strategies to reduce absenteeism, suggestions of students provide an insightful perspective. Student suggestions reported by Reid (1983) include the following: at school assemblies, call out the names of students who have had excellent attendance; require students to complete makeup work after school or in a designated area; give two warnings, then impose a fine on parents; and

send students to specialized schools for those who have attendance issues. From a survey completed by high school students in the United Kingdom, students indicated they considered the incentive of a school trip as extremely effective for their school. For them, the single most successful strategy across behavior and work was contacting home with positive feedback. "Not only does it promote good behavior and hard work, but it is also beneficial to the teacher–pupil relationship" (Payne, 2015, p. 500).

Educate professionals about student thinking. By understanding the psyche of the student, teachers and administrators can make more informed decisions concerning attendance issues. For instance, Green et al. (2012) used a self-system model to add to the understanding of the link between students' attitude and motivation, and their classroom performance and attendance. That study examined longitudinal models of academic processes leading to performance, and showed that

> (a) academic motivation and self-concept predicted attitudes toward school, (b) attitudes toward school positively predicted class participation and homework completion and negatively predicted absenteeism; and (c) class participation and homework completion positively predicted test performance whilst absenteeism negatively predicted test performance. (Green et al., 2012, p. 1)

To develop effective strategies to reduce the number of student absences, understanding why students attend school is as important as understanding why they do not. Toward this understanding, Kortering and Konold (2005) developed the Reasons Youth Come to School (RYCS) scale. They identified five reasons students come to school: (a) personal development or attending classes that had a direct connection to their future career or ambition; (b) socializing with peers; (c) participating in extracurricular

activities; (d) pleasing an adult or the belief that an adult within the school cares for him or her; and (e) what Kortering and Konold **(**2005**)** termed "nothing better to do" (p.6).

School environment/teacher relationships. A student's ability to voluntarily control impulses and pay attention in class is referred to as effortful control (EC). Students high in EC generally have higher achievement and better relationships with their teachers. Those with low EC are more likely to have lower achievement and poor relationships with their teachers. EC has been found to be positively related to grades and negatively related to absences (Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008). Students who have high EC and who perform well in school are influenced by their relationships with peers and teachers. Possibly those with low EC have "less classroom support from teachers and peers, miss out on learning opportunities, and view the classroom environment negatively as something to be avoided" (Valiente et al., 2008, p. 74.) If improving student and teacher relations increases student EC level, then it follows that doing so could also improve student attendance and achievement.

Do students fail because they have missed too much school or do students miss school because they are failing? Both statements have credibility and require school personnel to recognize which applies individually to each student, by identifying school characteristics that cause a student to fail. School climate has an effect on student performance. Schools with positive climate can make a difference to student attendance. Two noted school characteristics are supportive relationships between teachers and students and a perception among students that the work they are doing (especially in high school**)** prepares them for the future (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Schools need to use interventions that promote student engagement and a positive school environment. The

probability of student attendance increases when schools promote academic performance, offer rigorous academic programming, inspire future aspirations, and are perceived as safe (Henry, 2007).

Family engagement. A successful strategy to improve attendance is to educate and involve parents regarding the importance of attendance. Bracht's (2010) survey results of high school students indicated that parental factors (medical appointments, travel out of town, and transportation issues) had more influence on student absences than did school factors. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) demonstrated the positive effects of school and family partnership efforts in improving attendance at the elementary level. Applying the conceptual work of Sheldon (2007), focusing on the effects of improving family and community involvement at the elementary level can transfer to the high school setting. Sheldon specifically studied how implementing the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) affected student attendance in selected Ohio elementary schools. "The more schools worked to reach out to involve all of their families in children's education, the more likely they were to experience an increase in student attendance" (p. 273). Schools that were deliberate in their approach saw an increase in attendance rates, in comparison to similar schools that did not conduct any such activities. Most encouraging from this study was that positive results were almost immediate. The NNPS incorporates six types of involvement to create better partnerships: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) reported that "Attendance improves when schools implement positive activities that support good attendance and effective home-school

connections" (p. 317). Average daily attendance increased and chronic absence decreased when schools used the following three activities: communicating effectively with all parents about attendance; providing a school contact person for parents to call about absence; and rewarding students for improved attendance.

Effective strategies for improving attendance use data to target needed action while engaging students and working together with families (Ginsburg et al., 2014). Sometimes extra services or resources (transportation, health, social) need to be available to give positive support to students and families struggling with chronic absenteeism. Chang and Romero (2008) provide these recommendations to improve engagement and attendance, some of which include services or resources:

- engage families in their children's education;
- educate families on the importance of attendance;
- ensure access to preventative health care;
- coordinate public agency and legal response for families in crisis; and
- offer all children incentives for attendance.

Districts often use a computer-assisted calling service to improve school-to-home communication. Tennessee students from two high schools and one middle school were randomly selected to participate in a study using an automatic calling system (Helm & Burkett, 1989). The homes of one group of students were telephoned by an automatic system when the student was absent from school. Calls were made in the evening, with parents hearing a pre-recorded message from the principal stating that the student had been absent that day. The system notified the school if contact was made. At the end of eight months a comparison of the attendance rates was made. The group of students who

received calls from the service had better attendance: 7 days missed, compared to those than those who did not, 11 days missed.

Tracking student data. Early warning indicators—tools available to monitor students who may be showing signs of dropping out—have been effective for decreasing absenteeism. The West Virginia Department of Education employs a system, called the Early Warning System, tied into multiple student information sources and electronically recorded and housed by the WVEIS (West Virginia Education Information System) on the Web or WOW. Tracking student attendance, behavior, and course performance in English or math, the system helps educators monitor these predictors of potential high school dropouts.

Administrators can reduce chronic absence rates within a school by formulating an intensive monitoring system and deliberately acting on student data. Using such a system, one school saw a decline from 10% to 5% in chronic absences among young students living in poverty (Chang & Romero, 2008). Schools that focused on improving school attendance reported an increase of 0.71% in average daily attendance; the average rate of chronically absent students dropped from 8% to 6% (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Use of a school disengagement warning index, when aligned with official school records, is a "robust predictor of dropping out of high school" (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012, p. 164). The school disengagement warning index employed in the Rochester City School District, New York, has five risk indicators: standardized test scores, attendance, failing one or more core subjects, incurring one or more suspensions from school, and retention in grade level. The school disengagement warning index has been positively associated with identifying potential high school dropouts: as a student

accumulates more disengagement risk indicators, the likelihood of dropping out of school dramatically increases.

When the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) focused on ninth grade student data, it saw an increase in subsequent graduation rates. The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research developed an "on-track" data collection system to determine if freshmen were earning enough credits for promotion to tenth grade. "Students who end their ninth-grade year on-track are almost four times more likely to graduate from high school than those who are off track" (Roderick, Kelly-Kemple, Johnson, & Beechum, 2014, p. 2). From 2007 to 2013, the CPS on-track rate rose from 57 to 82%; an estimated 6,900 additional students finished ninth grade on-track than before implementation. Specific details about data elements included in the on-track system were not presented in this report.

Student meetings. A combined use of a check-in and reward system was effective in reducing chronic absence in one Georgia elementary school. Five kindergarten and five second grade students who had between 7 and 14 absences in the first semester of school were selected to participate in a study by Cole (2011). The students were required to check in each day with a member of the school's Student Advisory Team (counselors, principals, and office staff). Students who were present for a full week earned a reward, and those who missed no more than two days during the six-week program earned a pizza party with the counselor. At the conclusion of the study, 70% of the students had improved their attendance rate; the group average was 9 absences before the check-in/reward system, and 2 after it was implemented.

Another strategy with positive results was studied by Tate-Wyche (2015). She conducted weekly face-to-face meetings with 15 randomly selected grade 10–12 high school students selected because they had over 10 unexcused absences. During the meetings, Tate-Wyche and the students discussed numerous topics of interest to the students. All students in this program had improved attendance rates.

Summary

The research summarized in this chapter demonstrates how attendance affects GPA, standardized test scores, and graduation rates. Most comparisons of student data were for multiple grades. Much information about why students come to school or what affects student attendance is derived from self-reporting on student surveys. Specific experimental strategies to improve attendance were generally implemented with small numbers of students (Cole, 2011; Tate-Wyche, 2015).

Attendance studies have been completed with student data from Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Canada, and Texas. The current study is needed because, to date, no research provides a list of best practices that improve attendance among low-SES schools in West Virginia, a state in the federally designated Appalachian Region (Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.). West Virginia is representative of other Appalachian states struggling with low-SES students' achievement and attendance. Making changes in a school towards improving attendance rates begins with the school leadership. This study identifies the perceived best practices used in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates, applicable for use by school leaders to improve attendance among all low-SES schools.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate best practices to promote attendance in low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) high schools. Chapter 2 established the relationship between absenteeism and student achievement. When students come to school, they perform better. In the current school climate, improving student achievement is a concern. In the state of West Virginia, rates of attendance are generally dismal, though some low-SES high schools have reported annual attendance rates of 90% or better. What strategies have leaders of these schools employed to reach these high rates of attendance? This is the question of this study.

In this chapter, described are the research design and question; sample selection process; interview method and questions; data collection and analysis procedures; methods of verification; my role as researcher; measures of ethical protection of participants; and a summary of the chapter.

Research Design

This study used an applied qualitative design using interviews for data collection and an emergent approach to data analysis. "Applied research is conducted in a field of common practice and is concerned with the application and development of research-based knowledge about that practice" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 13). My study focused on the problem of attendance in low-SES high school students with the intent of developing a list of school-based best practices. I used an emergent approach to analyze interview data because "the procedure for coding and categorizing is less structured and prescribed" (p. 347). "Such [emergent] studies are most frequently employed to

investigate natural variation, to study phenomena to see what can be learned" (Krathwohl & Smith, 2005, p. 23).

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to identify best practices perceived by principals used in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates. The overarching research question was: *What are the best practices perceived by principals used in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates?*

Sample

Purposeful sampling procedures were employed to select participants for the study. More specifically, extreme criterion sampling was used. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) advise using purposeful sampling when "particular elements from the population" will be "representative or informative about the topic of interest" (p. 138) … "to increase the utility of information obtained from small samples" (p. 326). Purposeful samples "are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating" (p. 326).

Criterion sampling involves participants "selected based on the assumption that they possess knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of interest and thus will be able to provide information that is both detailed and generalizable" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 6). Extreme sampling is a type of purposive sampling that is used to focus on cases that are special or unusual, typically in the sense that the cases highlight notable outcomes, failures or successes" (Purposive-sampling, 2012, Extreme Sampling).

Criteria for selecting high schools were very specific. High schools were located in West Virginia, contained only grades 9-12, were identified 100% low-SES, and had an annual attendance rate over 90%—extreme cases at the uppermost range of attendance rates. Twelve schools met these criteria. Principals of these schools were asked to participate in the study. Eight of the 12 principals consented to be interviewed about their best practices.

Site sample selection process. Information publicly available from the ZoomWV webpage of the West Virginia Department of Education was used to select participant schools (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). For the 2015–2016 school year, 46 of the 114 high schools in West Virginia were identified as serving 100% low-SES students. Twenty-nine of these high schools contained only grades 9–12. (In West Virginia, high schools are designated as such even though other grades are housed within the building. Schools that included other grades were eliminated to allow the focus of the study to remain at the high school level.) Of these 29, 12 high schools served 100% low-SES students, housed grades 9-12, and had an annual attendance rate over 90%. Principals of these 12 high schools were asked to participate.

It should be noted: high schools that were 100% low-SES were Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools. The CEP was a meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas, a provision of The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA). This legislation created an additional way to eliminate individual family applications through community eligibility (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011). Community eligibility was accomplished through universal meal service in high poverty areas that have 40% or more of students directly certified for free school meals.

Families of children in these schools do not need to complete paper applications to allow participation in the School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

Participant sample selection process. Principals for all 12 schools who met extreme sampling criteria were selected. Eight principals responded to my request for their participation and were interviewed. The predominately rural high schools of the selected principals represented various regions in all parts of the state. After eight interviews, I analyzed my data to determine whether more interviews were needed to reach saturation. Because patterns emerged and could be described after eight interviews, I decided that more interviews were not needed.

Principals were appropriate as interviewees because they are the instructional leaders of the building; oversee all activities; and compared to other school representatives, have the most insight to share about school experiences regarding the improvement of student attendance in relation to student achievement. West Virginia Department of Education attendance policy requires that principals meet with parents of students who have had five unexcused absences. Interviewing principals who have a breadth of experience meeting with students and implementing programs provided an in-depth understanding of the best practices used in low-SES high schools. The interview "is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important issues through understanding the experience of the individual whose lives reflect those issues" (Seidman, 2013, p. 13).

Saturation. After eight of the 12 eligible principals were interviewed, data were analyzed. No additional participants were interviewed because redundancy of best practices was noted and saturation had been reached; and no new important information related to the study could be obtained by interviewing more participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Weiss (1994) advises in response to the question of how many participants to interview: "you stop when you encounter diminished returns, when the information you obtain is redundant or peripheral, when what you do learn that is new adds too little to what you already know to justify the time and cost of the interviewing" (p. 21).

Table 1 provides the population and attendance rate for the eight schools whose principals participated in the study. Student population numbers have been rounded.

Table 1

Participant Sample Information

Principal	High school	Population	Attendance rate
A	Alpha	750	93
B	Bravo	350	92
C	Charlie	1,100	90
D	Delta	650	90
E	Echo	200	92
F	Foxtrot	600	96
G	Golf	400	94
H	Hotel	1,050	93

Interview Method and Questions

I completed an applied qualitative design using interviews that were semi-structured because of the "focus on addressing questions rather than testing hypotheses: they are concerned with developing understanding in an exploratory way" (Blanford, 2013, para. 3). I conducted interviews with high school principals because the interview

"is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues" (Seidman, 2013, p. 13). Describing process is one research aim which dictates the need to use the interview as described by Weiss (1994). Describing process allows researchers to "know, about some human enterprise, how events occur or what an event produces" (p. 9). Wright (1979) recommends interviewing when "the investigator may need to explore a topic from the point of view of the respondents" (p. 52), which applied to this study. I wanted to learn about best practices reported by school principals resulting in high attendance.

Primary interview questions were preplanned, but lines of inquiry were pursued within the interview, the elicitation of school-based best practices. "Often qualitative interviews will be semi-structured, beginning with general questions and then probing with more specific questions" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 359). "In the interview guide approach, topics are selected in advance, but the researcher decides the sequence and wording of the questions during the interview" (p. 355). I used general interview questions and follow-up probes to increase comprehensiveness, to elucidate more details and additional explanations, and to clarify responses. All questions are in Appendix A. The interview questions were created to address the research study's question. The initial set of questions was reviewed by committee members who oversaw this dissertation, and revised based upon their input. The four interview questions were as follows:

1. What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

2. Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?
3. How do you know that your actions work?
4. Why do you think your actions work so well?

Questions 3 and 4 were developed with the intent of providing additional depth and credibility to support principal responses to Questions 1 and 2. Questions prompted respondents to "provide illustrative materials and to give an investigator a sense of the topic as seen in more subtle ways through respondents' eyes," (Wright, 1979, p. 52). Interview questions provided an understanding of the experiences of the participants, in terms of best practices.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

I formatted a sequence of events in a general application of the process suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) as my guide for analyzing qualitative data:

1. Collected interview data.
2. Created categories based on transcribed interviews, using audio recording as necessary to check for reliability and usefulness.
3. Divided responses into four sections based on notes and transcribed text.
4. Interviewed the next person and repeated the general analysis of the single interview described above.
5. Compared the first and second interview to identify patterns, differences, and commonalities in responses.
6. Repeated the sequence until saturation was reached— that is, until no new categories of best practices emerged.

Data collection. In summary, I completed these procedural steps:

1. Identified the low-SES high schools with 90%+ annual attendance rates for the 2015-2016 school year as listed on ZoomWV.
2. Contacted the principals of these schools via telephone and email to solicit participation in the study. In the case of schools that had more than one, I discerned and contacted the principal most directly involved in school attendance issues.
3. Arranged and scheduled a time to complete the telephone interview with the principal.
4. Emailed a summary of the study and a participation consent form to the principal.
5. Received a return consent form.
6. Scheduled an interview.
7. Initialized the interview: I contacted each principal at the scheduled time upon receipt of the participation consent form. Before asking interview questions, I reviewed the summary of the study and reminded the principal that participation was voluntary, information shared would be summarized and not attached to the interviewee in any way, and that the principal could decline to continue at any time without any risk or retribution. I also informed the principal that the interview was being recorded.
8. Using a prepared question list, asked the principal about the practices the school used to promote attendance at the high school.
9. Recorded the interview and simultaneously took interview notes.

10. Continued questions and probing until it was determined that a thorough understanding and description of school practices had been achieved.
11. Thanked the principal for participating and asked if they would like to receive a copy of the best practices determined by the study.
12. Transcribed the interview.
13. Emailed the transcribed, unedited copy of the interview to the interviewee, who was given two business days to review and comment or correct. No principal asked for a revision. After member checking (Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), I completed an initial analysis of the responses.
14. Proceeded to the next interview.
15. Compared interviews with each other, leading to initial and subsequent generation of codes. Categories from interviews two through eight were compared with initial codes, codes were compared, groups of codes were collapsed into categories with which future codes were then compared, and categories were subsequently compared with other categories as suggested by Birks and Mills (2015).

Data analysis. I analyzed principal interviews using a card-based to spreadsheet system employing the in vivo coding and structural coding protocols as described by Saldaña (2016). In vivo coding "uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes" (pp. 294-295). Structural coding "applies a content-based or conceptual phrase to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question to both code and categorize the data corpus" (p. 297). Principal responses were

placed upon index cards. I organized the note cards into categories with similar context and transferred the information into an Excel spreadsheet.

Full responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix C). I created headings and entered associated data for each respondent. Headings corresponded with research questions and included the following: top five strategies for improved attendance; other strategies for attendance; how the principal knew the strategies worked; and why, from the principal perspective, the strategies worked. As mentioned, I used a combined process of in vivo and structured coding processes in the analysis process. In vivo coding applied to my transcribing actual text from the interview into the spreadsheet. Structured coding applied to answering specific questions as I entered text (Saldaña, 2016). Once I completed all interviews, I organized the responses as codes, each one being "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4), for their top five and the other strategies into like group groups (categories). Some principals were not able to identify their most effective top five, but could describe other school strategies used to promote attendance.

I completed another initial analysis, indicated by highlighting with color and numbering the coded responses to classify whether the reported strategy was a top five, in its ordinal position as indicated by the principal—or assigned as "other" because it was not an identified top five strategy (Appendix D).

Two principals reported the use of an "early warning system." I omitted these responses from the list of strategies because the principals only mentioned

the use of an early warning system when directly asked if they used a system during follow-up questioning.

A second coding cycle was completed. Saldaña (2016) describes second cycle coding as more analytic, requiring more synthesis, which allowed me to develop my final categories and, hence, a list of best practices. At the end of the first cycle there were some left-over and undecided codes. When I finalized the definition of my categories during the second cycle of coding, I placed responses into other categories as appropriate (Appendix E).

The data analysis process for interview questions 3 and 4 was the same as for questions 1 and 2, using in vivo and structured coding processes. Because of the limited amount of data, which in turn produced a small number of codes, only one cycle of coding was needed to analyze questions 3 and 4 (Appendices F and G).

Upon completion of the data analysis, initial themes related to importance of school culture, leadership follow-through, student incentives, and extracurricular activities emerged with more potency than originally thought. Because of the strength of the themes, I made additions to the original literature review to add support and confirm my findings.

Methods of Verification

As compared to quantitative studies, qualitative studies require verification to ensure trustworthiness. Human emotions and perspectives are considered essential and invaluable in qualitative research (Leung, 2015). To ensure a level of trustworthiness in my study, I incorporated Shenton's (2004) suggested strategies, which are based upon E. G. Guba's (1981) constructs. The constructs are credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability. I describe my application of these four strategies in the following subsections.

Credibility. Credibility is a source of internal validity in that researchers "seek to ensure that their study measures or tests what is actually intended" (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). To promote confidence assuring I accurately recorded the phenomenon under study, I utilized credible research methods, such as interviewing, to collect my data, and coding for data analysis. Shenton (2004) recommends that researchers develop rapport through "an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations before the first data collection dialogues take place" (p. 65). I completed three pilot interviews to validate the process and hone questions. Also, with my personal experience as a principal of a high school, I was credible as an interviewer for participants in the study. Additionally, I sought expert advice and used member and peer checking.

Pilot interviews. I completed three pilot interviews. I used the same procedural steps as in the primary study, except that my pilot study sample of principals were from the district where I was employed. Each school had an annual attendance rate over 90%. Two principals worked in elementary schools and one was from a high school that housed grades 7-12. By completing a pilot study, I was able to strengthen my experience as a researcher. I became more familiar with the coordination of interviewing by telephone while using a digital recorder and simultaneously taking notes. I used the same interview questions formatted for the study, and I finalized the entire process of coding to make sure it worked for the purposes of my study. Upon completion of the pilot study, I made

no changes to the interview questions because they suited the intent of the study. The practice I gained through the pilot study enabled me to focus on listening and gaining information related to the interview questions without leading the respondent replies or adjusting recording equipment.

Rapport-building. During the process to recruit principal volunteers, I made them aware that I was a West Virginia high school principal. Their knowledge of my background helped me establish a rapport with principals and assure them that answers would not be connected to them in any way. Doing so mitigated possible inaccurate responses, such as inflated or fear-based responses. Building a positive, trusting rapport with the principals before and during the interview improved the credibility of the study.

Expert advice. I participated in frequent debriefing sessions with my dissertation advisor throughout the data collection and analysis processes. We discussed and practiced interviewing so I would not influence answers by how I asked them; I wanted to hear the interviewee as objectively as possible. My advisor also advised me about and agreed with my approach of categorizing codes.

Member and peer code-checking. I incorporated peer scrutiny by having a colleague, who is employed by the West Virginia Department of Education as a school improvement specialist and has data analysis experience, to review my transcripts and coding analysis. Additionally, I completed member checks, a process which ensures accuracy of the data collection, considered "the single most important provision that can be made to bolster a study's credibility" (Shenton, 2004**,** p. 68). During individual member checks, principals were asked to read the transcripts from their interviews and communicate to me if changes were needed. No principal asked for a modification.

Transferability. I strengthened the transferability of the study by providing a thorough description of the contextual information about the selected high schools and the interviewed principals (Shenton, 2004). I presented satisfactory detail concerning attendance and related student achievement issues in Chapter 2 and in this chapter "to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those that they have seen emerge in other situations" (Shenton, 2004, p. 70).

Dependability. To address dependability, I have reported the processes within my study in sufficient detail to enable future researchers to replicate my work.

Confirmability. "The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). I have taken steps to ensure that my findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the principals, rather than my preferences. I have provided a thorough data analysis, detailing my thought processes, and I have included in the appendices interview transcriptions and Excel spreadsheets tracking my coding analysis (Appendices B through G).

Role of Researcher

Although I shared experiences with the principals because I am a principal myself, my role was that of a person who was unknown to the school. As an interviewer, I analyzed data with an open attitude, to seek what emerged as important from the text using the filter of observing for best practices. I guarded

against allowing my personal beliefs and experiences as an administrator to interfere with the data analysis process. I was proactive to ensure that I was accurately representing the data.

Measures of Ethical Protection

Potential participants were provided a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study. All potential participants were given time to ask questions and the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Principals who chose to take part in the research were provided a statement of confidentiality concerning their organizational and personal responses during interviews, and participants signed a consent form. I disassociated names from interview responses at the beginning of the analysis process. I made every effort to protect the identities of the participating districts, high schools, and principal participants that elected to be a part of the research by using aliases or pseudonyms as necessary to describe best practices. In the table with school site information, the values for student population and annual attendance rates were rounded to provide an additional layer of anonymity. Finally, in the transcriptions, all mention of mascots or other items that could be traced to a specific school were given a generic name.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I have described my research design and question, sample selection process for low-SES schools in West Virginia and participating principals, interview method, data collection and analysis procedures, specific procedures, methods of verification, my role as researcher, and measures of ethical protection of participants.

Chapter 4: Findings

I completed an applied qualitative design research study using interviews for data collection and an emergent approach to data analysis. My findings emerged after the data analysis which included coding, categorizing, and reflecting on the material gathered from the principal interviews. From the research, a list of best practices emerged. Not only was I able to develop a list; in addition, based upon the principals' responses, I rank-ordered the practices from most to least used.

In the remainder of the chapter, I reveal these best-practice findings in more detail, including the results of both the first and second coding cycles. In addition to best practices, I include findings on principals' perceptions—how they knew their strategies were effective, and why they thought they were effective (Interview Questions 3 and 4).

Procedural Overview

Eight principals from West Virginia high schools that are rural, scattered throughout the state, with a predominately white student population of 100 to 1500 students, volunteered to participate in the study. Each principal was asked the same four primary interview questions. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and sent to the respective principals for review. Once transcribed and checked by interviewees, responses were entered anonymously into a spreadsheet. Responses were coded with labels for principals' top five effective actions or as "other" actions to promote attendance. The data analysis process continued until the categories emerged.

First Cycle Coding

In the first cycle of analysis—described by Saldaña (2016) as "those processes that happen during the initial coding of data" (p. 68)—I identified eight categories. These initial eight process categories were named: Incentives and

Student Recognition, Meetings/Personal Communication, Judicial Processes, School Culture, Expectations, Home Visits, Calling Absent Students, and SAT/Attendance Requirements. A ninth category was created for codes that I thought I would use, but at the time was unsure where I incorporate them. Responses in the ninth category were absorbed during the second cycle of coding.

Incentives and student recognition. The Incentives and Student Recognition category included rewards which students found motivational enough to make attending school desirable, such as gift cards, certificates, privileges, extra grade points, or their names posted for public view.

Meetings/personal communication. The Meetings/Personal Communication category included any face-to-face interaction with a school employee (teacher, principal, secretary, truancy officer, attendance director) and either the student and/or the parent.

Judicial processes. The Judicial Processes category included actions required by state and district attendance regulations, such as mandatory parent meetings, letters from school to home, and reporting students to the judicial system because of chronic absences.

School culture. The School Culture category included a school environment that helped students feel connected to the school, influencing them to want to be there. Some principals reported after-school activities to encourage students to want to be part of the school. One school provided supper, with bus transportation.

Expectations. The Expectations category incorporated the presumption that students were to be in school. Attendance expectations were promoted by staff and communicated to students and their families. Staff members were committed to the

philosophy; they analyzed data, set goals, and worked collaboratively to advance priorities throughout the school. Students and parents knew the staff wanted the students to attend school. Students knew that the principals would be checking on them when they were absent.

Home visits. Home Visits were described by principals as physically driving to student homes when the students failed to report to school.

Calling absent students. Calling Absent Students included telephoning the home of absent students by the principal or a computer system, or mailing a letter home when students had multiple unexcused absences. (During the second coding cycle process, I moved "mailing a letter home" to another category.)

SAT/attendance requirements. The Student Assistance Team (SAT) is designed to assist students struggling academically, behaviorally, or emotionally at school, which is inhibiting the student from being successful. Schools employ the SAT process, convening a meeting, when student nonattendance is of concern. Members of the SAT may include the principal, guidance counselor, teacher, student, and parent.

How do you know that your actions work? The codes from Question 3— "How do you know that your actions work?"—were placed into two categories: Quantifiable Data and Student Feedback. The Quantifiable Data category included attendance rate, percentages of graduates, number of excuse notes turned in to the office, and reduction in the number of SAT meetings held. The Student Feedback category included what students reported to their principals.

Why do you think that your actions work so well? The codes from Question 4— "Why do you think that your actions work so well?"—were also placed into two

categories: School Culture and Student Communication. The School Culture category included the emphasis on high expectations throughout the school, with students knowing that teachers were focused on helping them achieve. Driving to a student's home to bring the student to school, particularly, reinforced the expectation that the student should be in school. The category of Student Communication included any form of interaction between school and students or families, either directly or through surveys.

Second Cycle Coding

The second cycle combined categories from the first cycle of coding.

High expectations with school culture. The setting of high expectations for student achievement, behavior, and attendance is a factor contributing to a school's culture ("Hidden Curriculum," 2014); therefore, I consolidated High Expectations within School Culture.

Judicial processes in conjunction with SAT/attendance requirements. The Judicial Processes category was combined with SAT/Attendance Requirements because state policy requires meetings among parents, students, and staff members when students have more than five unexcused absences.

SAT/attendance requirements with meetings/personal communication. Codes relating to SAT/Attendance Requirements were also placed under the category of Meetings/Personal Communication in the second cycle of coding.

Calling absent students. I decided to differentiate between Meetings/Personal Communication and Calling Absent Students. Calling a student's home is a more specific action; therefore, it was made into a separate category. Calling Absent Students actions are telephone calls made to the student's home by a school employee (secretary, guidance

counselor, or principal) or an automatic system when an absence has occurred. Meetings/Personal Communications are face-to-face interactions that occur within the school building itself.

Incentives and student recognition. Upon completion of the second cycle of coding, no changes were made to the Incentives and Student Recognition category.

Home visits. No changes were made to this category.

Best-Practice Findings

I tallied the number of codes, or principals' responses, for each category. I rank-ordered the categories from highest to lowest based on the number of mentions. Resulting were six categories of best practices: Incentives and Student Recognition, School Culture/Expectations, Meetings/Personal Communication, Calling Absent Students, Judicial Processes (district/state policies), and Home Visits. The best- practice findings emerged from these categories and are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Best Practices with the Number of Principals' Responses

Best Practice	Number of Principals' Responses
Using incentives and student recognition.	22
Establishing a positive school culture that includes high expectations for encouraging students to come to school.	18
Holding meetings with parents, students and an administrator, and having personalized communication between students and an adult within the building.	16
Telephoning families of absent students.	10
Following established district and state policies for attendance.	7
Picking up absent students at their homes.	2

Using incentives and student recognition. Using incentives and student recognition was the most-cited practice. The principals provided 22 actions related to incentives and student recognition. Thirteen of these were identified as top five most effective actions. The Incentives and Student Recognition category included rewards to recognize perfect or near-perfect attendance. Reward included giving gift cards, special privileges, extra grade points, or exemption from taking semester exams. Recognitions included posting students' names for public view on a marquee or designated honor wall, and awarding certificates at assemblies. The timing for awarding incentives varied: daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, at the end of the semester, or at the end of the year.

Establishing a positive school culture that includes high expectations for students to come to school. Principals reported 18 actions related to school culture and

expectations, the second most cited of all categories. Eight of the responses were identified as top five most effective actions. School culture refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, and attitudes that influence how a school functions ("Hidden Curriculum," 2014). "Establishing a culture in which the kids want to be at school" (Principal G) was mentioned by one principal yet reflected the iteration of most others. Another quote exemplifying the importance of establishing an expectant school culture was: "School preaches that if you aren't in school, you are not getting an education; setting the expectation" (Principal E).

Holding meetings with parents, students and an administrator, and having personalized communication between students and an adult within the building. Principals reported 16 actions related to Meetings/Personal Communication. Three of these were identified as top five. Holding meetings with parents, students, and an administrator, and having personal communication between students and an adult within the building emerged as the third most mentioned best practice. Included were interactions within the school building between students and an adult such as a teacher, principal, secretary, truancy officer, or attendance director. SAT procedures were also placed within this category of best practice.

Telephoning families of absent students. Principals reported 10 actions related to telephoning families of absent students. Four of these were identified as top five. Calls were made by the principal or another representative of the school, or they were made using a computer system.

Following established district and state policies for attendance. The principals reported seven actions related to Judicial Processes, the following of established district

and state policies for attendance. Three of the eight principals had identified an action from this category as a top five most effective action. Judicial Processes originate at the state or local level and direct specific action related to attendance, such as sending letters, reporting students to the judicial system, and convening of SAT meetings with parent, student, and staff members, a requirement when students have more than five unexcused absences.

Picking up absent students at their homes. The principals reported two actions related to Home Visits, the least-cited of all the categories. Only one principal placed this action as a top five most effective practice. Principals described this practice as physically driving to student homes with the Prevention Resource Officer (PRO) when students failed to report to school.

Summary of best practices. From the first and second coding cycles emerged the final list of best practices perceived by the high school principals used to influence attendance in low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) high schools. In rank order of most- to least-used, these successful practices are:

- using incentives and student recognition;
- establishing a positive school culture that includes high expectations for encouraging students to come to school;
- holding meetings with parent, students, and an administrator and having personalized communication between students and an adult within the building;
- telephoning families of absent students;
- following, consistently, established district and state policies for attendance; and
- picking up absent students at their homes.

Principals' Perceptions Findings

Questions 3 and 4 from the interviews—"How do you know that your actions work?" and "Why do you think that your actions work so well?"—were developed with the intent of providing additional depth and credibility to support principals' responses when they reported their effective actions. Not only were the principals able to describe specific strategies for achieving annual attendance rates over 90%, they effectively justified their statements. I have addressed the principals' responses to these questions in the next two subsections.

How do you know that your actions work? My interpretation from the data analysis of the eight principals' answers to this question produced 12 codes, which I organized into two categories: Quantifiable Data and Student Feedback. The Quantifiable Data category included 10 of the 12 codes. Some examples included attendance rate, percentages of graduates, number of excuse notes turned in to the office, and reduction in the number of SAT meetings needed. None of the principals specifically stated that they monitored or used student data, yet it appeared that their knowledge and interpretation of such data drove their decision-making.

The Student Feedback category—what students reported to their principals—included two of the 12 codes. Principals mentioned that student feedback confirmed that their actions work.

Why do you think that your actions work so well? My interpretation from the analysis of the eight principals' answers to this question produced 13 codes. I organized them into two categories: School Culture and Student Communication. The School Culture category included principals' reports of having high expectations within the

school: students knew teachers were focused on helping them achieve. Driving to a student's home to bring him to school reinforces the expectation that students are to be at school. Student Communication included any form of interaction between the school and students or their families, either in person or through written surveys. The School Culture category was composed of 9 of the 13 codes from the principals' descriptions; the Student Communication category had three. One code failed to fit in either category as it referred to quantifiable data.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings related to best practices perceived and used by principals in low-SES high schools with annual attendance rates over 90%. I have included the findings on principals' perceptions—specifically, how they knew their strategies were effective and why they thought they were effective. From the principals' perspectives, attendance strategies worked well because they were part of their schools' overall positive culture. The students wanted to attend to school because they felt involved in this culture. Students felt cared about and safe. They enjoyed extra-curricular activities; they were well-fed; and they were expected to attend school. Although none of the principals explicitly stated that they monitored or used student data, my research supported the concept that their knowledge of the data drove their decision-making. Finally, all of the best practices were contingent on follow-through. The principals ensured that practices were employed.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

On February 10, 2017, West Virginia high schools with graduation rates of 90% or better for the 2015–2016 school year were recognized at a special ceremony. In the Capitol building in Charleston, State Superintendent Dr. Michael Martirano gave each principal a beautifully engraved plaque displaying the school's graduate rate. It was a wonderful closure to my investigation that all eight high schools I had selected for my study were lauded publicly. I believe that, in addition to facilitating their students' success, having their school publicly recognized is a personal benefit for high school leaders who actively engage in strategies to support high attendance.

The subject of this study was student attendance. Students with higher attendance rates have higher grade point averages (GPAs) (Bracht, 2010; Gottfried, 2010; Roby, 2004; Strickland, 1998;). Research reveals the relationship: higher attendance rates correlate with higher test scores (Clement, 2006; Crone et al., 1993; Parke & Kanyongo, 2012; Roby, 2004). Student achievement is associated with increased rates of graduation and college attainment. In addition to its positive correlation to achievement, attendance is so important that it is one of the items recommended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to be included as a nonacademic factor to assess high schools like those in West Virginia.

The purpose of this study was to identify best practices perceived by principals used in low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) high schools with high annual attendance rates. An applied qualitative design was completed using interviews for data collection and an emergent approach to data analysis. The research question explored was as follows:

What are the best practices perceived by principals used in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates?

The theoretical model in this study assumed that attending school fosters children's cognitive development. Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, cited in this study to support the connection between school attendance and learning, focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context: one learns from one's social environment. School is a paragon of such an environment.

In this chapter, I discuss my research findings in relation to previous research: the best practices perceived by principals used in low-SES high schools with high annual attendance rates; how principals recognized that their actions positively affected school attendance; and why they believed these measures were successful. Also included in this chapter are recommendations for future practice and research.

Discussion of Findings

This research identified six best practices perceived by principals as effective for use in low-SES high schools to affect high annual attendance rates. Although the purpose of this study was to identify attendance-fostering strategies, an over-arching best practice was identified from synchronizing all the strategies revealed; a positive school culture could be easily recognized as the one characteristic which promotes consistent student attendance.

The discussion is presented in three major sections. The first section is a discussion of the findings about strategies and principals' perspectives about why their strategies work. Findings confirm and expand on previous research. The second and third

sections include recommendations for practice and research based on findings and observations related to previous and present studies.

Best-practice findings. The six best practices emerging from this research, listed sequentially beginning with the most reported, are as follows:

- offering incentives and student recognition;
- establishing a positive school culture that includes high expectations for students to come to school;
- holding meetings with parents, students and an administrator, and having personalized communication between students and an adult within the school;
- telephoning families of absent students;
- following, consistently, established district and state policies for attendance; and
- picking up absent students at their homes.

***Offering incentives and student recognition*.** Providing incentives and recognizing outstanding attendance as a strategy to improve attendance in the present study is supported by several previous studies including Fefer, DeMagistris, and Shuttleton (2016), Payne (2015), and Reid (1983). Incentives identified in this study included receipt of gift cards in amounts varying from $25-200 for local restaurants or establishments, receipt of school spirit dollars to be spent at the school spirit store, earning the privilege of eating lunch off campus, attending a school trip to a hockey game, having the option to not take a final exam, and recognition during assemblies or by social media. Reid (1983) suggested announcing the names of high-attendance students at assemblies as an example of student recognition. Payne (2015) reported that students indicated they considered the incentive of a school trip as extremely effective for their

school; and the single most successful strategy described was contacting home with positive feedback. School use of incentives as reported by the principals supports the research of Fefer et al. (2016) for student preferences for free time, the receipt of snacks, coupons, or prizes, and more opportunity for choice in school day processes.

Establishing a positive school culture that includes high expectations for students to come to school. **S**tudent feelings about school define and contribute to school culture. Establishing a positive school culture, with high expectations for regular attendance, as a strategy to improve attendance in the present study is supported by several previous studies, including Green et al. (2012), Kortering and Konold (2005), Marchetti et al. (2016), and Parrett and Budge (2012). Students who are connected to school are motivated to attend. Extracurricular offerings provide a means for connectedness. Multiple comments reported by the principals in this study indicated students came to school because they wanted to be at school. Students attended school because the school culture was very positive. Contributors to positive school culture as identified by the principals included having after school extracurricular activities such as band, sports, theater, or other clubs, while providing after school transportation. One principal reported 70% of his students participated in after school activities.

In this study, the principals stated they had high expectations for their schools. They said their high expectations, communicated to students and staff, contributed to the culture of the school and promoted positive school attendance. My findings about principals who create school environments with emphasis on high expectations are supported by the research as reported by Ferguson et al. (2010), Lezotte and Snyder (2011), and the Wallace Foundation (2013). Effective principals incorporate all the non-

negotiable practices to influence student success within their buildings (Ferguson et al., 2010). They have high standards or high expectations in a data-driven decision-making positive school environment (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Strong and effective leadership creates the culture based upon the basic underlying assumptions, the unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of the school (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011).

Holding meetings with parents, students and an administrator and having personalized communication between students and an adult within the school. The principals reported various types of personalized communications and meetings with the students and their families; some are formal such as using the Student Assistance Team (SAT) process and others are less formal. One principal said that he or the counselor speaks with students who miss multiple days. An advisory teacher meets with the same student every day and can discuss grades and attendance. Another principal said that he stays on the students and is personal with them; all staff members try to be complementary to the students. This strategy to improve attendance is supported by several previous studies completed by Allensworth and Easton (2007), Cole (2011), Kortering and Konold (2005), and Tate-Wyche (2015). These researchers reported that pleasing an adult—believing that an adult within the school cares for him or her— and having face-to-face meetings were stated by students as incentive for attending school.

The actions of this strategy contribute confidently to a school culture which is characterized by good relations, a positive school climate, respectful treatment, and opportunities to bond with adults and is supported by several previous studies completed by Ekstrand (2015), Meece (2011), Niehaus et al. (2012), and Parrett and Budge (2012).

A positive school culture values and fosters communications and relationships, and strengthens everyone's sense of belonging. High-performing schools have purposely created cultures that build a bond between students and school. The actions included fostering caring relationships between adults and children and setting high expectations and providing the support needed to meet these expectations.

Telephoning families of absent students. Districts often use a computer-assisted calling service to improve school-to-home communications. Tennessee students from two high schools and one middle school were randomly selected to participate in a study using an automatic calling system (Helm & Burkett, 1989). The message of the telephone call was to inform the student's family that the student was not in school that day. The group of students who received calls from the service had better attendance than those than those who did not.

***Following established district and state policies for attendance*.** No previous research specific to this practice was presented; compliance is not optional. However, established mandatory practice supports both the expectation for students to attend school and the research associating attendance with a positive school culture. This research is supported by previous findings reported by Brockmeier et al. (2012). The school must be organized through specific procedures, programs, practices, and processes to support what is or purported to be important to the school culture or underlying beliefs and assumptions. A strong correlation between the presence of effective school criteria and the organizational structures to support these criteria demonstrated the interdependency of these two constructs (Brockmeier et al., 2012).

Picking up absent students at their homes. No indication of this practice was referenced in other research. The action of driving to the home of an absent student seems to be a unique approach by the principals who practice it. The principal and the Prevention Resource Officer (PRO) drove to student homes, when students were identified by the principals as chronic non-attenders had failed to report, and brought them to school. This practice emphasizes the expectation for students to attend school and supports research associating attendance with a positive school culture such as reported by Parrett and Budge (2012). Parrett and Budge (2012) attested that principals from high-performing high-poverty schools consistently employed comprehensive systems with specific practices that were central to their school's improvements. Driving to a student's home is a specific practice the principals in this study cited as a strategy associated with positive attendance.

Principals' perceptions findings. This section addresses the two interview questions: "How do you know that your actions work?" and "Why do you think that your actions work so well?"

How do you know that your actions work? None of the principals stated that they monitored or analyzed student attendance data specifically, yet it appeared that their knowledge and interpretation of such data drove their decision-making. Use of a data tracking system was not directly reported by the principals, but could be inferred because managing data was an integral part of their strategies. Principals knew their attendance rates and who their targeted students were. Principals were involved in the SAT process, which was data-triggered.

The principals reported that their recognition of the effectiveness of their actions was based on specific information, including attendance rates, number of excuse notes turned in to the office, graduation rates, and reduction in the number of SAT meetings held. Student feedback also contributed to the principals' understanding of the success of their strategies.

Administrators can reduce chronic absence rates by formulating intensive monitoring systems and acting on the resultant data. Use of such a system resulted in a decrease in the number of chronic absences among young students living in poverty (Chang & Romero, 2008). Schools that focused on improving attendance reported a decrease in chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) saw an increase in graduation rates when they focused on ninth grade student data, employing the on-track data collection system developed by The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research to monitor whether freshmen were earning enough credits for promotion to tenth grade. Lizette and Snyder (2011) identified frequent monitoring of student progress as one of the seven correlates of effective schools. Frequent monitoring means using data to guide instructional decisions and effective use of data depends on how well the school principal guides the process.

Why do you think that your actions work so well? From the principals' perspective, attendance strategies work well because they are part of a positive school culture that includes overall high expectations. Knowing that teachers are focused on student achievement, to the extent that principals will even drive to students' homes to bring them to school, reinforces the expectation that students are to attend school.

School leadership is second only to the classroom teacher as the most influential factor in student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). The influence of the school leader determines the effectiveness of any school improvement efforts, including those associated with attendance (Leithwood et al., 2004). Principals from high-performing high-poverty schools who consistently employed comprehensive systems with specific practices were central to their schools' improvements. Practices included monitoring attendance, tracking individual student performance, and providing mentors and free tutoring opportunities to struggling students (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Meece (2011) focused on teachers' and students' perceptions of their school environment and climate, and the principal's role in shaping the culture of mutual supportiveness within the school. The students reported that "the relationship with their teachers and the principal motivates them to do better" (p. 122).

Lyle Kirtman (2013) developed seven competencies for effective leadership that Fullan (2014) uses to describe the necessary skills for principals who want to become change agents. One component is for principals to build trust through clear communications and expectations. Leaders not only master directness and honesty about performance expectations, they also follow through with actions on commitments made to ensure clear understanding of the expectations. Leaders create a commonly owned plan for success which includes monitoring that concentrates on keeping track of whether school actions produce wanted results.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The following recommendations for practice are offered based on this research: improve attendance to improve other measure of success; target low-SES students; target

high school students; change the culture of the school; and communicate with students' families.

Improve attendance to improve other measures of success. School leaders have the responsibility to improve student achievement, not just because of local, state, and national demands, but primarily because of an obligation to the students served. With a solid education, students emerge from public school equipped to meet the future demands of college or employment. Students not attending school cannot be helped.

Target low-SES students. Chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students. This correlation has been established by multiple researchers, as noted throughout this study. Although a low-SES school is defined as one in which the majority of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, low-SES students who do not receive free lunch, perhaps because their family income is borderline for eligibility, also show a high absence rate (Lamdin, 1996).

Target high school students. As students progress through their years of public school, their attendance rates decline (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). Secondary school students have lower attendance rates than elementary school students (Crone et al., 1993; Clement, 2006). Targeting high school students so they attend school will result in higher attendance and graduation rates.

Change the culture of the school. Again, all of the attendance-promoting practices that emerged from this study can be included under the single best practice of establishing a positive school culture that encourages students to come to school, includes high expectations and leader follow-through. Leaders who want to improve student attendance, and subsequent graduation rates and performance on state and national

assessments, need to ensure that the culture of the school is positive. Leaders need to analyze student data, make decisions accordingly, and follow through with actions. Students cited dislike of school and poor relationships with teachers as reasons for not attending. Students who feel disengaged are more likely to drop out of school (Henry, 2007). School culture is improved by determining why students dislike school and taking measures to improve their relationships with teachers (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Klerman et al., 1987; Reid, 2008). Use of incentives to recognize and reward student attendance has been found effective for achieving high attendance rates. School leaders need to use student feedback and school data to determine what incentives are meaningful to their students. A school culture characterized by good relations, a positive school climate, respectful treatment, and opportunities to bond with adults creates pupil motivation and the desire to learn (Ekstrand, 2015).

Create expectations. Lyle Kirtman (2013) developed seven competencies for effective leadership used by Fullan (2014) to describe the necessary skills for principals who want to become change agents. One component is for principals to build trust through clear communications and expectations. High school principals who placed emphasis on high expectations, in that the goals established by the school leadership for the schools were "non-negotiable," produced schools with exemplary student assessment scores (Ferguson et al., 2010).

Leader follow-through. Leaders not only master directness and honesty about performance expectations, they also follow through with actions on commitments made to ensure clear understanding of the expectations. Leaders create a commonly owned plan for success which includes monitoring that concentrates on keeping track of whether

school actions produce wanted results (Fullan, 2014; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). Skillful and relentless implementation of school improvement plans was one of the steps identified during a 2009 conference at Harvard University with 15 high school leaders. The most successful administrators skillfully and relentlessly implement plans, monitor quality, and provide appropriate supports and incentives (Ferguson et al., 2010).

Communicate with students' families. A good relationship between student and school is required to positively affect student attendance. The relationship between parent and school can also be influential. Communication strategies can include telephoning the families of absent students, sending letters to families when students have accumulated unexcused absences, and meeting with family members to discuss concerns about their student.

Recommendations for Future Research

The factors and influences contributing to low student attendance are complicated and not easily defined. Solutions cannot be put into a one-size-fits-all approach. However, the more that is known about what influences and contributes to school attendance, the better school leadership can make decisions and follow-through for positive change. My recommendations for future research are as follows:

1. The conduct of a larger quantitative study encompassing more low-SES high schools, including the greater Appalachian region, perhaps in the form of a survey, to confirm and possibly identify additional best practices from a broader perspective using categories that emerged from this study.
2. The completion of studies similar to mine but focusing on the student perspective. My study was undertaken and processed based on the perspective of the school

administrator. Although it was not the intent of this study to determine the extent of student-voice representation, the principals reported using multiple measures of student feedback. Greater, more-direct student contribution to this research could be highly informative and productive.

3. The completion of a study connecting school culture specifically to attendance. Because school culture has emerged as a major influence upon attendance, I recommend more research to study the connection in greater depth.
4. The completion of research to study inner-city schools with predominantly minority populations to determine what attendance strategies are effective in promoting their school attendance. The interviewed principals worked in predominantly rural high schools representative of the student population of West Virginia, which is approximately 90% White and where African American students comprise less than 5% of the population, with the other 5% a mixture of other races.
5. The completion of research to investigate what can be done for those chronically absent students who seem to not be affected by any strategy used. The interviewed principals in this study worked in high schools that had annual attendance rates over 90% and were recognized for having graduation rates over 90%. So, what about the 10% who fail to come to school and fail to graduate?
6. The completion of research to further investigate the relationship between leadership follow-through and use of data to drive decision-making. As reported previously in the study, effective school leaders use data to drive their decision-

making. Little research is available specific to principal follow-through, although the principals in this study did exhibit this characteristic.

Summary

A list of six best practices principals use in low-SES high schools with high attendance rates emerged from this research. All of the practices identified from this study are subcomponents of a positive school culture, which, in turn, promotes consistent student attendance. My study was needed because, to date, no research has provided a list of best practices to improve attendance among low-SES schools. The study took place in the state of West Virginia, a federally designated Appalachian Region, but is representative of other schools struggling with low-SES student attendance and thereby, achievement. Effecting change in schools, including improving attendance rates, begins with school leadership. I have identified the best practices perceived and utilized by principals in low-SES, high-attendance high schools. Best practices emerging from this study in West Virginia may well be effective in other low-SES schools irrespective of location.

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Appendix A – Interview Questions for Administrators

1. What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?
2. Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?
3. How do you know that your actions work?
4. Why do you think that your actions work so well?

Supplemental Questions (if needed)

1. Do you use data or an early warning system to monitor attendance?
2. Do you or others do anything when students are frequently absent?
3. Do you do anything to recognize students with good attendance?
4. Do you contact families of students who miss a lot?
5. Do you let families know the importance of attendance?
   How do you do this?

Appendix B – Interview Transcripts

Principal A from Alpha High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: One of the first things we do is that we do have an attendance policy in the county. It's been in effect in the county where we target our better kids. We have an attendance policy where if they have 3 absences and an A or 2 absences or 3 absences and a B then they are exempt from exams for certain classes. It is a carrot, an incentive that we give kids to be in school. Another thing we do is make sure that we keep up with their attendances daily. We have a phone system that calls parents each time a student is absent. So that the parents are aware. It is a scripted message that says that your child is out of school. We also work with our truancy officers in the county for kids who are chronically truant. And we get the court systems involved in those cases. So it is a multi-tiered effect. We have different strategies that fit different kids.

Q: Is the daily phone system a human or a School Messenger?

A: It is a school messenger type of account. A lot of the parents will call in and if there's any ambiguity they will call in to make sure that that's correct and especially if the kids absent and the parent doesn't know about it. This is obviously a bad situation. They'll call in and we'll work on that type of scenario immediately.

Q: Is there anything else you do to work on your attendance? Maybe some other in school incentives?

A: We have a couple programs that we use grant money for. We have a school store to sell knick-knacks or school spirit items. We give something called Alpha Bucks for our mascot. We have an Alpha Pay Day. Kids are paid in Alpha Bucks for their grades and good attendance. They can use their Alpha Bucks to get into ball games for free. They can use the Alpha Bucks to purchase items in the Alpha School store. We also have drawings. We have grants from Walmart and some other locations. We have our most improved student and our most impressive student. We have drawings and the teachers send in the names. We'll have drawings for $100 gift cards.

Q: Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?

A: Probably our number one would be something that targets your chronically absent kids and it's working with the judicial system. Where we have kids that are chronically tardy that are put on a probationary status and the parents have to go through the court system. Number 2 is our exam policy. It targets the kids at the other end of the spectrum. They actually don't want to miss school so they can opt out of exams. And then, third, I think it would probably be the phone call system. The kids realize that if they are absent, their parents are going to get a phone call. I think the incentive programs are numbers

four and five. It is something nice to do for the kids to make them aware of the value of being at school every day. Hopefully they will be at work every day when they graduate.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: I've only I've been at the school since 2010. We have seen a turnaround in about probably 8 to 10% in our attendance rate since we've put some of these actions into practice.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: I think because they address families from different socioeconomic status. I guess you might say it's a full spectrum where we are trying to reach kids that have good families and kid families that probably don't value education. Instead of just hitting kids in one area, we hit kids across the spectrum. You have to understand your student body before you can address or fix a problem. You need to understand what the problem is and what kind of things will fix the problem, so to speak.

Q: Do you use data or early warning system to monitor attendance?

A: Yes, we use it. Our school is 700 kids and I'm from the community. I've been here 50 years so I know almost all the families. My assistant principal is not from this area but he's young and has a good mind. We really know our kids more so than anything. We get out during lunches. We make a point to go out during bus duty, and during the afternoons. We notice if kids aren't here other than just seeing their names on an absence list. We'll start asking around if a certain student is sick or whatever. If we don't get a satisfactory answer, we start making phone calls. I think this is probably more effective. There are always some kids that you can't get in touch with. That helps too, just being aware of which kids are absent, especially if we haven't seen the student for a couple days in a row.

Principal B from Bravo High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: Part of my job is to monitor attendance and every month print out an attendance report. I send out attendance letters to students' parents who have more than 5 unexcused absences. That letter gives them an appointment time to come in and meet with me to discuss their absences. I also try to call students in and talk with them about their absences. I give them a print out and I will highlight with them the days that they are unexcused and explain to them what type of excuses they are able to bring in that will count them as excused. Our attendance director for the county will also contact them if they have 3 unexcused absences and I do it again at 5.

We also have a positive behavior support system where they get points toward an auction and an Amazon week. They are awarded different points for bringing in their excuses. They can earn points for different things, too. We have had an auction. We have an Amazon week where they can convert points to actual bucks. A $50 item is bought with a

certain amount of points. We do give attendance awards at the end of the school year. For those with perfect attendance or less five, they get in a drawing. There are several items that we give out at the end of the year. We also have a program, the Challenge Program. It actually comes from Pennsylvania, but we were approached by a group of people. They got local business sponsors in our area. Our students get awards from $1,000 given to each class each year. One of the awards is a $200 award. Students are put into a drawing, if they have less than 5 absences, to win the $200. This is $200 per grade. There are other items for which they receive awards as part of the Challenge Program.

This year we have started a student center. We call it the Dog House Student Center. The Board purchased a number of items. There is a pool table in there. There is an Xbox System. There's two tvs. They are hooked into Netflix and the Internet. And there are couches and tables, bar stools, a refrigerator, a microwave and a sink. And some comfortable chairs and bean bag chairs. Attendance is part of what allows them to earn their way into that room during the lunch hour. They can eat in there instead of the cafeteria. This was an idea from a member of the Board. Entrance is based on grades, attendance, and how they did on last year's state assessment. It is a cool thing for the kids and they like it. The kids like to go in there with their friends. It is a hangout place with nice furniture like going to someone's house with chairs and coffee tables. It also gives them a place to warm up their food when they pack their lunch because they are limited. There is no microwave available to them.

Q: Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five?

A: I would say, trying to think how a student would think, the Challenge Program maybe one of the top. I would say getting the points for bringing in their excuses. And then I think the student center would be next. And us meeting with the parents is not high on the student list. And another is that I meet with them individually. I do an annual phone call. We have an automated system. Every day we send out a phone call with a message stating that your child was absent for the day. We started that because sometimes you call a parent incidentally, occasionally it happens that they wouldn't know their child was absent. It's not very often, but it does happen that a parent doesn't know their child isn't there that day. We also remind parents in that message to send in the excuse notes.

We have just started talking about that our biggest attendance problem is with our seniors, especially those who are 18. Unfortunately, at least in our area, the court system tends not to do anything towards the 18-year-olds. They don't press the issue and charge them. The students just see nothing happening to them. So we're thinking about trying to get our Board to pass and we would make this one effective the next school year, if a senior misses so many days that are unexcused, they would not be able to participate in the graduation ceremony. We feel that might affect them more than all the other things. For like I said, seniors just tend to feel they are untouchable when they get far into the school year or when they reach 18. This would let the students know it is important to

come to school and this would let parents to help get them to come to school. Graduation participation is a big deal.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: Because I am the one that deals with attendance, I think when the students bring in their excuses, they always want to bring them to me. Or they want to meet with me to discuss their absences. They will bring me in all of their excuses or they will say that they will bring them in the next day. Just the excuses coming in let us know it's working. It is hard to know if the individual things are working. We do have one person on duty. Her job every morning is to hound the students and she is the one who puts the points into the system. She really does hound them. She constantly reminds them and reminds them. They get points for bringing in their notes and she really will hound them. She constantly reminds them. Students have gotten to the point where they come in and walk straight to her and hand in their excuses. The feedback from the students. Although there is not major competition among the three county schools, there is some competition. There is one elementary, one middle and one high school in the county. The board office prints off a monthly summary and sends it to us showing us what each school's attendance rate. The high school tends to be the worst in the county. We just want to beat the other schools, so we work really hard. We have beat them in some months. We try really hard to be ahead in attendance rates.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: It helps that we are a small school and we talk with the kids. To talk with those kids individually, they know personally that we are there. I will make attendance phone calls, especially if a teacher points out that, hey, this kid isn't here or hasn't been here for three days. Then I will have them call the house to find out what's going on. After attending an attendance conference, we learned that if the teachers call is more meaningful than if I call. If I call it is seen more as a punishment. When a teacher calls, it is seen as the teacher cares and knows that I was missing for three days. I think for some kids this would mean a lot to them. That the teacher actually cares that they are out that many days. I don't think it would take that much time for a teacher to call because a kid has missed three days in a row. I think teachers are afraid to call the house but don't realize how well it would be received if they did call the house to check on a student.

Principal C from Charlie High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: Follow the county procedures/state code with the 3 and 5 day letters. There are the PBIS incentives. We are implementing PBIS this year. This is my fifth year at the school. We have PBIS here. PBIS was in place full force, but it kind of slipped away. We were retrained on it. We're going to have a better PBIS system in place. We still have the basis in place. We have Charlie Bucks for use in the school store called the DE store. Any type of positive behavior we that includes attendance. If we feel that a student has gone out of

his way and has done a good job. that we have some grading period rewards. The county does. It gives them gift cards. Kids names are put into a drawing like if a student had perfect attendance for so many day, they are put into a pool and we draw names at each school. And we make a big deal out of it and we present it to them. We use our social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) to showcase the winners. We have a marque out front of our school, if they have received any type of reward of a gift card we put their names on that as well. We give away t-shires. We have a line as the Charlie students "roll with pride" like the Alabama roll tide. Any time we can recognize the students and give them a t-shirt for that. During testing time, we have given surveys to find out how to get the students here to do their statewide tests. The kids tell us that they want to get fed. We'll get them extra snacks to get them here to take the tests. It doesn't cost us anymore because the cooks make them, whether it be a cookie or a bagged snack or something like that. We want them to perform well, but we want them to be here to take the tests.

Q: Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?

A: It's new the past couple of years, but I would say that the gift cards that they get that is probably number one. They look up forward to that because they know if they are in the drawing they know they still have it made. It's a kind of competition thing for them. The gift cards rewards they get at each quarter. These are from the county; they support our schools through the county that way. And they do like the Charlie Bucks. If we just feel that they've gone out of the way to really do anything we not only use that for attendance, we use it for anything although we use it for attendance as well. The Charlie Buck is only worth like a dollar. But they can use it where they sell things that they like at our DE store like slushies. They can put it with regular monetary money you know and then use it that way. Third, it is the state policy. Kids want to get their driver's licenses, they want to work and stuff like that. So once they get their 3-day, 5-day, and 10-day letters they know that they have to buckle down. That they want to get those things. They want to be able to work and they want to get their driver's license. It gives them an awakening that they need to get to school.

We don't really do anything out of the ordinary, but I just I think that we work on our school culture and our school climate. Kids want to be here. You know it's fun; it's fun to be here. So I think that's helped a lot. We have a Changing of the Guard that we've been going through the last administration. I'm really focused on. I was here with them, really focused on the kids. You know that they're here to learn. But you know there's some social aspect like a sporting event or a pep rally. Being at these events, they can't attend them unless they're at school so they want to be together. They want to be with each other and that has sort of helped. We have worked on our climate and our culture and they want to be together and they want to be here.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: The numbers don't lie. We were recognized for having over 90% attendance rate (graduation rate?). We think that is a positive. Student feedback. We do a lot of student surveys throughout the year. Our students respect the feedback that we get from them because it is their school. They feel like they're behind the decision-making and they enjoy coming to school here.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: Because of student feedback; they let us know. They like to be here. I mean for the most part of the majority.

Q: Do you use the early warning system to monitor attendance:

A: Yes, we do. But we've analyzed and have noticed that it's not 100% accurate but we do utilize that as well.

Q: Do you have a difference with your low-SES kid and your high SES kids?

A: I'm glad that you brought that up. I talk about the importance of food and stuff like that. This might be a whole other topic but they get free breakfast and free lunches here in this county. A lot of our students fall in that range of low-SES. Kids like to be here. This might be the only meal that they get. When we talk with kids with behavior problems and things like that, they are usually those kids. We tell them we're feeding you here, we're trying to make it a better place than what it is outside of the wall. (outside of the walls of the school) I think that's another reason why our attendance is so good because students come here, they get meals, they get breakfast and lunch. And they're good breakfast and lunches. We have a college style format with stations. There are two hot lines, there's a pizza line, there's a sandwich line, there's a salad bar, there's pre-made salad, there's hot and cold sandwiches. There's a lot of choices; it's college style. I think that's another reason why kids like to come to school, because they know they are going to get a good meal. Two good meals for free.

Q: Do you use a calling system when students are absent?

A: Yes, we do, it is through our attendance secretary. We use a service. If a student is absent and we don't receive a call or hear from a student that day they will get a call saying that the student wasn't in school and it will be unexcused unless someone call's. This is through our attendance secretary. The service has the secretary's voice that has the recorded message. It is tied into the WOW system.

We implemented a couple years in the way we handle tardies too. I don't know if this falls into it or not. We do tardy cards. When the students come in, they sign their name on just a regular index card. It stays right there in the sign in area. They put the date and the time on the page. When they get to six times they are referred to the discipline office and there's a written referral. Then we deal with it. So the students keep track of it themselves so they know so like if the student has been late four times this year, they know if he has two more times then he knows he going to have to face consequences for this. Some are

repeat offenders with this, but most of them know, because they are keeping track of their record and know it is legitimate. We keep it on file for them so when their name is written six times, then when they have to face the music they aren't shocked. We have a lot who are tardy. We have used this system for many years. It really helps the kids understand that they need to be at school and that they need to arrive on time.

Q: What do you do for your chronic absentees?

A: Our truancy officer will schedule meetings with the students in the school. Usually when she has these meetings, quarterly, she will also pull the for the gift cards that same day. She will meet with the students and their families at the school. She won't pull all of the students with problems, but will pull those who are chronic. She will try to get to the bottom of things quicker that way so there won't be a bigger problem later on. She will email that she will be coming to school. She will email to the principals that these are the ones that I'm going to file on and ask for information so we can communicate and give feedback on those students.

Q: Those who qualify for the drawing, how do their names get put in?

A: Yes, their name goes into a bucket. I think the names are those students with three days or less missed school. She will draw for 5 or 6 of them each quarter. I believe they are like a $25 Walmart gift card. Around Christmas time she had $25 for the area mall. She will do something different at the end of the nine-week period. There is BDW3 near the school that the kids like to go and hang out at before a ball game, so she might try to get something from there.

Principal D from Delta High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: In all honestly our attendance rate last year wasn't as high as we typically have. I think it was 93.7% last year. Typically, it all goes back to my philosophy of making our school very student centered. I truly believe that our attendance rate is decided within the first two minutes that our students wake up in the morning. If they wake up and grunt and say that they have to go to school. That's not where I want to be. They aren't motivated to go there. And they roll over and go back to sleep. So that's where it really all happens. Because if they don't get out of bed, they aren't going to come to school. And we make the school all about the students. In fact, we have posters around the school that state "Priority 1 at Delta HS is students. A blank sheet and then at the very bottom Priority 2 is everything else." So we run our school like that.

Q: Do you do anything else in the school to recognize attendance?

A: At the end of the year we recognize perfect attendance with gift cards and those kind of things. We even try to recognize students with improved attendance. If they have had bad attendance and then all of a sudden we get through to them and they really improve their attendance and finish strong, then we like to recognize them as well.

Q: Do you guys have a calling system for students who are not at school?

A: We do. It's a computer-generated system that calls students who are not there. It calls their home assuming we have their correct number. We're a small community. It doesn't take much, there is the exception, of course, but generally speaking, we'll call home and talk with those parents and that's all it takes. They support the school strongly.

Q: Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?

A: Establishing a culture where the kids want to be at school would clearly be number one. When we offer off-campus lunches the last Friday of the month sometimes as a reward. We have a closed campus. We're in an area where there are a number of fast food places very close by, walking distance. And so the last Friday of the month we offer as an incentive different things, that they can go off campus, get something, and bring it back. So that will probably be number. But really the biggest thing in my mind is creating a culture where the kids want to be here.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: By the common benchmark indicators – our attendance rate, our dropout rate, our graduation rate. We have 90% plus graduation rate. Our dropout rate is very low. So using those indicators, we know we are on the right track.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: Because of the benchmarks indicated. The data shows that what we do works. Except for the perfect attendance thing we don't do generally awards because being here is an expectation. I think we were being judicious for what we call out for a special award. Just being here and doing your best and doing your work is a basic expectation. That doesn't call necessarily for an extra award.

Principal E from Echo High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: We do a lot of phone calls home personally between me and the secretary. The students that are just tardy and late, me in the PRO officer have went and picked them up many times and brought them to school. The parents have been very appreciative of that because a lot of the parents, both sets, work and the kids are just hanging out at home after the parents leave. So we go and we make house calls, so speak. We have a big poster outside the office. When we reached our goal, I took everybody to a hockey game last semester. We want to keep our attendance above 95%. We took them to a professional hockey game. Everybody in the school went.

Q: Do you do any other incentives or awards?

A: Just like every other school you know you got your attendance incentives at the end of the school year. We give out the certificates and stuff like that. You know it's really hard

where we live and I think we have 97% attendance yesterday. I think that just knowing that someone is going to get them, sometime, makes them a little bit more eager for them to come. Our attendance has been about 92%; I'm trying to get it up to 94 or 95 percent by the end of the year. Just staying on the kids and being personal with them. Having that open dialogue with the kids every day and asking them where they've been. We had some really bad attendance kids. I'm trying to get the attendance kids. I make sure myself and all the teachers are complementary of them when they're here. I tell them we're glad to see them, stuff like that; just little things of keep them here.

Q: Do you have good communications with families?

A: We have good conversations with families, I call home and find out who's not here. We only have 6-10 kids out daily, which isn't so bad. What we have now is that the kids are calling us and beating us to the punch to let us know they are sick, or the parent call saying so and so is sick, no need to call us today.

Q: Do you use a computer calling system or a live body?

A: As far as calling, it is really just me and the secretary who make the phone calls, not an automatic system.

Q: Do you use any data or early warning system?

A: We don't really use any early warning system; we know the kids who are at risk just because we have 150 kids. We know the handful of them.

Q: Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?

A: One, going to get them!! With the cop car, the kids don't like that. Me and the PRO go. When we go to the house with the lights on in the siren and going, they don't like it very well. The parents like it, too. They're like, you better get your butt to school. Second or third, calling home to check on them to see where they're at is very helpful as well. And the students know that they are going to get a call home.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: The percentage. We have that poster out front as soon as you walk into the school you can see where they're at. The kids know where they're at every day. We preach that if you're not in school you're not getting any education. You're not getting any learning; you're not getting any smarter. And nothing is going on. They can visibly see where the school is at the percentage is there the next day. It's really good to see the 97% posted out front.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: Our actions are unconventional. There aren't that many principals that go out and get kids. We go with the PRO. He drives his Cruiser and that's where we going to get them.

Principal F from Foxtrot High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: It's all about personal relationships. We have a number of strategies. One strategies is that students with highest attendance schedule first. For seniors, they have an opportunity to be exempt from semester tests. With high rigger comes a desire for the kids not to have to take those exams. So, it's a benefit to them. There's also a kind of attendance incentive for grades 9-11 for exams as well. For example, if you had zero days absent you get 10% added to your semester test grade. So, those are academic pieces. We also have the link-up program from the state done during advisor/advisee time. There are very small groups for a teacher; they have 15 to 18 kids in their link-up. The same teachers follow them all four years of high school. They meet up every day. That's the personal relationship piece that I mentioned. There is the accountability of at least one professional expecting the kids to be here every day increases exponentially. When you couple that with teachers having expectations within each of their classes, kids respond to that.

As kids miss school we bring them down and talk to them. We observe certain thresholds, at three days we talk to them, encourage them, and ask them what barriers are interfering with their ability to come to school and ask how we can help them. While we are first in attendance we are also first in poverty. Very often obstacles are great so we talk about those. The administrator and the counselor talks with them. We run activity buses four days a week after school. So, a lot of time whatever activities kids are involved in whether it be FFA, and academic group, or skills or sporting groups. Often it's those sorts of things that encourage them to have to come to school. They often have practice after school so running activity buses, while it helps them to be an after-school it also increases the likelihood they will want to participate.

We have a very robust supper after school four days a week. If they stay, they also get a full meal. In a high poverty area, having three meals a day at the school is something they look forward to. If we can get them here, we can. Help change their lives. Anybody who stays after school has a dinner. So, they might be playing in softball, they may be here for theater and maybe they're here just because they want tutoring after-school. After school supper is available to anyone.

Q: Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?

A: Personal relationships. I think when kids know that someone believe in them, and they're behind them and will support them, kids will come to school when they know there's an expectation for them for that day. And that's just high expectations from the teachers. If you have a teacher says we aren't going to do anything today, then kids will say then why do I want to come here and be in your class. So, the expectation is that the teachers have high expectations. The kids respond to that. And it works for us. Making a personal connection. If you were my teacher and I missed yesterday and I walk in your classroom today, you say "Linda, we missed you yesterday, let's get you what you need

and get you caught back up. You've made a commitment to me, you are investing in me as a teacher." If I had to rank them, this would be the highest one.

Second would be engagement in student activities. We have about 70% of our students that are attached to something extracurricular. We have a student body of 500 with 70% of them are involved in something other than just a regular school day. Whether it be an athletic event or competition or academic competition or theater. So that involvement in an extracurricular activity is an encouragement for them to come to school. So this is probably number two.

Third is probably the semester test incentives.

And fourth is the scheduling.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: Well, basic attendance numbers, our daily attendance. We do a comparison of how kids are doing academically based on their attendance. We also use the SAT process, student assistant teams, to address attendance issues. If kids don't come to school, they aren't going to do well academically. They reach a certain threshold in their academic performance we would initiate a student assistance team. so, that's another way to collect that information, see where we are heading. We look attendance by grade level and by teacher rolls. We take a look at where are those high absentee areas and help teachers classroom develop classroom initiatives. Another thing is out teachers. We have school-wide initiatives, but we also have classroom level initiatives. Another example would be if you have perfect attendance for 4 ½ weeks, at mid-term then a teacher will throw out their lowest grade. So pieces like that; teachers keep track of attendance in their own classrooms.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: Consistency. We follow up on them. Kids know. What gets monitored gets done. If kids know we expect them to be here and we hold them accountable for what gets done, then they are more accountable. And we follow up. We don't let that fly, that's priority.

Q: Do you use any early warning system to monitor attendance?

A: We use the early warning system through WVEIS. We don't use the new system, BrightByte. We use the WVEIS tools. We check the midterm grades. Those are our processes. If a kid has made a D or an F at midterm, we'll make a parent contact. Normally what is behind that is a kid isn't turning in his work and it usually he isn't coming to school either. Then that would initiate that SAT process.

Q: Do you have a calling system that you use?

A: We do have a calling system, but we do not use it for attendance. We will do personal calls. We don't make them every day. When we see a pattern happening, we do individual

calls. We have done robo-calls for attendance in the past, but we didn't see any impact on that.

Q: What do you do for students who have excellent attendance; do you recognize them in some way aside from the grades?

A: We do. It is the finale of our awards program in the spring. They are bought up before the whole student body. They get a certificate. We also have a Hall of Fame. It's a countywide activity to recognize academic achievements so those students are also recognized at that point**.**

Principal G from Golf High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: To get the high attendance rate you have to have a culture in place that students know what is expected of them. The high expectations for students. Students need to understand that their attendance to school is part of preparing them for their College and Career. So, we do include a lot of things through assemblies and things through our advisor-advisee. Every year we have a theme. We set the standard high for the kids. For the majority of kids, they're going to come to school. It's just that 5% or 6% of kids that you have to deal with who won't come to school. Then we put a plan of action in place as to what we're going to do to get them in school. We have a theme every year. Our theme this year is grit. GRIT is guts, resilience, initiative and tenacity. With our students we stress the importance of your attendance, your discipline, and your commitment to your grades. The staff has said that one of the core beliefs is that we want the students to own their core learning. And so everything we do here and we do through focus groups, we are a high schools at work group. We work at through the 7 key practices. I have a teacher focus groups in these 7 different areas. And one of those focus groups is the high expectation focus group. And all they focus on is what are we doing to raise the expectations here. And when kids don't adhere to what they're supposed to do, what are we going to do about it. They work very closely with the advisor and guidance focus group because they are studying the data and are keeping up with what's going on with the kids. And teachers meet in PLCs. If attendance is one reason for a student to be in danger of failing, then we go into why are they are not here and where are they. We don't just let attendance be the flow in allowing whatever happens, happens, and we'll just wait for the county to take them to magistrate. We'll just wait until they have to have a fine. We try really hard to get him back here. I will go with my PRO or my assistant will go with my PRO. We make a home visit if we need to. I've actually gone to homes and have said "good morning" to kids. They wake up to seeing me standing there. I think the important thing about getting kids to school is we've got to make a real strong move to have a culture that there are relationships. Kids understand that this is their place. Some of them don't come to school because they don't feel like they fit in. Some don't come to school because they feel as if they're really not a part of things here. I had a young man the other day, just to give you an example, we've really struggled to get in school. We

struggled with the fact that his isn't coming to school and he is failing. We know he's headed to the dropout kind of thing. We figured out that he didn't feel like he's part of what goes on here. So we started off with small things like getting him three or four school shirts. We're finding a big difference because we're getting him involved in activities. He's wearing the school shirts. We're supporting him. Sometimes it's just finding the root cause. That's what I have PLCs doing. Then they identify who can take care of the situation in order to get the kids here. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. For the most part, if the kids know you care they are going to be here. I'm a nerd I love what I do. I create some pretty crazy things for my staff to do with kids and for my kids to do and it's pretty awesome. Not only do we have teacher focus groups, we have student focus groups.

Q: Of the actions that you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five?

A: I think, number one is the culture of the school and students know and understand what is expected from you for them. I think this is important. Number two is having a staff who is very committed to working together, collaborating and identifying who is not here and identifying why they're not here and looking at a plan of action. I strongly believe when you work in PLCs you need to identify the problem. You need to collaborate to work on a solution. You need to apply that solution and then you need to go back and evaluate that to see how it works with that student. I think the most important thing is follow-through for all of it. I think that has helped with the PLCs. We meet twice a week during a common planning time in the morning. It gives them time and so their commitment. I think one of the most important things too, and I probably should have put this up higher, is for students to know and understand that they need to own their learning. They also need to understand that we don't give away the diplomas, we don't give away grades, they earn them. This is one way to prepare them for their future life. I think it's important that students have a reason to want to be at school. When you look at the student side of this thing, it is important to that they know and understand that they belong. That they have a role here and responsibilities here. And getting them involved in clubs and extra- and co-curricular activities is another way to get them here because it gives them the incentive to be present.

Q: So you would say that your number one is establishing a culture with your students so that they want to come to school.

A: And all of those things are steps that go under it.

Q: And number two would be your staff commitment and the work that they analyzed the data. They set personal goals. And they identify students who need to come to school. And then maybe, three, is that you have co-curricular activities for students to want them to make them come to school and be a part of school.

A: We also have parent involvement. You have got to have parents involved. Parent involvement is meeting with parents, making parent contact. We have a message system

that if your child is not in school you get a phone call. So parents are notified if their child is not in school. And they absolutely have to be able to take care of it and work with us. So we contact them and we work with them as well to get the child to school, and we set up an accountability system that we can work with them. Most of them want to hold their kids accountable for being at school.

The other thing I didn't mention was we have the county policies and state policies limiting students to the number of absences before they're sent to court. We try to do a lot of this to prohibit that from happening. We live in a rural area where people don't have a lot of money. They get socked with $252 court costs and fines. Sometimes paying the fine is the motivator because they don't want to pay the fine. We try to stop this before it gets to that point. So, getting the student to come to school so the parent doesn't have to pay the fine is a motivator. Parents will say "I aint' got $252 to pay out on this kids who refuses to come to school." And will send their kids to school.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: Not every action works. But what we do is the importance of being able to apply solutions to our actions. And not just applying actions, but we have to evaluate them. And identify what worked and what didn't work. We utilize the SAT team frequently for students who are not attending school. We have several who are in the SAT process. We have several who are in SPL. You know when your actions are working is when the students at least start showing up to be here to do whatever they need to. But then they fade back off because it is a habit. I think it's important that we or the teachers stay committed to this kid to try to get them here.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: Because they are collaborative. We do involve team members here at the school, we involve the parents. And we bring in the student and we hold the student most accountable of all. We don't want to nail the student but at the same time sometime we've got to find out the root cause, and work with the kid. Sometimes it works out great and sometimes you just have to go with the flow because you got a kid that doesn't want to save themselves. It's hard to save somebody who doesn't want to save themselves. But you just stay on it. You stay persistent. I think that's why. And that's why and when it works.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: I think the bottom line is that belonging to something and feeling safe, feeling like they trust their teachers and they want to do something with their lives.

Principal H from Hotel High School

Q: What do you do to get your high annual school attendance rate?

A: One thing we do is have an exam policy, an exam exemption policy. Each semester students with 3 absences and an A in the class can be exempt from the exam, if they have

2 absences they have to have at least a B, with 1 absence and they can have a C, to be exempt from exams. This has helped. We have an awards program in place. Students who have excellent or perfect attendance are recognized each quarter and at the end of the school year. They are given gift cards or key chains for good attendance. The advisory teachers work with their advisory students. The advisory teachers encourage their students for multiple things like grades and activities in school and attendance. We also have a truancy officer with whom we work on a regular basis. After 3 unexcused absences, I will send a letter home to students, letting parents know that their child has three unexcused absences. Then the county office will follow up with me after the student has 5 unexcused absences and will send another letter. And upon receiving the letter the parents have to schedule a meeting with the school administrator to discuss their child's attendance.

Q: Of the actions you have shared with me, could you rank order what you consider to be the most effective top five actions?

A: The least effective is the exam exemption policy. It encourages students that to come to school, however, who would come to school anyway, are the students who work the hardest are the ones who benefit the most. Another downside to that one is that students come to school sick. They come to school no matter what, just to miss the exams. The rewards program that we are doing this year is new. We did it for one semester last year and started it back up this year. The kids seem to like that and to be recognized through that. They like the gift cards to McDonald or Sheetz or places like that. Between that and notifying the parents after the 3 unexcused absences. I am not sure which would be most effective. The parents seem to respond well to the letters after a student has 3 unexcused absences. The kids seem to like the recognition and the gift cards. It is hard to say which is most effective. The recognition for attendance is done quarterly, midway through the semester, at the end of the semester, midway again and at the end of the year. We recognize high attendance and perfect attendance, both. They get a pin, or a key chain and a gift card. They get one for excellent attendance and both for perfect attendance. They get a little extra for the perfect attendance. And then at the end of the school year, if they have perfect attendance all year, then they will receive a certificate. They get a certificate for three or less absences for the year, there is a number for excellence, and they get a gift certificate for that. This is based on the whole year.

Q: How do you know that your actions work?

A: Well, we have a good attendance rate. I would think that it works because of the good attendance rate. There are several schools in West Virginia that do not have this attendance rate. And I feel that since we have a high attendance rate, I think our efforts are paying off and students are wanting to coming to school.

Q: Why do you think that your actions work so well?

A: I think it's because the students and the parent know we are involved and we care. And we want our students to be in school. And we go out of our way to make sure that

we contact our parents and the students. The advisory teachers work with the students each day. And they talk with them about this. Then they talk to an administrator. If their attendance does slack up, then we have the attendance director who come to the school and meets with the administrator and the students with poor attendance. We contact parents. The rewards where the students are directly recognized because of our efforts. So they know we care. We want them to be in school. And we want them to be successful. I think that's how the students know.

With our graduation rates we have a 20/20 coach. Teachers and counselors can refer students that they are concerned about as far as graduation. We can target those students pretty early on, and work with them independently. They can get the extra help and encouragement that they need. Once our academic coach has talked with all the seniors, then he moves down to the eleventh grade and so on. Just to make sure that students are staying on task. That they are on the grade level that they need to be on time. We recognize them when they are on grade level on time. And we try to identify them early if there are problems with their credits. Ninth graders don't sometime understand the credit requirement situation and how that works.

Appendix C – Principal Response by Question

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Principal D	Principal E	Principal F	Principal G	Principal H
Top 5 Actions								
1	chroncally absent are put into judicial system	The Challenge Program - $200 student incentives from an end of the year drawing for having 5 or less absences	Quarterly gift cards of $25 given during a drawing for 3 or less days	Establishing a culture where the kids want to be at school	Picking them up with the PRO and giving them a ride to school	Personal relationships/personal connections with between teachers and students. High expectations for the teachers who in turn have high expectations for the students. Someone every day	Establishing a culture so that students want to come to school	Rewards program with gift cards every 9 weeks to recognize high attendance and perfect attendance; recognition at school end for the whole year (perfect and high)
2	Exam policy - allows good grades and attendance to skip	Receiving points for bringing in excuse notes as part of behavior support system that can be used for purchases	Awarding of Momarch Mula for use in school spirit store	Monthly incentives on Friday student earn the priviledge to go off campus for lunch	the principal or the secretary Calling home when students are absent	Student engagement in extra curricular activities; 70% do something after school. After school bus and supper provided.	Staff commitment, analysze data, set goals; wotk collaboratively	Parents are notified after 3 unexcused absense in writing
3	Automatic/computer system phone call to absent students/ keep up with attendances daily	Special student center priviledge, attendance partly based on attendance; students like to go there w/ friends	State policy - 3, 5 10 day letters; prohibit student drivers and workers		Students know that the principal will be checking on them when they are absent	Semester test incentives. Seniors can be exempt from exams; 9-11 can have 10% added to exam and/jor have lowest grade dropped	Have co- and extra-curricular activities for the students to make students want to be a part of the school	Exam policy, attendance allows and good grade allow studens to skip final exam
4	Incentive program - Panther Bucks awarded can purchase items in spiirit store or get into ball grames for free	Principal meets with students to discuss absences when more than 5	School climate and culture developed so that students want to come to school.			Scheduling privileges - highest attendance gets to schedule first.	Parent involvement - calling home and meetings with them	
5	Incentive program - drawings for $100 for qualified students of which having good attendance is a part	Automatic/computer phone call made daily for absent students					state and county policies that send a families to court and pay	
Other Actions	Follow county policy after 3 and 5 absences letters are sent home; required meeting	One person nags/assigned to collect absent notes	T-shirst given out	Making the school student-; make students want to come to school.	A poster shows the daily attendance for all to see	link-up program, same teacher has same group for 4 years and meets with students daily	high expectations for the students to be at school; one focus group works just on improving high expectations	Advisory teacher meets with same group of students daily; encourages grades and attendance
	They know their kids, are visible at lunch, bus duty; if a student is absent they will call the student		Automatic phone call system calls home when students miss	Poster with Priority 1 students	School preeches that if you aren't in school, you are getting an education setting the expectation	principal and or counselor talks with students who miss multiple days	assemblies	Truancy office
	Do use early warning system		Truancy officer meets with at risk students	End-of-the-year perfect attendance gift card	When quarterly attendance goal is met, the whole school gets to participate in an incentive like going to a hockey game	Use of SAT program	high standards set for students by all staff; use the annual theme to demonstrate	county attendance director will meet with students at school after 5 unexcused absences
			Drawing winners have names posted on school marque and posted to social media	recognize end-of-the-year improvement in attendance with gift cards	Usual end-of-the-year inentives and recognitions.	classroom level initiativess	student plan of actions developed by staff trying to identify root of problem and have a solution/action to try (SAT)	parents are contacted
			Tardy students have a card to record their tardies.		Staying on the kids and being personal with them; teachers and principal are complementary to students	Use of WVEIS early warning system	home visits when students are absent; principal/asst with PRO	20/20 program, academic coach meets with students identified as graduation risk
				Computer generated calling system for those who are absent		Calls made home by principal as needed	message system to contact home when students are absent	
						spring awards program to recognize perfect attendace with a certification and added to Hall of Fame wall	helping students feel connected to the school	
							student and teacher focus groups	
How do you know they work?	8-10% increase in attendance rate	Student excuse notes are coming into the school	Numbers don't lie, recognition for over 90% attendance rate	Common bench mark indicators for dropout, attendance rate, graaduation rate	Percentages	Daily attendance numbers	students with identified attendance issue come to school	We have a good attendance rate; it is higher than a lot of other WV schools
		Feedback from the students in that they are bringing in their absent notes	Student feedback			comparison of academics and attendance		
						Number of SAT referrals for attendance		
Why do these work?	strategies engage full spectrum of socio-economics of students and those who do and don't value education; good kids are rewarded	We talk with the kids individually if they are absent; I will make a call home if a student has been absent a few days	Student feedback on student surveys	Common bench mark indicators for dropout, attendance rate, graaduation rate	They are unconventional; not many principals go out to pick up students	Consistency - students know they are expected to be at school and that we monitor them	Collaborative process with parents, teachers, and students.	Students and parents know we are involved and we care.
			Postivite School Culture and climate Students want to come to school because it is better than outside the wall; students are well-fed with 2 free meals a day.	Aside from recognizing perfect attendance, there are no other awards. There is a high expectation that students will come to school.			Students are held accountable for their actions	Students and parents know we want our students in school
							persistence, staying on top of the kids with attendance issues	

Appendix D – First Cycle Coding for Best Practices

	Incentives and Student Recognition	Meetings/Personal Communication	Judicial	School Culture	Expectation	Home Visits	Calling Absent Students	SAT/Attendance Requirment	Multiple Categories
1	1 - Rewards program with gift cards every 9 weeks to recognize high attendance and perfect attendance	4 - Principal meets with students to discuss absences when more than 5	State and county policies that send families to court and pay	4 - School climate and culture developed so that students want to come to school	2 - Staff commitment, annalyze data, set goals; work collaboratively	1 - Picking them up with the PRO and giving them a ride to school.	2 - The principal or the secretar calling home when students are absent	Follow county policy after 3 and 5 absences letters are sent home: required meeting	Student and teacher focus groups
2	1 - Quaterly gift cards given of $25 given during drawing for 3 days or less	Persistence, staying on top of the kids with attendance issues	Chronically absent are put into judicial system	1 - Establishing a culture so that students want to come to school	3 - Students know that the principal will be checking on them whenn they are absent	Home visits when students are absent; principal/assistant with PRO	3 - Automatic/computer system phone call to absent students/keep up with attendances daily		4 - Parent involvement - calling home and meetings with them
3	1 - The Challenge Program 0 $200 student incentives from an end of the year drawibg for having 5 or less absences	Truancy officer meets with at risk students	State policy - 3, 5, and 10 day letters prohibit drivers and workers	2 - Student engagement in extra-curricular activities; 70% do something after school. After school bus and supper provided.	Students ae held accountable for their actions		5 - Automatic/computer phone call made daily for absent students		They know their kids, are visible at lunch, bus duty; if a student is absent they will call the student
4	2 - Exam policy - allows good grades and attendance to skip	One person nags/assigned to collect absent notes	Truancy office	3 - Have co- and extra-cirricular activities for the students to make students want to be a part of the school	High standards set for students by all staff; use the annual theremto demonstrate		2 - Parents are notified after 3 unexcused absences in writing		1 - Personal relationships/personal connections with/between teachers and students. High expectations for the teachers who in turn have high
5	2 - Receiving points for bringing in excuse notes as part of behavior support system that can be used for purchases	Staying on the kids, being personal with them; teachers and principal are complemenary to students		1 - Establishing a culture where the kids want to be at school	High expectations for the students to be at school; one focus group works just on improving high expectations		Message system to contact home when students are absent		Tardy students have a card to record their tardies
6	2 - Awarding of "School Money" for use in school spirit store.	20/20 program, academic coach meets with students identified as graduation risk		Making the school students s want to come to school	A poster shows the daily attendance for all to see		Parents are contacted		
7	2 - Monthly incentives; on Fridays students earn the priviledge to go off campus for lunch	Student paln of actions developed b staff trying to identify root of problem and have a solution/action to try (SAT)		Helping students feel connected to the school	School preeches that if you aren't in school, you are not getting an education, setting the expectation		Calls made home by principal as needed		
8	4 - priviledges - highest attendance gets to schedule first	Use of SAT program			Poster with Priority 1 = Students		Automatice phone call system calls home when students miss		
9	3 - Exam policy, attendance allows and good grade allow students to skip final exam	County attendance director will meet with students at school after 5 unexcused absences			Students and parents know we want our students in school		Computer-generated calling system for those who are absent		
10	3 - Semester test incentives. Seniors can be exempt from exams; grade 9-11 can have 10% added to exam and/or have lowest grade dropped	Principal and or counselor talks with students who miss multiple days							
11	4 - Incentive program - "School Bucks" awarded can purchase items in spirit store or get into ball games for free	Advisory teacher meets with same group of students daily; encourages grades and attendance							
12	3 - Special student center privilledge, attendance partly based on attendance; students like to go there with friends	Link-up program, same teacher has same group for 4 years and meets with students daily							
13	5 - Incentive program - drawings fro $100 for qualified students of which having good attendance is a part								
14	Classroom level initiatives								
15	Spring awards program to recognize perfect attendance								
16	with a certifiate and added to Hall of Fame Wall								
17	Usual end-of-the-year incentives and recognitions								
18	Recognize end-of-the-year improvement in attendance with gift cards								
19	T-shirt is given out								
20	End-of-the-year perfect attendance gift cards When quarterly attendance goal is met, the school gets to participate in an incentive like going to a hockey game								
21	Drawing winners; have names posted on school marquee and posted to school media								
22	assemblies								

Appendix E – Second Cycle Coding for Best Practices

	Incentives and Student Recognition	Meetings/Personal Communication	Judicial Policies (Distrct/State)	School Culture/Expectations	Home Visits	Calling Absent Students
1	1 - Rewards program with gift cards every 9 weeks to recognize high attendance and perfect attendance	4 - Principal meets with students to discuss absences when more than 5	State and county policies that send families to court and pay	4 - School climate and culture developed so that students want to come to school	1 - Picking them up with the PRO and giving them a ride to school.	2 - The principal or the secretar calling home when students are absent
2	1 - Quaterly gift cards given of $25 given during drawing for 3 days or less	Persistence, staying on top of the kids with attendance issues	Chronically absent are put into judicial system	1 - Establishing a culture so that students want to come to school	Home visits when students are absent; principal/assistant with PRO	3 - Automatic/computer system phone call to absent students/keep up with attendances daily
3	1 - The Challenge Program 0 $200 student incentives from an end of the year drawibg for having 5 or less absences	Truancy officer meets with at risk students	State policy - 3, 5, and 10 day letters prohibit drivers and workers	2 - Studentt engagement in extra-curricular activities; 70% do something afer school. After school bus and supper provided.		5 - Automatic/computer phone call made daily for absent students
4	2 - Exam policy - allows good grades and attendance to skip	One person nags/assigned to collect absent notes	Truancy office	3 - Have co- and extra-cirricular activities for the students to make students want to be a part of the school		4 - Parent involvement - calling home and meetings with them
5	2 - Receiving points for bringing in excuse notes as part of behavior support system that can be used for purchases	Staying on the kids, being personal with them; teachers and principal are complementary to students	Follow county poicy after 3 and 5 absences letters are sent home: required meeting	1 -Establishing a culture where the kids want to to be to at school		Message systen to contact home when students are absent
6	2 - Awarding of "School Money" for use in school spririt store.	20/20 program, academic coach meets with students identified as graduation risk	Use of SAT program	Making the school students - make students want to come to school		Parents are contacted
7	2 - Monthly incentives; on Fridays students earn the priviledge to go off campus for lunch	Student paln of actions developed b staff trying to identify root of problem and have a solution/action to try (SAT)	Student paln of actions developed b staff trying to identify root of problem and have a solution/action to try (SAT)	Helping students feel connected to the school		Calls made home by principal as needed
8	4 - priviledgss - highest attendance gets to schedule first	Use of SAT program		2 - Staff committment, annalyze data, set goals; work collaboratively		Automatice phone call system calls home when students miss
9	3 - Exam policy, attendance allows and good grade allow students to skip final exam	County attendance director will meet with students at school after 5 unexcused absences		3 - Students know that the principal will be checking on them whenn they are absent		Computer-generated calling system for those who are absent
10	3 - Semester test incentives. Seniors can be exempt from exams; grade 9-11 can have 10% added to exam and/or have lowest grade dropped	Principal and or counselor talks with students who miss multiple days		Students ae held accountable for their actions		They know their kids, are visible at lunch, bus duty; if a student is absent they will call the student
11	4 - Incentive program - "School Bucks" awarded can purchase items in spirit store or get into ball games for free	Advisory teacher meets with same group of students daily; encourages grades and attendance		High standards set for students by all staff; use the annual therem to demonstrate		
12	3 - Special student center priviledge, attendance partly based on attendance; students like to go there with friends	Link-up program, same teacher has same group for 4 years and meets with students daily		High expectations for the students to be at school; one focus group works just on improving high expectations		
13	5 - Incentive program - drawings fro $100 for qualified students of which having good attendance is a part	Follow county poicy after 3 and 5 absences letters are sent home: required meeting		A poster shows the daily attendance for all to see		
14	Classroom level initiatives	4 - Parent involvement - calling home and meetings with them		School preeches that if you aren't in school, you are not getting an education, setting the expectation		
15	Spring awards program to recognize perfect attendance with a certifiate and added to Hall of Fame Wall	They know their kids, are visible at lunch, bus duty; if a student is absent they will call the student		Poster with Priority 1 = Students		
16	Usual end-of-the-year incentives and recognitions	2 - Parents are notified after 3 unexcused absences in writing		Students and parents know we want our students in school		
17	Recognize end-of-the-year improvement in attendance with gift cards			Student and teacher focus groups		
18	T-shirt is given out			1 - Personal relationships/personal connections with/between teachers and students. High expectations for the teachers who in turn have high		
19	End-of-the-year perfect attendance gift cards					
20	When quarterly attendance goal is met, the school gets to particiapte in an incentive like going to a hockey game					
21	Drawing winners; have names posted on school marquee and posted to school media					
22	assemblies					

Appendix F – First Cycle Coding for "How Do You Know?"

Principal Response	Category
Student feedback	Quantifiable data
Feedback from students in that they are bringing in their absence notes	Quantifiable data
Number of SAT referrals for attendance	Quantifiable data
Daily attendance numbers	Quantifiable data
Common bench mark indicators for dropout, attendance rate, graduation rate	Quantifiable data
8-10% increase in attendance rate	Quantifiable data
Percentages	Quantifiable data
Numbers don't lie, recognition for over 90% attendance rate	Quantifiable data
We have a good attendance rate: it is higher than a lot of other WV schools	Quantifiable data
Student excuse notes are coming into the school	Quantifiable data
Students with identified attendance issues come to school	Student feedback
Comparison of academics and attendance	Student feedback

Appendix G – First Cycle Coding for "Why Do You Think Your Actions Work?"

Principal Response	Category
Common bench mark indicators for dropout attendance rate, graduation rate	Quantifiable data
Students and parents know we are involved and we care	Culture
Consistency – students know they are expected to be at school and that we monitor them	Culture
Collaborative process with parents, teachers, and students	Student communication
They are unconventional: not many principals go out to pick up students	Culture
Aside from recognizing perfect attendance, there are not awards. This is a high expectation that will come to school.	Culture
Positive school culture and climate. Students want to come to school because it is better than outside the wall; students are well-fed with two free meals a day.	Culture
Student feedback on student surveys	Student communication
We talk with the kids individually if they are absent; I will make a call home if a student has been absent a few days	Culture
Strategies engage full spectrum of socio-economics of students and those who do and don't value education; good kids are rewarded	Culture
Students are held accountable for their actions	Culture
Persistence, staying on top of the kids with attendance issues	Culture
Students and parents know we want our students in school	Culture