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Mentorship As An Intervention For Chronically Absent Ninth Graders At An Urban High School: An Action Research Study

Nicholas Ford
College of William and Mary - School of Education, nicholas.ford.teach@gmail.com

MENTORSHIP AS AN INTERVENTION FOR CHRONICALLY ABSENT NINTH GRADERS AT AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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Nicholas R. Ford

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Approved May 13, 2024, by

Christopher R. Gareis, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Leslie W. Grant, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Steven M. Constantino, Ed.D.
Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my anchor and my rock, my wife Kassie. Also, to my parents, Ann and Steve, and to my grandmother, Bea. Thank you for your encouragement, your strength, your understanding, your sacrifices, and your love. Without you, this would not have been possible.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Steven Constantino, my committee chair. I appreciate your time, guidance, patience, and teaching. Your essential influence helped create the product this study became and helped provide me with the strength to complete the work. I would also like to thank Dr. Christopher Gareis and Dr. Leslie Grant for their guidance and assistance in this process. Additionally, thank you to Dr. Tom Ward, for his essential advice and expertise.

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Finally, there is not enough room to thank my wife and family enough for their unbounded love and support. Kassie, thank you so much for never letting me quit, for always listening, and your unwavering commitment to this dream. To my parents, Ann and Steve, thank you for the time you sacrificed with me and your constant support. To my in-laws Kathy and Chris, thank you for your many meals, laughs, the world's finest coffee, and your encouragement. To the rest of my family, thank you for believing in me and supporting me through this process. To Granny, I miss you, and none of this would be possible without you.

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Abstract

This action research study explored the use of mentorship as an intervention to improve the attendance chronically absent ninth grade students at an urban high school. Chronic absenteeism is a phenomenon with multiple compounding negative impacts on students. Moreover, it is a complicated problem with multiple contributing factors and potential root causes. Considering the complexity of the issue, this study used a modified version of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development to identify areas where schools can leverage their influence to solve problems of practice. This action research study employed a mixed methods approach to explore any changes in student engagement, perception of school and attendance importance, attendance behavior, or grades after participating in the intervention. While some research suggests mentorship as a positive intervention for chronically absent students (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013, 2018; Balfanz et al., 2007; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; May et al., 2021), this body of research is not extensive and often does not address the participants involved in this study. Although this study was delimited by both sample size and time, the results show a statistically significant decrease in participant absenteeism. The findings suggest that interventions that target students with a history of chronic absenteeism, and interventions involving mentorship, especially when a school-family relationship is established, hold promise for further decreasing chronic absenteeism. Further study replication for larger samples and longer periods of time in other contexts could help to confirm the presented findings.

MENTORSHIP AS AN INTERVENTION FOR CHRONICALLY ABSENT NINTH GRADERS AT AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the issue of chronic absenteeism moved to the forefront of educational considerations for students. This legislation requires states to select measures of school quality. ESSA provides chronic absenteeism as one possible indicator of school quality (Jordan & Miller, 2017). The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE, 2023) defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of the academic year for any reason. This definition does not differentiate between excused absences, unexcused absences, or suspensions. As part of the Commonwealth's implementation of ESSA, Virginia and many other states selected chronic absenteeism as one of the state's indicators of school quality (VDOE, 2023). Considering this focus, it is important for school leaders, practitioners, and policy makers to understand the causes, impacts, and possible interventions for chronic absenteeism.

Chronic absenteeism, as a measurement, includes all the time a student misses from school. The reason a student was absent is irrelevant to the indicator. Despite both chronic absenteeism and truancy addressing a student's time away from the classroom, chronic absenteeism is not truancy. Truancy occurs when a student willfully does not attend school combined with a possible lack of parental support surrounding student attendance. Furthermore, most school divisions, localities, and states develop procedures to hold students and their families accountable for their decision to follow their state's mandatory attendance requirements. Chronic absenteeism, by comparison, includes all student absences, regardless of reasons. As a

result, it is possible for a student to be both truant and chronically absent, but the two are not synonymous. This study does not seek to address the specific problem of truancy, but rather explores chronic absenteeism exclusively.

Chronic absenteeism compounds negative impacts on students and can significantly affect school accountability. Chronically absent students score significantly lower on English and math assessments than their peers (Chang & Romero, 2008; Gershenson et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b, 2019; Romero & Lee, 2007; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Gershenson et al. (2019) found that "consistent with previous research…on average, a one standard deviation (SD) increase in absences (6.3) reduces achievement by 0.03 to 0.04 test score SD" (p. 68). This negative impact highlights the danger of students falling behind due to chronic absenteeism. The more time students are not in the classroom their academic performance continues to decline and chronic absenteeism becomes predictive of course failure (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Allison & Elliot; 2019; Gottfried, 2014b). One study of eighth-grade students in Chicago found that "course attendance is eight times more predictive of course failure in freshman year than eighth-grade test scores" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 6). Failing courses leads to chronically absent students falling further behind in their studies and becomes more concerning as students reach high school, where the rates of chronic absenteeism are highest (Buehler et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Jordan & Miller, 2017; U.S. Department of Education; 2019). Secondary students are affected as chronically absent students are as much as 7.4 times more likely to drop out of school than their non-chronically absent peers (Balfanz et al., 2007; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Chronic absenteeism creates a vicious cycle in which previous chronic absenteeism is predictive of future chronic absenteeism (Balfanz et al., 2007; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Ginsberg et al., 2014; Olsen, 2014; Romero & Lee, 2007; Smerillo et al.,

2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Data from California found that a student who was chronically absent in a previous year was 10 times more likely to be chronically absent the following year (Hough, 2019). Moreover, the problem of chronic absenteeism raises issues of equity as it disproportionally impacts students of color (Chang et al., 2018; Hough, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019); students with disabilities (Gee, 2018; Hough, 2019); and students of lower socioeconomic status (SES; Dougherty & Childs, 2019; Hough, 2019).

Seeking to address this issue is complicated. Chronic absenteeism has numerous causes and contributing factors. This study explored mentorship as an intervention to address ninth grade chronic absenteeism. The aim of the study was to provide urban high school leaders and practitioners with actionable information for addressing chronic absenteeism in their contexts.

Statement of the Action Research Problem

Charles Bruner et al. (2011) referred to chronic absenteeism as a "problem hidden in plain sight" (p. 1), noting most schools were not measuring the phenomenon. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) agreed stating "a school can have average daily attendance of 90% and still have 40% of its students chronically absent, because on different days, different students make up that 90%" (p. 5). Since that time, research into the issue has grown. Researchers estimate that as many as 16%, or 1 in every 6, of the nation's students are chronically absent (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This rate is higher for students in urban school districts, students whose families are of a lower SES, and students of color (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bruner et al., 2011; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b, 2019; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Romero & Lee, 2007). Students who are in poor physical or mental health are more likely to miss school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Certain neighborhood conditions, such as violence and poverty, both have a negative impact on school

attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013, Gottfried, 2014a). The lack of resources experienced by many urban school districts creates increased difficulties in addressing chronic absenteeism (Gottfried, 2019). Beyond raising issues of equity, chronic absenteeism has multiple detrimental and compounding impacts on students. Research demonstrates students who are chronically absent experience decreased academic achievement, experience negative social and emotional impacts, and are more likely to have negative health and life outcomes (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2007; Brooks et al., 2020; Chang & Romero, 2008; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b, 2019; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Chronic absenteeism is a wicked problem, defined as having multiple, varied, and interconnected root causes and contributing factors (Childs & Lofton, 2021). Students who are not engaged, or do not see the relevance of attending school, are more likely to be chronically absent (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2007; Catalano et al., 2004; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). This action research study implemented a mentoring intervention to address chronic absenteeism in a select group of ninth graders at an urban Mid-Atlantic high school. The study sought to determine the short-term impact of such interventions for the target group of students.

Context of the Action Research Study

This study used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participating school and school district. City High School (CHS) is one of five high schools in Jefferson Public Schools (JPS). The racially diverse student body consists of approximately 1,700 students who identify as the following: 57.1% Black, 26.2% White, 7.3% Hispanic, 6% Multiple Races, 2.7% Asian, 0.4% Native Hawaiian, and 0.3% American Indian. Approximately 50.8% of students are

economically disadvantaged. Students with disabilities comprise 12.9% of the school population. 20.9% of students were chronically absent in the 2022-23 school year. Mirroring outside research, these rates were higher for students of color, families of lower SES, and students with disabilities. The most recent data (2022-23) showed that 27.8% of Black students, 27.9% of Hispanic students, 32.2% of economically disadvantaged students, and 27.1% of students with disabilities were chronically absent. These data are compared with state and district rates in Table 1.

Table 1

Percent of Students Chronically Absent Comparison, 2022-2023 School Year

Demographic Group	School	District	State
Total Chronic Absenteeism	20.9%	20.2%	19.5%
American Indian Students	*	19%	24.5%
Asian Students	0%	5.7%	14.4%
Black Students	27.8%	23.2%	22.7%
Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Students	*	14.1%	19.1%
Hispanic/Latino Students	27.9%	20.6%	25.6%
Multiple Race Students	18.6%	18.2%	19.6%
White Students	7.5%	13.7%	16.6%
Economically Disadvantaged Students	32.2%	25.6%	27.7%
Students with Disabilities	27.1%	23.7%	25.5%

* Data fell below state reporting threshold.

Information Related to the Organization

CHS is a part of JPS which serves a community of approximately 250,000 people. This diverse urban Mid-Atlantic school district serves approximately 27,000 students. The district operates a total of 53 schools. Among these are 25 elementary schools, four middle schools, five high schools, five combined schools, as well as numerous other special programs. The racial

demographics of JPS consist of students who identify as the following: 57% Black, 20.4% White, 13.4% Hispanic, 6.8% Multiple Races, 1.8% Asian, 0.3% American Indian, and 0.3% Native Hawaiian. Approximately 60.9% are economically disadvantaged. District-wide, approximately 20.2% of students were chronically absent in the 2022-23 school year. These rates were higher for students of color (Black 23.2% / Hispanic 20.6%), families of lower SES (23.7%), and students with disabilities (25.6%).

The JPS senior leadership mandated that each school assemble an attendance team. At CHS, this team consists of the school's principal, two assistant principals, two graduation coaches, a teacher (the researcher), the attendance technician, and the student data specialist. This team was tasked with addressing chronic absenteeism in the building, implementing the district's required actions, and developing interventions for chronically absent students.

JPS prescribed a set of actions for schools to address students at risk of chronic absenteeism and truancy. At three unexcused absences, an attendance letter is sent home. Once a student accumulates five unexcused absences, an attendance plan is created with the student, student's family, and the school's attendance team. At 10 unexcused absences, a conference is held with principal, or a designee, a member of the attendance team, the student, and family to review the attendance place and reaffirm the compulsory attendance requirements. At 15 unexcused absences, if the student is making no progress and/or the student's parent or guardian is intentionally noncompliant, the student is referred to court proceedings (Appendix A contains the detailed district absence procedures). Despite the statement that these strategies were meant to address chronic absenteeism and truancy, they focus more on truancy. This is demonstrated by the plan's focus on unexcused absences. The intervention in this study did not seek to address

truancy. Consequently, students currently involved in truancy court proceedings were not included as part of this study.

Information Related to the Intended Stakeholders

I sought to provide meaningful and effective interventions for chronically absent ninth graders at CHS. Ninth grade was chosen as the focus of this study based on previous research identifying this transitional period where students with a history of chronic absenteeism may require additional support (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Chang, 2016). Rather than evaluating the current procedures in place across JPS, I sought to implement an additional mentoring intervention for a select group of students. Key stakeholders for the study included City High School's leadership, CHS teachers and staff, CHS students, CHS families, and the community of Jefferson Public Schools. The findings from this study are meant to inform future interventions for addressing chronic absenteeism at CHS beyond the proscribed actions mandated by the school district. Findings from the study could also be shared with JPS leadership to inform district wide interventions for chronic absenteeism. Furthermore, this study could influence future policies and interventions taken to address chronic absenteeism in other contexts outside JPS. The rate of chronic absenteeism at CHS was above the district and state averages. Considering the clear and detrimental impact that chronic absenteeism has on students, this information is critical for future practice, planning, leadership, decision making, and the direction of future research.

Brief Description of the Action Research Intervention

Theoretical Framework

Recognizing the multiple interconnected factors contributing to chronic absenteeism, multiple researchers have used Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development

to address the complexities of the issue (Brooks et al., 2020; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Melvin et al., 2019; Sugrue et al., 2016). This model seeks to define the complex and interconnected layers, or systems, which affect a child's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) there are five distinct layers: Individual, Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, and Macrosystem. Beginning with the individual, the layers progressively move farther away from the child. The influences found in each layer are bi-directional, meaning that each system can affect the others. This model further expresses the complexities of human development by analyzing the components of Process, Person, Context, and Time to explain how these layers affect the development of an individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Individual. This level focuses on the development of a single person. In essence, Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model seeks to explain how someone's experiences impact this level. The individual student is the target level for this study and the area intervention addressed. Using Process, Person, Context, and Time to further contextualize Bronfenbrenner's Model, this layer addresses Person. This study aimed to influence the Person component by influencing the student's regular school attendance and connection to school. Considering the bi-directional nature of Bronfenbrenner's Model, the person influences the other layers as their attachment and perceptions of school change or do not change (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Microsystem. This level is best understood as an individual's immediate environment. The layer includes those structures with which the individual has regular and almost constant contact. Their immediate family, their closest friends, peers, and teachers play a large role at this level. Structures that might affect a person at this level include their school, their neighborhood, and other institutions they regularly frequent, such as a religious institution. The Microsystem

begins to address the characteristic of Context. This factor is understood as the environmental factors that influence individual development. Being closest to the child, the people and institutions that make up the student's Microsystem influence the Context of their individual development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Mesosystem. Moving outward from the Microsystem, structures of the Mesosystem begin to appear. This level of Bronfenbrenner's Model is characterized by the people and institutions that have an indirect effect on the individual. Extended family members or siblings not in the home, colleagues or schoolmates, and acquaintances are people who characterize this level. Notably, the school is present in the Mesosystem as well as the Microsystem. This is because the school, as an institution, has an indirect impact on the student. To better distinguish this, a student's classroom environment, classmates, and teacher could be considered part of their Microsystem. The school as an entity, as well as the school's overall student body, culture, climate, activities, offerings, and policies are present in the Mesosystem.

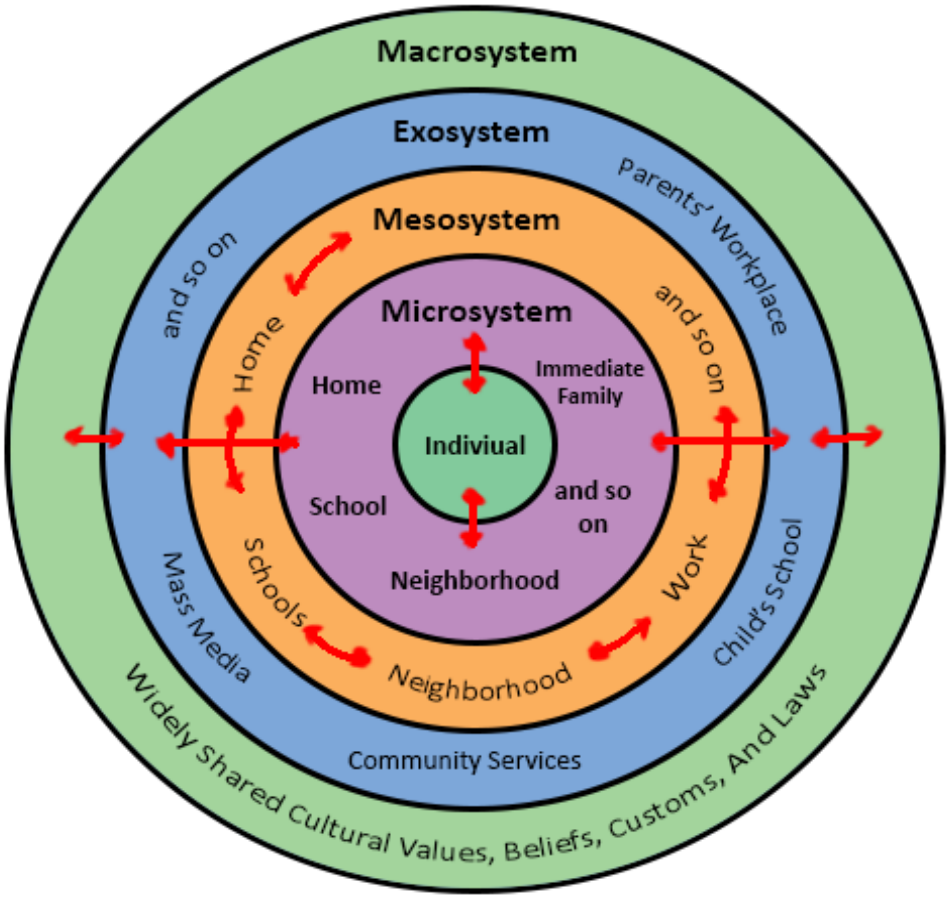
Considering the Process, Person, Context, and Time framework of the model, Context is further addressed by the Mesosystem. The factors present in this layer of the system help to further define an individual's environment. Found in the Mesosystem, and linking together the Mesosystem, Microsystem, and Individual are the characteristics of Process and Time. Process considers how a student develops their relationships with others. Considering that personal relationships are present in both the Micro- and Mesosystems, this characteristic can be seen as a linkage between these two levels and the individual. Furthermore, Time plays a role in the development of these relationships and the impact of various environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Exosystem. This layer is characterized by those institutions and factors another step removed from the student. Examples could be their parent's workplace and their colleagues, mass media, and characteristics of their neighborhood, city, or state. These factors have an indisputable impact on the individual but are far removed from the level of immediacy found in the microsystem, or the frequency of contact found in the Mesosystem. Again, in this layer, Context and Time have an impact on individual development. Context is further characterized by these people and institutions and Time is necessary for their creation, impact, and possible change (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Macrosystem. This is the level farthest from the individual. It is characterized by ideas, beliefs, and institutions that are cultural in nature. This could involve laws, social norms and mores, and governmental systems. Characteristics of this level have the most indirect impact on individual development. The Macrosystem further defines the Context of an individual's development and helps to fully encompass the influences placed on a person (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Figure 1 below summarizes the model in visual form.

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model Diagram



Note. From *Bioecological model*, by Psychology Wiki, 2013 (https://psychology.fandom.com/wiki/Bioecological_model). In the public domain.

Theoretical Framework in the Context of the Study. I used Bronfenbrenner's model to target interventions for chronic absenteeism. This built on the work of previous scholars who advocated that the complex nature of chronic absenteeism necessitates Bronfenbrenner's bioecological approach. This framework considers the multiple layers influencing a student's development and perceptions surrounding school attendance (Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Gottfried

& Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021; Sugrue et al., 2016). Drawing on suggestions of Gottfried and Gee (2017), Sugrue et al. (2016), and Singer et al. (2021), I focused on the layers closest to the child, the Individual, the Microsystem, and the Mesosystem. These layers include the student, the school, and their closest influences. Moreover, the linkages between these layers are key to developing and affecting a student's desire to attend school (Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

I did not target the Exo- or Macrosystems. Both Childs and Scanlon (2022) and Singer et al. (2021), provided strong arguments that influences from these layers affect student chronic absenteeism. Despite this research, I sought to inform school level leaders of possible interventions. Further, I assumed these leaders have limited resources or ability to influence the Exo- and Macrosystems in their communities. Consequently, I focused on the Individual, Microsystem, Mesosystem, and the linkage of these layers together using the components of Process, Person, Context, and Time.

Process. I sought to address the student's relationship with school. Specifically, I provided each student with a mentor as a relationship-based bridge. Through positive interactions with this caring adult, who was not their teacher, it placed this person between the Micro- and Mesosystems. The hope was that increased positive interactions would strengthen the individual student's linkage to the school, thus improving their attendance.

Person. I sought to influence this factor by addressing the student's disposition towards school. Specifically, the importance the student placed on regular attendance and their sense of belonging at the school. Once again, mentorship played a role, linking the three targeted layers together, using this characteristic.

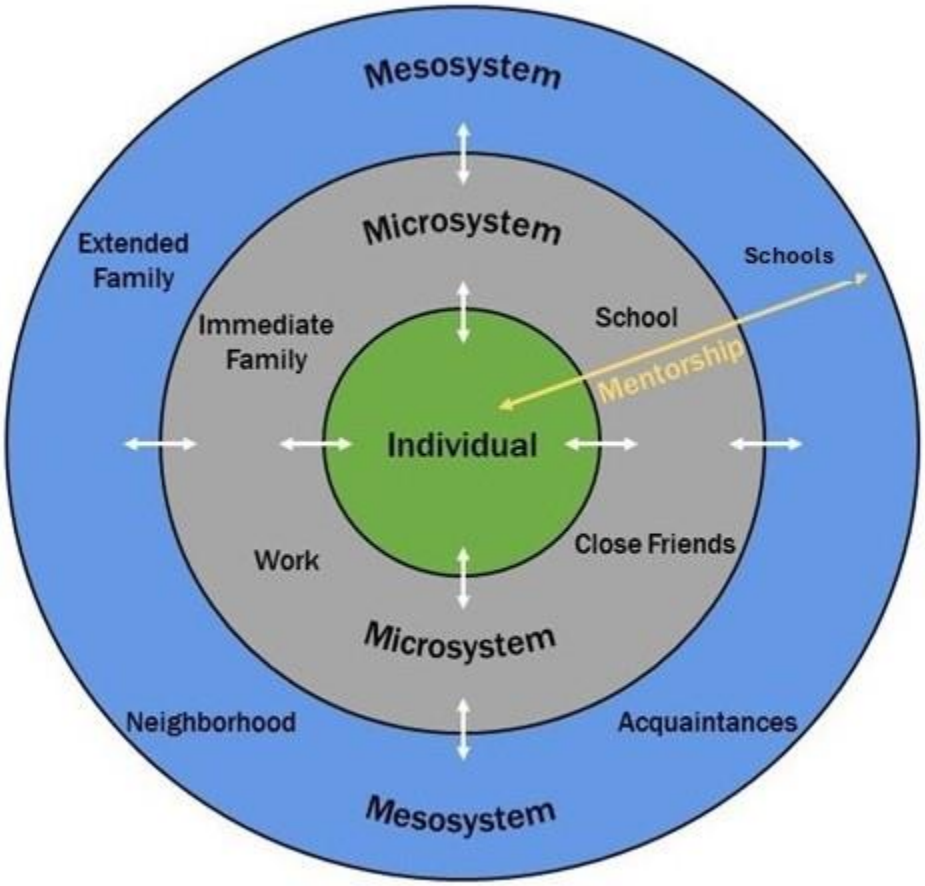
Context. Environmental factors influence all individuals. Despite my focus on the layers of the Individual, the Microsystem, and the Mesosystem, factors of these layers and beyond them influenced the student. These could include a student's SES, their previous attendance history, the characteristics of their neighborhood or their family. These factors had an influence on a student's likelihood of becoming chronically absent and are addressed further in Chapter 2.

Time. Time was omnipresent in the study. All participating students spent significant time out of school. This absence likely affected their development in some way. In addition, time is a consideration when exploring the length of the study. I explored a short-term intervention, and this factor of time could possibly be explored by future research.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of how I used Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development.

Figure 2

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model as Implemented in Study



Note. Adapted from U. Bronfenbrenner and P. A. Morris (2006), The Bioecological Model of Human Development, in R. M. Learner and W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child Psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793-828). Johnn Wiley & Sons, Inc.. Copyright 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Inc..

Action Research Questions

I built upon and extend previous efforts to address chronic absenteeism in urban schools. Specifically, I explored the following:

1. After participating in a school-based mentorship program to what extent was there a change in student affective and cognitive engagement among participating students?

2. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent did the perceptions of participating students on the importance of regular attendance change?
3. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?
4. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in academic achievement among participating students?

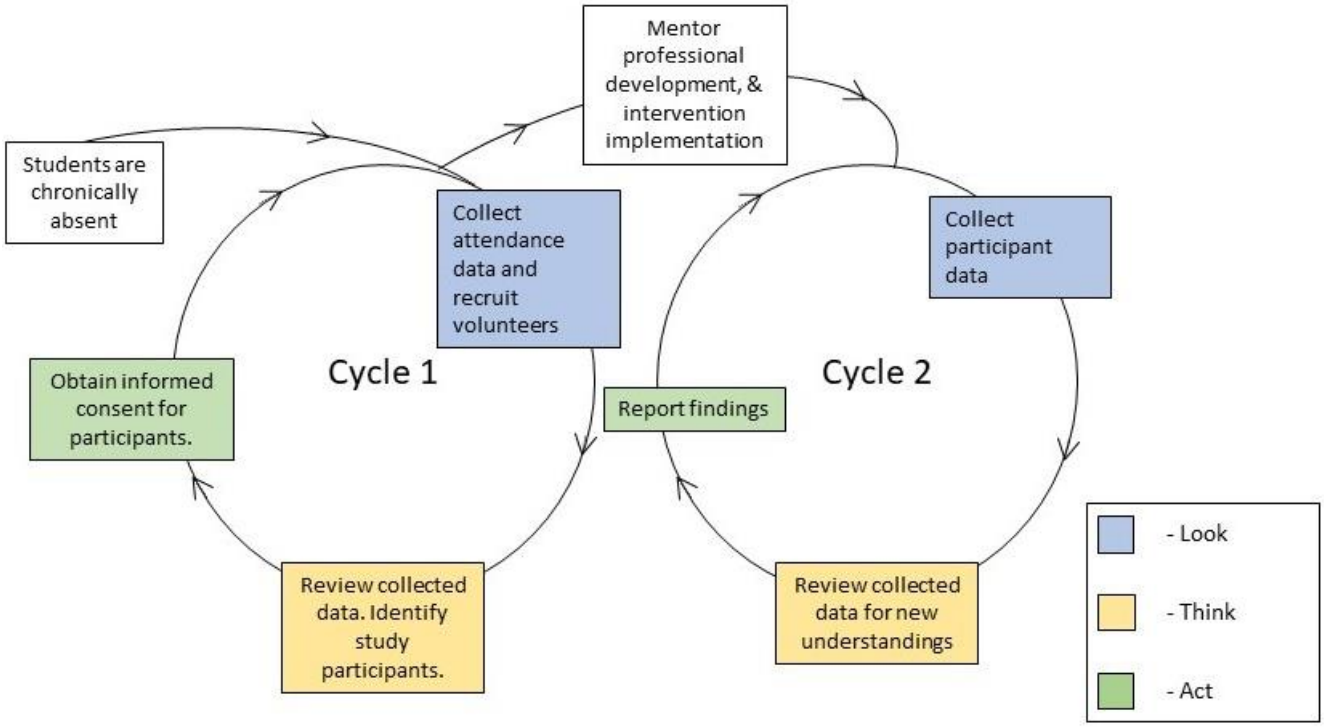
Action Research Model

I chose action research because it "seeks to directly engage the complex dynamics of given social contexts in order to accomplish practical solutions to issues affecting people's lives" (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 4). The goal of this study was to implement and test an intervention for chronic absenteeism. Findings from this action research may provide practitioners at CHS with information to guide future interventions for chronically absent students.

I used the Stringer Model of Action Research (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021). Using this model, I conducted the first and second cycles of the action research process. The first cycle consisted of data collection, assessing the current situation, and developing the intervention. The second cycle involved professional development, implementation of the intervention, and data collection. Professional development involved a 2-hour session with mentors exploring mentorship best practices and providing the expectations for the intervention. I explore implementation and data collection further explored in Chapter 3. Analysis followed to inform future action. For a visual depiction of this model in action, see Figure 3.

Figure 3

Stringer Action Research Model as Implemented in Current Research Study



Note. Adapted from E. T. Stringer and A. Ortiz Stringer Model adapted from Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, (2021), *Action research* (5th ed.), Sage. Copyright 2021 Sage.

Brief Description of Intervention

My goal was to decrease the number of chronically absent ninth grade students at CHS. This select group consisted of first-time ninth grade students, who were chronically absent in eighth grade (2022-2023) or demonstrated a risk of chronic absence (10% or more of the school year) in the first quarter (2023-2024 school year). A student who has been chronically absent in a previous school year is more likely than their peers to be chronically absent in their future (Balfanz et al., 2007; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Ginsberg et al., 2014; Olsen, 2014; Romero & Lee, 2007; Smerillo et al., 2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Cycle 1 of my study analyzed

middle school data and CHS data from Quarter 1 of the 2023-2024 school year to identify the students who were eligible for participation. Once the students with a history of chronic absenteeism from the 2022-2023 school year and those who are at risk of chronic absenteeism were identified, those students with significant, high, or extreme cases of chronic absenteeism were approached to participate in an eight-week mentorship program. Definitions for these rates of absenteeism can be found in the definition section at the end of this chapter and are restated in future chapters for reference.

Theoretical Framework of Intervention. I applied a modified version of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development to the context of chronic absenteeism. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of factors that influence human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Chronic absenteeism itself has numerous interconnected causes and impacts. These factors span all layers of Bronfenbrenner's Model. Considering this fact, this study recognizes that Process, Person, Context, and Time all contribute to a student's chronic absenteeism. Furthermore, this study focused on the Individual, the Microsystem, and Mesosystem layers, demonstrating the assumption that school-based interventions for chronic absenteeism can address some of the interconnected factors contributing to students missing school.

Mentorship Program Description. Mentorship programs have demonstrated success in reducing chronic absenteeism (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013, 2018; Balfanz et al., 2007; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; Holtzman et al., 2017; May et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2014). This intervention created a mentorship program for ninth graders at CHS with a history of chronic absence. The mentorship intervention drew on research provided by the National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR). MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice*

for Mentoring (4th ed.), provides six key elements of effective mentorship programs. These elements are recruitment, screening, training, matching and initiation, monitoring and support, and closure. The created program incorporated each of the six key elements, developing an intervention for students who frequently miss school.

Participating students received a school-based mentor. The intervention invited the participation of all teachers and staff at CHS as potential mentors. The school's principal screened any teachers or staff who they felt should not participate. The selected mentors participated in a 2-hour face-to-face training prior to working with a mentee. This training reviewed the benchmarks for mentor training provided by the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (4th ed.), as well as the requirements and expectations of the mentorship program. In addition, each mentee received training materials to assist with their work.

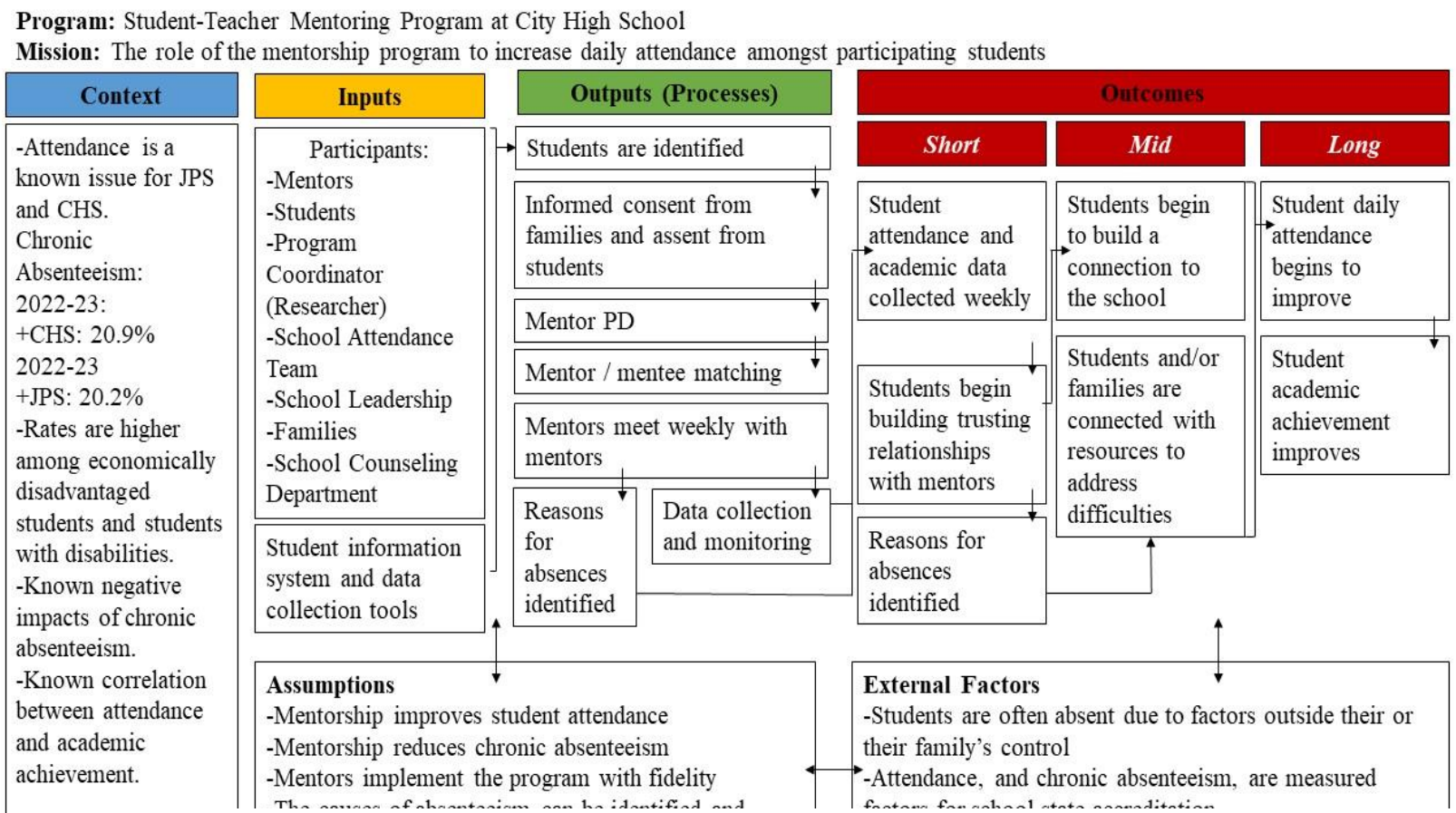
Mentors completed a brief face-to-face check in with their mentee each day to confirm their attendance at school that day. Any day the student did not attend school, or did not check in, the mentor made a parent or guardian contact. This contact occurred via phone call to the parent or guardian's provided phone number. Timely phone calls home support strengthened bonds between parents and mentors (Garringer et al., 2015). Also, timely attendance information has been effective in reducing chronic absenteeism in different contexts and studies (Bergman & Chen, 2019; Ehrlich et al., 2019; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Marvul, 2012; Rogers & Feller, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Mentor training, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, provided mentors with suggested phrases to assist in building the mentor parent relationship. Suggested phrases such as, "I saw [student's name] was not in school today, I wanted to check in and see if there is anything I can do to help [him/her] be here tomorrow," helped to demonstrate the

supportive role of the mentor. Providing mentors with tools and support of this type created an environment where the mentor had the best chance of success.

In addition to daily check ins, each mentor had one extended meeting with their mentee of at least 15 minutes each week. Research supports frequent meetings, including some extended meetings, between mentors and mentees. These meetings helped to strengthen relational bonds and work towards programmatic goals (Garringer et al., 2015). Each mentor had the liberty to decide the flow and structure of this meeting on their own, based on the needs of their mentee. Despite that freedom, each meeting was required to include the following elements: (a) prompting for information on how the mentee's week has been at school and/or at home, (b) review of their mentee's most recent attendance information, (c) growth goal setting or a check in related to a created goal, (d) identification of any barriers or aversions to regular attendance, and (e) a relationship building component. To explain further, all mentor meetings had the same components, but mentors employed those structures in a manner that best fit the individual needs of their mentee. Each week, mentors used a provided data log to record interactions with their mentee. This log also included prompts and resources for their extended meeting. Figure 4 summarizes the mentorship program as implemented at CHS in the form of a logic model.

Figure 4

Logic Model of Mentorship Program as Implemented at City High School



Note. City High School (CHS). Jefferson Public Schools (JPS). Professional Development (PD).

Definitions of Terms

Absence – missing the entire academic school day.

Chronic Absenteeism - missing 10% or more of the academic year for any reason. This definition does not differentiate between excused absences, unexcused absences, or suspensions (Jordan & Miller, 2017; VDOE, 2023).

- Low Chronic Absence: Missing 0% - 5% of the school year.
- Modest Chronic Absence: Missing 5% - 9% of the school year.
- Significant Chronic Absence: Missing 10% - 19% of the school year.
- High Chronic Absence: Missing 20% - 29% of the school year.
- Extreme Chronic Absence: Missing 30% or more of the school year.

Mentee – A chronically absent student who meets regularly with an adult for the purposes of attendance tracking, attendance barrier identification, and relationship building.

Mentor – A person who is acting in a non-professional helping capacity to provide relationship-based support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee's development (Garringer et al., 2015, p. 9).

Mentoring – "Mentoring takes place between young persons (i.e., mentees) and older more experience persons (i.e., mentors) who are acting in a non-professional helping capacity to provide relationship-based support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee's development" (Garringer et al., 2015, p. 9).

Truancy – "Truancy is the act of accruing one or more unexcused absences, where the parent is unaware of or does not support the student's absence, or where the parent's provided reason for the absence is not acceptable to the school administration" (VDOE, 2023).

Student Perceptions – A student's attitudes and beliefs surrounding the value of schooling and regular attendance to school (Robinson et al., 2018).

Urban School – This study took place in a school that Milner (2012) describes as "urban emergent" (p. 560). Urban emergent schools are those which are "located in large cities but not as large as major cities. They typically have some of the same characteristics and sometimes challenges as urban intensive school districts in terms of resources, qualification of teachers, and academic development of students" (Milner, 2012, p. 560).

Wicked Problem – Problems that are "complex, unpredictable, and difficult to isolate" (Childs & Lofton, 2021, p. 222). These problems have multiple root causes and therefore are difficult to address or solve.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Attendance is a focus for public schools and has been for most of their history. The driver of this focus has changed, but ensuring students are in the school building has usually been a priority. Much of the scholarly research surrounding attendance focused on the strong connection between regular attendance and student achievement (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019). Beginning in the early 2000s, the issue of chronic absenteeism began to emerge in the literature. This early research began to highlight the hidden dangers of chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2007; Bruner et al., 2011; Catalano et al., 2004; Chang & Romero, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007). Average daily attendance was the most common measurement used for attendance. While this measurement is useful, as much as 40% of a school can be chronically absent and the school could still have a daily average attendance of 90% (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In the years following this initial research and the passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) in 2015, the research surrounding chronic absenteeism increased. Researchers explored the contributing factors for becoming chronically absent, the impacts of being chronically absent, and potential interventions for addressing chronic absence. This literature review explores that development and additionally explores the use of mentorship as a potential intervention for chronic absenteeism.

Defining Chronic Absenteeism

Despite a lack of focus on the issue, schools have long understood the existence of chronic absenteeism. Parker (1949) defined chronic absenteeism as “that group of children who

from kindergarten on through high school are frequently absent from school, usually with the knowledge of their parents, and usually for reasons which, while generally acceptable to parents, are not considered valid under school regulations" (p. 114). Since Parker's time, chronic absence has come to include all time missed by students, regardless of reason. As of this writing, researchers do not agree on one definition for chronic absenteeism (Gottfried & Hutt, 2019).

Most definitions of chronic absenteeism tend to mirror that used by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). The VDOE defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10% or more of the academic year for any reason. As previously highlighted, this definition does not differentiate between excused absences, unexcused absences, or suspensions (VDOE, 2023). Applying this definition to a practical situation, a student is considered chronically absent if they miss 18 days of a 180-day school year or as few as 2 to 3 days of each month. Despite the clear definition provided by the VDOE, not every case of chronic absence is the same. In their work, Jordan and Miller (2017) presented the following scale developed by the Office of Civil Rights for better understanding differing levels of chronic absenteeism:

- 0% - 5% of Year Absent – Low Chronic Absence
- 5% - 9% of Year Absent – Modest Chronic Absence
- 10% - 19% of Year Absent – Significant Chronic Absence
- 20% - 29% of Year Absent – High Chronic Absence
- 30% or More of Year Absent – Extreme Chronic Absence

Using this tiered system of chronic absence helps to define differing cases of chronic absenteeism as practitioners seek to better understand what causes the phenomenon, the impact it has on students, and how to address the problem.

Impacts of Chronic Absenteeism

Much of the early research of chronic absenteeism explores the impacts it has on students (Allensworth & Easton 2007; Balfanz et al., 2007; Catalano et al., 2004; Chang & Romero, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007). Research in this area, as with much of the research into the impacts and causes of chronic absenteeism, relies on an analysis of longitudinal data with large groups of students, usually of a specific school district or state. The research demonstrates that chronic absenteeism has a clear negative impact on a student academically, but also impacts students outside of school and later in life. The following sections will explore those impacts in detail.

Academic Impacts

Academic Achievement Decreases. The clearest and most well documented impact of chronic absenteeism is on academic achievement. A lack of attendance is strongly correlated to poorer academic performance. Chronic absenteeism impacts student's reading and math abilities (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2007; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Chang and Romero (2008) explored this phenomenon by analyzing data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort from the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Their analysis determined that chronic absence in kindergarten is associated with lower academic performance. Their research found this negative correlation was true for all children regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (SES; Chang & Romero, 2008). In a study using statewide data from Oregon, Buehler et al. (2012) explored this issue in a state specific context. In addition to analyzing elementary grades, researchers tracked a cohort of students in high school. Buehler et al.'s (2012) findings were in line with Chang and Romero's, discovering a clear and consistent

relationship between chronic absenteeism and lower performance on English and mathematics assessments (Buehler et al., 2012). A study exploring chronic absenteeism conducted by the Utah Education Policy Center (2012) showed similar findings with chronically absent students on average scoring lower than their non-chronically absent peers on English (3.8 points less), math (5.9 points less), and science (4.9 points less) assessments. Analyzing this issue from a national perspective, Ginsberg et al. (2014) confirmed these findings once again, using data from the 2013 National Assessment for Educational Progress. These researchers found "students reporting missing 3 or more days of school in the prior month had lower average…scores in reading and math than students with fewer absences" (p. 3). This finding is particularly telling for chronic absenteeism as a student who misses two or three days in a single month is at risk of becoming chronically absent. Furthermore, Ginsberg et al. (2014) found that the impacts of chronic absenteeism worsened in later grades. Fourth-grade students missing 3 or more days before a test scored 12 points lower in reading than their peers and eighth-grade students with similar absenteeism scored 18 points lower than their peers in math (Ginsberg et al., 2014). Building from this research, Gershenson et al. (2019) explored data from Tennessee's Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio). They found that "a one standard deviation (SD) increase in absences (6.3) reduces achievement by 0.03 to 0.04 test score SD" (p. 68). This finding further solidifies the connection between absences and decreased academic achievement. This negative correlation existed regardless of context, age, SES, or race (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2007 Buehler et al., 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012).

Risk of Course Failure Increases. Considering the clear connection between chronic absenteeism and decreased academic achievement, researchers explored the connection between

chronic absenteeism and course failure. Researching this connection in Chicago Public Schools, Allensworth and Easton (2007) found that:

> course attendance is *eight times* more predictive of course failure in the freshman year than eight-grade test scores; freshman absences can be used to predict 63 percent of the variation in course failures among freshmen in the 2004-05 entering class, while together math and reading eighth-grade…scores predict only 8 percent of the variation in course failures. (p. 16)

Moreover, Allensworth and Easton (2007) found a correlation demonstrating when absences increase, so do the failure rates for students. This finding is in line with the previously reviewed research demonstrating the negative impacts of absences on academic achievement. Students who are not in the classroom are not getting the instruction, support, and practice necessary for academic success. This deficit makes these students more likely to perform worse and be at higher risk of course failure than their peers. Allensworth and Easton's (2007) findings are similar to those of Balfanz et al. (2007) who also found that students with more absences were more likely to fail courses. When other research sought to make a connection between chronic absenteeism and course failure, most of this research cites these two studies. Considering both studies took place in urban contexts, there appears to be a need in the literature to confirm the findings of these two key studies in other contexts. One possibility for the lack of further study could be the larger number of studies that have found a connection between chronic absenteeism and decrease in academic achievement. This area of impact could benefit from further replicatory studies.

Risk of Dropout Increases. Balfanz et al. (2007) explored data from The School District of Philadelphia's middle school grades (6-8). Their analysis found that:

> fifteen percent of sixth graders attended school less than 80% of the time. By the school year that ended in 2000, only 60% of these students were in 9th grade as expected, and 28% of these students had already left the district. (p. 227)

These data from Balfanz et al. (2007) presented a strong link between chronic absenteeism and school dropout. Allensworth and Easton (2007) analyzing high school grades in Chicago Public Schools found similar results. They stated:

> just one to two weeks of absence, which are typical for [Chicago Public Schools] freshman, are associated with a substantially reduced probability of graduating. In the 2000-01 cohort, only 63 percent of students who missed about one week (five to nine days) graduated in four years, compared to 87 percent of those who missed less than one week. (p. 6)

The findings of both Balfanz et al. (2007) and Allensworth and Easton (2007) took place in urban school divisions with a higher-than-average percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Their connection between chronic absenteeism and increased dropout risk held true in other urban contexts (Bruner et al., 2011; Smerillo et al., 2018), in a statewide context (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012), and in nationwide research (Ginsburg et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Students who are chronically absent are 7.8 times more likely to drop out when compared to their peers (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Considering the various age groups, geographic contexts, and time periods analyzed, it can be concluded with some certainty that chronically absent students face an increased risk of dropping out of school compared to their non-chronically absent peers.

School Disengagement Increases. As students decline academically, they also begin to become disengaged in their education generally (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Balfanz et al., 2007;

Gottfried, 2014b, 2019; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Interestingly, many of these studies also cite academic disengagement as a cause of chronic absenteeism. This duality helps highlight that chronic absenteeism is a compounding phenomenon. This vicious cycle is further solidified by research that clearly demonstrates previous chronic absenteeism is a strong predictor of future chronic absenteeism (Buehler et al., 2012; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Olsen, 2014; Romero & Lee, 2007; Smerillo et al., 2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). As a student begins to miss school, they are more likely to be negatively impacted by their absence, and therefore miss more days of school.

School Climate Worsens. Gottfried (2019) sought to address what he saw as a gap in the research surrounding chronic absenteeism by exploring the "spillover effects" it has on other students (p. 5). His study investigated chronically absent students and their impact on the achievement outcomes of other students in their classroom in urban elementary schools. His study found that classrooms with a larger percentage of chronically absent students had lower math and English test scores. Gottfried also stated there is a potential increased negative impact on economically disadvantaged students and those students with behavioral issues. In his article, Gottfried theorized the cause of this impact is the additional effort required from a classroom teacher to remediate and address the needs of chronically absent students. This additional responsibility or workload pulls from the time, energy, and resources the teacher has to address the needs of other students. While this article is alone in exploring this impact, it does raise interesting questions and avenues for future exploration.

Social and Societal Impacts

The effects of chronic absenteeism are not limited to the school or the classroom. Kearney (2007) conducted a literature review exploring school absenteeism from a psychological

perspective. He found multiple studies that linked school absenteeism to increased use of illicit drugs, binge drinking, driving under the influence, risky sexual behavior, increased HIV risk, suicide risk, and lack of nutrition. Despite the existence of these data, as Kearney (2007) stated "causation remains largely unclear, however, so knowing whether absenteeism predisposes these risky behaviors or vice versa is in need of further study" (p. 455). Gottfried (2014b) explored this gap by analyzing a representative national sample of kindergarten students. Despite highlighting some of the same work as Kearny (2007), he did not confirm a causal link between chronic absenteeism and negative health or life outcomes. Despite those findings, Gottfried (2014b) did find that chronically absent students did present higher frequencies of educational and social disengagement. The frequency of those behaviors increased with the number of absences (Gottfried, 2014b). Allison and Elliot (2019) also conducted an exploration of these factors and did not find any casual links between chronic absenteeism and negative health and societal outcomes. This research demonstrates that despite a clear causal link between these negative outcomes and chronic absenteeism, these students appear to be more at risk (Allison & Elliot, 2019; Catalano et al, 2004; Gottfried, 2014b; Hawkrigg & Payne, 2014; Kearney, 2007).

Factors Contributing to Becoming Chronically Absent

Having explored the impacts of chronic absenteeism, this review now shifts its focus to the factors that make a child more likely to miss school. Research demonstrates that chronic absenteeism impacts students of all backgrounds (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Childs & Lofton, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2019; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Despite this, numerous factors make a student more likely to be chronically absent than their peers. A student presenting with one or more of these factors does not mean that a student is guaranteed to be chronically absent, but it does place them at higher risk of missing school.

Considering the stark impacts of chronic absenteeism, it is crucial for practitioners to be aware of these factors. Schools that better understand the risk factors surrounding possible chronic absenteeism can intentionally target interventions for students with, or at risk for, chronic absence (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Jordan & Miller, 2017).

Demographic Factors

SES. One of the clearest and most researched factors contributing to a student becoming chronically absent is SES. Economically disadvantaged students are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers of a higher SES (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Bruner et al., 2011; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Dougherty & Childs, 2019; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gee, 2018; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014a, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Jordan & Miller, 2007; Ready, 2010; Romero & Lee, 2007; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Although much of this research focused on urban schools, this risk factor holds true across all contexts (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Ready, 2010; Romero & Lee, 2007; Utah Policy Education Center, 2012). Specifically, Chang et al. (2018) found that SES is a better predictor of a student becoming chronically absent than locality type (urban, suburban, or rural). In addition, Dougherty and Childs (2019) advanced this area of research findings "independent of grade, attendance is always lower among students who are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. These differences in attendance by grade and family income exist regardless of what attendance measure is used" (p. 57). This research solidifies the understanding that students of lower SES, regardless of their age or where they live, are more likely to miss school than their peers of higher SES.

Chronic absence is a serious issue for economically disadvantaged students. Ready (2010) found that students of lower SES are 25% more likely to miss three or more days of

school a month than their more affluent peers. Building off Ready's (2010) findings, Gottfried (2014a, 2014b) analyzed the impact of economic disadvantage on student attendance making the argument that the two may be linked. Gottfried (2014a) found that as the number of families of a lower SES in a neighborhood increases, so does the number of absences among that neighborhood's students. Furthering this connection, Chang et al. (2018) found that students of lower SES were also more likely to have extreme levels of chronic absence than their peers. This finding builds on the argument put forward by Gottfried (2014a) by showing that economic disadvantage can lead to students accumulating extreme levels of absences. These findings, combined with previous analyses of the impact of chronic absenteeism, help to demonstrate how chronic absence among students of lower SES contributes to the achievement gap between these students and their more affluent peers (Ginsburg et al, 2014).

Students of Color. African American, Latino, Hispanic, and Native American students are more likely to be absent than their White and Asian peers (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gee, 2018; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried 2014a; Hough, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). A later study done by the Utah Education Policy Center (2012) found that American Indian, Black, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and multiracial students were 40% more likely to be absent than their White or Asian peers. A study from the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research found that this risk factor begins as young as preschool, with African American students being almost twice as likely to be chronically absent than their peers (Ehrlich et al., 2014). Balfanz and Chang (2016) expanded on this research finding "the places with the greatest rates of chronic absenteeism have often experienced inter-generational poverty and segregation that have isolated primarily African American students in neighborhoods rife with multiple

factors that make it harder to attend school regularly" (p. 15). This study also highlighted a key issue in addressing chronic absenteeism and the interconnected nature of the factors causing the problem.

Further exploring these factors, a study from Attendance Works and the Everyone Graduates Center, both affiliated with Johns Hopkins University, analyzing nationwide data found that Native American, Hispanic, African American, and Nonwhite students where above the national average for chronic absenteeism (Chang et al., 2018). That finding was further supported by a report from the United States Department of Education (2019) which stated:

> compared to their white peers, American Indian and Pacific Islander students are over 50 percent more likely to lose three weeks of school or more, Black students are 40 percent more likely, and Hispanic students are 17 percent more likely [to be chronically absent]. (para. 5)

This abundance of research demonstrates this risk factor is not limited to a particular age group, type of school, locality type, or state (Chang et al., 2018; Romero & Lee, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). As with lower SES, students of color are some of the students most at risk of becoming chronically absent. This risk factor is of particular concern as it is contributing to the achievement gap found between students of color and their white classmates (Ginsburg et al., 2014).

Students With Disabilities. Numerous researchers have found that students with disabilities (SWDs) are more likely to be chronically absent than students without disabilities (Buehler et al., 2012; Gee, 2018; Gottfried et al., 2019; Gottfried et al., 2019; Hough, 2019; Jacob & Lovett, 2017; United States Department of Education, 2019; Utah Policy Education Center, 2012). The research surrounding this subject varies greatly as to how much more at risk

SWDs are for becoming chronically absent. Depending on the study, SWDs are as much as 1.5 times more likely chronically absent than their general education peers (Jacob & Lovett, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Research analyzing data from the 2009-2010 school year in Oregon found that 29% of students receiving special education services were chronically absent (Buehler et al., 2012). This finding was reinforced by findings from the Utah Policy Education Center (2012) which found that SWDs were 70% more likely to be chronically absent than their peers without disabilities. These differences in findings can likely be contributed to differences in study samples. Despite their differences, these various findings demonstrate that independent of grade level and locality type, SWDs are more likely to be chronically absent than general education students (Gee, 2018; Hough, 2019; U.S. Department of Education; 2019).

Despite the clear findings that SWDs are more likely to be chronically absent, few studies explored why this connection exists. Addressing this gap in the research, Gottfried et al. (2019) compared chronic absenteeism between SWDs and general education students in Grades 1–5 in New York City. The study presented three key findings. First, confirming previous research, SWDs were more likely to be chronically absent than their general education peers. Second, SWDs were more likely to be chronically absent when they comprise the majority of the classroom population. The researchers found that SWDs in general education majority classrooms were almost 11% less likely to be chronically absent than peers in classrooms where SWDs were the majority. Lastly, students with emotional disturbance specifically struggled with chronic absenteeism. These students were 13–19% more likely to be chronically absent than their general education peers (Gottfried et al., 2019). Gottfried et al.'s (2019) findings require further exploration and are not able to fully explain why SWDs are at such high risk for chronic absence. Moreover, as with most factors contributing to chronic absence, each is interconnected with

others (Singer et al., 2021). Despite the clear finding that SWDs miss more time than general education students, the exact reason for why this occurs is not present in the literature.

Environmental Factors

Household Characteristics. The environment that a person grows up in has an impact on how they develop in numerous ways (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Gottfried (2014a) explored this subject in Philadelphia using longitudinal data. He found that both household size and home ownership had an impact on chronic absenteeism for elementary and middle school students. The larger a student's household and the larger the household size of neighbors, the more likely a student is to miss school (Gottfried 2014a; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Gottfried (2014a) attributed this result to a lack of adults to ensure students are attending school regularly. Students in the study were also more likely to be chronically absent when there were lower rates of homeownership in a neighborhood. Gottfried (2014a) connected this finding to other research highlighting neighborhoods with high rates of homeownership have less crime and stronger social neighbor networks due to residential stability. Although few have followed up on or attempted to repeat Gottfried's (2014a) findings, his research provides additional data and are strongly connected to issues of economic disadvantage.

Economic Disadvantage. Students of lower SES environments are more likely to be absent than their affluent peers due to numerous factors (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Dougherty & Childs, 2019; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gee, 2018; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014a, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Jordan & Miller, 2007; Ready, 2010; Romero & Lee; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Ready (2010) posited that students of lower SES were 3 times more likely to miss school due to illness. This is because they are more likely to be affected by asthma, heart and kidney disease, epilepsy,

digestive problems, as well as vision and hearing issues. Students living in areas of economic disadvantage are also more likely to be exposed to tobacco, substandard housing, and environmental pollutants (Ready, 2010). In addition, being of economic disadvantage, these students are more likely to lack access to quality medical care for these issues (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Gottfried; 2014a; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Ready, 2010). Balfanz and Chang (2016) further explained that chronic absenteeism is concentrated in communities that experience poverty. Members of these communities often live in substandard housing, are more likely to be exposed to airborne pollutants, and face increased amounts of food insecurity, evictions, and exposure to violence (Balfanz & Chang, 2016). These factors associated with economic disadvantage make students more likely to be sick, to have less support from adults in their community, and several other issues that make it more difficult than their affluent peers to attend school regularly (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Gottfried, 2014a; Ready, 2010). This area of study is not as extensive but raises strong concerns as school leaders and policy makers seek to address issues of educational equity.

Health Related Factors

Although economically disadvantaged students are more likely to become sick, this risk factor is not exclusive to lower income children. In fact, among younger students, the most frequently given reason for why a student has missed school is because they are sick (Ehrlich et al., 2014). This finding builds off of previous research by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) and Ready (2010), which both found that illness was a common reason for why students are chronically absent. Specifically, asthma is often cited as a reason for student chronic absenteeism (Childs & Lofton, 2021; Gottfried, 2019; Ready, 2010). Gottfried and Gee (2017) found that students with the lowest health ratings were more likely to be chronically absent when compared to their

healthier peers. Access to healthcare is an issue for many in the United States and this further highlights the importance of health as a driver of chronic absenteeism (Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Graves et al., 2019). Once again, it is important to note the interconnectedness of the factors contributing to chronic absenteeism as healthcare access and SES are often closely connected (Singer et al., 2021).

School Factors

Early and Later Grades. Chronic absenteeism is worst in the early elementary school (Grades K-2) and in high school (Grades 9-12). Hough's 2019 study supports this finding stating "chronic absenteeism declines in grades 1-6 and then increases again in the high school grades (with rates highest in grade 12 at 21 percent)" (p. 19). This trend is found across the country and is true regardless of locality type (Balfanz & Byrnes 2012; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Balfanz et al., 2007; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Jordan & Miller, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2019; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). The highest rates of chronic absenteeism across almost all school levels can be found in high school (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Chang et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Moreover, students in high school are more likely than other students to have extreme levels of chronic absence (Buehler et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2018). Hough (2019) theorized that this difference comes from the shift in responsibility for attendance from the parent (in lower grades) to the student themselves (in high school). High schools can take common steps to address this issue. Allensworth and Easton (2007) found schools that cultivated supportive relationships between teachers and students and helped students to understand the relevance of their learning, had higher attendance. This suggests that improving student relationships with school members is a promising solution for high school chronic absenteeism.

School Climate Issues. Often factors at school create a student aversion to regular attendance. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) described these as students who "will not attend school" (p. 7). These students avoid school if they are being bullied, harassed, feel unsafe or embarrassed (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). A student may also try not to attend school if they are off track academically, have an undiagnosed disability, or are experiencing ineffective school discipline (Balfanz & Chang, 2016). Research also shows that students who struggle socially and those who do not feel culturally accepted are also more likely to be chronically absent (Chang et al., 2018). These factors can lead to a student feeling less connected and less safe at school. Considering that as students get older, the responsibility for attendance often shifts to the student, it can become easier, or more tempting, for a student to avoid the school environment where they do not feel safe or welcome (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Hough, 2019). Much of the research in this area simply highlights barriers and does not fully explain how these aversions develop. One clear finding is that the lack of a social connection to the school makes the student more likely to become chronically absent (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang et al., 2018; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Improving student relationships to the school community by using mentors is a promising strategy to address this risk factor (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Guryan et al., 2017; May et al., 2021). Beyond helping students through issues of school aversion, mentors can also help to make students feel more welcome and increase how much students value regular attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Guryan et al., 2017; May et al., 2021).

Despite the lack of extensive research on the subject, the recent COVID-19 pandemic affected chronic absenteeism (Antoni, 2021). The global pandemic stretched the abilities of most traditional measures of, and interventions for, chronic absenteeism. The impacts to school

climate, transportation, and student health also had negative impacts on student attendance (Antoni, 2021). Further research is necessary in this area to determine causal correlations between factors related to COVID-19 and increased chronic absenteeism.

Personal Factors

Previous Chronic Absenteeism. One of the clearest predictors of future chronic absenteeism is a student being chronically absent in a previous school year (Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Hough, 2019; Olsen, 2014; Romero & Lee, 2007; Singer et al., 2018; Smerillo et al., 2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). This risk factor holds true regardless of student age; locality type (rural, suburban, or urban); or state (Ginsberg et al., 2014; Hough, 2019; Singer et al., 2021; Smerillo et al., 2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Exploring this issue demonstrates that chronic absenteeism is a compounding issue. The more school that a student misses, the more at risk they are to be absent (Ehrlich et al., 2014; Ginsburg et al., 2014). Olsen (2014), exploring chronic absenteeism in Baltimore, found that this issue can present itself as early as the beginning of the school year. She found that students that missed 4 days or more in the month of September missed on average 6–9 days each month (Olsen, 2014). A recent study from Detroit found:

> controlling for the other student, neighborhood, and school factors, the model predicts that students who were chronically absent in the 2014-2015 school year were *9 times* more likely to be chronically absent in the 2015-2016 school year than students who were not chronically absent in that prior year. (Singer et al., 2021, p. 16)

This recent finding reaffirms previous research and proves once again the importance of this risk factor for student absence. Research in this area is clear: students who are chronically absent in

the past are more likely to be chronically absent in the future than their peers without a history of chronic absence.

Educational Disengagement. Students who are academically disengaged are more likely to be chronically absent than their engaged peers (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Catalano et al., 2004; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Maynard et al., 2014; Plasman & Gottfried, 2020). Disengaged students do not feel the information they are learning at school is relevant, important, or valuable. As a result, they have chosen to actively not participate in the educational program provided by the school (Balfanz & Chang, 2016). Plasman and Gottfried (2020) found that students who took one STEM related vocational elective course were 12% less likely to be chronically absent. This finding helps demonstrate that when students feel their learning matters and are engaged in that learning, they are more likely to attend school.

Educational disengagement could also be classified as a student failing to make healthy relationships with peers and adults at school (Balfanz & Chang, 2016). In this area, mentorship holds promise as an intervention (Guryan et al., 2017). These programs help students build trusting relationships at school, decreasing their educational disengagement.

Disengagement from school is not only a risk factor for being chronically absent but it is also an impact of being chronically absent (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). This connection further helps to highlight how chronic absenteeism has compounding and interconnected risk factors and impacts.

Parental Influence. A student's parents play a large role in their attendance. The more involved and connected to school parents are, the less likely a student is to be absent (Chang & Romero, 2008; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Gottfried, 2014b, 2019; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Feller, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). The presented research does not

use any one specific action or form of evidence to show parental involvement. Rather, numerous different actions demonstrate the connection between parents and the school. These include, but are not limited to, parents attending meetings or after-school events, contact with teachers or other staff, and supporting students' learning from home. Considering this variability, determining what type of parental involvement is most effective or impactful is not possible. Despite the varied forms of evidence, the collected research in this area is clear in stating the strength of connection between a student's home and the school can predict possible chronic absence (Chang & Romero, 2008; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Gottfried, 2014b, 2019; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Feller, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Sugrue et al., 2016).

Another factor in a student's attendance is the importance placed on school by their parents. The less important a parent finds school, the more likely their student is to be absent (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Ehrlich, 2014; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018; Sugrue et al., 2016). Also, if a parent had negative school experience, their child could be more likely to be chronically absent than their peers (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Sugrue et al., 2016).

Beyond the importance parents place on school itself, research from Rogers and Feller (2014) and others have found that parents often underestimate the amount of school their student has missed and how much that time away matters to student success (Robinson et al., 2018). Rogers and Feller (2014) found in their study that parents tend to think their students have missed half as much time as they have from school. This research demonstrates the importance of explaining the impacts of chronic absenteeism to parents. Despite placing importance on

regular daily attendance, parents may have an inaccurate picture of how many days their student has missed.

Considering the importance of the linkage between the school and family in addressing chronic absenteeism, interventions that focus on this connection hold promise. Some schools implemented mentorship programs that focused not only on informing parents of student absences, but also at addressing barriers and aversions to regular attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; Holtzman et al., 2017; Maynard et al., 2014).

Transportation. Difficulties in transportation to or from school can make a student more likely to be chronically absent than their peers (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Gottfried, 2014a). While it is unclear how much of an impact any specific form of transportation, such as bus riding, has on chronic absenteeism, a lack of transportation is a clearly defined barrier to a student regularly attending school (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Cordes et al., 2019).

Before moving to a discussion of interventions for chronic absenteeism, it is crucial to recognize the interconnected nature of the factors that place a student at risk of chronic absenteeism. It is specifically because of this interconnection that future research addressing chronic absenteeism necessitates an ecological approach (Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021).

Interventions for Chronic Absenteeism

Researchers and practitioners alike have suggested numerous interventions for improving the attendance of chronically absent students. These interventions tend to focus on improving the tracking of attendance, correcting student behaviors, and improving the relationship between families and the school (Eklund et al., 2022).

Despite numerous interventions for chronic absenteeism, the available research into the effectiveness of these interventions remains unclear. In a recent meta-analysis Eklund et al. (2022) stated, "most practices implemented to improve student attendance are either understudied, lead to small effects, or both" (p. 105). Eklund et al. (2022) found only 22 studies that could be included due to a lack of usable data, lack of an article implementing an intervention, or containing no data related to student attendance. Although there is overwhelming evidence demonstrating the existence, causes, and impacts of chronic absenteeism, the same cannot be said about effectiveness of initiatives to address the problem. Despite the lack of overwhelming evidence, researchers and practitioners can gain information and suggestions from the existing body of knowledge. The following sections explore some suggested interventions to improve student chronic absence.

Improving the Tracking of Attendance

Multiple researchers have suggested that closer tracking of attendance can decrease chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Chang et al., 2018, Ginsburg et al., 2014; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Olsen, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Chang and Romero (2008) highlighted that chronic absenteeism can be hidden if schools are not looking for it. As schools seek to address the issue, a first step is to ensure leaders and practitioners have accurate data surrounding student absences. This intervention is found in the discussion and future steps sections of numerous articles (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Chang et al., 2018) and is an acknowledged first step in improving chronic absenteeism. Ginsburg et al. (2014) wrote that "effective strategies use data to target action, engage students and families working together to improve attendance" (p. 6). This point summarizes the research into this intervention. Teachers and school leaders cannot improve student attendance if they do

not know which students are missing and which are trending towards becoming chronically absent. Additionally, considering the strong predictive factor of previous chronic absenteeism, having current information of the attendance of previously chronically absent students could also serve as an important tool (Gee, 2019; Hough, 2019; Singer et al., 2021).

Correcting Student Behaviors

Some interventions addressing chronic absenteeism focus on trying to correct student behaviors using programmatic interventions. These interventions usually seek to change the mindset of a student, making them more likely to attend school regularly. Studies that examine the effectiveness of such actions usually examine more than one individual intervention, making it complicated to identify what specific actions led to the overall impact (Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Marvul, 2012; McBride et al., 2016; Reissner et al., 2015). For example, Marvul's (2012) study included daily phone calls home to students, participation in a moral issues class, and the sponsoring of club sports teams. While the members of the intervention group were less likely to be chronically absent than nonparticipants, the author does not clearly identify the strength of the individual interventions. Fantuzzo et al. (2005) explored a court related intervention for truant students, finding that those students were less likely to be chronically absent than students that did not receive the intervention. The researchers moved court proceedings for truancy to the school building and provided families with a person to help connect them to community-based services (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). Although the researchers sought to change the behavior of truant students, the intervention could also be effective in addressing the needs of chronically absent students as well. McBride et al. (2016) implemented a social emotional learning program in an attempt to improve middle school students' disengagement and poor attendance. The 9-month intervention did not reduce chronic absenteeism but students were less likely to skip class while

in school (McBride et al., 2016). Reissner et al. (2015) explored the use of cognitive behavioral therapy for students presenting with school avoidance due to an underlying mental disorder. They found that the intervention was no more effective than traditional therapeutic treatment methods for school avoidance at reducing student absenteeism.

Research into this style of intervention is sparse. It also does not show particularly high effectiveness for improving student attendance. Considering the small sample sizes and small impacts associated with these studies, further investigation is required into this style of intervention.

Improving the Connection Between Families and the School

The connection between families and the school has an impact on attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bergman & Chen, 2019; Chang & Romero, 2008; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Fellers, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Smythe-Leistic & Page, 2019). Numerous interventions explore improving communication between parents and the school. Rogers and Feller (2014) found that parents underestimated their own student's absences by a factor of two. This finding presents an area of improvement which previous and future research sought to address. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found exploring the use of family and community involvement to improve attendance is one of the most heavily referenced works in this area. The researchers found that the use of family engagement strategies reduced chronic absenteeism from 8% to 6.1%. Specifically, establishing a contact at the school for parents, rewarding improved student attendance, making home visits, and increased communication with parents all had statistically significant impacts in reducing chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Building on their previous research Sheldon and

Epstein (2004) found that phone calls home to parents when students are absent, timely information about student absences, and keeping parents more informed were effective in reducing chronic absenteeism. In addition, addressing parents' expectations surrounding attendance and connecting students with a mentor also led to reductions in chronic absenteeism (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Key to this research is the recognition that schools must provide parents with pathways for communication and timely attendance information to help reduce chronic absenteeism. Reinforcing these findings, Robinson et al. (2018) found that mailing student specific attendance data and information reinforcing attendance decreased chronic absenteeism by 15% over the course of a school year. Numerous studies, seeking to build on this work, explored texting attendance information to parents saw reductions chronic absenteeism (Bergman & Chen, 2019; Lavigne et al., 2021; Smythe-Leistic & Page, 2019). Despite varied effect sizes, further studies reaffirm the finding that increased communication with parents reduces student chronic absenteeism (Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019). This research overwhelmingly suggests that practitioners should focus on increasing parent communication to improve attendance.

In addition to communicating with schools, parents are also crucial in physically getting their students to school. This is especially important for elementary aged students, where the responsibility of getting the student to school falls almost completely on the parents' shoulders (Gee, 2019; Hough, 2019). Research demonstrates that chronic absenteeism is worst in early grades (K-2) and later grades (9-12; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). As students reach high school, more of the responsibility for getting to school rests with the student (Hough, 2019). Despite this fact, parents serve a key role in ensuring students are attending and supporting when transportation issues arise (Gottfried & Gee, 2017). Schools can implement interventions in this

area to support parents in this function. Robinson et al. (2018) helped parents develop back up plans for getting students to school. This intervention is included with a suite of others; therefore, its specific effectiveness cannot be determined. Despite this fact, helping parents plan for transportation difficulties is highlighted in the suggestions of numerous other studies (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014a; Smythe-Leistic & Page, 2019; Sugrue et al., 2016).

Varied effect sizes, the combination of multiple interventions, the vastly different sample sizes, and different types of schools where this research took place make it difficult to determine any single intervention that is most effective. Taken collectively, this research demonstrates that interventions that increase involvement and communication between target families and the school can reduce chronic absence.

Mentorship

Mentorship occurs between a younger person and an older more experienced person, acting in a non-professional capacity, to provide relationship-based support that benefits one or more of the mentee's areas of development (Garringer et al., 2015). School-based mentorship involves school staff meeting with mentees who are students (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016). A recent meta-analysis found positive outcomes for youth after participating in one-on-one mentorship programs (Raposa et al., 2019). The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) reviews research surrounding mentorship. In 2015, MENTOR published the 4th edition of *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (Garringer et al., 2015). This guide creates standards and provides procedures for the development and implementation of mentorship programs.

Programs that provide mentors to students experiencing issues with attendance have demonstrated positive impacts (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013, 2018; Balfanz et al., 2007; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; Holtzman et al., 2017; May et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2014; Raposa et al., 2019). These programs involve pairing an adult with one or more chronically absent students. These mentors work to build relationships, identify barriers to regular attendance, and address the issues of chronically absent students. Most of these studies exploring this intervention take place in urban schools (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; 2018; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; May et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2014). Despite these studies taking place in urban schools, few have addressed ninth graders specifically. Multiple researchers have highlighted the need to address the transitional year of ninth grade as chronic absenteeism tends to increase as students age in high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019). The sample size of these studies varies with the largest being above 1,000 students and the smallest around 100 students. Most of these studies demonstrate the effectiveness of mentorship in reducing chronic absenteeism. Balfanz and Byrnes (2013) explored the effectiveness of using "Success Mentors" in New York City for students at risk of becoming chronically absent. They found that students with mentors were less likely to be chronically absent, earned more credits, and were more likely to be enrolled the following year than students without mentorship. Guryan et al. (2017), exploring the effectiveness of the same program, as implemented in Chicago, found statistically significant increases in the attendance of mentored students. May et al.'s (2021) multi-year study exploring the impact of a mentorship program for middle and high school students found the participants experienced a statistically significant reduction in absences. Some

studies that have combined mentorship with other interventions have reduced student absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Childs & Grooms, 2018).

Other researchers, like Maynard et al. (2014), have not found similar results. Their exploration of the Check and Connect mentorship program as it was implemented in multiple Texas secondary schools found no statistically significant impact on attendance. However, the study did find that participating students had fewer disciplinary referrals and better grades (Maynard et al., 2014). Another study explored the effectiveness of Check and Connect in an urban district in California also found a lack of statistically significant impacts of the program (Holtzman et al., 2017). These conflicting results highlight the need for repeated exploration of the impact of mentorship on reducing chronic absenteeism. Despite the mixed findings highlighted above, mentorship does hold promise as a positive intervention at increasing regular student school attendance. This is because mentorship can improve the linkage that exists between the family, the student, and the school.

Using an Ecological Approach to Address Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is a complicated problem with numerous interconnected root causes, risk factors, impacts, and possible solutions (Childs & Lofton, 2021; Singer et al., 2021; Sugrue et al., 2016). Considering the wicked nature of this problem, some researchers have advocated for an ecological approach to addressing the issue (Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021; Sugrue et al., 2016). These researchers highlighted that most studies exploring solutions for chronic absenteeism only attempt to address a single part of the problem. Gottfried and Gee (2017) explained this stating “the factors of absenteeism have been analyzed in isolation from one another in an atheoretical and disjointed research agenda” (p. 4). Singer et al. (2021) later echoed this sentiment, highlighting that most studies of interventions for

chronic absenteeism do not address most of the levels of child development. This area of study is rich for further exploration to demonstrate if an ecological approach to chronic absenteeism is ideal.

Mentorship as an Ecological Intervention for Chronic Absenteeism.

Mentorship is an intervention for chronic absenteeism that supports an ecological approach. In addition, some research has shown this intervention can reduce student absences (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013, 2018; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; May et al., 2021). Mentorship serves an ecological intervention because it addresses multiple layers of student development. First, mentorship addresses the student at the Microsystem level. Here, mentors address the student's personal needs and work to resolve student's aversions to daily attendance. Second, mentors address a student's Mesosystem by improving the relationship between the school and the family. Mentors can become the person of contact at the school for parents. They can also help to notify parents when students are not in class and assist in identifying barriers to a student's regular attendance. Mentors can also help to discover possible Exosystem and Macrosystem factors that could be leading to a student's absences. A family could lack housing or transportation, have limited job opportunities or hours, or possibly even a lack of respect for the educational institution (Sugrue et al., 2016). Moreover, mentorship cuts across these different levels and strengthens the linkage between the student, the family, and the school.

In their 2017 study, Gottfried and Gee advocated for taking an ecological view of this issue and suggested that mentorship programs, and those programs that increase communication with parents, hold promise in reducing chronic absenteeism. Their findings are supported by others in the field (Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Singer et al., 2021; Sugrue et al., 2016). Any

potential intervention for this issue must recognize the multifaceted nature of the problem and be prepared to address these causes.

Summary

The causes of chronic absenteeism are complex, intertwined, and varied. Many are completely out of the control of families, students, and schools alike. Despite these various root causes, the effects are clear and almost exclusively negative. Research exploring chronic absenteeism unequivocally demonstrates that chronically absent students perform worse academically, are less likely to graduate, and are more at risk of negative life outcomes than their peers who are regularly in school. In addition, this problem affects families of color and those of lower SES in disproportional amounts, regardless of location.

Despite numerous attempts to address the issue, chronic absenteeism remains a problem in the United States, particularly in urban school districts. Research does not identify any one clear intervention to improve the attendance for chronically absent students. Much of what does exist are general best practices, or studies demonstrating differing levels of influence. This demonstrates the need for further study of effective interventions for chronic absenteeism.

Considering the complex nature of the issue, some researchers have suggested an ecological approach. This conceptual framework helps to address the multifaceted nature of chronic absenteeism. Mentorship, an intervention that has shown some positive results in reducing student absenteeism and complements an ecological approach to addressing chronic absenteeism. Research using an ecological approach to address chronic absenteeism is not overwhelming and is rich for further analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter presents the methods used to undertake this mixed methods action research study. I used a pragmatic philosophical worldview. This approach is most concerned with practical problems and their potential solutions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, pragmatism often uses both quantitative and qualitative data to achieve the best understanding of a research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I collected both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions. Quantitative data included daily student attendance, documentation of mentor interactions, student grade point average (GPA), and student survey responses. Qualitative data for the study included mentor data logs and semi-structured interviews with students. I employed a convergent design in which these quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed simultaneously. These results were then merged and interpreted to determine the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Collection of these varied data sources resulted in triangulation, providing coherence and validity to the study's results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, I employed a modification of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development as a theoretical framework to understand the complex interconnected systems that affect a child's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This model added further nuance to the collected data in exploration of the research questions.

This chapter explores these elements in detail. Included are the action research model and a detailed description of the intervention. In addition, the section describes participants,

instruments used, data collection and analysis. The chapter acknowledges delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of the study. Lastly, the chapter provides the ethical considerations undertaken for the protection of the study's participants.

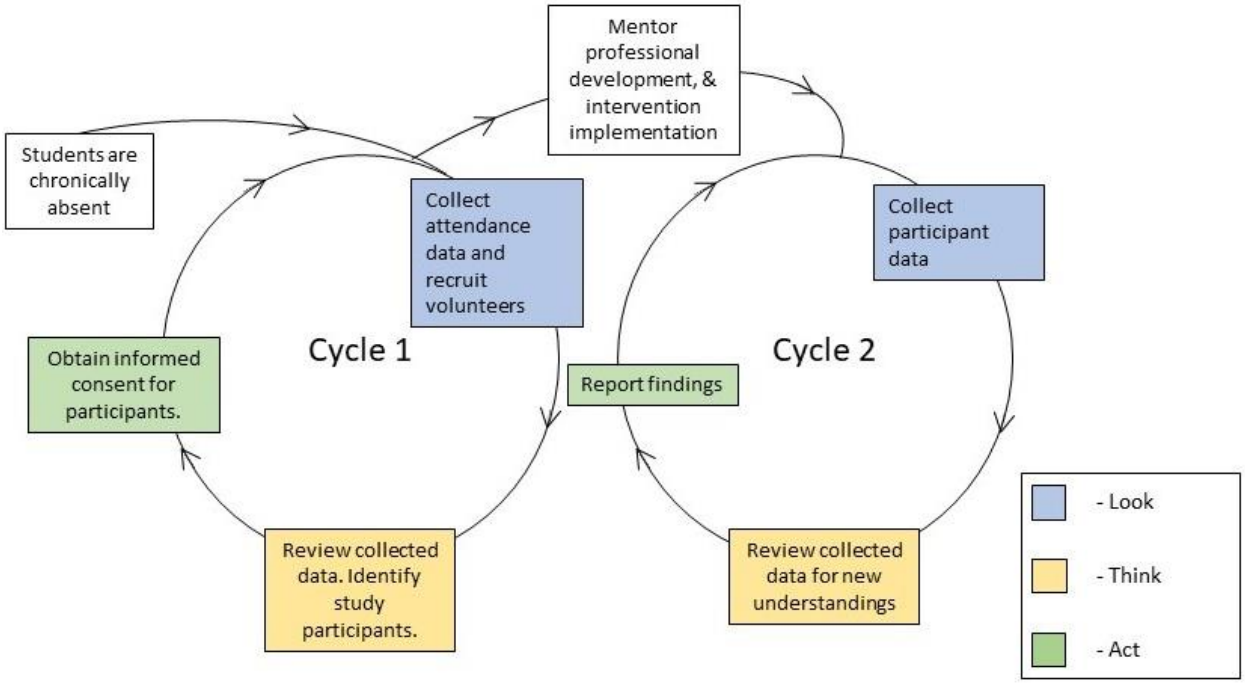
Action Research Model

I used an action research model. This approach was most appropriate for this study because "action research seeks to directly engage the complex dynamics of given social contexts in order to accomplish practical solutions to issues affecting people's lives" (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 5). Rather than following a traditional research structure, which sees a researcher separate themselves from participation in a research setting, the action researcher works collaboratively with practitioners in exploration of solutions to real world problems. In addition, action research is well suited to mixed methods studies as "both seek to provide comprehensive information: Mixed methods seeks to provide comprehensive answers to study research questions, whereas action research seeks to provide comprehensive solutions to practice problems" (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 52) Utilized in this way, a mixed methods action research study provides nuanced, specific, and actionable findings for the participants who are experiencing the problem in real time.

Action research is an iterative process, often involving multiple cycles of research. Using these cycles, the researcher uses a "Look-Think-Act" (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 10) structure to plan, implement, and evaluate their findings. A detailed description of how the "Look-Think-Act" structure was applied to this specific action research study is available in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Stringer Action Research Model as Implemented in Current Research Study



Note. Adapted from E. T. Stringer and A. Ortiz Stringer Model adapted from Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, (2021), *Action research* (5th ed.), Sage. Copyright 2021 Sage.

Description of the Action Research Intervention

I implemented a school-based mentorship program to address chronic absenteeism at City High School (CHS). The program focused on the individual and their family. Students received an intervention intended to strengthen their bond to school, increase their engagement, provide information on the importance of regular attendance, address barriers and aversions to regular attendance, and develop goals for improved attendance. I also sought to strengthen the linkage between the student's parent or guardian to the school. The following section describes the

intervention and its conceptual framework in detail. Discussions of the study's participants and my role are also included.

Mentorship as a Bioecological Intervention. This intervention created a new microsystem for the student in the form of a mentorship program. This intervention bi-directionally influenced both the individual student and their mesosystem.

Individual. The intervention addressed the bioecological level of the individual student, providing the student a mentor. Through participation in mentorship activities, the intervention sought to address the factors that led the individual student to miss school. While common contributors to chronic absenteeism are known, this intervention worked to identify a student's specific issues. Mentors then provided support by addressing any barriers, aversions, or disengagement leading to a lack of regular attendance. This helped to demonstrate the bi-directional influence of this intervention. The intervention had the clear goal of improving student attendance, but the participants influenced the program with their specific needs.

Microsystem. This mentorship intervention introduced a new microsystem into the individual's environment. Much like other structures found at this level, this program had an impact on the individual. The newly created microsystem sought to have a bi-directional influence. First, the intervention addressed the individual and their barriers, aversions, and disengagement that are leading to their lack of regular attendance. Specifically, the mentorship intervention identified and addressed school level factors impacting the student. In addition, the program addressed the mesosystem, specifically the family in the mesosystem. The intervention attempted to improve the linkage of the family, the school, and the individual. The intervention influenced the family through the communication of student attendance information.

Additionally, regular communication attempted to develop the relationship between the mentor and the family.

Mesosystem. The intervention affected the student's mesosystem through the introduction of information and resources to the family. The mentor functioned not only as a resource for the student, but also for the family. A family's attitudes towards attendance or school and outside factors can influence a student's attendance rates (Sugrue et al., 2016). The intervention addressed the Mesosystem, attempting to pull parents or guardians into the work of addressing their student's attendance patterns. As families provide information to the mentor, that mentor is then able to further influence the individual student and attempt to improve their regular school attendance.

Mentorship Conceptual Framework. Formal mentorship was the structure used by this mentorship intervention. Formal mentoring is mentorship that is planned, structured, and implemented to resolve a problem in an organization (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Mentoring in this intervention took a dyadic form. The program pairs one mentor with one mentee as opposed to one mentor with several mentees simultaneously (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021).

This study's mentorship intervention draws on research provided by the National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR). MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (4th ed.) provides six key elements of effective mentorship programs. These elements are recruitment, screening, training, matching and initiation, monitoring and support, and closure (Garringer et al., 2015). The definition of mentorship provided by MENTOR states "Mentoring takes place between young persons (i.e., mentees) and older or more experienced persons (i.e., mentors) who are acting in a non-professional helping capacity to provide relationship-based support that benefits one or more areas of the mentee's development" (Garringer et al., 2015, p.

9). This mentorship program used the essential elements provided by MENTOR, combined with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Framework to guide the structure of the intervention.

School-Based Mentorship Program at CHS. This intervention created a mentorship program. Mentors had a face-to-face check in with their mentee each day to confirm the mentee's attendance at school. Any day the student did not check in, the mentor made parent or guardian contact. This contact occurred via phone call to the parent or guardian's provided cell phone. Timely phone calls home supported the strengthening of bonds between parents and mentors (Garringer et al., 2015). Also, timely information surrounding attendance has been effective in reducing chronic absenteeism in different contexts and studies (Bergman & Chen, 2019; Ehrlich et al., 2019; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Marvul, 2012; Rogers & Feller, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). In addition, if a student attended all check ins and their extended meeting, the mentors contacted families with this positive information. Mentor training, discussed in detail later, provided mentors with suggested phrases to assist them in building the mentor-parent relationship. Suggested phrases such as, "I saw [student's name] was not in school today, I wanted to check in and see if there is anything I can do to help [he/she] be here tomorrow." Phrases such as this communicated the supportive nature of the mentor to participating families. The intention was to communicate to families that mentors were a resource for improvement, not a punitive measure.

In addition to daily check ins, each mentor had one extended meeting with their mentee for at least 15 minutes each week. Research supports frequent meetings, including some extended meetings, between mentors and mentees. These meetings help to strengthen relational bonds and work towards programmatic goals (Garringer et al., 2015). Each mentor had the liberty to decide the flow and structure of the extended meeting based on the needs of their

mentee. Despite that freedom, each meeting required the inclusion of the following elements: (a) a prompting for information on how their week has been at school and/or at home (b) a review of their most recent attendance information (c) growth goal setting or a check in related to a created goal (d) identification of any barriers or aversions to regular attendance (e) a relationship building component. Research demonstrates that the development of growth goals has resulted in improved attendance in other contexts (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2021; Martin et al., 2022). All mentor meetings had the same components, but mentors had freedom to employ those structures in a manner that best fit the individual needs of their mentee. Each week, mentors completed a provided data log to record interactions with their mentee. This log also included prompts and resources for their extended meeting. I communicated with mentors weekly identifying common issues and providing solutions and resources as needed. The following sections explore the intervention in more detail. Specifically, these sections describe how this mentorship program operationalized the six core elements of effective mentorship.

Recruitment. The teachers and staff of CHS served as the recruitment pool for this program. An email sent to all staff realistically communicated the requirements and expectations of the program. This communication included a detailed flyer explaining the program's length, goals, and mentor requirements. This style of communication leads to more invested and committed mentors who are more likely to support their mentee (Garringer et al., 2015). Following this email, the participating principal and I met to review the staff who have volunteered to participate. The principal or I then made face-to-face appeals to specific teachers or staff who we felt might serve as quality mentors. An invitation followed expressing the desire for these staff members to participate in the program. This type of word-of-mouth invitation is

shown to have positive results in securing high quality and committed mentors (Garringer et al., 2015).

Screening. Considering the close relationship developed between mentors and mentees, MENTOR's focus in this area speaks much to the vetting of mentors from a safety standpoint. Their Elements suggest multiple background checks and interviews for all potential mentees (Garringer et al., 2015). As all potential mentors are employees of JPS, each has been subject to a background check and interview with district personnel. CHS' principal served as screener with the ability to deny any mentor's participation due to cause that could not be shared for that person's privacy. This filter screened mentors for safety prior to their admission into the program.

Each mentor received a written explanation of the program before joining. This document explained the commitments required of each mentor. Mentors signed these forms in recognition of these responsibilities and their agreement to meet all expectations. No potential mentors were screened from the program by the principal. Overall, 32 staff members made themselves available as potential mentors.

Training. Each mentor received two hours of face-to-face training. The program offered four training dates for potential mentors. Printed and online materials supplemented this training. Mentors accessed these materials through a Google Form which provided verification of their receipt. This training reviewed the benchmarks for mentor training as provided by the *Elements of Effective Practice of Mentoring*. These benchmarks include: (a) program requirements; (b) mentors' goals and expectations for the mentee, parent or guardian, and the mentoring relationship; (c) mentors' obligations and appropriate roles; (d) relationship development and maintenance; (e) ethical and safety issues that may arise related to the mentoring relationship; (f)

effective closure of the mentoring relationship; (g) sources of assistance available to support mentors; (h) opportunities and challenges associated with mentoring specific populations of youth; (j) initiating the mentoring relationship; (j) developing an effective, positive relationship with the mentee's family; and (k) instruction in the development and support of growth goal setting activities (Garringer et al., 2015, p. 35). In addition, training covered the following: (a) appropriate physical contact, (b) contact with the mentoring program, (c) relationship monitoring requirements, (d) approved activities, (e) a review of mandatory reporting requirements, (f) confidentiality and anonymity, (g) digital and social media use, (h) emergency and crisis procedures, (i) discipline, and (j) other program relevant topics (Garringer et al., 2015, pp. 35-36).

In addition, mentors were encouraged to share training information with parents and guardians. These documents communicate the expectations and requirements of the mentorship program to both parties. Prior to the start of the program, mentors contacted both their mentee and the mentee's parent or guardian.

Matching and Initiating. The research surrounding the effectiveness of intentional matching based on demographics or other factors is mixed (Garringer et al., 2015; Mullen & Klimatis, 2021). With this in consideration, matching and initiation followed a semi-structured format. Teachers or staff members who had a previous relationship with a student (as a member of their class or elsewhere) had priority during mentee matching. The rationale behind this decision was that the teacher or staff member has an existing relationship to build upon. An exception existed for when the teacher or staff member presented an objection due to an underlying damaged relationship with their assigned student. The matching process proceeded randomly from this point.

Monitoring and Support. The mentors turned in their data forms at the end of each week. After a review of these forms, I conducted check-ins with the mentors who needed specific support or assistance. Once a week I offered further programmatic support to any interested mentor. Mentor training provided mentors with a list of resources they could use to address specific areas where they needed additional support in their mentorship activities.

Closure. Mentorship training communicated the importance of closure of the mentorship relationship. The final session between mentees and mentors included closing procedures. Continuation of mentor and the mentee relationship was up to both parties following the end of the study.

Participants. Approximately 351 out of 1,700 students at CHS were chronically absent during the 2022-2023 school year. This accounted for the school's chronic absenteeism rate of 20.9%. Table 2 provides detailed demographic information of chronically absent students at CHS.

Table 2

Chronic Absenteeism by Demographic Subgroup at City High School for 2022-2023 School Year

	Chronically Absent	
Subgroup	No.	%
Female	180	51.1%
Male	171	48.7%
Asian	0	0.0%
Black	256	72.9%
Hispanic	43	12.3%
White	33	9.4%
Multiple Races	19	5.4%
Students with Disabilities	60	17.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	285	81.2%
English Learners	14	4.0%
Homeless	22	6.3%

Participating students were a selection of first-time ninth-grade students at CHS. Cycle one of this action research study involved a review of attendance data from the previous and current school year. This review analyzed attendance from eighth grade and quarter one of the 2023-2024 school year. Those students who demonstrated chronic absence from the 2022-2023 school year or were currently demonstrating a risk of becoming chronically absent in the 2023-2024 school year, are eligible for participation in the study. Students missing 10% or more of Quarter 1 qualified as at-risk for 2023-2034 chronic absenteeism. Students involved in truancy proceedings at CHS were ineligible for the study. Among those eligible students, only those ninth-grade students with significant, high, or extreme chronic absenteeism for the current school year, or from the previous school year, were potential participants for the study. Using the scale previously defined by the United States Office of Civil Rights, students with significant to

extreme absenteeism, have missed 10% or more of the school year (Jordan & Miller, 2017). Following these standards, 80 students qualified for participation.

Modifications to the Action Research Study. I sought to have a representative sample to mirror the demographic factors of CHS. Taking these factors into consideration, I aimed for at least 30 or more participants to be part of the research cycle. I invited all the families of potential participants. This invitation provided families with an overview of the study. Additionally, the invitation asked families for their informed consent for their child's participation. Analysis for demographic factors of those families who agreed to participate occurred. Of the 80 families invited to participate, 16 agreed, with one student leaving the study before the program concluded. This sample did not allow for a representative sample of chronically absent students at CHS. The study included all families and students that agreed to be part of the study.

Despite demonstrated chronic absenteeism at all grade levels at CHS, ninth grade was the focus of this intervention, drawing on suggestions from previous research (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019). JPS was not allowed to share demographic data relating to the SES of participants. Table 3 summarizes the demographic factors of the study's participant group.

Table 3

Demographic Factors of the Intervention's Participants

Demographic	No.
Total Participants	16
Sex	
Female	9
Male	7
Race	
Black	15
White	1
Students with Disabilities	4

Role of the Researcher. During the action research study, I was a teacher and member of the attendance team at the participating school. I served as a facilitator and point of contact for the participants involved in the intervention. However, I did not teach the grade level of the participants. This helped limit the bias as I was not the teacher of record for any participants. Mentors completed a mentor data form that documented any student missed check-ins. I cross referenced these data with attendance data from the student information system to help control for mentor and researcher bias and do not have any supervisory role over the mentors. This role supported the action research model as I was participating in the research process to solve a problem in my professional context (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021).

Action Research Questions

The goal of this mixed-methods study is to explore the impact of an intervention for chronic absenteeism to inform current practitioners.

1. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in student affective and cognitive engagement among participating students?
2. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent did the perceptions of participating students on the importance of regular attendance change?
3. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?
4. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?

Data Sources

This study collected qualitative and quantitative data sources. The following subsection explores those data sources in detail.

Daily Student Attendance

JPS uses a student information system (SIS) called Synergy (hereafter referred to as the SIS). One key function of the SIS is to collect daily attendance data. The teacher of record enters attendance for each student, during each class period. The attendance system of JPS defaults to present. Consequently, the SIS counts a student as present unless the student's teacher takes action. Although teachers are responsible for entering attendance accurately each class period, it is likely that some discrepancies or recording errors occur. Considering that the SIS defaults to marking a student present, for the purposes of this study, if a student was marked absent, then the study assumed this was not a recording error. Additionally, this study defined an absence as missing the entire academic school day. Chronic absenteeism counts absences regardless of the circumstances surrounding that absence. As a result, all absences, including excused absences and suspensions, are counted as absences for the purposes of this study.

Mentor Data Forms

Each mentor kept a weekly log documenting their interactions with their mentee. The log included the mentor's name, the student's numeric identification number, the dates of the week. Below these dates were spaces for the mentor to record if their mentee checked in. If the mentee missed the check in, the mentor recorded if they made parent contact, and if the parent was aware of the absence. Below this was a space for the mentor to take notes on their interactions with their mentee. Mentor training encouraged mentors to record any developments with their mentee. This included any information felt relevant including mentee mental states, quotes from mentees, and documentations of the mentor's efforts.

The reverse side of the form provided attendance research and a relationship building activity or conversation for mentors to have use with their mentee if desired. The content of these components changed each week. Below that section was a goal setting space for mentors to document the goals they set with their mentees surrounding their attendance behaviors. Goal setting took the form of developing growth goals with students. Research shows growth goals in different contexts to improved attendance behavior (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2021; Martin et al., 2022). The form concluded with an open-ended section. This section allowed the mentor to provide further documentation surrounding how their student was performing. Mentors could also use this space to document the mindset of the mentee, as they were progressing through the program.

This data source served multiple functions. First, the form documented if mentees were checking in with their mentors. Second, it provided documentation showing that mentors were communicating with parents when students were absent. Third, it provided mentors with expectations for their weekly extended meetings, providing them with an activity and a goal

setting exercise. Lastly, the form collected qualitative data from the student's perspective. Although these perspectives were filtered through the mentor, they still provided a more nuanced picture of the student's feelings during their participation in the intervention. See Appendix B for a sample data form.

Student Engagement Instrument

This data collection method used the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI; see Appendix C for full instrument). The collected data were quantitative in nature. Participants completed this survey during the first week of the intervention and again during their last week participating in the program.

The University of Minnesota developed the SEI in support of the Check & Connect mentorship program (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2020). The survey seeks to quantify differing measures of student engagement. As explored in Chapter 2, educational disengagement is both a cause and impact of chronic absenteeism. Consequently, having measures of engagement were relevant to developing a further understanding of participating students. Researchers developing the survey stated a belief that student engagement is comprised of four subtypes: academic engagement (e.g., grades, assignments completed, time on task); behavioral engagement (e.g., attendance, classroom participation); cognitive engagement (e.g., self-regulation, relevance of school, value of learning); and affective (psychological) engagement (e.g., belonging, identification with school, school membership; Appleton et al., 2006). Developers of the instrument stated that academic and behavioral engagement lend themselves to easily observable metrics (daily attendance, grades, completed assignments, disciplinary referrals), but cognitive and affective engagement are not easily observable. In response to this, the researchers developed the SEI to measure these areas of student engagement.

The SEI consists of 35 questions across six subtypes of student engagement (Betts et al., 2010). The survey measures cognitive engagement through subtypes of Control and Relevance of School Work (CRSW), Future Aspirations and Goals (FG), and Intrinsic Motivation (IM; Betts et al., 2010; Reschly et al., 2014). Survey questions relating to cognitive engagement include *School is important for achieving my future goals* (FGA), *The tests in my classes do a good job of measuring what I'm able to do* (CRSW), and *I'll learn, but only if the teacher gives me a reward* (IM; Lovelace et al., 2014). The SEI measures affective engagement through the subtypes of Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR), Family Support for Learning (FSL), and Peer Support at School (PSS; Betts et al., 2010; Reschly et al., 2014). Representative survey items from these sections include *At my school, teachers care about students* (TSR), *When I have problems at school, my family/guardian(s) are willing to help me* (FSL), and *Other students at school care about me* (PSS; Lovelace et al., 2014). The instrument includes standardized directions for administration and collection of the SEI controlling for differences in student reading ability and ensuring students understand the survey items (Appleton et al., 2006; Betts et al., 2010).

These areas of measurement are valid and reliable for Grades 6-12 (Betts et al., 2010; Lovelace et al., 2014; Reschly et al., 2014). Betts et al. (2010) found good internal consistency for survey items in relation to the five factors of student engagement with a comparative fit index = 0.95 and a root mean square error of approximation = 0.04. Betts et al. (2014) also found no statistically significant variance for items when analyzing gender or grade level. A follow up study confirmed these results in a different setting (Reschly et al., 2014). Both Reschly et al. (2014) and Lovelace et al. (2014) found concurrent validity with low to moderate correlations between SEI scores and other academic data points. Specifically, Lovelace et al. (2014) found

among students who were frequently absent the SEI provided values of strong statistical significance. Lovelace et al. (2014) also found the SEI to be predictive of high school dropout.

The SEI's areas of measurement complemented this action research study. The intervention had each mentor make parent or guardian contact if a participant missed a check-in or day of school. The SEI's affective engagement subtype of FSL connects closely with the intervention treatment. Additionally, student engagement rates provided additional data for a factor linked to causing chronic absenteeism. The Check & Connect Team at the University of Minnesota granted permission for the use of this instrument. For a full copy of the instrument as used in this study, see Appendix C. Additionally for a full copy of the implementation and interpretation procedures used in this study, see Appendix D.

Student Interviews

I invited all participants to complete a semi-structured interview at its conclusion. These qualitative data provided a more nuanced understanding of how students felt about their participation in the study. The interview followed a format from *What works in our community: A toolkit for identifying promising local practice*, created by Attendance Works (2020), a chronic absenteeism advocacy group supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The interview protocol included eight questions with each question having an associated probing or follow-up question. A member of the CHS school counseling department conducted these interviews.

Questions from this interview protocol included *Do you like coming to school?; What makes you want to go to school every day?*; *Do you know who to go to for help if you are struggling with problems that keep you from attending school?*; *What makes it hard to get to school?; Is there anything that helps you overcome those challenges getting to school?* These questions added additional qualitative information to areas measured by the SEI. In particular,

the factors of FSL, CRSW and FG, and TSR. In addition, the questions asked in this protocol provided insights into the influence stemming from the intervention. These questions looked for data surrounding the program's bioecological impact on the student and their family.

These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis when allowed. If the participant's parent or guardian did not approve the use of an audio recording, I took extensive notes during the interview. Attendance Works provided permission for the use of this interview protocol. For the full interview protocol, see Appendix E.

Student GPA

Considering the clear correlation between academic achievement and chronic absenteeism, this study collected grades as a measure of student academic achievement. Prior to the study's start, participating student grades from Quarter 1 and Interim 2 of the 2023-24 school year were collected from the SIS. The SIS quantifies these using a GPA. The GPA system used by JPS assigns a value to each grade. Standard level classes receive the following values: A = 4 / B = 3 / C = 2 / D = 1 / E = 0. For advanced classes, these values are adjusted to the following: A = 5 / B= 4 / C= 3 / D = 2 / E =0. Following a student's participation, their GPA from Quarter 2 and Interim 3 were collected from the SIS to determine any change in academic achievement after participating in the intervention. I acknowledge known issues of validity and reliability with grades. Grades are an imperfect measure of academic achievement, but this measure is the one most easily accessible and applicable for this action research study.

Data Collection

In support of the study's action research model, data collection took place over two cycles, with the first cycle informing the second (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2021, p. 10). Data collection for Cycle 1 took place before implementation of the intervention. During this time, I

analyzed CHS's attendance records to identify first time ninth-grade students with a history of chronic absenteeism and/or at risk of future absenteeism. The second stage of data collection took place over an 8-week period in support of action research Cycle 2. This cycle saw the implementation of the described intervention. Research Cycle 2 collected student pre- and post-responses to the SEI, student attendance records, student GPAs, and mentor data forms as quantitative data. I collected qualitative data in the form of open-ended question responses from mentor data forms as well as transcripts, recordings, and notes from student interviews.

Data Analysis

Action Research Question 1: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in student affective and cognitive engagement among participating students?

The data used to answer Action Research Question 1 were quantitative in nature. The SEI measures student perceptions of the importance of regular attendance by examining their cognitive and affective engagement. Mentors administered the SEI during their first mentorship session and again after the final mentorship session. Questions on this instrument were answered using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). These data were scored using the scoring procedures provided with the instrument, determining student responses across the six subtypes of engagement. A total score SEI scaled score was also calculated. For a full demonstration of scoring procedures, see Appendix D. In addition to prescribed scoring procedures, the raw data from both administrations were subjected to descriptive analysis including mean, mode, median, range, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. After both administrations, a dependent t-test was conducted to determine any difference between pre- and post-administrations. Lastly a Cohen's d determined the effect size of these results.

Action Research Question 2: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent did the perceptions of participating students on the importance of regular attendance change?

Multiple data sources answered action research question two. The first source is quantitative in nature. As stated previously, the SEI measures student perceptions of the importance of regular attendance by examining their cognitive and affective engagement. Mentors administered the SEI during their first mentorship session and again after the final mentorship session. Questions on this instrument were answered using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). These data were scored using the procedures provided with the instrument, determining student responses across the six subtypes of engagement. For a full demonstration of scoring procedures, see Appendix D. In addition to prescribed scoring procedures, the raw data from both administrations were subjected to descriptive analysis including mean, mode, median, range, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. After both administrations are completed, a dependent t-test was conducted to determine any difference between pre- and post-administrations. Lastly a Cohen's d determined the effect size of these results.

Qualitative data were collected to supplement and add nuance to the SEI's quantitative data. Open-ended responses from mentor data forms and transcriptions of student interviews provided this qualitative component. The collected data sources were digitized and uploaded to MAXQDA for further analysis. Student responses and interview transcriptions were coded with the goal of understanding the participants' feelings surrounding school after having participated in the intervention. This occurred across two cycles of data analysis. The first cycle used affective coding. This was most appropriate as these methods "investigate subjective qualities of

human experience…by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences" (Saldaña, 2016, p.124). Among these methods emotion coding was most appropriate as it tapped into the inner cognitive systems of participants by labeling the feelings of participants (Saldaña, 2016). These codes consisted of a combination of In Vivo codes and emotional states described by participants. To provide a thematic and conceptual understanding of the data, they were subjected to a second round of data analysis. This second cycle consisted of pattern coding to categorize the emotion and In Vivo codes (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding was most appropriate as it not only organized the first cycle codes, but identified emergent themes, configurations, or explanations inside the data (Saldaña, 2016). The study analyzed qualitative and quantitative data collectively in hopes of providing a nuanced picture of student perceptions.

Action Research Question 3: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?

Student attendance records answered action research question three. Student participants were first time ninth graders with a history of chronic absenteeism. Qualifying students were those chronically absent in eighth grade and/or those who missed 10% or more of Quarter 1. The SIS recorded student attendance and later was accessed for data retrieval. Attendance data for these participants were subjected to descriptive analysis to determine any change in daily attendance. Descriptive statistical analysis included mean, mode, median, range, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. A dependent t-test analyzed the attendance rates for participating students comparing their attendance from the eight-week period before starting the intervention and from the eight-week period when they participated in the intervention. Lastly, a Cohen's d test determined the effect size of the intervention.

Action Research Question 4: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?

The data answering this question were quantitative in nature. Classroom grades from Quarter 1, Interim 2, Quarter 2, and Interim 3 were collected. Classroom grades were quantified using CHS's GPA calculation procedure. These data were subjected to descriptive analysis including mean, mode, median, range, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. After this analysis, a dependent t-test determined any difference in these data from before and after student participation in the intervention. Lastly, a Cohen's d test determined the effect size of the intervention. Table 4 summarizes the action research questions and associated data sources and methods of analysis.

Table 4

Action Research Questions, Data Sources, and Data Analysis

Evaluation Question	Data Sources	Data Analysis
1. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in student affective and cognitive engagement among participating students?	Pre- and Post-Administration of the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI)	*M*, Mode, *Mdn.*, Range, *SD*, Skewness, & Kurtosis Dependent T-Test Cohen's d Test
2. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent did the perceptions of participating students on the importance of regular attendance change?	Pre- and Post-Administration of Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) Results Mentor-Student Forms Student Interviews	*M*, Mode, *Mdn.*, Range, *SD*, Skewness, & Kurtosis Dependent T-Test Cohen's d Test
3. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?	Student Attendance Records	*M*, Mode, *Mdn.*, Range, *SD*, Skewness, & Kurtosis Dependent T-Test Cohen's d Test
4. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?	Student Report Cards and Interim Reports	*M*, Mode, *Mdn.*, Range, *SD*, Skewness, & Kurtosis Dependent T-Test Cohen's d Test

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Delimitations

I focused only on the microsystem and mesosystem of the participants and did not include other layers of Bronfenbrenner's model that have an impact on the student (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Traditionally these layers, the Exo- and Macrosystems lie outside the control and influence of the school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Using a pragmatic approach, I excluded these layers because they lie outside the purview of practitioners.

Additionally, I limited the sample to ninth graders who had a history of chronic absenteeism in the 2022-23 or 2023-24 school years. While the participating school has demonstrated chronic absence issues at all grade levels, ninth graders were of interest as shown by other studies (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019). I focused on one factor influencing chronic absenteeism, the school. The choice of focusing on one factor is a delimitation as it did not account for other influences on the issue. This was a short cycle action research study with a focus on a specific contextual issue. I did not seek to support the effectiveness of any one intervention, rather exploring the possible impacts of an intervention in the specific context.

Limitations

Time was a major limitation of this action research study. This study took place over an 8-week period of the school year. This limits data to a small window of time and does not collect data from the entire school year. There was no funding for materials in this study, this limited the resources used to develop and implement the interventions. This study took place at my place of employment, which disallowed control for this bias. In addition, there was bias in the selection of intervention and target for that intervention. The sample size was a limitation: 16 students agreed to participate with more than 80 qualifying for participation. Additionally, using grades as a measure of academic achievement is a limitation. A further limitation was the setting for this study. The specific contextual environment surrounding the participating school limits the scope of the study.

Assumptions

A key assumption of this study was that chronic absenteeism is a problem that can be addressed in a meaningful way by school leaders, policymakers, and practitioners. Chronic absenteeism is a problem with complex and interconnected causes. I assumed that a systemic

problem can be improved by actions taken that address some but not all portions of the system. In addition, I assumed that addressing the linkages between the student, their family, and the school is the best solution for addressing chronic absenteeism. I assumed that the collected data were accurate and that all participants responded honestly to all prompts. I also assumed that mentors are interested and committed to building connections with students.

Ethical Considerations

After Action Research Cycle 1 identified a pool of participants, each parent or guardian was consulted. These individuals were presented with an opportunity to provide informed consent to become part of the study. Only parents or guardians who provided informed consent for their child became participants in the study. The informed consent form used by this study is available for review in Appendix F. No student, parent, guardian, or mentor names were used as part of the study. For purposes of the study, each participating student was given an identification number to serve in the place of their name. Student interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. Any participant responses included in the study were masked for protection using an identification number. All electronic information were collected and stored in password protected files. All physical documents were stored in a locked and secure location. Any identifiable files or information, including audio recordings, will be destroyed following the publication of the study.

All data collection methods were vetted by the William & Mary's Institutional Review Board to study human subjects. I took steps to eliminate personal bias as I am an employee of the participating school. As part of the study, I kept a reflective journal to control for personal bias. I also offered member checking as an assurance of accuracy in the interviews. I did not include any students for which I am the teacher of record. In addition, I did not include participants with

whom I have a previous professional or personal connection. Permission to conduct the study was obtained by the participating school and school district.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to explore the use of a school-based mentorship program as an intervention for previously chronically absent ninth grade students. I sought to understand how this mentorship program would impact student engagement, the value participants placed on regular school attendance, their attendance behaviors, and their academic outcomes. A logic model provided in Chapter 1 (Figure 4) describes the intervention's expected influence. The following questions guided this action research study:

1. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in student affective and cognitive engagement among participating students?
2. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent did the perceptions of participating students on the importance of regular attendance change?
3. After participating in a school-based mentorship program to what extent was there a change in the attendance behavior among participating students?
4. After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in academic achievement among participating students?

To answer these questions, I collected various forms of qualitative and quantitative data. The data collection and analysis methods used by the study are outlined in Chapter 3. The following sections explore the collected data and analysis for each research question. Each

subsection concludes with a short summary explaining the findings and/or results associated with the specific research question. The chapter concludes with a summary of all findings.

Action Research Question #1: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in the student affective and cognitive engagement among participating students?

This question explores how the intervention impacted participants' affective engagement (e.g., belonging, identification with school, school membership) and cognitive engagement (e.g., self-regulation, relevance of school, value of learning). The data that informed this question are quantitative in nature and come from the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI).

SEI

The SEI is a survey that measures a student's affective engagement and cognitive engagement (Appleton et al., 2006). The SEI consists of 35 questions across six subtypes of student engagement (Betts et al., 2010). This instrument measures cognitive engagement as three subtypes, Control and Relevance of School Work (CRSW), Future Goals (FG), and Intrinsic Motivation (IM; Betts et al., 2010; Reschly et al., 2014). The SEI measures affective engagement through three subtypes, Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR), Control and Relevance of School Work (CRSW), and Peer Support for Learning (PSL; Betts et al., 2010; Reschly et al., 2014).

Students respond to the SEI's questions in the form of a Likert scale with the possible responses of *1* – Strongly Disagree / *2* – Disagree / *3* – Neither Agree nor Disagree / *4* – Agree / *5* – Strongly Agree. Each of the SEI's questions relates to one of the six previously stated subtypes. Scoring procedures detail the process used for calculating scaled participant scores for each subtype and for the SEI total score (Appendix D).

The developers of the SEI provide administrative standardization procedures to ensure consistency of results (Appendix D). This study's administration of the SEI followed these procedures. Participating students completed this instrument during the first week of the intervention and then again during the last week of the intervention. Of the 15 participants, 14 fully completed both administrations of the survey. It is important to note that this analysis excludes results from Student 2 because that participant did not complete the post-administration survey.

Descriptive Analysis of SEI Results

Pre-Administration. To determine the values for each engagement subtype, scores were calculated using the administration standardization procedures. A descriptive analysis using these values then followed. Descriptive statistics for each engagement subtype, and the SEI total engagement scale score proceeded. These analyses include the following: (a) mean, (b) mode, (c) median, (d) minimum, (e) maximum, (f) standard deviation, (g) skewness, (h) standard error of skewness, (i) kurtosis, and (j) standard error of kurtosis. Table 5 summarizes the descriptive statistics for the SEI's pre-administration.

Table 5

Descriptive Analysis Results From Student Engagement Instrument Pre-Administration

Engagement Domain	*M*	Mode	*Mdn.*	Min.	Max.	*SD*	Skewness	*SE* of Skewness	Kurtosis	*SE of* Kurtosis
Affective (Psychological) Engagement										
Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR)	3.62	4.00	3.89	2.00	4.33	0.62	-1.56	0.60	2.58	1.15
Peer Support at School (PSS)	3.60	4.17	3.83	2.00	4.83	0.83	-0.74	0.60	-0.15	1.15
Family Support for Learning (FSL)	4.20	4.75	4.24	1.25	5.00	0.95	-2.55	0.60	7.85	1.15
Cognitive Engagement										
Control and Relevance of School Work (CRSW)	3.61	3.78	3.78	1.00	4.44	0.87	-2.24	0.60	6.30	1.15
Future Aspirations and Goals (FG)	4.01	4.00	4.00	1.00	5.00	0.99	-2.2	0.60	6.45	1.15
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	4.18	5.00	4.00	2.50	5.00	0.87	-0.65	0.60	-0.71	1.15
SEI Total	3.77	3.71	3.81	1.63	4.49	0.67	-2.66	0.60	8.85	1.15

Note. n = 14. Student Engagement Instrument responses are scaled 1-5.

Exploring the data for each engagement subtype and the SEI Total reveals the impact of outliers on the data. Due to the assessment's small sample size, the influence of these outliers had an impact on the descriptive analysis. In the pre-administration data, the outliers impact the data pulling the average score lower. In the post-administration data, the outliers pull the data

higher. The skewness and kurtosis scores, four of which are beyond the normal ranges of acceptance, demonstrate this influence. Normally acceptable ranges of skewness and kurtosis are between -2 and 2 (IBM, 2023). Figure 6 demonstrates the described impact for the SEI Total score.

Figure 6

Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) Pre-Administration Total Score Histogram

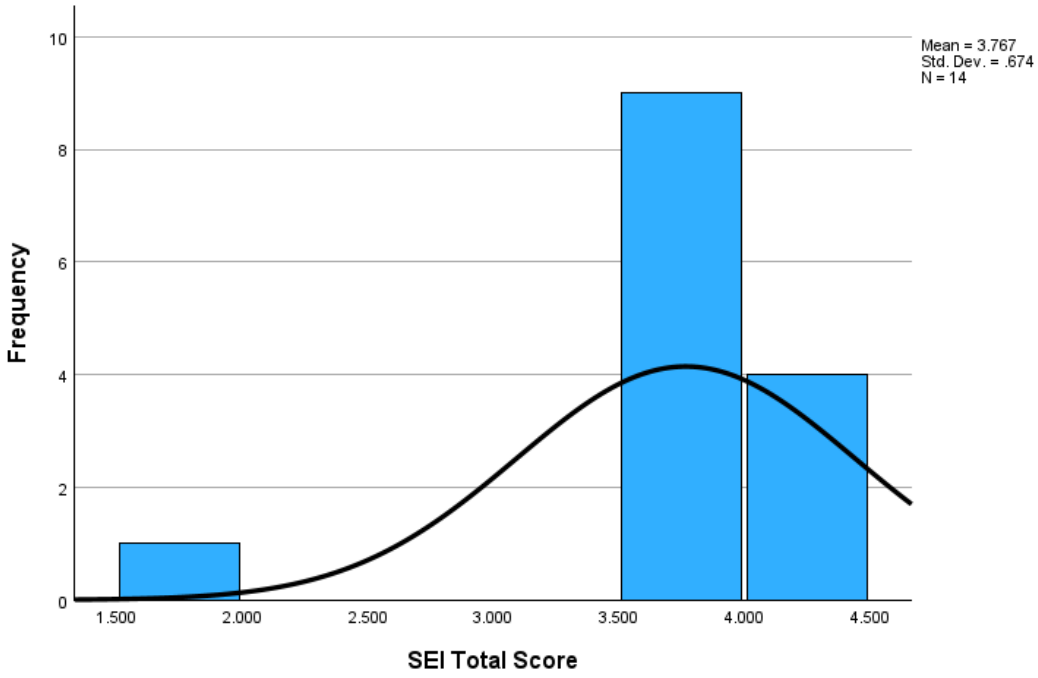


Figure 6 is representative of most subtype pre-administration data. It shows data that are abnormal. The data show the impact of outlier scores, notably Student 7's pre-administration scaled score of 1.629. This score was much lower than the next lowest score from Student 6 of 3.514. The presence of outlier scores necessitated careful analysis of other collected data.

Post-Administration. Participants retook the SEI after completing an 8-week mentorship intervention. Table 6 summarizes the descriptive analysis of participant post-administration engagement scale scores.

Table 6

Descriptive Analysis Results From Student Engagement Instrument Post-Administration

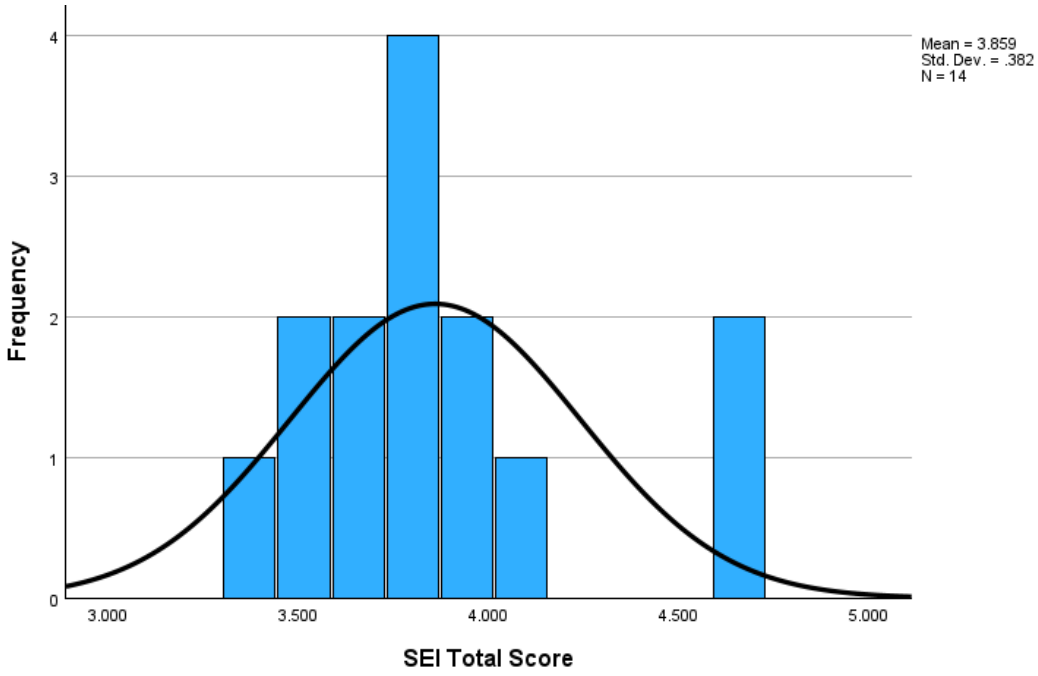
Engagement Domain	*M*	Mode	*Mdn.*	Min.	Max.	*SD*	Skewness	*SE* of Skewness	Kurtosis	*SE of* Kurtosis
Affective (Psychological) Engagement										
Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR)	3.56	2.67	3.39	2.67	4.78	0.66	0.45	0.60	-0.46	1.15
Peer Support at School (PSS)	3.83	3.83	3.83	2.33	4.83	0.70	-0.70	0.60	0.23	1.15
Family Support for Learning (FSL)	4.46	4.75	4.63	3.50	5.00	0.48	-0.60	0.60	-0.76	1.15
Cognitive Engagement										
Control and Relevance of School Work (CRSW)	3.77	3.44	3.67	3.22	4.56	0.44	0.63	0.60	-0.44	1.15
Future Aspirations and Goals (FG)	3.75	3.80	4.00	2.00	5.00	0.96	-0.39	0.60	-0.63	1.15
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	3.75	4.00	4.00	2.00	5.00	0.96	-0.39	0.60	-0.63	1.15
SEI Total	3.86	3.77	3.79	3.37	4.66	0.38	1.18	0.60	1.10	1.15

Note. n = 14. Student Engagement Instrument responses are scaled 1-5.

In comparison to pre-administration data, the post-administration scores better resemble the normal distribution. While the data do not completely conform with those of the normal distribution, skewness and kurtosis scores are in acceptable ranges. Figure 7 is representative of these differences.

Figure 7

Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) Post-Administration Total Score Histogram



Despite the presence of two higher scores (Student 11, 4.657; Student 7, 4.629), the distribution of these scores is closer to the normal distribution than the pre-administration scores. This difference between pre- and post-administrations necessitates further exploration in comparative analysis.

Percentiles. The SEI Administration and Scoring Procedures suggest interpreting SEI as percentiles. Research demonstrates that students with scores in the lowest percentiles were more

likely to miss school and have worse academic performance (Appleton et al., 2006). Table 7 summarizes percentile results for pre- and post-administrations.

Table 7

Student Engagement Instrument Total Scores (Pre- and Post-Administration) Presented as Percentiles

Student ID Number	SEI Pre-Administration Total Score	Percentile	Student ID Number	SEI Post-Administration Total Score	Percentile
10	4.486		11	4.657	
11	4.371		7	4.629	
16	4.229		9	4.057	
_____		75th Percentile	_____		75th Percentile
13	4.057		10	3.943	
9	3.971		12	3.886	
1	3.942		14	3.857	
4	3.857		13	3.800	
_____		50th Percentile	_____		50th Percentile
8	3.771		16	3.771	
15	3.743		8	3.771	
14	3.743		6	3.657	
			1	3.657	
_____		25th Percentile	_____		25th Percentile
5	3.714		4	3.514	
12	3.714		15	3.457	
6	3.514		5	3.371	
7	1.629				

Note. n=14. Student Engagement Instrument responses are scaled 1-5.

Comparative Analysis of SEI Results

The descriptive analysis of participants' SEI scores showed differences. A series of dependent t-tests explored the changes between pre- and post-administrations of the SEI. These analyses explored changes in each engagement subtype and the SEI Total Score. The pre- and post-administration scores were weakly correlated and none of the changes were statistically significant. The results from the SEI Total are representative of this trend in the data. Tables 8-10 summarize the results for the SEI Total score.

Table 8

Paired Samples Correlation From Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) Pre- and Post-Administration

	Pre-Admin *M*	Post-Admin *M*	*N*	Correlation	Significance One-Sided (*p*)	Two-Sided (*p*)
SEI Total	3.767	3.859	14	-0.329	0.13	0.25

Table 8 demonstrates the slight increase (0.0.92 scale points) in SEI Total score between pre- and post-administrations. It also presents a weak correlation between the two variables (r = -0.329). This shows there is only a small connection between the pre- and post-administration data.

Table 9

Paired Samples Test Results From Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) Pre- and Post-Administration

	Paired Differences *M*	*SD*	*SEM*	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	*t*	*df*	Significance One-Sided (*p*)	Significance Two-Sided (*p*)
SEI Total	-0.092	0.877	0.234	-0.598	0.415	-0.392	13	0.35	0.70

The statistically insignificant ($p = 0.702$) result demonstrated above explains that the change in SEI Total score between pre- and post-administrations cannot be wholly attributed to the intervention program. Despite the large effect size shown in Table 10, this result cannot be confirmed due to the lack of statistical significance between the variables.

Table 10

Paired Samples Effect Sizes From Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) Pre- and Post-Administration

	Instrument	Standardizer	Point Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
SEI Total	Cohen's d	0.877	-0.105	-0.628	0.423
	Hedges' correction	0.932	-0.099	-0.591	0.398

Despite a small average increase in the Total SEI score, these analyses did not demonstrate a statistically significant change. Despite that fact, the presence of outliers in both the pre- and

post-administration data created complications in this analysis. Viewing changes between pre- and post-administrations individually exposes the impact created by outliers on this analysis. Table 11 summarizes these results.

Table 11

Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) Pre- and Post-Administration Total Scores by Participant

Student	SEI Pre-Score	SEI Post-Score	Change
1	3.943	3.657	-0.286
4	3.857	3.514	-0.343
5	3.714	3.371	-0.343
6	1.629	3.657	2.028
7	3.771	4.629	0.858
8	3.771	3.771	0
9	3.971	4.057	0.086
10	4.486	3.943	-0.543
11	4.371	4.657	0.286
12	3.714	3.886	0.172
13	4.057	3.800	-0.257
14	3.743	3.857	0.114
15	3.743	3.457	-0.286
16	4.229	3.771	-0.458

As demonstrated by Table 11, accounting for one student with no change, 7 students' scores decreased, and 6 students' scores increased. Participant 6's increase of 2.028 scale points is unique and impacts the averages of both the pre- and post-administrations. This result demonstrates the impact outliers had an impact on the average results of the SEI total and engagement subtypes.

Further comparison of pre- and post-administration occurred exploring the engagement subtypes. Among these domains, there was a neutral result or decrease in scores between pre- and post-administration for most participants except for the subtype Family Support for Learning (FSL). With two students exhibiting no change, four decreased and eight experienced an increase in score. Table 12 summarizes the results for each individual participant in the engagement subtype FSL.

Table 12

Pre- and Post-Administration Results for Family Support for Learning (FSL) Engagement Subtype

Student	FSL Pre-Score	FSL Post-Score	Change
1	4.25	3.5	-0.75
4	5	4.75	-0.25
5	4.75	4	-0.75
6	4.25	4.5	0.25
7	1.25	5	3.75
8	3.75	4	0.25
9	4.75	5	0.25
10	4.25	4.75	0.5
11	5	5	0
12	3.75	4	0.25
13	4.25	4.5	0.25
14	4	4.75	0.75
15	4.75	4.75	0
16	4.75	4	-0.75

Note. n = 14. Student Engagement Instrument responses are scaled 1-5.

Most participating students' (8/14) scores increased between pre- and post-administrations for this subtype. Exploring these raw data, the pre-administration score from Student 7 (1.25) stands out. This result, which is more than three standard deviations (3.11) from the mean (*M = 4.20, SD = 0.95)*, skews the pre-administration data. Student 1's post-administration score similarly stands out. This score of 3.5 is two standard deviations from the mean (*M = 4.46, SD = 0.48*). These two scores impact the means of both data sets, influencing the dependent t-test conducted examining these means. Tables 13-15 summarize the results of that test.

Table 13

Paired Samples Correlations From Family Support for Learning (FSL) Pre- and Post-Administration

	Pre-Admin *M*	Post-Admin *M*	*N*	Correlation	Significance One-Sided (*p*)	Significance Two-Sided (*p*)
FSL	4.196	4.464	14	-0.111	0.35	0.70

The average scores in this engagement subtype improved by 0.268 scaled points. There was a weak correlation between these means (r = -0.111). This weak relationship suggests there is not a strong connection between pre- and post-administrations. Table 14 explores the relationship between these two means further.

Table 14

Paired Samples Test Results From Family Support for Learning (FSL) Pre- and Post-Administration

				95% Confidence Interval				Significance	
	Paired Differences Mean	*SD*	Std. Error *M*	Lower	Upper	t	*df*	One-Sided (*p*)	Two-Sided (*p*)
FSL	0.268	1.107	0.296	-0.371	0.907	0.905	13	0.19	0.38

As demonstrated in Table 14, the change in means cannot be wholly attributed the intervention ($p = 0.382$). Despite this, a change did occur. Table 15 explores the potential effect size of that change.

Table 15

Paired Samples Effect Sizes From Family Support for Learning (FSL) Pre- and Post-Administration

				95% CI	
		Standardizer	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
FSL	Cohen's d	1.107	0.242	-0.294	0.769
	Hedges' correction	1.177	0.228	-0.277	0.724

As shown in Tables 14 and 15, the change between pre- and post-administrations for FSL are not statistically significant. Despite this, a key focus of the intervention was contact with the parents or guardians of participants. The intervention sought to have a bi-directional influence on the

student and their family. When students missed a check-in with their mentor, a phone call was made home to the mentee's parent or guardian. The increase demonstrated for FSL among most participants shows this intervention could hold promise in increasing strengthening family support for student learning.

Summary of Action Research Question 1 Results

Based on the reviewed data, whether the mentorship intervention had an impact on student affective (psychological) engagement and/or cognitive engagement is inconclusive. Despite observed changes in pre- and post-administrations these findings were not statistically significant. Student scores on the SEI increased on average, but individual results were mixed. Student engagement scores decreased for most participants in most domains except for FSL. Improvements in this subtype of affective (psychological) engagement were not statistically significant but the increase in this subtype amongst most participants demonstrates the potential for increase in FSL in this context. Overall, these results demonstrate that the participating students saw a slight, statistically insignificant increase in engagement as measured by the SEI.

Action Research Question 2: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent did the perceptions of participating students on the importance of regular attendance change?

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer this action research question. Quantitative data took the form of student responses to the SEI. Students completed this survey during Week 1 of the intervention and again during Week 8 of the intervention. The previous section explored results from the pre- and post-administrations of this survey in detail.

The qualitative data informing this question were mentor recorded information from mentor-student data logs and responses collected from student interviews. Each week, mentors

received a log to record their interactions with their mentee and their mentee's family. Each of these forms included spaces for recording the following:

1. Did the mentee check in?
2. If not, date and time of parent / guardian contact.
3. Was the parent /guardian aware of the absence?
4. Parent / guardian feedback or information.
5. Mentor feedback, reflections, or information.
6. Suggested attendance research and discussion starters.
7. Growth goal establishment, progress, and barriers.
8. Additional notes. (see Appendix B for full sample form)

Information provided from mentors was digitized from written forms and uploaded to MAXQDA for analysis.

The study invited all participating students to take part in one-on-one interviews with a member of the CHS school counseling department. These interviews asked students questions related to the value they place on regular attendance. In addition, interview items also prompted students to identify potential barriers to regular attendance and determine if they knew resources to address those issues (see Appendix E the full interview protocol). Five of the 14 participating students were interviewed. Some interviews were audio recorded by the CHS school counselor and transcribed later. Participants whose parent or guardian did not approve of recording were interviewed by the CHS counselor while I sat in the room and took notes on a laptop. There is a possibility that this may have influenced participant responses. This could result from the participants feeling less comfortable or open in the interview. Member checking was offered to

all participants to support validity. Interview transcripts and notes were uploaded into MAXQDA for analysis.

Quantitative Analysis

Overall, the results of the SEI pre- and post-administration were inconclusive. While changes occurred in the average scores of specific domains and a slight increase appeared in average total SEI score, these results were statistically insignificant and had a small to moderate effect sizes. The Future Goals (FG) engagement subtype is the area of the SEI most related to this action research question. The SEI's items in this domain address the importance of attending school. Questions such as *"My education will create many future opportunities for me,"* and *"School is important for achieving my future goals"* demonstrate this connection. Despite this connection, comparative analysis of the pre- and post-administrations of this subtype demonstrated a lack of statistical significance (M = -0.264, t = -0.679, p = 0.509). As a result, data from the SEI provide no conclusions on how important students feel school attendance is after having participated in the intervention. Qualitative analysis further explored the collected data for findings supporting Action Research Question 2.

Qualitative Analysis

To inform the study's action research question, I used coding for the mentor student data logs and student interviews. This analysis had the goal of determining how participating students felt about the importance of school and regular school attendance after participating in the mentorship program.

Mentor Student Data Logs. Mentors provided data logs for all participants in the intervention. Data included in these forms includes information from the participants that is filtered through the mentor themselves. This information was usually short in form, often a

bulleted list or multiple sentence fragments. Their written notes were transcribed digitally and uploaded to MAXQDA for qualitative analysis.

The first round of coding included a search for two groups of codes. Emotion codes made up the first type. Examples of generated emotion codes include “Improvement,” “Effort,” and “Anxiety.” In Vivo codes were the second type of first cycle codes used. This method of coding was used alongside emotion coding to capture participant feelings or experiences in their own words. Examples of codes generated from this code cycle include “No Transportation,” “Do Not Want,” and “Does Not Matter” (Saldaña, 2016). Code counts were recorded to determine the frequency for first cycle codes. Table 16 highlights the most frequently used codes. For a full list of codes and frequencies see Appendix G.

Table 16

Emotion and In Vivo Code Counts From Mentor Student Data Logs

First cycle code	*f*
Parental Support	31
Checking In	24
Missed Check In	22
Improvement	21
Suspended	19
Mentor Support	19
Negative Behaviors	17
Sickness / Unwell	14
Positive	13
Dislikes	9
Motivation to Improve	9
Distraction	8
Parental Appreciation	7
Disengagement	5
Bonding	4
Mentor Dissatisfaction or Disappointment	4
Likes	4
Tired	4
Struggle	4

Note. 236 pages of transcript were reviewed and coded for emotion and In Vivo codes. Codes not included are those with 3 or fewer occurrences; 54 codes are not shown. See Appendix G for full list.

To categorize emergent themes, I conducted a second cycle of coding using pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). This cycle grouped first cycle codes and used them to develop an understanding of how participants felt about school and regular attendance. I analyzed the first cycle codes, organizing them into categories based off patterns in the responses. The following subsections explore the emergent themes from this analysis.

Mentor Log Theme 1: Barriers to Attendance. Participating students experienced, and were impacted by, barriers to their regular attendance. Codes relating to attendance barriers

appeared 58 times in the mentor logs, making up slightly over 17% of all codes for these documents. Participants experienced various different barriers to their regular attendance. Student 6 became sick with the flu, causing them to miss an extended period of time. The mentor for Participant 5 stated their mentee was not living at home during the study. The most commonly occurring barrier to attendance logged by mentors was suspension. The code "Suspended" appeared 19 times. These instances highlighted periods of time explaining previous absences and reasons for absences during the mentorship intervention. In addition, students expressed feeling anxiety about the number of students attending the school, feeling overwhelmed, and tired as reasons for why they were not attending school. The varied barriers expressed by students helped to highlight the varied nature of the problem chronic absenteeism presents.

Mentor Log Theme 2: Negative Feelings. Participants expressed a number of negative or adverse emotions surrounding school. They also expressed emotions and experiences that related to their avoidance and apathy towards their regular attendance. Participant 12 presented a representative example of this theme. Student 12's mentor stated, "Tried to find #12, she skipped all her classes (except band), but was at [CHS] at 7am." Six other mentors provided information highlighting similar class avoidant feelings from their mentees. Negative, adverse, avoidant, or apathetic feelings surrounding school appeared 66 times across all participants, accounting for about 19% of all recorded code frequencies. Participant 14 highlighted another reason for not attending stating "There is no purpose to attend school on even days." Reponses such as this also highlight if learning does not feel relevant to students, they will find ways to not attend class. Another example of avoidant behavior came from Participant 10. This student's mentor stated, "She does not like English 9. She feels like the teacher picks on her while ignoring others that

also wear their headphones." This quote shows that instructors can potentially be a factor in avoidant behavior, not just the course feeling irrelevant. Once again, the varied nature of participants' negative feelings highlights the complexity of the issue.

Mentor Log Theme 3: Motivation to Improve. Despite many negative feelings, 14 of 15 participants exhibited a motivation to improve in school and/or their attendance behavior. Seventy-seven of the total 333, about 23% of codes, related to this theme. First cycle codes contributing to this theme included those like, "Improvement," "Effort," and, "Desire for Good Grades." Reviewing these segments collectively, participants cared about their academic performance. There were numerous references to "getting make up work" and to working with mentors to complete "missing assignments." As the intervention focused explicitly on attendance, some of the improvement also relates to attendance behavior. The mentor for Participant 1 stated "Student is working hard to maintain current attendance streak. Says he feels class is going better when he is there." This segment helps to demonstrate that the student was beginning to make the connection between their improved attendance and their improved academic performance. Some other segments were structured more like Participant 5's which stated "[Student's name] is making slow and steady progress towards meeting his goal." Segments like this one helped to demonstrate that participants felt some value to being in class and attending, even with the present barriers and aversions to regular attendance.

Mentor Log Theme 4: Student Supports Matter. The mentor student logs helped to highlight the importance of supporting students with chronic absenteeism. Codes referencing support related to the mentorship program appeared 55 times and support from parents appeared 38 times. These notes were often revelatory like that from the mother of participant #16 stating "informed of recent passing of father and discussed absences / suspension" This note highlighted

the need for specific support for chronically absent students in unique situations. Another example of a parental support for the program was to explain an absence like that of Participant 6, “Received an email from mom: allowed student to stay home due to inclement weather forecast.” Segments like this highlight when parents are the ones removing students, not the student choosing not to attend school themselves. Additionally, segments from this analysis revealed that mentors developed a different relationship with the parents or guardians of participants than the one that existed previously. A quote from Participant 2’s mentor highlighted this stating, “Mom was always receptive to a conversation with me as a mentor. She stated that she did not want to speak with the school because it was always negative.” This quote demonstrates how some mentors were able to cultivate a different relationship between the school and parents. This not only helped to strengthen the bond between the family and the school but helped to provide the participants with additional support when needed. Finally, exploring the differing supports offered by mentors and families throughout the intervention demonstrates the unique needs of each chronically absent student. It also highlights the bi-directional influence of the mentorship intervention as it impacted both students and their families. These themes were noted and saved for further analysis with data collected from student interviews.

Student Interviews. All participating students were invited to complete an interview following the conclusion of the program. Of the 15 participants, 5 agreed to an interview. The other ten participants either refused or were unavailable to participate due to absence from school. Among those who did participate, three were female and two were male. Four of the interviewees improved their attendance during the treatment, one experienced worse attendance.

Notes from interviews and interview recordings were transcribed and uploaded to MAXQDA for analysis.

The first coding cycle included a search for two code types. Emotion coding was first used, exploring the emotional states of participants. Emotion coding was followed with In Vivo coding, used to participant responses in their own language. First cycle coding yielded a total of 94 codes with a total code frequency of 71. Table 17 summarizes these findings.

Table 17

Emotion and In Vivo Code Counts From Student Interview Responses

First Cycle Code	*f*
Fairness	6
Parental Support	5
Admin or Staff Support	5
Negative Behaviors	4
Teacher Support	4
Desire to Graduate	3
Desire to Learn	3
Tired	3
Mentor Support	3
Likes	2
Appreciation	2
Desire for Good Grades	2
Be Something in Life.	2
Motivation to Improve	2
Interest	2
Sickness / Unwell	2
Socialization	2
Sibling Support	2
Make Parents Proud	2

Note. 15 pages of documents were reviewed and coded for emotion and In Vivo codes. Codes with fewer than 2 responses were not included in the table. See Appendix H for full code frequency counts.

A second cycle of coding utilized pattern coding to categorize student responses in an exploration for themes. First cycle codes were placed into categories relating to the emotional states and experience expressed by participants. I then analyzed these categories, and the segments contained in them, for emergent themes. The following subsections explore these emergent themes in detail.

Student Interview Theme 1: Fairness of School Rules. The most commonly coded response from the student interviews was fairness. This code appeared 6 times and in all five responses. The final main question on the interview protocol asks *Sometimes students get suspended. Can you tell me about some of the reasons why a student might get suspended? Probe: Do you think the rules are fair?* All code occurrences of "Fairness" related to this prompt. Further analysis of this section revealed that students understood and could name behaviors that would get them suspended from school. Of the 5 participants, 4 highlighted "Fighting" as a reason why a student could be suspended. Other behaviors noted were "Vaping or smoking," "might fuss at a teacher," and "caught with an illegal substance." When the probing question was asked to students, all five stated they felt the rules were fair. Participant 16's response was largely representative when she stated "Yeah, [the rules are] fair, kids just don't follow them, they don't follow them." This response is important to highlight because it demonstrates that students understand the expectations placed on them by the school. All the students understood that school rules required they be in class, and they felt these rules were fair. Despite this feeling of fairness, all of the students involved in this study made the choice at some point in their past not to follow these expectations. This theme helps to demonstrate that participants have an understanding of school rules and understand how they could keep them from being able to attend school.

Student Interview Theme 2: Support of Students by Others Matter. Similar to the analysis of the student mentor data logs, students revealed that the people who support them matter. Participants expressed support from both family members and school-based adults. Four of the five participants highlighted someone at the school who could help support their attendance. For example, Participant 7 referenced a school counselor, graduation coach, a teacher, and an assistant principal as people who could help with their attendance. Three of these five participants specifically highlighted their mentor as one of those supporters. When Participant 1 was asked how their mentor helped them, they replied "keeps me in class." This reply helps to demonstrate the power of school-based supports to influence student regular attendance and addressing of barriers.

Familial support for attendance was highlighted by four of the five participants. In total, codes relating to these responses came to 21 of the total 71 code occurrences. Family members helped to support the participants by explaining to them that school attendance was important. When asked "*Do you like coming to school?"* Three replied "No," one replied "sometimes," and one replied "yes." When asked "*What makes you want to go to school every day?"* then 4 of the 5 students referenced parental or sibling support. These figures were again referenced by 3 of 5 participants when they were asked "*What most helps you get to school?"* The highlighting of family-based supporters demonstrates the importance they had to these students getting to school regularly. Some participants highlighted how these figures helped by providing them with motivation. Participant 5 in responding to the question of what helps her get to school stated, "My mother. My mother wants me to go to the Navy." This quote demonstrates how parents can tie school attendance to tangible goals for students. Participant 16 also provided a similar response stating "My mama. Cause I wanna go to cosmetology school. She say I gotta graduate

first. That got me in my head that once I finish, I should be able to shoot over to that." Once again, parents are serving to help tie regular attendance and academic success to goals that students want to achieve. This theme helps to demonstrate the important role that student supports play in ensuring students are regularly at school. In addition, it references the dual influence of both parental support and mentorship support in ensuring attendance.

Student Interview Theme 3: Education is Important. All five participants articulated reasons why they felt school was important. All of the participants expressed wanting to graduate, to be academically successful, and as Participant 1 said "be something in life." These students articulated reasons to come to school. Participant 13, responding to the question *"Why is it important to attend school every day?"* said, "Umm, for the education. For you [to] learn about new things each day you come to school." All students were able to reference reasons for them to be at school each day, making it clear that they understand the value of education. Codes relating to the value of education or being at school appeared 24 times. This theme helps to demonstrate the connection that students feel the product laying at the end of school. They expressed wanting to graduate and use that completion to move on to other activities. This theme helps to expose that even if students are struggling with their attendance, they do understand the value of being in school.

***Student Interview Theme 4: Barriers to Attendance*.** Despite that value, most participants then followed those responses with reasons that made it difficult to get to school. Participant 16 expressed this saying "Its drainingggg. It is waking up at 5 o'clock every day because my bus comes at six. I can't. Uh nuh it's too much." This response highlights that despite students recognizing that school is important, they find the experience less than ideal. Participant 13 echoed this response saying that "Being tired. I'm tired all the time." was a reason

why they had trouble getting to school. These responses help show that the school can be tiring for students, even if they do see the value in attendance. One student, participant #7 mentioned transportation as a barrier to their attendance. They stated, “[If] I don’t come, it’s because I wake up late and we ain’t have no transportation, well, [my mother] ain’t got her car right now.” A lack of transportation is a known barrier for students experiencing chronic absenteeism and this student helped to demonstrate this issue. Participants also expressed anxiety, being sick, and being suspended as reasons for why they might not be able to attend school. Once again, the varied nature of these barriers help to highlight the difficulty in addressing chronic absenteeism.

Summary of Action Research Question 2 Results and Findings

Quantitative and qualitative data supported the answering of this action research question. The analysis of the SEI pre- and post-administration data were inconclusive. Consequently, the qualitative data collected by the study serve as the primary data informing the findings answering this action research question. The presented data demonstrated how students felt surrounding regular school attendance. Three emergent themes inform these findings. These themes are:

1. Importance of Education
2. Barriers to Regular Attendance
3. Support of Students by Others Matter

Table 18 summarizes the code frequencies from mentor data forms and student interviews informing the emergent themes.

Table 18

Emergent Theme Code Counts for Each Qualitative Analysis

Emergent themes	*f*		Total *f*
	Mentor Logs	Student Interviews	
Importance of education	90	24	114
Barriers to regular attendance	124	19	143
Student Supports Matter	93	21	114
Document totals	118	5	123

Note. Total of 251 pages of documents were reviewed and coded for emotion and In Vivo coding to produce emergent themes.

Importance of Education. The participants in this study demonstrated a value for education. Codes associated with this theme appeared 114 times across both types of documents. Participants highlighted numerous reasons for valuing education including "Wanting to Graduate," "Motivation to Improve," and "Satisfaction" with their educational experience. Students did not always express positive feelings associated with attending school. Despite that, they did express valuing the product that came from attending. This value highlights a clear connection between a student valuing education and the student making progress towards clear attendance and academic expectations. Mentors supporting this intervention highlighted multiple instances of students striving to improve both their attendance behavior and their academic (*f* = 77). In addition, student responses from post-participation interviews demonstrated student motivations to attend school in support of future life goals. These data serve as evidence to support the finding that participating students do see value in education.

Barriers to Attendance. Despite valuing education, the participants highlighted numerous barriers to their regular attendance. Codes relating to this theme appeared 143 times

across both document types. Most students, at some time during their participation, provided or demonstrated a barrier to their regular attendance. At times, these barriers also called into question how much students valued their education. Students expressed numerous negative or adverse emotions including "Dislike," "Distraction," and "Disengagement" (f = 9, 8, 6, respectively). Students expressed feeling like attendance to certain classes did not matter, thus the students struggle with motivation. These negative feelings contributed to a barrier or an avoidance to the student's regular attendance.

In addition to their negative feelings surrounding attendance, most students identified external barriers impacting them getting to school. These included being "Suspended," being "Sick / Unwell," or having "Anxiety" (f = 20, 16, 4, respectively). In addition, participants referenced factors such as transportation and not living at one's home. These external barriers, combined with the internal feelings surrounding school can combine to make a student miss time from the classroom. These feelings could be predicted considering the attendance history of the participants. Despite their past attendance behavior, numerous students made improvements during their time in the intervention supporting the following theme.

Support of Students by Others Matter. Across both types of documents 114 coding occurrences documents students being supported. Broadly, these broke down into family support (45 occurrences) and programmatic school-based support (69 occurrences). When describing these supports students referenced feeling motivated. As discussed in the analysis of student interviews, two students (Participants 5 and 16) spoke about how their parents were connecting their current success in schools to future goals. Mentors referenced parents supporting student attendance by speaking to the student after they missed a check-in or expressing appreciation for timely attendance information. Familial supports and school-based supports presented a bi-

directional influence. The two informed and impacted one another. These two factors combined to create the emergent theme. Data from this theme supports the action research question by providing an area of influence. Mentors and family members helped to influence the way students feel about school. They impact the perception the participants hold as to the importance of regular attendance. In this way, these findings demonstrate that student supports can be a linkage, helping to create change for students in addressing barriers or who are lacking motivation or a value towards education.

The Importance of Regular Attendance. When students express negative feelings, negative emotions, aversions, or barriers to their attendance, who they have to support them matters. Mentors and families can support students by addressing these negative feelings and barriers. Moreover, mentor and familial support influence one another by providing timely information surrounding what is happening at home and at school. Through doing so, each encouraged regular attendance behavior. For students who have a history of chronic absenteeism, they additionally help to influence a change in perception and actions. That change moves away from those associated with barriers to attendance and moves towards clearer attendance and academic expectations. These changes help to expose the bi-directional influence of mentorship both on students and on participants' families. The participants of this study understand that school is important, but also describe clear barriers to their regular attendance. The presence of both family-based and school-based supports can influence their behavior.

Action Research Question 3: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?

The data answering this question are quantitative in nature. These data took the form of daily attendance data pulled from the SIS. A student was counted as absent if they missed all of

their scheduled classes for that school day. Present is the default setting for each class period. Consequently, if a teacher marked a student absent, this research assumes a student absence was not a recording error. The eight weeks of the intervention contained 37 school days. The data analyzed for this question included attendance for all participants from the 37 school days of the intervention and the 37 school days prior to the intervention.

Descriptive Analysis of Student Attendance Data

This analysis explores the number of absences each participating student accrued in the 37 school days before and the 37 school days of the intervention. The descriptive analysis of these data included the following: (a) mean, (b) mode, (c) median, (d) minimum, (e) maximum, (f) standard deviation, (g) skewness, (h) standard error of skewness, (i) kurtosis, and (j) standard error of kurtosis. Table 19 summarizes the findings of this analysis.

Table 19

Descriptive Analysis of Pre-Intervention and Intervention Participant Absences

	M	Mode	*Mdn.*	Min.	Max.	*SD*	Skewness	*SE* of Skewness	Kurtosis	*SE of* Kurtosis
Pre-Intervention Absences	8.27	3.00	6	2	18	5.41	0.354	0.58	-1.29	1.12
Intervention Absences	5.47	2	2	0	19	5.89	1.20	0.58	0.367	1.121

Note. $n = 15$.

The analysis Table 19 demonstrates a decrease in the average number of absences of 2.8 days. The descriptive analysis also reveals changes in the skewness and kurtosis between pre-

intervention and intervention absences. Figures 8 and 9 explore these differences visually in the form of histograms.

Figure 8

Histogram of Total Absences in the 37 School Days Prior to Intervention

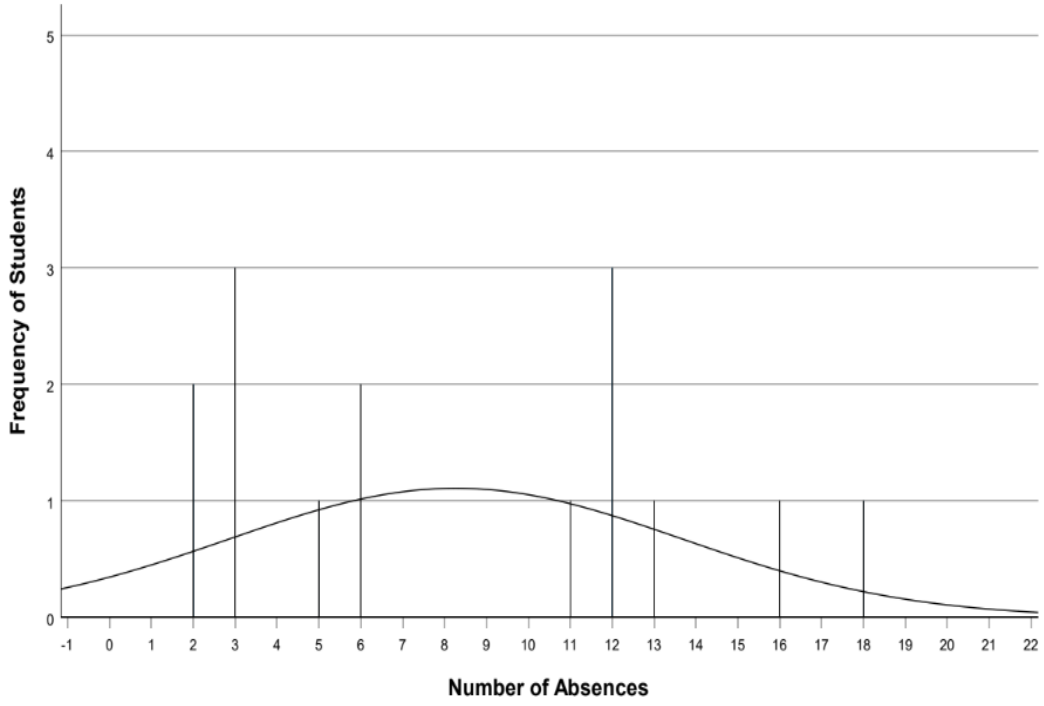
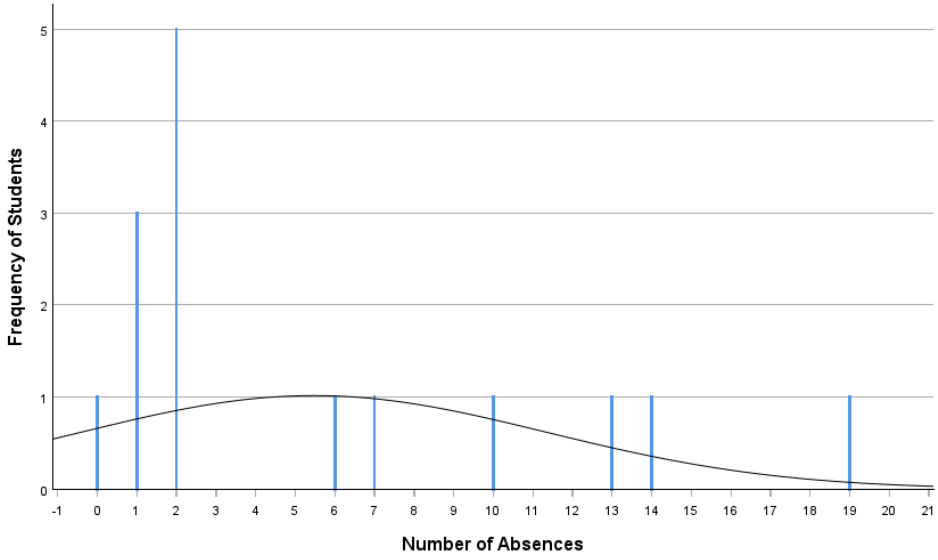


Figure 9

Histogram of Total Absences in the 37 School Days of the Intervention



These visual explorations clearly demonstrate a change in attendance behavior from before and during the intervention. Although the attendance information from during the intervention still show three students missing more than 14 school days, there is a large change in attendance behavior amongst most participants. Further correlational analysis explores the statistical significance and effect size of this finding.

Comparative Analysis of Student Attendance Data

Exploring the change in students' attendance behavior began by comparing the number of absences pre-intervention and during the intervention for each student. Eleven students accrued fewer absences during the intervention when compared to 37 school days prior to the intervention. Two participants saw no change in attendance behavior. Two students accrued more absences during the intervention than in the 37 school days before the intervention.

To further understand these results. A dependent t-Test was conducted to determine the statistical significance of this change in attendance behavior. Tables 20-22 summarize the results of that analysis.

Table 20

Paired Samples Correlation of Pre-Intervention and Intervention Absences

	Pre-Admin *M*	Post-Admin *M*	N	Correlation	Significance One-Sided (*p*)	Two-Sided (*p*)
Pre- & During Intervention Absences	8.27	5.47	15	0.593	0.01	0.02

Table 20 demonstrates a statistically significant moderate correlation between the two variables (r = -.593, p = 0.02). This demonstrates that, on average, participants missed 2.8 fewer days of school during the intervention when compared to the 37 days prior to the intervention. The absences from before and during the intervention were found to be moderately connected. Table 21 explores the relationship between these two variables further.

Table 21

Paired Samples Test Results of Pre-Intervention and Intervention Absences

			95% CI				Significance	
Paired Differences Mean	*SD*	Std. Error *M*	Lower	Upper	t	*df*	One-Sided (*p*)	Two-Sided (*p*)
-2.8	5.116	1.321	-5.633	0.033	-2.12	14	0.02	0.05

Table 21 describes a difference in means of -2.8 school days ($p = 0.05$). Table 22 explores the effect size of this impact.

Table 22

Paired Samples Effect Size of Pre-Intervention and Intervention Absences

	Standardizer	Point Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Cohen's d	5.116	-0.547	-1.038	0.0006
Hedges' correction	5.412	-0.517	-1.024	0.005

Table 22 explores the effect size of the change in attendance rates for participants before and during the intervention. This program had a medium sized effect, demonstrated by a Cohen's d score of -0.547.

Considering the effect size is moderate, and the reduction of student absences is statistically significant, these findings suggest the program had the desired effect of reducing student absenteeism. These changes in attendance behavior varied by student. These variances in student attendance are summarized in Table 23.

Table 23

Change in Student Attendance Behavior Pre- and During Intervention

Student	Pre-Intervention		During Intervention		Improvement	Change
	Absences	Attendance Rate	Absences	Attendance Rate		
1	11	70.27%	1	97.30%	Yes	+27.03%
2	18	51.35%	7	81.08%	Yes	+29.73%
4	2	94.59%	1	97.30%	Yes	+2.70%
5	3	91.89%	2	94.59%	Yes	+2.70%
6	2	94.59%	2	94.59%	No	0.00%
7	3	91.89%	6	83.78%	No	-8.11%
8	5	86.49%	2	94.59%	Yes	+8.11%
9	12	67.57%	19	48.65%	No	-18.92%
10	6	83.78%	2	94.59%	Yes	+10.81%
11	6	83.78%	1	97.30%	Yes	+13.51%
12	16	56.76%	14	62.16%	Yes	+5.41%
13	12	67.57%	10	72.97%	Yes	+5.41%
14	13	64.86%	13	64.86%	No	0.00%
15	3	91.89%	2	94.59%	Yes	+2.70%
16	12	67.57%	0	100.00%	Yes	+32.43%

The level of improvement in attendance behavior among participants was largely positive. Six of the 11 students who saw improvement in their attendance behavior increased their attendance rate by more than 10 percentage points. Some of these participants, such as Student 16, experienced suspensions during the first quarter of the school year. Addressing the student's personal situation helped to make them more likely to attend school regularly. Other students who saw large increases in their attendance received support from their mentor and family members to help improve their attendance. Among participants, most had attendance rates during the intervention that would not classify the student as chronically absent.

Attendance Behavior and the SEI

Previous research suggests that those students scoring in the lower percentiles of the SEI are more likely to be absent than peers with higher scores. The results of this study do not confirm this finding. Table 24 compares SEI Total Scores to student attendance behavior for both the pre- and post-administrations of the SEI.

Table 24

Participant SEI Total Scores and Attendance Behavior Presented as Percentiles

SID	Student Absences	SEI Pre-Administration Total Score	Percentile	SID	Student Absences	SEI Post-Administration Total Score	Percentile
10	6	4.486		11	1	4.657	
11	6	4.371		7	6	6.629	
16	12	4.229		9	19	4.057	
			75th Percentile				75th Percentile
13	12	4.057		10	2	3.943	
9	12	3.971		12	14	3.886	
1	11	3.942		14	13	3.857	
4	2	3.857		13	10	3.800	
			50th Percentile				50th Percentile
8	5	3.771		16	0	3.771	
15	3	3.743		8	2	3.771	
14	13	3.743		6	2	3.657	
				1	1	3.657	
			25th Percentile				25th Percentile
5	3	3.714		4	1	3.514	
12	16	3.714		15	2	3.457	
6	2	3.514		5	2	3.371	
7	3	1.629					

Note. n=14. Student Engagement Instrument responses are scaled 1-5.

Table 24 demonstrates the SEI scores were not predictive of student absence in pre- or post-administration.

Summary of Action Research Question 3 Results

Attendance behavior improved for the majority of participants involved in the study (11 out of 15 students showed improved attendance during the intervention). The number of absences among participants decreased by an average of 2.8 school days. This average hides the overwhelming positive impact for six students who saw their attendance improve by 10.81% to 32.43%. The difference in attendance behavior from before and during the intervention is statistically significant ($p = 0.05$). The mentorship intervention demonstrated a moderate effect in reducing student absences as measured by an effect size of -0.547.

Action Research Question 4: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in academic achievement among participating students?

Data answering this question are quantitative in nature. These data took the form of student grade point averages (GPAs). The GPA system used by Jefferson Public Schools (JPS) assigns a value to each grade. Standard level classes receive the following values: A = 4 / B = 3 / C = 2 / D = 1 / E = 0. Advanced classes use a different scoring scale, but no participants in the study took advanced classes. The SIS stores student grades for City High School (CHS). This study collected student grades from Quarter 1, Interim 2, Quarter 2, and Interim 3.

Due to delays in program implementation, data from Quarter 2 included six weeks before implementation of the mentorship intervention, and three weeks of the intervention. Comparison of data from Quarters 1 and 2 therefore presented an incomplete understanding of the impact of the intervention on student academic performance. Student grades from Interims 2 and 3 did not present this problem. Each interim measures a period of 4.5 weeks. Interim 2 falls entirely before the implementation of the intervention. Interim 3 covers the last 4.5 weeks of the intervention, with the final day of Interim 3 being the day after the conclusion of the study. Analysis occurred

separately due to the differences in time measured. The analysis compared Quarter 1 to Quarter 2, and Interim 2 to Interim 3. The following section explores these analyses in detail.

Descriptive Analysis of Student GPA

This analysis collected participant grades from Quarter 1, Interim 2, Quarter 2, and Interim 3. I then assigned each grade the appropriate GPA value. After, I added the values together and then divided the sums by the total number of classes to determine the participant's GPA for the specified grading period. Those GPAs were then subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. This analysis included the following: (a) mean, (b) mode, (c) median, (d) minimum, (e) maximum, (f) standard deviation, (g) skewness, (h) standard error of skewness, (i) kurtosis, and (j) standard error of kurtosis. Tables 25 and 26 summarize the findings of these analyses.

Table 25

Descriptive Analysis of Participant Grade Point Averages From Quarters 1 and 2

Quarter	*M*	Mode	*Mdn.*	Min.	Max.	*SD*	Skewness	*SE* of Skewness	Kurtosis	*SE of* Kurtosis
1	0.892	0.125	0.625	0	2.75	0.817	0.93	0.58	0.062	1.121
2	0.858	0	0.125	0	2.875	1.018	0.832	0.58	-0.715	1.121

Note. $n = 15$.

Table 25 demonstrates the change in average GPA for participants between Quarters 1 and 2. Considering that a large portion of Quarter 2 fell outside the intervention program, student GPAs from Interims 2 and 3 were also collected and compared. Table 26 shows the Descriptive Analysis of Participant GPAs from Interims 2 and 3.

Table 26

Descriptive Analysis of Participant Grade Point Averages From Interims 2 and 3

Interim	*M*	Mode	*Mdn.*	Min.	Max.	*SD*	Skewness	*SE* of Skewness	Kurtosis	*SE of* Kurtosis
2	0.958	0	0.375	0	3.25	1.082	0.812	0.58	-0.667	1.121
3	1.142	0	0.875	0	3.125	0.911	0.729	0.58	-0.121	1.121

Note. $n = 15$.

Table 26 descriptive analyses show data that present low average GPAs. The distributions of values skew negatively confirming this finding. These data support previous research demonstrating that students who are chronically absent are more likely to perform poorly in school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Further comparative analysis was necessary to determine if any change in values could be attributed to the action research intervention.

Comparative Analysis of Student GPAs

Comparative analysis explored the potential change in grade point average amongst participating students. The comparison between Quarters 1 and 2 showed little change on average (-0.333 GPA Points). GPAs among participants improved for five students, decreased for six students, and stayed the same for four students. An analysis subjected participant GPAs from Quarters 1 and 2 to a dependent t-test. The results were not statistically significant despite a statistically significant correlation between the two means ($r = 0.919$, $p = <.001$). As a result of

these findings, more attention was placed on the results of the comparison between the grading periods of Interim 2 and Interim 3.

Additionally, the periods of time measured by Interims 2 and 3 more accurately measured the implementation of the intervention. The grading period of Interim 2 fell entirely outside the intervention and Interim 3 fell almost entirely inside the period of the intervention. This makes these two grading periods the best measure of any potential change in student academic performance. Among participants, GPAs between Interim 2 and Interim 3 increased for 10 students, decreased for 3 students, and stayed the same for 2 students. Despite this sign of potential improvement, and correlation between the two means, this finding was not statistically significant. Tables 27-29 summarize the findings of this analysis.

Table 27

Paired Samples Correlations of Interim 2 and Interim 3 Grade Point Averages

	Interim 2 *M*	Interim 3 *M*	N	Correlation	Significance One-Sided (*p*)	Two-Sided (*p*)
Interim 2 & Interim 3 GPAs	0.958	1.142	15	0.852	<0.001	<0.001

Table 27 presents a strong statistically significant correlation between the two means ($r = 0.852$, $p = <0.001$). Table 28 explores the relationship between these two variables further.

Table 28

Paired Samples Test Results of Interim 2 and Interim 3 Grade Point Averages

Paired Differences *M*	*SD*	*SEM*	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	*t*	*df*	Significance One-Sided (*p*)	Significance Two-Sided (*p*)
0.183	0.567	0.146	-0.130	0.497	1.253	14	0.11	0.23

As shown in Table 28, the increase in student grades between Interims 2 and 3 cannot be wholly attributed to the mentorship intervention ($p = 0.231$). Despite the lack of statistical significance, Table 29 explores the potential effect size of the intervention.

Table 29

Paired Sample Effect Sizes of Interim 2 and Interim 3 Grade Point Averages

				95% CI	
		Standardizer	Point Estimate	Lower	Upper
Interim 2 & Interim 3 GPAs	Cohen's d	0.567	0.324	-0.202	0.838
	Hedges' correction	0.599	0.306	-0.191	0.792

Table 29 demonstrate the change in student GPAs for these grading periods is statistically insignificant. Despite the appearance of a strong and statistically significant correlation between the two means, the resulting changes cannot be wholly attributed to the intervention.

Academic Performance and the SEI

Previous research suggests that those students scoring in the lower percentiles of the SEI are more likely to have lower GPAs than peers with higher scores. The results of this study do not confirm this finding. Table 30 compares SEI Total Scores to student attendance behavior for both the pre- and post-administrations of the SEI.

Table 30

Participant SEI Total Scores and Student Grade Point Averages Presented as Percentiles

SID	Student GPA I2	SEI Pre-Administration Total Score	Percentile	SID	Student GPA I3	SEI Post-Administration Total Score	Percentile
10	0.625	4.486		11	0.5	4.657	
11	0.375	4.371		7	1.625	6.629	
16	3.25	4.229		9	0.00	4.057	
			75^{th} Percentile				75^{th} Percentile
13	2.25	4.057		10	1.00	3.943	
9	0.00	3.971		12	0.75	3.886	
1	1.375	3.942		14	0.50	3.857	
4	1.875	3.857		13	1.875	3.800	
			50^{th} Percentile				50^{th} Percentile
8	2.00	3.771		16	3.125	3.771	
15	0.00	3.743		8	0.875	3.771	
14	0.25	3.743		6	2.375	3.657	
			25^{th} Percentile	1	1.50	3.657	
5	0.125	3.714					25^{th} Percentile
12	0.00	3.714		4	2.00	3.514	
6	2.125	3.514		15	0.00	3.457	
7	0.125	1.629		5	0.375	3.371	

Note: n=14. Student Engagement Instrument responses are scaled 1-5.

Table 30 demonstrates the SEI scores were not predictive of student academic performance in pre- or post-administration.

Summary of Action Research Question 4 Results

The impact of the intervention on student academic performance is inconclusive. An increase in average GPA among most participants occurred between the grading periods of Interim 2 and Interim 3. This increase was not statistically significant but does demonstrate a potential for change given longer intervention and observation periods. Considering that student academic performance is a long-term indicator of success for the intervention, the lack of a statistically significant finding could suggest a need for the intervention be in place for longer than an eight-week period.

Summary of Findings and Results

Student changes in engagement as measured by the Student Engagement Instrument are inconclusive. In addition, the predictive nature of the SEI did not hold true for this study. Percentile scores were not predictive of student attendance behavior or student grades. The collected qualitative data suggested that despite changes in student engagement as measured by the SEI, participating students understand the importance of attendance to their academic success. These data also suggest that mentors had a positive impact in encouraging and supporting positive attendance behaviors and academic performance. Additionally, there appeared to be an increase in the amount of supportive behavior experienced by students from parents and guardians. A statistically significant reduction in absenteeism occurred for most participating students. On average, students missed 2.8 fewer days of school during the 8-week period of the intervention. Six of the 15 participants improved their attendance behavior by 10% to 32%. Despite improvements in attendance behavior, observed increases in student academic performance as measured by grades were not statistically significant. Due to the identified long-

term nature of this indicator, it could be possible that the intervention would need to be longer than 8 weeks to see a statistically significant improvement in this area.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

This mixed methods study explored the use of a school-based mentorship program as a bioecological intervention for ninth grade students with a history of chronic absenteeism at an urban high school. Chronic absenteeism is a pervasive issue, affecting students across the entire United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The issue is more severe in urban schools which often lack resources and experience other factors making chronic absenteeism more likely amongst their student populations (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bruner et al., 2011; Ehrlich et al., 2014; Chang & Romero, 2008; Gottfried, 2014b, 2019; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Gottfried & Hutt, 2019; Romero & Lee, 2007). Addressing chronic absenteeism is important for a multitude of reasons. First, it is detrimental to students, with research establishing a clear linkage between chronic absenteeism and decreased academic performance (Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Beyond academics, chronic absenteeism has also been connected to multiple other harmful impacts on students (Allison & Elliot, 2019; Catalano et al, 2004; Gottfried, 2014b; Hawkrigg & Payne, 2014; Kearney, 2007). Second, this is an issue for practitioners seeking to ensure the success of their students. Lastly, chronic absenteeism is an issue for school divisions that have selected it as a measure of school quality for accreditation under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

My findings reveal possible applications to other contexts. A brief summary of those findings is offered in this chapter. Findings are linked to extant literature where relevant. Recommendations for future practice and policy follow. In addition, this chapter provides areas of possible future research.

Summary of Major Findings

This section summarizes findings presented in the previous chapter. The section is organized by and aligned with the study's action research questions.

Action Research Question #1: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in affective and cognitive engagement among participating students?

The Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) provided the data in support of this question. The data supporting this question are inconclusive and statistically insignificant. After participating in the 8-week mentorship intervention, accounting for one student with no change, seven students' total engagement scores decreased, and six students' total engagement scores increased. The SEI also measures students' engagement across specific domains. Most students saw decreases in all engagement types, with the exception of affective engagement subtype of Family Support for Learning (FSL). Aligning with other results supporting this question, this increase was statistically insignificant. Despite that statistical insignificance, the increase in this engagement subtype shows the potential for the intervention to increase support from a student's parent or guardian in study's context. Considering that the intervention involved mentors reaching out to their mentee's parent or guardian when they failed to check in, this connection stands out as relevant despite the statistical insignificance. It is possible that mentors contacting parents had an impact on parental support that was felt by participants. While these results

cannot completely confirm this connection, the possibility lends itself to further exploration. In addition to findings around a student's affective and cognitive engagement, the predictive nature of SEI scores surrounding student attendance and academics were not confirmed by this study.

Action Research Question #2: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent did the perceptions of participating students on the importance of regular attendance change?

Considering the history of chronic absenteeism presented by the participants, it might be assumed they placed less importance on regular attendance than non-chronically absent students. Quantitative and qualitative data collected by the study answered this action research question. The data showed that the participating students understood why education and regular attendance were important. Despite that understanding, most participating students expressed numerous negative or adverse feelings associated with school and school attendance. This finding demonstrated that barriers to attendance, or negative feelings associated with school, often can get in the way of chronically absent students, even if they know school is important and that solutions that require a change in beliefs and attitudes may take time.

Additionally, when the participating students encountered difficulties, they noted that it mattered to them that they had support. Findings demonstrated that having the support of a school-based mentor helped participants in progressing towards positive change. Participants also expressed feeling increased support from their parents and guardians during the intervention. Engaging both mentors and family members simultaneously potentially resulted in feelings of increased support surrounding school attendance. Since the participants were not of the age of consent, parental consent was required. This may suggest that the families of the participants may be willing partners in the effort to improve their child's attendance. As the

intervention progressed, many students expressed feelings of improvement and an increased desire to improve their academic standing. Despite these findings, it is important to recognize that relationship development takes time. The eight-week length of the intervention was possibly too short to fully develop a strong relationship between the participant and their mentor.

Action Research Question #3: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in attendance behavior among participating students?

Data to support this question are quantitative and take the form of student attendance records. On average, participants increased their attendance by 2.8 school days during the eight-week intervention. This change is statistically significant ($p = 0.05$) however, it should be used with caution given the delimitations of time for the intervention and the small sample size. Six participants experienced increases in their attendance of 10% to 30%. Two of the program's 15 participants showed decreased attendance during the period of the intervention. Two participants saw no change in their attendance rate during the intervention. The program had a moderate effect (Cohen's $d = -0.547$) in reducing student absenteeism. These findings reveal that this mentorship intervention may have influenced student attendance behavior in the short term for some participants in this context.

Action Research Question #4: After participating in a school-based mentorship program, to what extent was there a change in academic achievement among participating students?

Data to support this question are quantitative in nature and take the form of student grade point averages (GPAs). Due to the timeline of the 8-week intervention, two portions of two grading periods were selected for comparison, Interim 2 and Interim 3. During this period, 10 out of 15 students saw an increase in their GPA. Three students presented decreased GPAs and two students demonstrated no GPA change. Despite an improvement in GPA for most participants,

this finding was not statistically significant. This finding once again highlights the importance of time for this intervention. It is likely that the mentorship program was not in place long enough to observe a change in GPA, which was identified as a long-term indicator. The growth that was observed in this area does create the opportunity for future improvement given a longer implementation of the studied intervention.

Discussion of Findings

The following section explores the findings of this study in detail. This section is organized generally around the topics explored by each action research question. The section first explores findings related to student engagement and connection to school. Second, the section explores findings relating to the perception of school importance among participants. Then the section explores changes in participant attendance behavior and discusses changes in participant academic performance. Lastly, the section explores the use of mentorship programs as a bioecological intervention for students with a history of chronic absenteeism.

Student Engagement

Multiple researchers have highlighted a connection between educational disengagement and chronic absenteeism. This disengagement seems to stem from a student feeling of a lack of relevance, value, and/or connection to what they are experiencing in the school building. (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Catalano et al., 2004; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Maynard et al., 2017; Plasman & Gottfried, 2020). Educational disengagement can also be defined as a student failing to make healthy relationships with peers and adults at school (Balfanz & Chang, 2016). Beyond being a factor contributing to chronic absenteeism, researchers have also connected educational disengagement as an impact of missing school (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017). I sought to determine any

changes in student engagement during the intervention period. In addressing student engagement, I sought to improve one of the known root causes of absenteeism.

Appleton et al. (2006) suggest that engagement is comprised of four subtypes: academic engagement (e.g., grades, assignments completed, time on task); behavioral engagement (e.g., attendance, classroom participation); cognitive engagement (e.g., self-regulation, relevance of school, value of learning); and affective (psychological) engagement (e.g., belonging, identification with school, school membership). Understanding these engagement subtypes helps to inform the style of support a chronically absent student may require getting back on track. Some subtypes are easily measured using readily available school data (attendance, student grades, etc.), while others require additional measurement. Each of these subtypes was explored using different measures of the study.

Academic Engagement. Chronic absenteeism and academic performance are highly correlated, meaning the more class time students miss, the poorer they do academically (Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). One factor in students performing well academically is academic engagement. Students can demonstrate their academic engagement through their grades, assignments completed, and time on task (Appleton et al., 2006). I explored academic engagement through student GPA. The use of GPA was a limitation of my study, because grades are not a perfect measure of academic achievement. Additionally, GPA does not always respond quickly to short term changes. The participants in this study confirmed previous research demonstrating poor academic performance among students with a history of chronic absenteeism. The average GPA for participants in the first quarter was 0.89 out of a possible 4.0,

which demonstrates these students were failing most of their classes. During the intervention period, 10 of the 15 participants demonstrated a small increase in their GPA (+0.183 GPA scale points). This change in GPA was not statistically significant ($p = 0.23$). Despite the statistical insignificance of this change it is logical that increasing time in school may equate to improved student performance over time. A longer intervention treatment may have provided different results from what were found in this study.

Exploring qualitative data from mentor-student logs found that mentors often supported students pursuing academic improvement. This ranged from assisting students in identifying classes where they were struggling academically to assisting in making up missing assignments. Actions taken by participants to improve their grades also demonstrate possible increases in academic engagement. Lastly, numerous participants expressed a desire to get good grades and/or to graduate. Students expressing these feelings show that they place some value on what is being provided by the school. Participants expressing this to their mentors demonstrates the potential for these adults to provide students with support in progressing academically and increasing their academic engagement.

Behavioral Engagement. Behavioral engagement is evaluated by reviewing student attendance and classroom participation (Appleton et al., 2006). Attendance among participating students increased by an average of 2.8 school days over the course of the eight-week study. This result was statistically significant ($p = 0.05$). In addition, the increase in attendance was greater than 2.8 days for a third of participants. This result is similar to that of Guryan et al. (2017) which found that a mentorship program was effective in reducing chronic absenteeism for middle school students. This finding suggests that mentorship interventions may lead to

increases in behavioral engagement as students develop more positive feelings toward school, find academic success and find support in school-family partnerships.

Cognitive Engagement. This subtype of engagement is harder to measure using typical school-based indicators. I used the SEI to assess student cognitive engagement. The SEI divides student cognitive engagement into three subtypes, Control and Relevance of School Work (CRSW), Future Aspirations and Goals (FG), and Intrinsic Motivation (IM). Changes in these subtypes between pre- and post-administration of the SEI were not statistically significant. Despite average increases, most students demonstrated a slight decrease in scores in these subtypes. Qualitative data do not add anything further to these findings. Despite students being more likely to attend class, the slight decrease in scores appears to suggest that most participants did not feel more cognitively connected to school as a result of the brief mentorship intervention.

Affective (Psychological) Engagement. This subtype of engagement is also difficult to measure using typical school-based indicators. As a result, I used the SEI to assess participant affective (psychological) engagement. The SEI breaks this engagement subtype into three subtypes, Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR), Peer Support at School (PSS), and Family Support for Learning (FSL). Despite slight average increases, most participating students demonstrated slight decreases in TSR and PSS. These decreases were not statistically significant. Standing out as the sole area of potential improvement as measured by the SEI, most participants provided increased scores in FSL. This increase was not statistically significant.

When a student missed a daily check-in or extended meeting, mentors were directed to contact the mentee's parent or guardian. The mentor provided documentation states that mentors attempted contact the majority of times students missed check-ins. Mentor-student data logs provided numerous instances of parents providing information as to why students had missed

school and expressing appreciation for the contact. In some cases, parents stated that students were at school and then offered to support the mentor in making sure the student checked in. These qualitative data support the increase shown in SEI scores. Numerous studies have suggested that providing parents with regular attendance information can be effective in reducing student absenteeism (Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Feller, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Additional cycles of the intervention may draw on these initial findings by increasing the connections between students, teachers, and families.

Predictive Nature of the SEI. Previous research using the SEI suggested low SEI scores were correlated with poor academic performance and poor attendance rates (Lovelace et al., 2014; Reschly et al., 2014). I was unable to replicate these findings. SEI total scores both from pre- and post-administration were not predictive of attendance or academic improvement. Given my study's small sample size, short cycle of the intervention and statistically insignificant results surrounding data collected from the SEI, the results are inconclusive in determining the predictive nature of SEI scores.

Perceptions of School Importance Among Participants

All participants in this study presented a history of chronic absenteeism. Research exploring this phenomenon in chronically absent students examined the actions of students in expressing the importance they placed on school. Overwhelmingly, this research focused on student educational disengagement (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Catalano et al., 2004; Gottfried, 2014b; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Maynard et al., 2017; Plasman & Gottfried, 2020). Few studies explored the importance students placed on school themselves. I examined how much emphasis participants gave regular attendance though an analysis of the information they provided to

mentors. The data appear to present the potential for mentorship to increase the value students place on their education and regular attendance. Most participants expressed the desire to improve but appeared to need support in achieving these goals. Themes emerging from the qualitative data appear to suggest that mentors and family members can provide students with this support, assisting them in adding value to their education and attendance.

Themes emerged describing that the participants in this study understood why education and regular school attendance were important. Student interview responses demonstrated that they understood the connection between attendance and academic performance. Participants also understood that school was a pathway to achieving future goals. Despite understanding school is important, many students had many negative or adverse feelings associated with school. Mentors identified emotional barriers to students attending school ranging from anxiety to feelings of being drained, to feelings of frustration. Mentors and families also identified external barriers to attendance, such the student not living at home to being unwell. It does not appear that issues of fairness at school was a barrier for participants in this study. All interviewed participants suggested the school rules are fair, thus removing them as a barrier or aversion for these students.

Mentors and families supported participants in this study by identifying and addressing barriers to attendance. The assigning of mentors in this way confirms that this an effective use of school resources as described in previous studies (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Childs & Grooms, 2018). Students also expressed that mentors and parents helped motivate them to be in class and to align school with the attainment of future goals. A key finding of this study was the bi-directional influence that the mentorship intervention had on the student and the family. When interviewed, participating students clearly expressed the importance of education. Some

explained this influence came from their parents. Other mentees described their mentor helping them to address school-based challenges and to attend more classes.

An important aspect of the intervention was the connection between home and school. Research demonstrates that families have an impact on student attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bergman & Chen, 2019; Chang & Romero, 2008; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Fellers, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Smythe-Leistic & Page, 2019). Families and school-based resources serve as key supports in identifying barriers and aversions to regular attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Ehrlich, 2014; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018; Sugrue et al., 2016). Specifically, increased communication between the school and the family reduced chronic absenteeism in previous studies (Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Rogers & Feller 2014). Additionally, multiple studies support the influence that parents have on attendance behavior and the value students place on school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Ehrlich, 2014; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Robinson et al., 2018; Sugrue et al., 2016). My findings support the value in building strong relationships between school personnel and the families we serve.

Improving Attendance Behavior

On average, participants increased their attendance by 2.8 school days during the eight-week intervention. The results from this small sample were statistically significant ($p = 0.05$). Six of the 15 participants showed improvement in their attendance rate by 10%-30%. Attendance rates decreased during the intervention for two participants and two other participants

demonstrated no change in attendance. This intervention demonstrated a medium effect (Cohen's d = -0.547) in reducing participant chronic absenteeism.

These findings confirm pervious research demonstrating the promise of mentorship programs in reducing student chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Childs & Grooms, 2018; Guryan et al., 2017; May et al., 2021). The rate of decrease demonstrated in this study is consequential to the participants. Missing 2–3 days a month over the course of a school year is enough to identify a student as chronically absent. Since research demonstrates that past chronic absenteeism is a predictor of future chronic absenteeism, then it seems critical to provide interventions for students with a pattern of absenteeism (Ehrlich et al., 2014; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Hough, 2019; Olsen, 2014; Romero & Lee, 2007; Singer et al., 2021; Smerillo et al., 2018; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). While the findings in this study must be considered with caution due to its limitations, it is useful to the context of the study as it addresses chronic absenteeism as a problem of practice.

Improving Academic Performance

Chronically absent students fare worse academically than their peers who are not chronically absent (Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Buehler et al., 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gershenson et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried, 2014b; Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). The participants in this study confirmed this finding. The average GPA among participants in the first quarter of the school year was 0.892. This increased slightly to an average of 0.958 in Interim 2 period. These low average GPAs also add confirmation to research suggesting that students with a history of chronic is predictive of future course failure (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz et al., 2007).

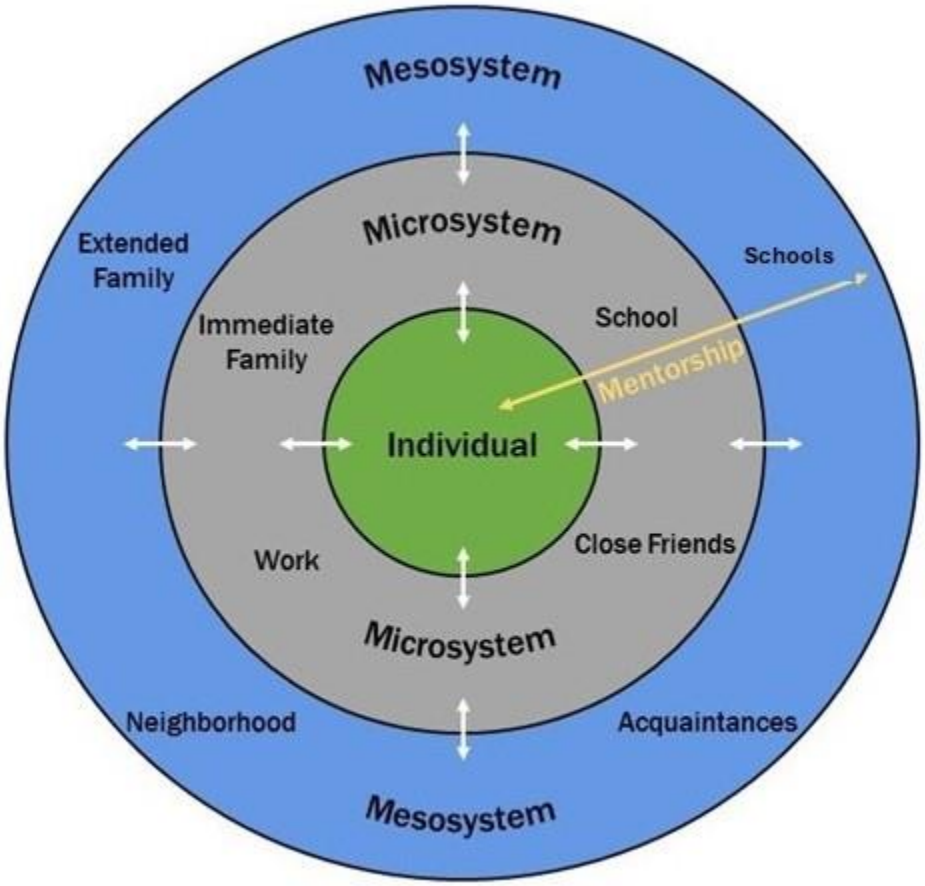
Participants in this study saw slight improvements in their GPA in the two grading periods measured. Participant average GPA increased from 0.958 in Interim 2 to 1.142 in Interim 3. Academic achievement and improvement are long-term indicators of student success. Consequently, it is likely that this short cycle intervention did not provide enough time to affect the types of behavioral and cognitive changes required for students to achieve significant academic improvement.

Mentorship as a Bioecological Intervention

Multiple research studies suggest the use of bioecological interventions to address chronic absenteeism (Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021; Sugrue et al., 2016). I explored an intervention addressing chronic absenteeism and the problems associated with it for students, using mentorship as a bioecological intervention for the problem. The intervention aligned with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model as a guiding theoretical framework. Using this framework, the mentorship program created a new structure in the student's Microsystem. I theorized this program would then impact the individual student by changing their attendance behavior. I also theorized it would impact the student's Mesosystem changing the behavior of the individual's parent or guardian surrounding school attendance. Figure 10 summarizes the framework as used in this study.

Figure 10

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model as Implemented in Study



Note. Adapted from U. Bronfenbrenner and P. A. Morris (2006), The Bioecological Model of Human Development, in R. M. Learner and W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child Psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793-828). Johnn Wiley & Sons, Inc.. Copyright 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Inc..

The findings demonstrated some participants experienced changes at individual and Mesosystem levels. While it is unclear which level exhibited the most influence, it is likely that this would vary for each individual participant as the causes of their absenteeism vary. The attendance behavior of some students changed with a sample average increase in attendance of

2.8 school days. I also found an increase in most individual's expression of support from their family for learning as measured by the SEI. Analysis of student responses showed that both mentors and families had an influence on student attendance behavior and student views of the importance of education. These findings align with research advocating for interventions for chronic absenteeism that use a bioecological approach (Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021).

Chronic absenteeism is a wicked problem, exhibiting multiple interconnected causes and impacts which defy singular solutions (Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021). Given the many factors at play in student chronic absenteeism, the interventions must be multidirectional if they are to meet the individual needs of the students. Bioecological interventions leverage multiple areas of an individual's development and provide a unifying theoretical basis for differentiating interventions (Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021). The results of this study, while not profound, do lend support for using bioecological interventions to address the issue of chronic absenteeism.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The following section details practical implications and recommendations, emergent from the study, for chronic absenteeism. Table 31 below summarizes three recommendations for policy and practice. The following subsections explore those recommendations in detail.

Table 31

Recommendations Related to the Findings of the Action Research Study

Findings	Related Recommendations	Supporting Literature
Targeted mentoring for students with a pattern of chronic absenteeism may be successful in improving student attendance rates.	Student attendance data should be analyzed early and often across feeder schools to identify chronically absent students for targeted interventions.	Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Chang et al., 2018, Ginsburg et al., 2014; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Olsen, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004
Mentorship interventions that partner with families of students with chronic absenteeism can improve student attendance.	Provide mentorships as an intervention for chronically absent students as part of programming across all grade levels.	Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013, 2018; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; Holtzman et al., 2017; May et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2014
Mentorship programs that involve families can increase the influence a school has on student attendance.	Implement mentorship programs as an intervention to increase the influence of the school and the family on the student's behavior.	Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Constantino, 2016; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021; Sugrue et al., 2016
Student absences decreased for most participants during the intervention treatment period.	Establish contact and communication with families to reduce student absences.	Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Rogers & Feller, 2014

Recommendation 1: Student attendance data should be analyzed early and often across feeder schools to identify chronically absent students for targeted interventions.

One of the most common recommendations from previous chronic absenteeism research is the increased tracking of the phenomenon (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Chang et al., 2018; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Olsen, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). This study reaffirms and builds off these recommendations. Considering the connection between previous chronic absenteeism and future attendance issues, having current

information surrounding the attendance behavior of students in previous and current school years is crucial (Gee, 2019; Hough, 2019; Singer et al., 2021). All participants in this study were chronically absent in eighth grade or in the first quarter of the school year. The data identifying these students were not easily accessible by the administration of City High School (CHS). The data identifying these students had to be directly requested from Jefferson Public Schools' (JPS) central administration. School districts should provide building leaders with data monitoring tools that easily and clearly identify their students exhibiting a history of chronic absenteeism. School leaders should review the previous chronic absenteeism status of their current students at the start of each school year. After the year begins, timely attendance data should be analyzed, at a minimum, on a bi-weekly basis. This timeline allows for identification of those students presenting a need for support. Without the knowledge of which students are beginning to attend school less often, school leaders must implement school-wide solutions, which may be a less effective use of limited resources. Chronic absenteeism data should be reviewed by a school's leadership, their attendance team, and then distributed to those supporting student attendance. Involving some members of the school's teaching faculty is also suggested to incorporate their views, assistance, knowledge, and expertise.

Previous studies suggested the implementation of supports for students with a history of chronic absenteeism at transitional periods, especially between eighth and ninth grades (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019). Researchers single out this transition for several reasons. First, chronic absenteeism often reaches its highest rates towards the end of high school (Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Chang et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Second, students in high school are more likely than other students to have extreme levels of chronic absence (Buehler et al.,

2012; Chang et al., 2018). The findings in this study support the possible effectiveness of interventions at transitional periods, before student absenteeism reaches its highest levels in the later high school grades (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019). Focusing on the eighth- to ninth-grade transitional period also helps to focus resources, which are at a premium in urban schools like CHS (Milner, 2012). The findings in this study support the future targeted use of chronic absenteeism interventions, for students with a history of poor attendance as they are making school transitions.

Recommendation 2: Provide mentorships as an intervention for chronically absent students as part of programming across all grade levels.

Multiple research studies explored mentorship as a possible intervention for chronic absenteeism (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013, 2018; DeSocio et al., 2007; Guryan et al., 2017; Holtzman et al., 2017; May et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2014). These studies presented mixed results. While this study presented a statistically significant reduction in student absences for a small sample, this suggests that a longer cycle of the intervention may have promise in extinguishing chronic absenteeism for students.

Most studies exploring the effects of mentorship programs on attendance lasted for a year or more (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Childs & Grooms, 2018: Guryan et al., 2017; Holtzman et al., 2017; Maynard et al., 2014). This study utilized a short-term intervention, lasting just eight weeks. This finding adds to the discussion of mentorship as an intervention for chronic absenteeism highlighting its potential for short term attendance improvement. Considering the lost cost associated with mentorship programs, especially when they use existing staff as this

study did, these findings present school leaders with the potential of improving a difficult problem.

Recommendation 3: Implement mentorship programs as an intervention to increase the influence of the school and the family on the student's behavior.

Previous research suggested the use of a bioecological approach to the issue of chronic absenteeism (Childs & Scanlon, 2022; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2021; Sugrue et al., 2016). This approach attempts to unify research and practice by utilizing approaches that address multiple levels of a student's development (Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Singer et al., 2017). Addressing chronic absenteeism can be difficult for schools, which often lack the resources and reach to influence students beyond their walls. I sought to address that problem by using mentor communications to increase the involvement and influence of parents. Previous research demonstrates that families have a large influence on the attendance behavior of their children (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Bergman & Chen, 2019; Chang & Romero, 2008; Childs & Lofton, 2021; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Gee, 2019; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Gottfried & Gee, 2017; Jordan & Miller, 2017; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Robinson et al., 2018; Rogers & Fellers, 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Smythe-Leistic & Page, 2019). Some of this research specifically highlighted increasing communication between the school and the family to improve attendance (Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Rogers & Feller, 2014). Building on these findings, mentors in this study contacted parents or guardians with timely attendance information when their student failed to check in. In this way, the intervention of the mentor created a new microsystem for the student. Although I was unable to determine the specific impact of contacting families independent of the mentorship received by students, the overall decrease in absences supports the value of this approach.

Interventions for chronic absenteeism should seek to span multiple layers of the student's development. My findings highlight the bi-directional influence mentorship can have on participating students. Mentorship programs should implement the key elements of effective mentorship programs as provided by MENTOR's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (4th ed.). These include well developed and implemented plans for recruitment, screening, training, matching and initiation, monitoring and support, and closer (Garringer et al., 2015). Utilizing mentorship programs that incorporate these elements lend promise because they extend the influence of the school and pull in additional family-based resources. Family members and mentors served as student support during times when they were making the decision about if they should attend class. Having support on multiple layers of influence and development could potentially lead to increased positive attendance behaviors, as shown in this study. This recommendation builds off previous research highlighting the ability of family engagement to improve schools (Constantino, 2016).

Urban schools often suffer from a lack of resources. Using bioecological interventions can potentially allow these schools to extend the impact of the programs they have to address their problems. This occurs when the mentors reach out to families, thus involving them more in the process. This further highlights the potential bi-directional influence mentorship programs can have in addressing problems like chronic absenteeism.

Recommendation 4: Establish contact and communication with families to reduce student absences.

As previously stated, research suggests that improving communication between the family and the school can lead to better student attendance (Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019; Rogers & Feller, 2014). I used

mentors to contact families when participants missed a daily check in or meeting. This provided parents and guardians with timely information surrounding their student's attendance behavior. Although I cannot determine the impact of this contact independent of the mentorship activities, student attendance did improve. This finding demonstrates that contacting families should be a key part of any intervention seeking to address chronic absenteeism. Other studies have found similar interventions have been successful in reducing student absenteeism (Smythe-Leistic & Page, 2019). Pulling from observations of this study, I would additionally recommend that this contact be assisted by school members other than teachers. Moreover, those who reach out to families should use a supportive approach as opposed to a punitive approach. Those reaching out about student absenteeism should inquire with empathy and offer any possible assistance to improving the student's attendance.

Recommendations for Future Cycles of Action Research

The following section details suggestions for future research emerging from this study.

Modifications to Study Size and Implementation

I explored the implementation of a short-term mentorship intervention for students with a history of chronic absenteeism. Eighty-two ninth-grade students qualified as participants in the study with 38 of them identified as chronically absent in eighth grade, and 65 identified to be chronically absent in the first quarter of ninth grade. Of these 82 students, only 16 agreed to participate in this study. Students and families were invited through a letter home, phone calls, and emails. This low participation rate suggests that future programs should attempt additional methods at enrolling students in interventions for chronic absenteeism. It may also suggest that the families who provided consent were already interested in improving their students'

attendance. Research suggests that home visits with the families of chronically absent students may improve attendance and ultimately achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

A second suggestion for study modification is to begin the intervention earlier in the year. Olsen's (2014) research suggests that student absences in September are predictive of chronic absence in the rest of the school year. With students being identified as chronically absent from eighth grade, the potential exists to implement a mentorship intervention for these students at the beginning of the school year. With other research highlighting the importance of transitional periods beginning this intervention earlier in the year could lead to more impactful results (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Chang, 2016; Ehrlich & Johnson, 2019; Mac Iver & Sheldon, 2019).

A third recommendation is to increase the time length of the intervention. While this study explored mentorship as a short-term solution, previous research of longer-term mentorship programs yielded positive results (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Childs & Grooms, 2018: Guryan et al., 2017; Holtzman et al., 2017; Maynard et al., 2014). Extending this mentorship program over a full school year or longer could lead to more credible results and provide more actionable information for practitioners.

Lastly, further studies of mentorship in non-urban settings could provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of this intervention. Most of the reviewed research surrounding mentorship as an intervention for chronic absenteeism takes place in urban settings. Replicatory studies in rural and/or suburban settings are necessary to confirm the transferability of this intervention across contexts.

Further Exploration Using a Bioecological Approach

As explained by Gottfried and Gee (2017), "the factors of absenteeism have been analyzed in isolation from one another in an atheoretical and disjointed research agenda" (p. 4). Singer et al. (2021) later echoed their opinion, highlighting that most interventions for chronic absenteeism do not address multiple layers of child development. Although I used a small portion of the model, there is potential for Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model to serve as a unifying theoretical framework for the future study of a variety of school problems of practice. My study's small sample size, limited time frame, and targeted nature demonstrate the need for a more comprehensive study. Future studies might explore this approach using different interventions and research parameters to further examine the use of bioecological approaches in addressing chronic absenteeism.

Summary

Chronic absenteeism is a problem experienced across the United States that is detrimental to student success. School districts, school leaders, and educational practitioners require clear and effective interventions to address this issue. This mixed methods study explored the use of a mentorship program as a short-cycle intervention for ninth-grade students with a history of chronic absenteeism. This bioecological approach used school-based mentors as resources to influence student attendance behavior and increase communication between student's family and the school. This program presented a bi-directional influence on both the participating students and their families. I explored how mentors and participants' family members supported students as they attempted to make positive progress towards improving attendance behaviors and academic achievement.

Many educators suggest that relationships are the most important factor in educational practice. This study confirms that understanding, providing students in need of support with another adult seeking to establish a positive relationship. Using programs like the one explored in this study, it is possible to improve the interconnected and complicated problem of chronic absenteeism. Considering the number of causes and impacts associated with this issue, programs that seek to address only one factor ignore the problem's interconnectedness. Interventions in this area should address multiple layers of individual development and use the school's limited resources in a way that extends its influence beyond its walls. The mentorship program accomplished this by involving parents and guardians in the support of student attendance improvement. Programs such as this hold promise in further decreasing chronic absenteeism.

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APPENDIX A

JPS Mandated Steps for Chronically Absent Students Compared to the Intervention Program

JPS Procedure	Mentorship Program

Attendance Team Members and Responsibilities:
• Principal – Determines agenda for meetings, has final say on all decisions, guides the work of the team.
• Assistant Principals – Provide administrative perspective for work and decisions.
• Graduation Coaches – Conduct home visits, identify students off track for graduation (attendance or grades) and communicate with the student and their families, help to ensure JPS attendance procedures are followed.
• Attendance Secretary – Update student attendance for excused absences, send generated attendance letters, data collection and entry.
• Attendance Technician – Oversee all JPS required attendance procedures, participates in all truancy related proceedings.
• Teacher – Provides teacher prospective and feedback.
 	
JPS Mandated Steps for Absences:
3 Unexcused Absences - Attendance Letter
• A letter is sent to the student's physical address notifying the parent or guardian of the student that they have missed three days and reminding them of the importance of regular attendance.
5 Unexcused Absences - Attendance Plan
• Jointly created with parent and member of school's attendance team.
10 Unexcused Absences - Attendance Conference
	Mentorship Program Team Members and Responsibilities:
	• Researcher: Study coordinator, Mentor coordinator, data collection and analysis.
	• Attendance Team: Data collection and analysis, program feedback
	• Mentors: Direct contact with mentees
	• Mentees: Participating 9th grade students with a demonstrated history of chronic absenteeism.
	• Families: Families of chronically absent 9th graders.
	
	Mentorship Program Procedures:
	• Mentees check in daily with mentors.
	• Mentors have one extended meeting a week with a mentee.
	  ○ If a mentee misses either a check in or a meeting, parent contact is made. Information is collected from the parent or guardian from that interaction.
	  ○ When a mentee makes all meetings for a week, mentors are to contact home to deliver this good news.
	• Mentors meet with their mentees for eight weeks.
	• Mentors help mentees set growth goals for their improved attendance.
	• Mentors help to identify aversions and barriers to regular attendance. When appropriate, they will connect their mentee to resources to address these aversions and barriers.

• A conference is held with the principal, or principal's designee, and at least one other attendance team member. This meeting is to review the attendance plan and reaffirm attendance requirements. 15 Unexcused Absences Court Referral / Complain or Proceedings Filed Held if student is not making progress in improving attendance. If a parent is intentionally noncompliant, the attendance team is to document those circumstances. If a student is resisting parental efforts to comply with compulsory attendance requirements, the attendance team is to document those circumstances.	

Appendix B

Sample Mentor Form

Mentor's Name: Student Numeric ID#:

Day of Week	Monday 11/13	Tuesday 11/14	Wednesday 11/15	Thursday 11/16	Friday 11/17
Did the student check in?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Date and Time of Parent / Guardian Contact					
Was the Parent / Guardian Aware of the Absence?	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
Space for Parent / Guardian Feedback or Information					

Space to Record Mentor Feedback, Reflections, or Information

Suggested Attendance Research to Share: *"The more you're in class, the more likely you are to pass.*"

Negative academic performance and poor attendance are clearly connected. The more time a student misses, the more likely they are to do poorly academically. With this knowledge, know that the more time you miss the more likely you are to fail classes, which in high school, you will have to take again.

Discussion starters for your mentor (*Feel free to use one of these to discuss or dive deeper into problems with your mentee's attendance. These are not a requirement, if you and your mentee do not need these feel free to discuss on your own*):
"Does high school fit into your plan for your life?"
"Do you see any value in the classes you are taking?"
"What about your classes feels difficult or hard?"
"What are you goals for life outside of school?"

Growth Goal Check In

Student's Growth Goal:
Progress:
Identified Barriers:

Extra space for notes:

Appendix C

Student Engagement Instrument

1 – Strongly Disagree / 2 – Disagree / 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree / 4 – Agree / 5 – Strongly Agree

Question	Rating				
1. My family/guardian(s) are there for me when I need them.	1	2	3	4	5
2. After finishing my schoolwork I check it over to see if it's correct.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My teachers are there for me when I need them.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Other students here like me the way I am.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Adults at my school listen to the students.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Other students at school care about me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Students at my school are there for me when I need them.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My education will create many future opportunities for me.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Most of what is important to know you learn in school.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The school rules are fair.	1	2	3	4	5
11. going to school after high school is important.	1	2	3	4	5
12. When something good happens at school, my family/guardian(s) want to know about it.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Most teacher at my school are interested in me as a person, not just as a student.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Students here respect what I have to say.	1	2	3	4	5
15. When I do schoolwork, I check to see whether I understand what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Overall, my teachers are open and honest with me.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I plan to continue my education following high school.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I'll learn, but only if the teacher gives me a reward.	1	2	3	4	5
19. School is important for achieving my future goals.	1	2	3	4	5
20. When I have problems at my school my family/guardian(s) are willing to help me.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Overall, adults at my school treat students fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I enjoy talking to the teachers here.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I enjoy talking to the students here.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I have some friends at school.	1	2	3	4	5
25. When I do well in school it's because I work hard.	1	2	3	4	5
26. The tests in my classes do a good job of measuring what I'm able to do.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I feel safe at school.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I feel like I have a say about what happens to me at school.	1	2	3	4	5
29. My family/guardian(s) want me to keep trying when things are tough at school.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I am hopeful about my future.	1	2	3	4	5

31. At my school, teachers care about students.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I'll learn, but only if my family/guardian(s) give me a reward.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Learning is fun because I get better at something.	1	2	3	4	5
34. What I'm learning in my classes will be important in my future.	1	2	3	4	5
35. The grades in my classes do a good job of measuring what I'm able to do.	1	2	3	4	5

Note: Approval to use this instrument provided to the researcher through electronic communication received on 10/22/22, from The Check & Connect Team / checkandconnect@umn.edu /1-866-434-0010.

Appendix D

Student Engagement Instrument Procedures for Administration, Scoring, and Use of Results

5-Point Scale
Student Engagement Instrument (SEI)[1]
Administration Standardization Procedures[2]

What to Say to Students:

1) "Today we have a questionnaire to learn about your experiences while attending this school. Your responses will be confidential: no one at this school will see your individual answers. To keep them confidential, I will select a student to collect the questionnaires and seal them inside an envelope before sending them to the central office. Reports of the survey results will show only summarized data. Your honest answers will be used to help me and the school serve you and other students better."
2) "Do not begin marking answers until we discuss the directions and I begin to read the questionnaire items aloud."
3) "First, use a pencil to fill in your student number in the boxes in the upper right corner of the form. Then darken the circles corresponding to each digit of your student number."
4) "For most of the questionnaire items you will be choosing how much you agree with the statement by selecting from 'strongly agree,' 'agree,' 'neither agree nor disagree,' 'disagree,' or 'strongly disagree.' The last two items of the questionnaire are different, and require you to fill in two-digit numbers."
5) "For each item mark only one answer by filling in the circle completely with a pencil. If you make a mistake or change your mind, erase your old answer entirely and fill in your new answer."
6) "I'll be reading the items so that I can respond to any questions you might have right away."
7) "If you have any questions about the items I'm reading or if you need a bit more time with an item be sure to let me know." *[Read items as directed in the right column 'Administration Procedures.']*
8) "Thank you for your time and opinions."

Administration Procedures:

- Read questionnaire items aloud with 3- to 5-second pauses between items depending on the reading levels within the class
- Items should be read with brief pauses between the general text and parenthetical sections to aid in understanding, e.g., "extracurricular (after school) activities"
- Plural versions should be used for items with a plural option, e.g., "parent/guardian(s)".
- Choices (i.e., "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree") are described during the introduction. Following the introduction, the questions can be read without the choices.

Note:

- If students ask, they may work ahead on items if the Advisor's pace of reading is too slow for them.

Collection:

- Give the questionnaire collection envelope to a student and ask that student to:
  - collect all of the completed questionnaires,
  - arrange them so they all face the same way,
  - place them in the envelope, and
  - seal the envelope closed.
- Return the sealed envelope as directed by your school's advisement program coordinator.

[1] Appleton, J.J., Christenson, S.L., Kim, D., & Reschly, A. (2006). Measuring cognitive and psychological engagement: Validation of the Student Engagement Instrument. *Journal of School Psychology, 44,* 427-445.
Betts, J.E., Appleton, J.J., Reschly, A.L., Christenson, S.L., & Huebner, S. (2010). A study of the reliability and construct validity of the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) across multiple grades. *School Psychology Quarterly, 25(2),* 84-93.

[2] *These procedures are intended to ensure questionnaires are administered similarly across advisement groups. Thank you for your help.*

Write each column total in the box next to the column title.
Then divide by the **number of items answered**[1] to calculate a column average.

AFFECTIVE (PSYCHOLOGICAL) ENGAGEMENT:

Teacher-Student Relationships (TSR)	☐ /	9 (or 8 or 7 if fewer answered)
Peer Support at School (PSS)	☐ /	6 (or 5 if fewer answered)
Family Support for Learning (FSL)	☐ /	4 (or 3 if fewer answered)

COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT:

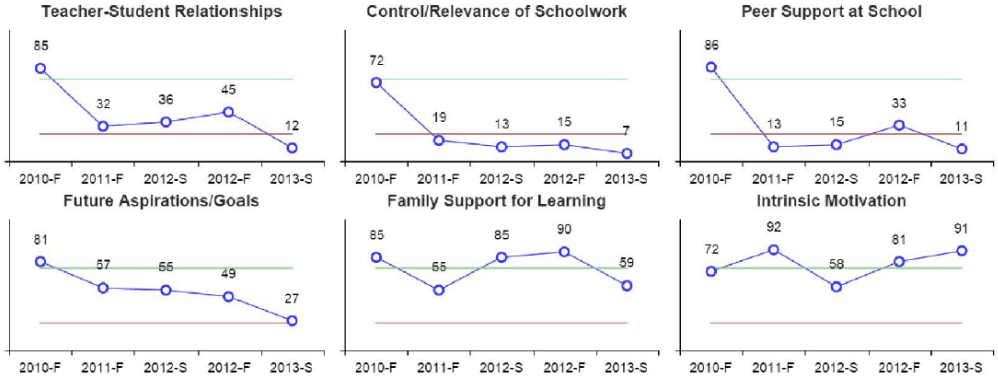
Control and Relevance of School Work (CRSW)	☐ /	9 (or 8 or 7 if fewer answered)
Future Aspirations and Goals (FG)	☐ /	5 (or 4 if fewer answered)
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	☐ /	2

SEI Total (SEI_Tot)	☐ /	35 (use number answered)

[1] Domain (and SEI) totals should only be calculated if students have answered at least 75% of the items.

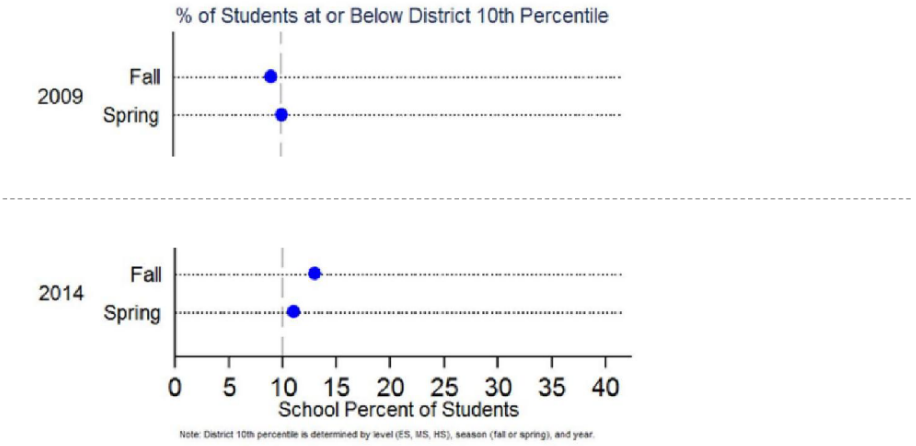
UNDERSTANDING ENGAGEMENT SCORES:

- Percentiles by education level (elementary, middle, and high) support practitioners in better understanding a student's engagement score relative to his/her education-level peers. See below a high school student's fall(F) and spring(S) SEI percentiles, across years, with district 75th (green) and 25th (red) percentiles marked by lines.



- Students with SEI scores at the 10th percentile or lower in an education level were found to be absent more frequently, have more disciplinary incidents and suspensions, and to have lower standardized achievement test performance (Appleton, 2012). Therefore, it can be useful to monitor students for SEI scores at the 10th percentile or lower and to examine proportions of 10th percentile or lower students in a school over time. See below for examples (Note: since the 10th percentile is established at the education level, in districts with more than one school at the examined education level, it is possible for more or less than 10% of students at a given school to be at the 10th percentile or lower for their SEI Total score).

	SEI Teacher - Student Relationships	SEI Control and Relevance of Schoolwork	SEI Peer Support at School	SEI Future Aspirations and Goals	SEI Family Support for Learning	SEI Intrinsic Motivation	SEI All Items Mean	SEI All Items Category (Relative to GCPS)
Student 1	4.44	3.44	4.50	4.80	4.50	4.00	4.23	Middle 80%
Student 2	3.44	4.33	4.83	4.20	5.00	2.00	4.11	Middle 80%
Student 3	3.50	4.11	2.20	5.00	4.25	4.00	3.82	Middle 80%
Student 4	1.78	4.00	1.00	4.40	4.50	5.00	3.09	Lowest 10%



Scoring Procedures

Within each clear box, write the number that corresponds with the rating identified by the student.
Use either five or four options depending on the version of the SEI Scale you are using.

5-point scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5)
4-point scale: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Agree (3), Strongly Agree (4)

Item	TSR	PSS	FSL	CRSW	FG	IM*
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
25						
26						
27						
28						
29						
30						
31						
32						
33						
34						
35						
Total						

Affective *Cognitive*

*Intrinsic Motivation (IM) is the only domain where the item responses are reversed.

Student responses should be re-coded as follows before entering the value in the clear box:

5-point scale:

Strongly Agree	(5)	= 1
Agree	(4)	= 2
Disagree	(2)	= 4
Strongly Disagree	(1)	= 5

4-point scale:

Strongly Agree	(4)	= 1
Agree	(3)	= 2
Disagree	(2)	= 3
Strongly Disagree	(1)	= 4

SEI Total = (Sum all items if at least 15 Affective and 12 Cognitive Items Completed)	

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol from Attendance Works' What Works in Our Community: A toolkit for identifying promising local practice.

1. What grade are you in?
2. Do you like coming to school? What makes you want to go to school every day?
3. What most helps you get to school? Is there anything your school or teacher does that is especially helpful?
4. What makes it hard to get to school? Is there anything that helps you overcome those challenges to getting to school?
5. Have your teachers or principal talked to you about the importance of coming to school every day? Why is it important to attend school every day?
6. What happens when you miss school? Does anyone notice?
7. Do you know who to go to at your school for help if you are struggling with a problem that keeps you from attending school? (*for older children)*
8. *Sometimes students get suspended. Can you tell me about some of the reasons why a student might get suspended? (for older children)*
    a. *Probe: Do you think the rules are fair?*
    b. *Probe: Are the rules applied to everyone equally?*
    c. *Probe: What would make the rules more fair?*

Note: Permission to use this instrument provided to the researcher through electronic communication from Cecelia Long, VP of Programs (cecelia@attendanceworks.org), on 10/24/22.

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH:
Your child is being asked to participate in a research study. Scientists do research to answer questions and learn new information. Some research might help change or improve the way we do things in the future. This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want your child to participate. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing for your child to be part of the study.

TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY IS VOLUNTARY
You may choose not to allow your child to take part in the study or you may choose for your child to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to allow your child to participate, or later deciding to remove your child from the study, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you and/or your child are entitled and will not affect your or your child's relationship with the school.
As an alternative to participating in the study, your child will receive the standard services any child could expect from the school. They will receive no additional treatment, education, or services beyond what is normally provided by the school.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of a mentorship program for students at risk of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism is defined as a student being absent, for any reason, for 10% or more of a given school year. As attendance is important to student success, this study is being conducted to explore if mentorship can impact student absences.
Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because they are a ninth grader who was chronically absent last school year and/or is at risk of being chronically absent this year.

This study is being conducted by Nicholas Ford and the College of William & Mary.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART?
If you agree to allow your child to participate, your child will be one of approximately 30 participants taking part in this study.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY?
If you agree to allow your child to be in the study, your child will be asked to do the following things.

- Your child will be paired with a mentor who works at the school.
- Your child will be asked to complete a survey prior to beginning the study and after their completion of the study.
- Your child will be asked to check-in each day with their mentor at school to account for their attendance for eight weeks.

- Any day your child does not check-in with their mentor, that mentor will contact you.
- Your child will be asked to participate in a weekly meeting with their mentor for at least 15 minutes for eight weeks.
- You will be given the contact information for your child's mentor to allow you to communicate with them during school hours.
- Your child may be selected and asked to interview with a member of the school to discuss their experiences as part of the study.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?
While participating in the study, potential risks include:

- A risk of completing the survey and/or interview is being uncomfortable answering the questions.
- A risk of taking part in the mentorship program is interruption of your child's daily school schedule and loss of instructional time from participating in weekly meetings.
- Despite efforts to prevent it, there is a risk of possible loss of confidentiality.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?
Potential benefits to participation in the study are changes in your student's attendance and communication between yourself and the school.

HOW WILL MY CHILD'S INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?
Efforts will be made to keep your child's personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your child's personal information may be disclosed if required by law. No information which could identify your child will be shared in the publications about this study. If used in publications, students will be identified by a participant identification number, not by their name or other identifiable attribute. Databases where your child's information will be stored under password protection at all times. If audio recordings are made, only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Audio recordings will be destroyed after the publication of the study's results.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your child's research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study's investigator, William & Mary Institutional Review Board or its designees, and Dr. Steven Constantino, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, especially the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), who may need to access the research records.
We may ask to record audio of your child as part of the study. Please let us know whether you agree to allow use to record your child:

_____ YES, I agree to have my child's audio used in the study.

_____ NO, I do not agree to have my child's audio used in the study.

Laws require that we report information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child. If any investigator has or is given such information, he or she may be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

The study will involve accessing information about your child which is protected by a law called FERPA. Your child's student education records must be kept secure by their school and can only be disclosed to researchers like us with your consent. The records we need to access for this study include, their gender, race, free or reduced lunch status, whether or not they are a student with a disability, their grades, and their attendance records. The only people who will have access to these records for the research are the investigators.

WILL MY CHILDS INFORMATION BE USED FOR RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE?
Information collected from your child for this study may be used for future research studies or shared with other researchers for future research. If this happens, information which could identify your child will be removed before any information is shared. Since identifying information is removed, we will not ask for your additional consent.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATION?
Neither you nor your child will be paid for participating in this study.

WHAT FINANCIAL INTEREST DOES THE RESEARCHER HAVE?
The researcher has no financial interest in this study.

WHO SHOULD I CALL WITH QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?
If you have any questions or problems that may arise as a result of your child's participation in the study, you can contact Nicholas Ford, the researcher, at phone number 757-628-3344 and/or email at: nrford@wm.edu. I understand that I may also contact Dr. Steven Constantino at 757-221-2323 and/or email at smconstantino@wm.edu. You may also contact Dr. Tom Ward at (757) 221-2358 or EDIRC-L@wm.edu.

WILL I BE CONTACTED ABOUT RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE?
You will not be contacted in the future as part of this study.

PARENTAL CONSENT
In consideration of all the above, I give my consent for my child to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep my records. I agree to allow my child to take part in this study.

Child 's Printed Name: _____

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Cell Phone Number of Parent or Guardian: _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G

Mentor Student Data Log First and Second Cycle Codes and Frequencies Generated from the Action Research Data Analysis

First Cycle Affective Codes	First Cycle Frequencies	Associated Second Cycle Pattern Codes	Second Cycle Frequencies
Mentor Support	19	Programmatic Supports	55
Checking In	24		
Bonding	4		
Appreciation	3		
Pleasing?	2		
Compliance	1		
Adjusting	1		
Teacher Support	1		
Parental Appreciation	31	Family Supports	38
Parental Support	7		
Suspended	19	Barriers	58
Sickness / Unwell	14		
Tired	4		
Struggle	4		
Anxiety	3		
Not Living At Home	3		
No Transportation	3		
Negative Feelings Towards Teachers / Staff	2		
Lack of Motivation	1		
Dislike of Other Students	1		
Overwhelmed	1		
Anger	1		
Frustration	1		
Influenced	1		
Improvement	21	Motivation to Improve	77
Positive	13		
Motivation to Improve	9		
Want / Desire	3		
Importance / Value	3		
Effort	3		
Belief	3		
Openness	3		
Willing	2		
Interest	2		
Receptive	2		
Working	2		

Engagement Hopeful Agreement Helpful Desire to Graduate Desire for Good Grades Desire for Change Make Parents Proud	1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1		
Missed Check In Mentor Dissatisfaction	22 4	Programmatic Avoidance	26
Negative Behaviors Dislikes Distraction Disengagement Shyness or Apprehension Does Not Matter Boring Annoyed Stuck Negative Feelings Disinterest	17 9 8 5 3 3 3 1 1 1 1	Negative or Adverse Emotions / Actions	52
Likes Comfort Enthusiastic Understanding Enjoyment Pleased Surprise Happiness Relief	4 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	Satisfaction	13
Not Needed Do Not Want Do Not Know Avoidance Does Not Care Not a Problem No Problem	3 3 2 2 1 1 1	Avoidance or Apathy	14

Appendix H

Student Interview First and Second Cycle Codes and Frequencies Generated from the Action Research Data Analysis

First Cycle Affective Codes	First Cycle Frequencies	Associated Second Cycle Pattern Codes	Second Cycle Frequencies
Fairness	6	Fairness	6
Parental Support	5	Parental Support	7
Sibling Support	2		
Admin or Staff Support	5	School Supports	14
Teacher Support	4		
Mentor Support	3		
Appreciation	2		
Desire to Graduate	3	Want / Desire	17
Desire to Learn	3		
Desire for Good Grades	2		
Be Something in Life	2		
Motivation to Improve	2		
Make Parents Proud	2		
Want it to be Done	1		
Negative Behaviors	4	Negative Feelings	9
Desiring Support	1		
Lack of Recognition	1		
Nothing Really Happen	1		
Distraction	1		
Dislikes	1		
Tired	3	Barriers	10
Sickness / Unwell	2		
Not Being Missed	1		
Anxiety	1		
Suspended	1		
Overwhelmed	1		
No Transportation	1		
Likes	2	Satisfaction	7
Enjoyment	1		
Easier	2		
Socialization	2		
Do Not Know	1	Avoidance	1

VITA

Nicholas Ryan Ford

Education:	2024	William & Mary Williamsburg, Virginia Doctor of Education *Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership*
	2020	William & Mary Williamsburg, Virginia Master of Education *K-12 Leadership*
	2011	University of Mary Washington Fredericksburg, Virginia Bachelor of Arts *History*
Experience:	2017-present	Teacher, Public Schools Virginia
	2022-2022	Summer School Center Leader, Public Schools Virginia
	2015-2017	Teacher, Charter School Washington, D.C.
	2014-2015	Teacher, Public Schools Washington, D.C.
	2012-2014	Teacher, Public Schools Virginia