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## Teachers' Perceptions of Student Attendance of a Newly Implemented Tardy Policy

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE OF A NEWLY  
IMPLEMENTED TARDY POLICY

By

Tyree Dawn Sejkora

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Jeanne Surface, Ed.D.

Omaha, Nebraska

May, 2015

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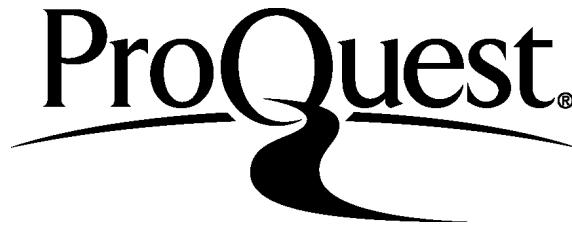
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE OF A NEWLY IMPLEMENTED TARDY POLICY**

Tyree D. Sejkora, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Jeanne Surface

Improving student attendance has been a major focus in school districts all over the country (Atkinson, 2005; Cole, 2011; Railsback, 2004). Students cannot be taught if they are not present. There are three factors that are crucial to the issue of students being tardy to class: the requirements of state laws, the importance of the first minutes of class and the interference on others instruction. Finding an answer to erasing tardiness is crucial (Railsback, 2004). Many schools throughout the nation discuss concerns about students arriving to class tardy. Policies are put into place, not only class wide, but school wide, in attempt to help prevent students from missing class time (Atkinson, 2005).

Consequences are put into place when these policies are abused in an attempt to curb the behaviors of students who arrive late. Even with these attempts, tardiness to class continues to be a problem and hinders the opportunities for an education that teachers provide their students. The purpose of this study is to examine the efficacy of a newly implemented tardy policy in a large middle school in a large Midwest school district.

Using a mixed methods approach, quantitative data analyzed tardies by comparing the first semester of a 7th grade class in the 2012-2013 school year when a tardy policy was not implemented, to that of the first semester of the same student in the 8th grade class in the 2013-2014 school year once the tardy policy had been implemented using *t*-tests. The

researcher then completed a qualitative approach to delve more deeply into the teachers' perceptions of student attendance and how it impacts the classroom. Six purposely selected teachers were asked guiding questions to provide a framework for discussion. The researcher identified any categories and participant opinions that had a similar theme. This was done with the use of coding the findings.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

“They cannot learn if they are not there!” This quote is often heard in conversations related to students’ attendance at school as related to their success. This is also true for students who arrive to class tardy. When students arrive late to a class, they miss out on important instructional learning. Not only does arriving tardy to class affect the learning of the student who arrives late, it also disrupts the learning of the other students in the class, as well as the instruction being given by the teacher. The loss of this learning by the student is just the beginning of a downward spiral for students who arrive tardy to class.

When students arrive tardy to class, they begin to fall behind in their lessons. If this happens often enough, the student begins to sense a loss of hope to get caught up. The student may begin to feel as if he/she is not as smart as the other students in the class, so he/she stops trying to improve his/her knowledge. Sometimes these students begin to act out with bad behaviors to draw attention away from the lack of understanding. There are some students that will use this as a way to be removed from class altogether. Atkinson (2005) states that low commitment to school is linked to nearly all problem behaviors displayed during adolescence.

Once students begin to have a lack of commitment to school and learning, they not only are more apt to arrive late, but to begin skipping class altogether. Truancy can correlate with an array of problem behaviors displayed during adolescence. Studies have established that a lack of commitment to school and truancy are risk factors for substance abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquent behavior, and school dropout. According to

Atkinson's (2005) research, truancy is likely a precursor to serious nonviolent and violent offenses among youth. Law enforcement officials have documented a connection between higher truancy rates and higher rates of daytime crimes, including burglary and vandalism.

When students are chronically truant from school, missing long stretches at a time, it seems the natural progression simply is to not return. Truancy is a well-established risk factor for school dropouts. School dropouts have significantly fewer job prospects, make lower salaries, and are more often unemployed than students who stay in school. Other measures of truancy and student dropouts that impact social and financial issues are that of a less educated workforce, business loss due to youth who shoplift during the day, higher daytime crime rates, cost of social services for families of children who are habitually truant, lower annual income for the students' life, and loss of federal and state education funding for schools. With the drastic results that student tardies can escalate to, it is crucial for school staff to find ways to prevent students from missing school at the earliest opportunity (Atkinson, 2005).

With the accountability of No Child Left Behind Act, the federal government made attendance an "additional indicator" for elementary and middle schools to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The AYP indicator for high schools is based on student dropout rates. Statistics show that absenteeism due to reasons other than illness and cutting individual classes increases with each grade level, starting in the 8th grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

States and districts are also responding to the growing concern about chronic absenteeism. In the state where this study is occurring, laws require students from the

age of 6 to 18 to be in schools to acquire an education. Once a student has missed a total of 20 days in a school year, district administration is required to write a referral to the county attorney stating the attempts made by the district to help the families abide by the state law. According to research done by Railsback (2004), although academic achievement certainly is a driving force for developing these policies, it is not the only concern. The budgets for most school districts are based on average daily attendance, and high absenteeism can result in the loss of funds.

While much research has been done on the topic of school attendance of students, it continues to be a concern throughout the nation. Schools have tried several ways to improve student attendance with use of both positive incentives as well as consequences for students who continue to arrive late. This study was done to determine if a newly implemented tardy policy in a middle school in a large school district in the Midwest will help improve student attendance. First, the researcher analyzed routinely collected data on student attendance by using a *t*-test. The researcher then gathered teacher perceptions on the tardy policy by holding a forum with purposefully selected teachers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to implement a new tardy policy in a school, a paradigm shift will have to take place. The old way of thinking for both staff and students will have to be replaced with a new thought process. Covey (1990) states that character and skill development is related to natural laws and governing principles. By observing these laws and principles, old habits can change and interpersonal effectiveness can happen.

Principle-centered leadership is a new way of thinking that helps resolve the classic dilemmas of modern living. Covey (1990) asks the following:

How can we be empowered (and empower other people) with confidence and competence to solve problems and seize opportunities – without being or fearing loose cannons; How do we encourage the desire to change and improve without creating more pain than gain; How can we be contributing members of a complementary team based on mutual respect and the valuing of diversity and pluralism; Where do we start, and how do we keep recharging our batteries to maintain momentum for learning, growing, and improving. (Covey, 1990, p. 31)

When implementing a new tardy policy, the goal is to motivate the students to be on time, therefore improving student attendance. The framework of principle-centered leadership can also affect the implementation of a new tardy policy. First, the student should focus on the “personal” and how being tardy to class could impact his/her own lives. Next, the student should view the “interpersonal” level and how his/her tardiness to class could affect the relationship he/she has with not only with his/her teachers, but impact the learning of his/her classmates as well. The third level the student would need to understand is that of the “managerial” level or the effect it has on the school as it relates to data of tardies, possible drop-out rates, and funding that is provided based on attendance. The fourth and final factor that the student would need to understand is the “organizational” or in this scenario, the level that poor attendance can impact the community with higher possibility of crimes, as well as lower knowledge and skills of employees in the workforce.

### **Problem Statement**

A number of issues come from students being tardy to class. Not only is it a disruption to the teacher who is providing instruction and the other students who are in



the class to learn, but being tardy may result in a downward spiral of possible problems for the student themselves. Past research states that students, who are tardy to class, prevent themselves the opportunity to learn. This can then result in the student falling behind in the class. Falling behind in class can begin to make the student feel as if he/she is not capable enough to understand the instruction that is being provided. When students begin to feel like a failure, the probability of skipping the class altogether becomes higher which can then lead to dropping out of school completely. When students drop out of school, the likelihood of finding a job that is sufficient in supporting their needs to live becomes more difficult. This could then result in students turning to stealing to make ends meet. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore a newly implemented tardy policy in a middle school from a large district in the Midwest as it relates to student attendance. If success was seen with this tardy policy in one school, the researcher hoped it could help other schools improve their attendance rates as well.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question is, “How does the newly implemented tardy policy impact student attendance?”

The sub-questions revolving around these findings are:

1. “Based on tardies by semester, was there a significant difference in student attendance from 2012-13 to 2013-14?”
2. “How do teachers’ perceive the new tardy policy post implementation?”

In order to answer these questions, the researcher first looked at the schools data as it relates to student attendance. From this data, the researcher posed questions to a group of selected teachers from that same school to get their perception of the new policy. To

complete this research study, the researcher then identified any categories and participant opinions that had a similar theme. This was done with the use of coding the findings.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Absenteeism.** Absenteeism is when a student is not present in school for any reason during any part of the school day (Good, 1973).

**Academics.** The course of study that students take during their school career is considered their academics (Good, 1973).

**Core class.** A core class is the main body of knowledge that all students are expected to learn. The core academic subjects are required by all students to complete in order to be eligible for grade promotion or graduation. Core classes usually are math, science, history, and English (School Wise Press, 2011).

**Elective class.** An elective class is typically a course that fall outside of the main core academic subject areas. Electives may reflect a teen's interests, introduce or improve skills, or be directly related to a future career. Students are required to take an allotted number of elective courses in order to graduate, along with the specified core classes that are set by the state and district.

**Extrinsic Motivation.** Extrinsic motivation occurs when the motivation to perform a behavior or engage in an activity is done in order to earn a reward or avoid a punishment (Cherry, 2015). For the purpose of this study, students are extrinsically motivated to arrive to class on time so they do not earn a consequence for being tardy.

**Focus group.** A focus group is a way to collect shared understanding and specific views from several individuals. The interview process for a focus group is a way

to collect data by the researcher asking a small number of questions to elicit responses from all individuals in the group (Creswell, 2012).

**Home attendance area.** In this study, the home attendance area, also known as the neighborhood school, is the closest school to a student's home address. The transportation department of this school district is designated to create the area borders for this process.

**Intrinsic Motivation.** Intrinsic motivation involves engaging in a behavior because it is personally rewarding; essentially, performing an activity for its own sake rather than the desire for some external reward (Cherry, 2015). For the purpose of this study, students are intrinsically motivated to be in class on time because they enjoy learning about the specific subject that is being taught.

**Instructional learning.** Instructional learning takes place when teachers use all approaches to actively engage students in learning. Teachers use strategies as they work to meet specific learning objectives. The use of instructional strategies by teachers meets the learning styles and developmental needs of all students (Meador, 2015).

**Leadership team.** For the purpose of this research project, the leadership team is the administration of the building. In this district, the administration includes the principal, assistant principals, and deans of students. This administrative staff is the team of people that will hand out the consequences for poor student behavior.

**Milestone.** A milestone is a marker to indicate an important event. In this district, attendance milestones are set-up at certain intervals in the students' absences to inform parents of poor attendance as well as specific points when interventions will take place.

**Paradigm shift.** A paradigm shift is the change of a basic assumptions within the rule of what is already perceived as the normal or correct way (Pinkerton, 2012). In this study, the paradigm shift that will be taking place is that of a new tardy policy. It will change the way that students, staff, parents, and all others who are involved in this school will understand what the new structure for accounting for student attendance will be.

**Policy.** A policy is a principle of action that has been adopted or proposed by an organization or individual (*Oxford Dictionaries*, 2015). The tardy policy in this study is the rules for attendance that all pertinent parties are expected to adhere by.

**Preventative measures.** Preventative measures for correcting misbehaviors are averting problems before they occur. Preventative measures that are used during this study will be the use of informing students, staff, and family of the expectation of the new tardy policy. It will provide staff with professional development for how the new policy will work. It will also provide to stakeholders with information as to why student attendance is important to the success of students' education (Kyle & Rogien, 2004).

**Punitive measures.** To take punitive measures is to inflict punishment. Punitive measures for this study would be to give a consequence to students who skip school or are tardy to class (Kyle & Rogien, 2004).

**Tardy.** A tardy is when a student misses school for part of the day. That could include missing school due to arriving late at the beginning of the school day or arriving late to any class throughout the school day (Farrar, 2010).

**Truancy.** Truancy can mean a deliberate absence from school by the student without the knowledge or consent of the parent or when the student is absent from school

with no reasonable or acceptable excuse given (Atkinson, 2005; Farrar, 2010; Good, 1973).

**Truant.** When a student is absent from school without the knowledge and consent of his or her parents/guardian, the student would be considered truant (Good, 1973).

### **Assumptions**

The first assumption at play in this study was that the leadership team of this school provided thorough professional development on the implementation of this tardy policy. The researcher assumed that data was provided to the staff of the current tardy standings of students in that school. Furthermore, the researcher assumed that an explanation was given to the staff identifying reasons for changing the tardy policy, as well as identifying the goal hoped for through the implementation of the new policy. The assumption made about the professional development on this topic is a standard practice in this school.

The second assumption was that all teachers who were interviewed in the focus group were certified educators according to the state regulations that are required. All staff had also received a teaching certificate from an accredited school of higher education in their specified area of teaching.

A third assumption the researcher made was that both the teaching staff and leadership team complied with the procedures of the newly implemented tardy policy. It was assumed that the teachers followed protocol for reporting tardies. The researcher also assumed that the leadership team followed protocol for giving consequences to students who were tardy.

The final assumption of the researcher was of honesty from the focus group of selected teachers. The researcher assumed that the selected teachers did not feel pressured from outside sources to participate in the research or that any outside sources swayed their opinions of the tardy policy.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The researcher identified limitations of this study so that potential weaknesses or problems would be visible from the beginning (Creswell, 2012). A limitation that could not be controlled in the research is that of the maturing behavior of the students from their 7th grade to 8th grade year. This study will not conclude whether tardiness and absenteeism generally escalate between 7th and 8th grade. Students who left after their 7th grade year in 2011-2012 or new students who enrolled into the 8th grade class in the 2012-2013 school year also could not be controlled. In this study, there was a change of leadership in the building, with a new principal and assistant principal being hired. In the 2011-2012 school year, the building principal left and the new principal for the 2012-2013 implemented the new tardy policy. This also created the possibility that a different type or style of giving consequences to students was implemented with the hire of a new principal, which could result in a change of behavior for students. A limitation of questioning teachers about their perceptions would be hard to conclude if these results will represent schools elsewhere. Also, the researcher's interpretation of the data collected could impact the information that is acquired. In qualitative studies, there is always a possibility of observer bias and the effect that it may have on the assessment of what the data means (McLeod, 2008). Finally, testing was done only pre and post implementation year of the new tardy policy, and no other years were studied.

**Delimitations**

The following delimitations were selected by the researcher in order to avoid perceptions that could be affected by inconsistent data. These delimitations were selected to deliberately define the study. The student population that was selected was that of 7th graders in 2011-2012 that became 8th graders in 2012-2013. This selection was made for the purpose of having a similar group of students from one year to the next. A second delimitation was the selection of the six teachers that were interviewed. Their selection was based on principal choice, subject content that they teach, and their employment pre and post tardy policy.

**Significance of the Study**

While there is a vast array of studies for students who are truant to school and the impact that this can create for the students, there is relatively little research investigating the outcomes of interventions that address chronic levels of students who are tardy to class (Tyre, Feuerborn, & Pierce, 2011). Furthermore, the exploration of teachers' perceptions on student tardies and interventions are virtually nonexistent. This study was to find the outcome of the implemented tardy policy and if the interventions set in place, improve, remain the same, or increase student attendance. The researcher wanted to explore if the new tardy policy provided a climate in the school that encouraged students to want to arrive to class on time.

This study also was a way to give voice to the staff that deals one on one with the chronic behaviors of students who arrive late to class. This study allowed the teachers to share their perceptions on the outcome of the new tardy policy. This feedback could then be used as a way to evaluate the policy and make any improvements that are needed.

## **Outline of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to study the efficacy of a newly implemented tardy policy at a middle school in a large school district in the Midwest. This, in turn, impacts not only the success rate of the students, but prevents disrupting the teaching of the instructor and the learning of the other students. Chapter Two will discuss teacher perceptions on the importance of student attendance in class and possible reasons as to why tardies take place as well as ways to improve student attendance to school and arrival to classes will be discussed. This chapter will go on to give details on three levels of successful interventions which include reasons that students are tardy, implementation of a tardy policy, and interventions. Finally in this chapter, the layout of the new policy will be explained. In Chapter Three, is an in-depth description of the methodology used for completing this study will be provided. Chapter Four will discuss the results of the quantitative data from the collected data from the school district, while Chapter Five will go over the findings of the qualitative data from the teacher focus group and researchers' field study. Chapter Six will be summary of the discussion and conclusion of the paper.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

This review of literature is a study of journal articles, studies, and professional literature to address the implementation of a new tardy policy into a school setting, the impact it has on students, and the teacher perceptions of its outcomes. The first segment of this chapter will include current studies of teacher perceptions on student attendance. The next segment will discuss three levels to a successful intervention. These levels include reasons why students are tardy, implementation of a tardy policy, and possible interventions. The final segment of this chapter will discuss the expectations and policies of the specific school district that the researcher is studying. It will also explain the school's procedure for attendance both pre and post implementation of the tardy policy.

### **Impact of Tardies in School**

Complying with instructional routines is difficult when students arrive tardy to class. Students miss out on crucial instructional information when they enter a classroom late. According to Harry and Rosemary Wong (2009), teachers should have students actively learning the minute they sit down. While the students do their starter activity, the teacher has time to take attendance. This makes it convenient for a teacher to know who is coming to class tardy. No time is wasted in an effectively-managed classroom.

Starter activities, also known as bell work, can include reviewing previous lessons, an assessment of past knowledge, pre-test for lessons to be learned, or exercises that will help prepare for the lesson that will be taught that day. When classes are set up with instruction being taught as soon as the bell rings, students who are tardy fall behind. They miss out on pertinent information that may be needed for review or future lessons.

Also depending on the amount of time that the student is tardy, the daily lesson could also be missed. Since this lesson is taught at the beginning of class and practice time is given at the end, the part that students would miss if they arrive tardy is that of learning (Suttor, 2010).

When information is missed due to excess tardies, it is hard for students to keep up with their classmates. Not only does tardiness impact the student who is tardy, it also impacts the learning of other students and instructional time provided by the teacher. Therefore, another problem with tardies is when a student walks into class late; he or she interrupts the instruction of the teacher. The teacher has to request the tardy pass from the student. If there is a pass, the teacher has to document the time at which the student walked into class. If there is no pass, the teacher then must inquire where the student was and decide if the student needs to return for a pass. This process creates a great deal of classroom disruption and missed instruction time for students.

Once the tardy student is in the classroom, the teacher must either re-teach the portion of the lesson the tardy student missed, or must take time out of providing extra help and support from students who have questions during practice time. Additionally, as Zeiger (2014) noted, if teachers were to tell tardy students to come in after school to catch up on what they missed, the tardy students would be taking time out of teacher plan and preparation time. Even with laws put in place and issues that tardies can cause to the education of students, schools still struggle with the lack of urgency that some students have in arriving to class on time.

### **Teacher Perceptions on Student Attendance**

As stated previously, little research exists regarding teacher perceptions on student attendance. Research that is often used for teacher perception concludes that students cannot learn if they are not in class; therefore effective teachers want their students to have perfect attendance so that teachers can help them learn. Research specific to teacher perception on the implementation of any sort of attendance policy or plan had even fewer results.

Research done by Malik, Ladhani, and Bhamani (2009) found that some teachers in Pakistan felt the first five to ten minutes of class were useless because students did not come on time. Teachers found it inconvenient as the momentum of class does not remain smooth and consistent when students arrive sporadically to class. Teachers also felt distracted from their normal pace of teaching as well as feeling that tardy students hinder the teacher's time management during the class period. According to this research, teachers' response to student tardies varied. A few teachers would ignore late students, while other teachers would send students back to where they came from, and still others would give students consequences for their late behavior.

Specific research to teacher perceptions related to an implemented attendance incentive intervention is found in a study that surveyed 21 elementary teachers. (Cox, 2006) The classroom attendance incentive rewarded the entire class if all students were present an allotted number of school days. Based on the survey question, "Did classroom incentives help improve attendance rates?" teachers' response showed very little improvement. Teachers said that students who were chronic about not attending made the achievement of a class reward very difficult. For primary grades, teachers felt tardies were more of an issue with parent follow-through, than that of the students refusing to be

to school on-time. Once students reached 5th grade, students had very little interest in classroom reward. Cox (2006) also found that teachers felt that there was little to some awareness of on-time attendance raised among students. While teachers did see some peer encouragement and self improvement, because of delayed reinforcement and rare achievement, the award meant there was little daily awareness about attendance as a result of this implemented incentive.

Still, while there is not a lot of specific research on teacher perception of student attendance or implemented tardy policies or programs, there is a vast amount of research about reasons tardies exist, ways to implement tardy policies, and interventions to prevent students from being tardy to class.

### **Three Levels to a Successful Intervention**

There are three levels to understanding tardiness and improving student attendance in school and arrival to classes. The three levels include reasons that students are tardy, implementation of a tardy policy, and interventions (Atkinson, 2005).

**First level - Reasons.** Understanding reasons for students' tardies to school is an essential first step to solving the school tardy problem. Some of the more common reasons students give for being tardy include wanting to enjoy the camaraderie of friends, lacking interest in classroom content, and facing few-if any-immediate, meaningful consequences for their tardies.

To focus on the factors of tardies, whether during the school day or at the beginning of school, research often looks at three factors: school, student, and family. A fourth category, economic influences, is also discussed when studies address school absences; but, for the purpose of this study, economic influences will not be addressed.

When school officials understand the reasons students arrive late to class, they can appropriately and effectively address the problem (Blumenthal, 2008; Railsback, 2004).

***School factors.*** Several researchers identified school factors that include inconsistencies with the expectations of administration, teachers, and culture of the school as a cause for students being tardy to class.

Research by Blumenthal (2008), Byrne (1981), Cole (2011), Railsback (2004), and Teasley (2004) all show that a common school factor of students tardies is inconsistent policies. This inconsistency may be within the administrative team and the consequences or lack thereof for students who are tardy to class. Inconsistency may also be in the classroom, but the lack of administrative leadership to address the situation of not correctly following the attendance policy can also be of concern for student tardies. Cole (2011) also states that low administration expectation for students to arrive to class on time only feeds the students' habit of arriving tardy to class. Teasley's (2004) research shows that another low administrative expectation is hiring uncertified teachers to teach the youth. Some uncertified teachers have a lack of knowledge and training for good instruction for the classroom, which leads to students being bored and not interested in class. The California Department of Education (CDE, 2000) stated that frequent school suspensions can cause students to feel unfavorable and fall behind in school, so this lack of positive thought towards education makes students less likely to care about attending class on time. Lack of caring by students will again be discussed when addressing the student factors behind why tardies take place.

Other school factors that contribute to student tardies occur in the classroom. Research of Blumenthal (2008), Cole (2011), and Teasley (2004) shows that a difference

in teaching and learning style between the student and teacher can affect students' motivation to attend class. Teasley (2004) and Cole (2011) identified poor student-teacher relations and teacher expectations as factors of student tardies to class. Teasley (2004) also said that a deterrent for some students' drive to be to class on time was due to not feeling supported by the teacher. His research continues to say that when teachers had high absenteeism rates and provided unchallenging class work/homework assignment, students perceived that the teacher didn't believe the class was important and the students then believed it was acceptable that they also could view the class as unimportant.

The final school factor that influences tardies is school culture. Blumenthal (2008), Cole (2011), Railsback (2004), and Teasley (2004) all found that a low sensitivity of the school staff to diversity issues of the students and their families had an effect on students and parents to perceive schooling as unimportant. A lack of concern for the culture of the families may also create resistance when wanting to build a relationship of support between the school and family. Cole (2011) found that in order to better communicate with families, it is important to have interpreters who can speak with all families as a way to intervene when students have been arriving late to class. Blumenthal (2008), Cole (2011), and Teasley (2004) also found that poor interaction between parents and school personnel leads to higher number of tardies to class. Poor interaction can be seen as a result of inconsistency in the way schools contact parents when students are tardy to class. For example, some teachers and administrators are consistent with contacting the parents each and every time, while others may be less apt to make contact when the student arrives late to school. Byrne's (1981) research shows that in some cases

a too restrictive environment can cause a student to use arriving to class as a way to lash out in behavior so that the student is removed from the entire class as a disciplinary action. Finally, Blumenthal (2008) found that school safety issues can sometimes cause students to arrive tardy to class. For example, students who do not feel safe to walk the hall during passing periods may tend to arrive after the bell rings so they are not bullied by other students that they may pass by.

***Student factors.*** The work of Atkinson (2005), Blumenthal (2008), Cole (2011), Railsback (2004), and Teasley (2004) also identified several student factors that were tied to high rates of student tardiness. In fact, Atkinson (2005), Blumenthal (2008), and Teasley (2004) found that students with tardy issues were often avoiding class, could not keep up with school work, or were failing. As might be expected, students who had high rates of tardiness were less likely to view school as favorable, felt inferior academically, and were less likely to feel socially competent in class (Blumenthal, 2008; Railsback, 2004). Tardiness, according to Blumenthal (2008) and Atkinson's (2005) research became a proponent to students who had behavior problems, emotional function disorders, and who had phobias. Atkinson (2005), Blumenthal (2008), Cole (2011), and Teasley (2004) cited a lack of understanding attendance laws, and student engagement in sexual activity, alcohol and drug use, violence, daytime vandalism, burglary, and other forms of delinquency as behaviors that had a strong correlation to high tardy rates. In addition, Atkinson (2005), Cole (2011) and Teasley (2004) reported that students with high tardy rates often viewed classes as boring, irrelevant, and a waste of time, as well as the student not having a positive relationship with other students. In addition, Atkinson (2005) also reported that students who are often tardy did not have a positive relationship

with their teacher, sometimes did not feel safe at school, or found classes not challenging enough.

***Family factors.*** Family factors identified by researchers that may contribute to a high tardy rate by students can range from differing cultural values to conflict and turmoil in the home. In a booklet produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory that addresses current educational concerns and issues, Railsback (2004) identified six family factors that contribute to tardy and attendance problems. He found that families that provided a lack of supervision, had inconsistent or lax discipline, had a lack of knowledge regarding the laws of attendance, or had different attitudes about education, often had children who had high tardy rates. High tardy rates were also found in students whose families were in conflict or who were dealing with drug and alcohol abuse.

Cole (2011) also found a connection between lack of supervision at home and a high tardy rate at school. Other areas of commonality in Cole (2011) and Railsback (2004) included a correlation between drug and alcohol abuse at home and tardies, and a parallel between high student tardies and a lack of knowledge regarding the laws of attendance and differing attitudes toward education. Additionally, Cole (2011) identified homelessness, turmoil and neglect in the home, and a struggle with basic necessities including transportation as factors that contributed to high rates of tardiness and absenteeism. Blumenthal's (2008) findings were consistent with the findings of Cole (2011) and Railsback (2004). Blumenthal (2008) also found that a lack of supervision and drug/alcohol abuse correlated to high student tardies, as did a lack of knowledge regarding the laws of attendance and differing attitudes toward education.



**Second level – Implementation.** The second level of successful interventions are strategies for implementing a tardy policy and for making arriving to class on time an important expectation of all staff and students in the school.

High school principal Robert Rood (1989) provides some points for administrators to consider as they develop expectations for school-wide tardy policies. Rood (1989) suggests that staff first identify and counsel students with chronic absenteeism. Next, Rood (1989) suggests that staff make an effort to contact home when students are absent. When evaluating the current policy, Rood (1989) suggests the consistency of the enforcement of the attendance policy by administrators and teachers should be examined. He also states that the effectiveness and revisions that had been implemented to the current policy should be evaluated. Input should be taken from all parties involved including teachers, administrators, administrative staff, counselors, parents, and students. Rood's (1989) research states that everyone needs the chance to voice concerns and understand the policies. Principals should also take into account whether good attendance is valued and rewarded in the school and classroom. Ways to solicit the opinions of those impacted by tardies would be to post and announce daily, weekly, and monthly attendance rates, as well as to host fairs and parties to celebrate excellent attendance. The final key proponent to making arriving to class on time important to students is to make sure that there is instructional incentive for students to be at school every day. Classes should be interesting and challenging enough for children to be motivated to attend school.

When implementing a new change in the school system, McIntyre (2012) recommends having everyone on board. Total staff buy-in ensures smooth

implementation of new policies. Unless the majority of the staff is committed to the implementation and is in favor of supporting the change, the new system will fail. The support and consistent execution of policies by the staff creates an environment that demonstrates expectations to all who are involved, including students and parents. Inevitably, some staff and students will resist changes; the leadership team must implement new policies in a way to gain the most cooperation (McIntyre, 2012).

McIntyre (2012) states that there are five steps to insure that everyone gets “on the bus”. First, the staff needs to understand why changes are needed and the purpose of the changes. Second, the staff will need to have ownership of the change. Ownership can happen by giving staff a say in the implementation process. Staff can help with strategies and procedures when figuring out how to implement change. Third, it is crucial to gain support and let staff members know they are accountable for helping make this change effective, which will in turn alleviate any fear or anxiety about unclear expectations that the staff may have. At this point the leadership team will need to be accessible and nonjudgmental with questions that may occur. Fourth, celebrate even the smallest successes. The fifth and final step is to remain positive when implementing change, even when there is pushback and fear from those who may need a little nudge in the right direction. Change is difficult for most people, and it is the job of the leadership team to make the process as simple as possible by respecting the needs of the staff through understanding and listening to their resistance, setting clear expectations, and supporting them at every turn (Powell, n.d.).

White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr, and Ellis (2001) addressed a school-wide approach to managing problem behaviors. When implementing changes to the system,

similar steps were used. Four objectives drove the implementation of a new policy. First was to gain unified attitudes of teachers and school personnel in the same belief that a change would create a positive outcome. The next two steps were setting unified expectations and creating unified consequences. White and Algozzine (2001) found it was important that staff members who would be dealing directly with the changes made to the policy were provided the opportunity to give input and had the chance to offer advice. Finally, they created unified team roles that clearly described the responsibilities for all school personnel. With the new changes in place, the preliminary data on the study showed promising trends, such as reductions in office referrals.

By having the whole staff involved in making changes to policy, the school is able to present a united front to students and families. In the case study of a school in Fort Lee, N.J., former Principal Robert Byrne (1981) implemented an accountability theory to improve student attendance. This policy shifted the responsibility of the time, neglect, and mere lack of attention of classroom attendance from the institution, back to the students and parents. The revision of the policy stressed the importance of the program as

A unified effort, among all interested parties in the school system. Teachers were reminded that this was a policy undertaken at their request. Parents were advised of the importance of the attendance policy in terms of strengthening discipline and the school environment. The students were told the exact purpose of the program, the reasons for its enactment, and the limits and stages at which administrative inquiry would be made. (Byrne, 1981, p. 32)

***Create a cultural norm.*** A school's culture can be defined as the traditions, beliefs, policies, and norms within a school that can be shaped, enhanced, and maintained through the school's principal and teacher-leaders (Short & Greer, 1997). In Pocomoke City, MD, the principal focused on all students, not just offenders, when implementing a rewards system to boost attendance. Research shows that when creating tardy policies for schools, all involved—administration, staff, students, and parents—need to understand and accept the schools culture (VanSciver, 1986). Full student engagement in the process was considered essential by Principal Robert Byrne (1981). He concluded that a "...long-term solution in the case of attendance is one which permeates the entire educational program and environment of the school...invites and requires the full participation of the youngsters for whom they were planned and developed" (p. 33), when implementing the accountability theory for the elusive student.

The principal investigator for Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson (2004) found when implementing a program designed to increase graduation rates and increase student attendance, key features of the program include relationship building, routine monitoring of alterable indicators, individualized and timely interventions, long-term commitment, motivation and continuity regarding education, problem solving, and affiliation with school and learning.

When creating a cultural norm, students need to be informed of the attendance improvement program during orientation, in the handbook, and in the student newspaper (Armstead, 1980). Students need to have a clear understanding of the difference between excused and unexcused absences as well as a clear understanding of the consequences for excessive absences (Blumenthal, 2008; Railsback, 2004). Attendance policies must be

publicized and understood by all staff and students (Railsback, 2004). VanSciver (1986) found the schools that were successful in implementing the rewards system to boost attendance had teachers read a statement to their classes about the importance of maintaining perfect attendance during the first class period each morning. To help parents understand the expectations of the new attendance policy, the school sent each student's parents a letter outlining the same information.

To create a cultural norm for teachers, a school in Washington set expectations that included teaching and reinforcing behavioral expectations, which all staff were to follow. Interventions included active supervision of students in common areas during all transition periods and clear definition and explicit teaching of expectations for behavior during transition periods. By creating a cultural norm that all teachers followed to help with reducing chronic tardiness, the rates of tardiness declined and remained at lower levels for 17 months (Tyre, et al., 2011).

***Create a positive climate.*** While most often the lack of classroom attendance and participation is directed primarily towards students, researchers at the National Center for School Engagement are encouraging schools to ask themselves how they can provide a positive, welcoming, safe, academically challenging, and personalized environment within which students can succeed (Blumenthal, 2008).

Research shows that some students disconnect from classes because they feel lost or bored with the quality of the course. Focusing on improving the value of a course may help students be more apt to attend classes (Railsback, 2004; Teasley, 2004). The way teachers frame lessons can make a difference (Smith, 2004). By creating lessons that refer to previous teachings and connect the lesson to the students' lives and the real

world, students will become more successful in the classroom. Research reported by Cole (2011) on increasing student attendance stated that key features of the program included motivation and continuity regarding education, as well as affiliation with school and learning. This research also focused on teacher-student relationships as being another key factor to successful student engagement in the classroom.

By intensifying interpersonal relationships between students and teachers, students will feel safer and included in schools (Cole, 2011; Railsback, 2004; Teasley, 2004). Rick Smith (2004) found that students who do not feel a connection to an adult will eventually start acting out because they do not feel satisfied. When students are unsatisfied or feel uncared for, they feel indifferent about getting to class on time (California Department of Education, 2000; Cole, 2011; Railsback, 2004; Teasley, 2004).

Researcher Raymond Wlodkowski (as cited by Smith and Lambert, 2008) investigated a strategy called *Two-by-Ten*. With the strategy, the teachers focus on their most difficult students. For two minutes each day, ten days in a row, teachers have a personal conversation with the student about anything the student is interested in. Wlodkowski (as cited by Smith and Lambert, 2008) found an 85% improvement in that one student's behavior. In addition, he found that the behavior of all the other students in class improved.

***Include parents in plans to address tardy issues.*** Studies have demonstrated that individual factors related to truancy prevention work best when there is an alliance between parents and teachers. Much research shows that when implementing new tardy policies, involving families in all of the program planning and implementation helps to create a mutual trust which will help the families and schools work together to solve

problems. Family involvement also includes parent notification when students are truant or tardy and frequent home-school contact by teachers and administration (Blumenthal, 2008; Railsback, 2004; Teasley, 2004).

Schools can also educate parents regarding the requirements of school attendance by providing parent workshops or information meetings on the importance of the attendance policy and state laws. Schools can provide information to families about family and community involvement activities and connect parents to key school personnel to help with any questions or concerns as a way to keep the line of communication open (Blumenthal, 2008; Railsback, 2004; Teasley, 2004). Teasley (2004) also discusses the importance of providing information to families of diverse backgrounds in a way that is understood by them.

At Foreman High School in Chicago, IL, the principal included parents throughout the implementation of a new attendance program for his school. He began informing parents about the program in May. Before school started in the fall, he then passed out parent and student handbooks. Staff members scheduled parent conferences and made home visits to determine the causes of chronic absenteeism. Homeroom teachers made daily phone contacts to parents of students who had chronic absences. When students' behaviors persisted and interventions were put into place, parents were asked to meet with counselors and teachers to help collaborate on student success (Armstead, 1980). When implementing a rewards system for Pocomoke High School in Pocomoke City, MD, the principal explained the attendance improvement program to each parent at the beginning of the school year, outlining the attendance information. Midway through the school year the principal called the parents of every student who

hadn't been absent to congratulate them on their student's exemplary record (VanSciver, 1986).

***Monitoring and data driven.*** Schools have greater success when staff uses information to help clarify issues, identify alternative solutions to problems, and target resources more effectively. Research shows that the use of data to drive implementation of a tardy policy is crucial. Even after a tardy program has been implemented, the continued use of data-based decision making with respect to intervention planning and monitoring of outcomes is strongly suggested in order to make informed changes. Data-driven reflection is essential in the creating and revising of attendance policies and practices that affectively address chronic truancy, investigate underlying causes, and help staff respond with appropriate changes needed for a successful program (Blumenthal, 2008; Cole, 2011; Railsback, 2004; Tyre, et al., 2011).

When creating an attendance policy, a monitoring system should be established so data can be gathered which will be used to determine if the procedures are appropriate, if programs are being implemented, and if goals are being met (Armstead, 1980; Teasley, 2004).

**Third level – Interventions.** The third level of improving student tardies is interventions. An intervention is the act of inserting one thing between two others. Examples for interventions in this study could be the use of incentives and rewards, the delivery of sanctions for bad behavior, and thorough clarification of expectation and policies as a way to improve tardies. Often an intervention is intended to make things better.



***Incentives and rewards.*** According to research, using incentives or rewards to improve student attendance is not always successful. Meaningful incentives should have the goal of solving the problem of tardiness for long term or forever, and not just short term (Railsback, 2004). For some educators, it is a battle of what is the correct way to motivate students, extrinsically or intrinsically.

Smith (2004) reported that some educators believe that extrinsic rewards are temporary motivators that allow students to perform for the short term, without reaching the behaviors needed to create a habit or life-long skill. Students who are extrinsically motivated focus on what they will get out of the activity immediately, but over time become numb to the incentive behind the reward.

Peek (2009) reported that “Perfect Pals Program” was the most effective means for modifying student attendance at her school. Perfect Pals was an incentive program used for students who had perfect attendance with no tardies. These students earned lunch in the lobby, small treats, and had their picture on a bulletin board. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers from that school strongly agreed that incentives were what helped raise attendance in their school.

Barber and Kagey (1977) implemented a school-wide incentive program that entitled students to a monthly party depending on their attendance. This program raised student attendance 4% to 6% percent. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that rewarding elementary students for good attendance reduced chronic absenteeism.

Other research poses questions about if there are the long-term successes of policies that rely on rewards for motivating students (Railsback, 2004). Smith (2004) states, “When using rewards, I suggest that teachers be conscious of the potential long-

term limitations and pitfalls. Counterbalance these rewards, with a lot of genuine appreciation of students, as well as individual conversations geared toward fostering intrinsic motivation.” (p. 196). Smith (2004) states if genuine appreciation is given from teachers, a personal connection can then be created with students. Expressing appreciation to students sends a powerful message that students will tend to internalize. This appreciation will make the student feel as if he/she are a valued member of the class and his/her absence would be noticed by the teacher. Canter’s strategy for aggressive discipline focuses on positive recognition as a way to gain intrinsic motivation for students. They believe in using positive recognition to build self-esteem, encourage good behavior, and create a positive climate (as cited in Charles, 1999).

***Establishing sanctions for tardies.*** When implementing a tardy policy, research shows that consequences are important; however, the way consequences are utilized and in what severity are often a topic of discussion. Teasley (2004) believes there should be a careful balance between the use of authority and adhering to student needs. Students and parents must realize that there are real consequences for truancy; however, schools should address the unique needs of each child and consider developing initiatives to combat the root causes of truancy. The process that is better served is the use of preventive measures rather than punitive measures that do not address underlying concerns (Teasley, 2004).

The Civil Rights Projects (2000) states that highly punitive programs that place the problem of truancy on the individual have not curbed truancy rates. Zero tolerance policies have done more to alienate students from school than to improve teaching and learning. Research suggests that extremely punitive policies such as suspensions and

detentions don't have a positive impact on attendance, especially with minority students and students in poverty (Railsback, 2004).

Skiba & Knesting (2001) say the purpose of consequences should be to change behavior, not to punish. Skiba's (2001) research suggests that school staff reconsider the use of zero tolerance policies such as suspensions for truancy and instead consider less severe consequences such as community service or in-school detentions. In-school suspensions, where students are provided academic support and are kept engaged in school rather than sent home, are a better solution. The in-school suspension time can be used to provide more assistance to struggling students and can keep students up-to-date with coursework while they are out of class (Finlay, 2005; Railsback, 2004). Shannon and Bylsma suggest that "actively discharging students pushes students out the door" (Shannon & Bylsma, 2003).

### **Expectations and Policies**

Throughout the nation, school staffs discuss concerns about students arriving to class tardy. Policies are put into place, not only class wide, but school wide, in attempt to help prevent students from missing class time. Most tardy policies include consequences for students who arrive late in order to curb the behaviors of students from being late. Even with these attempts, students continue to be tardy to class and miss the education that their teachers are trying to provide.

In every school building, tardies can be defined differently. A tardy can even look different from class to class. Some teachers do not count students tardy if they are close to the door when the tardy bell rings, while other teachers will mark the students tardy if they are not in their seats with their materials on the desk, ready to learn.

According to Smith (2008), schools benefit from having a school-wide tardy policy that all staff members follow. Addressing students' tardies to class is important for three reasons: meeting seat-time requirements of state laws, getting important instructional information given to classes during the opening minutes of class, and ending the interruption of instruction for other students.

Each school district in every state is responsible for trying to address the problems of truancy in order to abide by state laws. According to this state's law, it is mandatory for a child who will reach 6 years of age prior to January of the current school year and has not reached 18 years of age, to enroll in a public, private, denominational, or parochial day school.

**District expectations.** To abide by the state law, this metropolitan school district has steps in place to insure that their students are receiving education that is freely given to them. If a student has missed a total of 20 days in a school year, administration in this school district is required to write a referral to the county attorney stating what attempts were made by the district to help the families abide by the state statute. Prior to a student reaching 20 absences, school administrators and counselors make multiple contacts by way of letters, phone conferences, student contacts, and parent meetings in an attempt to reach out to families that may need support. Social workers and other district employees often become involved with families to help locate outside resources including family counseling, daycare, mentoring, family support staff, or transportation in order to achieve student's attendance in school. While there are a variety of support systems in place to help families get students to school, what is being done once the students arrive to the school and are responsible themselves to be in their class rooms on time? Student tardies

to class are a continuing problem in schools. The purpose of this study is to see the efficacy of a newly implemented school-wide tardy policy in a metropolitan middle school. It also will delve more deeply into the teachers' perceptions of student attendance and how it impacts the classroom.

This school district believes that regular attendance and participation in school are the foundation for engagement and successful graduation from high school. While the district believes that the responsibility of ensuring regular school attendance lies with the parent/guardian, the school has a variety of interventions in place to assist if needed. Multiple contacts are made by the staff at the building-level that involve teachers, school counselors, and building administrators. Every minute missed from the school day, whether tardy to school, late to class, leaving school early, skipping, etc., is added up until it is equal to one total day of absence. The first intervention takes place once students have accumulated a total of five days of absences. After a student has missed five days in a quarter, the school sends a letter home and the school counselor makes contact with the student or parent about attendance concerns. The next milestone occurs when a student has missed seven days in a semester. After seven days of absence, another letter is sent to the parents/guardians, as a notice of continued attendance concerns.

At 10 days of absences, the school's attendance team meets to try to identify the causes of the absences and to address these issues/concerns. They review prior interventions and focus on any additional support that may need to be provided. If the school's attempts prove unsuccessful and the student reaches 15 days of absence in the school year, a Student Personnel Assistant (SPA) will intervene. A meeting or phone

conference will be held with the parents to discuss the 15 days of absences. Depending on the nature of the concerns, the SPA may refer students and families to community agencies/resources that may be able to assist the families. The SPA will also provide a warning that continued violation of mandatory attendance requirements may be reported to the county attorney. If the SPA's attempts to improve attendance are unsuccessful and the student reaches 20 days of absences in a year, the SPA will submit a report of the violation of mandatory attendance statutes to the County Attorney, Juvenile Division.

In this district, absences are an accumulation of minutes missed during the school day. This means that tardies to class or at the beginning of the school day are just as important as missing a whole day of school. Students who report after class has started or leave school before the end of the school day will have the total minutes missed calculated and those minutes become a day of absence once the total minutes missed from class equal the length of one school day. So that students and their parents/guardians can comply with state attendance laws, it is crucial that families understand how attendance is calculated and deem attendance as an important part of the student's success.

**School Policy.** Principals are aware of the expectation that trickles down from leadership above them, not only by district requirements but state laws as well. Often an annual goal is set for the school to decrease the numbers of truant and tardy students to class each year. The goal of improved attendance that principals are expected to achieve is included along with many other obligations that are expected of them such as disciplined students, safe schools, and high instructional teaching. With all that principals are expected to complete, they are constantly looking for the most effective

and easy procedures in keeping abreast of student attendance. They often rely on the support of teachers to keep track of the tardies that are acquired from students in their own class. In some classes it is an easier task than that of others. For elementary teachers, with the same kids all day, it is easy to tell when “Little Sally” is gone. For middle school and high school teachers, it becomes a little more difficult with the possibility of up to eight different classes and 20 or more students per each class. Often times keeping track of every student can become a challenge.

***Pre-tardy policy.*** To abide by District Policy and State Laws, the school used for this study previously had each teacher keep track of tardies for all of their students in each individual classroom. The teachers were responsible for documenting the time that each student came tardy to class. They were then responsible for giving consequences to any student who reached five tardies with an after-school detention with that teacher. At 10 tardies, the teachers would write a referral to the office for administration to intervene. These documentation procedures took a lot of teachers’ instructional time. Because tardies were recorded by individual teachers for individual classes only, students who were in eight classes could accumulate nine tardies in each class. The ninth tardy would be received if the student came back from lunch tardy, due to the lunch being placed in the middle of a class period. Students could have accumulated 45 tardies before they would be sent to office on a referral. This format put a lot of responsibility on the teachers while also expecting them to teach their class. As a result, it was felt by staff that the students were taking advantage of the system.

Administration felt it was difficult to stay consistent with the consequences that were given for student tardies. Sometimes teachers would decide that the instruction they

were providing was more important than taking time out of their class to worry about tardy students. Some teachers would choose not to log or give consequences to students who arrived tardy to class. Administration felt that the lack of consistency took place not only in the classroom, but also caused inconsistency throughout the entire school building.

Due to these inconsistencies, students were heard saying that it did not matter if they were on time or not because they still had quite a few tardies left before an office referral would be written. Students also knew that sometimes they could get away with tardies because it was easier for the teacher to just let them into the classroom without even worrying about the tardies. The lack of consistency and a lack of consequences left the hallways of this school full of students after the bell rang. It was clear to the leadership team that the school's tardy policy needed to be changed.

***Post-tardy policy.*** The new tardy policy is an accumulation of every tardy to every class for each student. When the bell rings, the only expectation for teachers is to close their classroom doors. Any student who is not in the classroom is considered tardy and must report to the attendance window to get a pass into the class. An EXCEL spreadsheet with all of the students' names listed, keeps a running record of tardies for each student. This data allows for tardies to all classes be calculated as a whole instead of for each individual class. Using the total tardies for each student allows consequences to be given in a more prompt fashion and with more consistency. It also takes the responsibility off of the teachers, so they can stay focused on providing instruction for their classes.



***Tardies to any class.*** In this school, the first four tardies are considered a warning. The student is allowed to return to class with a pass from the attendance window. At five tardies, the student receives a lunch detention. Tardy six is again a warning. On the seventh tardy, the student will receive an after-school detention, which is two hours long and will meet with the designated staff member that will provide support to students and families to improve school attendance. This staff member collaborates with the youth, parents, school personnel, and other adults in the community to reduce barriers that are impacting attendance. This staff member maintains contact with the student and provides encouragement, goal setting, and an action plan to meet individual student needs. If a student should reach his or her eighth and ninth tardies, he or she will again receive warnings. At 10 tardies the student receives an office referral, which results in one day of in-school suspension (ISS). The consequence becomes more severe, as the number of tardies increases. If a student should reach 23 total tardies, a Student Assessment Team (SAT) will meet to create further interventions to help motivate the individual student to attend class on time (see Table 1).

***Tardies to the beginning of the school day.*** Along with focusing on tardies to every classroom, this school also addressed the reoccurring behavior of students who are consistently late at the start of the school day. The leadership team saw that sometimes a student who had several tardies were strictly late to the beginning of the school day, but arrived to every other class on time. The leadership team began keeping track of the repeated violators at milestones of 5, 7, 10, 15 and 20 tardies specific to the start of the school day. For students who reach 5 and 7 tardies to school, the consequence is a lunch detention and parent contact made by school counselor or attendance secretary. An

administrator is contacted once a student has reached 10 tardies to school, and the administrator will either assign a two hour after-school detention or five days of lunch detentions. The choice between the two options of consequences given is based on the after school needs for the student. For example, if the student cannot stay after school based on transportation needs, he or she will then receive the five days of lunch detention. At 15 tardies to school, the counselor and building principal are notified in order to set up a meeting with the family to discuss the concerns about the tardiness of the student to school. Once a student reaches 20 days of tardies to school, the administrator will hand out a consequence of one day of ISS (see Table 2).

### **Summary**

In conclusion, leadership in the schools and school districts feel the pressure of students having good attendance in schools. Not only do they understand the expectations of state laws, they also understand how crucial it is to the student's success to be in class in order to learn. Teachers also value the time that they have with their students and want to be able to provide substantial instruction for the students learning and in order to do so, they desire the students in class for the entire time period.

To best achieve the implementation of a new tardy policy, it is important to first understand some of the reasons why students arrive late to class. Administrators and teachers should focus on each individual case to find the specific reason as to why the student is not present, and determine whether the reason is related to school, student, or family issues. When school staff knows the reason behind the student's tardies, they will best know how to work towards finding a solution.

Once the decision has been made to implement a new policy to help improve student attendance: the implementation of the new program is vital. Following best practices in implementing change is the most promising way to see success. It is also important for key people to be a part of the decision making, which will help building a positive climate and new culture for the school. In the next chapter, the researcher will address the specifics of how this mixed methods study was framed to find the efficacy of the newly implemented tardy policy in this school.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This chapter includes a description of the methodology that guided the data collection and analysis of this study. Components of the research methodology include the research design, population and sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, limitations of the study, and the summary.

#### Overview

The purpose of the study was to establish teacher perceptions on student tardies and whether or not a newly implemented tardy policy in a large middle school in the Midwest helps to improve students' attendance and teaching instruction without interruptions. The analysis of routinely collected data on students' tardies drove discussion about the perceptions of teachers in a forum setting. The researchers' observations were collected and coded to categorize any recurring themes that occurred in the discussion.

Although there is a great deal of research on student tardies to class, little research addresses teachers' perceptions about the impact tardies have on classroom instruction. To address this void, a focus group was held with six teachers from this school to discuss their perceptions of the impact student attendance had on their classroom instruction. Teachers were asked how they feel tardies have impacted the delay on starting class and if the new tardy policy has helped with better providing instruction to students without interruptions. They were also asked if they saw any patterns with certain groups of students or time of day. Finally, teachers were asked to provide suggestions on what they think should be different with the new tardy policy or if

they feel it needs to be altered in any way. After completion of the focus group with teachers, the researcher will identify categories and themes based upon responses.

With more consistency in the building and consequences being given in a timely fashion, the goal of the new tardy policy was to decrease tardies to each class; therefore a decrease of tardies in the school building would take place as a whole. A decrease in student tardies will in return allow teachers to focus on bell-to-bell instruction without the interruptions of late students. It also gave students the opportunity for increased learning by being in the classroom for the entire duration when instruction is being provided.

### **Research Design**

This study is a mixed methods approach. Creswell (2012) states that “a mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and ‘mixing’ both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research problem” (p. 510). A quantitative study is raw data that is collected and turned into usable information by a mathematical approach, which helps lead to predictions. A qualitative study is to gain insight by a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning. This study collected quantitative and qualitative information sequentially in two phases, with one form of data collection following and informing the other. Creswell (2012) calls this an explanatory sequential mixed methods design which “consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results” (p. 543). The quantitative piece provides a general picture, where the qualitative piece then expands on the general picture.

The first part of the study was to analyze the data that is collected annually from the districts data system that shows the results of students’ attendance in this middle

school. It compared data collected from the first semester of the 2012-2013 school year when the tardy policy was not implemented to the data from the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year once the new tardy policy was put into place. Dependent *t*-test was employed to analyze aggregate data, with a two-tailed .05 alpha, to help control for Type 1 errors. This data analyzed 7th grade student attendance before implementation and the same students as 8th graders, one year after implementation to determine whether the attendance rates of students improved, declined, or stayed the same.

Using purposeful sampling, a focus group was used to discuss results of the *t*-test. The focus group informed the researcher on the perspective of teachers on the newly implemented tardy policy. The researcher led discussion in a focus group setting with three teachers that taught core classes, two teachers that taught elective classes, and one teacher that taught special education classes. From these discussions, the researcher observed the perceptions that these teachers have on student attendance and if there is any relation with the newly implemented tardy policy. It also addressed any reoccurring themes that the researcher observed in the discussion with the selected teachers. Based on the discussion, the researcher determined if teacher perceptions support or do not support the data configured by the *t*-test. The researcher collected this data by use of videotaping the conversation with the teachers and scribing the discussion. The researcher also kept a journal of personal thoughts during the discussion with the teachers. The researcher then used coding to see if similar themes occurred in the perceptions of the teachers. Coding is when the researcher examines their data to notice things that stand out such as behaviors, patterns, state of mind, etc. The researcher then uses a labeling system to note each major theme. Coding allows for a close study of data.

For this research study, categorize coding was utilized. Categorizing involves movement from seeking specific codes, to seeking general patterns within the codes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The researcher categorized the data by using the four principles discussed earlier in this paper: personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational (Covey, 1990).

After concluding the results, the researcher completed a member check with the teachers to verify that what was written was accurate according to the teachers' beliefs. This allows participants a voice in what the findings said and the opportunity to correct any possible misinterpretations on the part of the researcher. As a result of checking with the participants for feedback and verification of interpretation, the research is thought to be more credible (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question is, "How does the newly implemented tardy policy impact student attendance?"

The sub-questions revolving around these findings are:

1. "Based on tardies by semester, was there a significant difference in student attendance from 2012-13 to 2013-14?"
2. "How do teachers' perceive the new tardy policy post implementation?"

### **Subjects**

**District.** This school district serves over 50,000 students of various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds in preschool through 12th grade. There are a wide variety of excellent educational opportunities offered to students and the options for school choice are many. Special programs in the school district provide activities in

math, science, engineering, visual and performing arts, leadership, world languages, and international studies. Students can choose to attend any of the seven high schools in order to suit their interests and talents. Numerous business and civic community organizations work together with the school district to fulfill the district's mission of providing educational opportunities that enable students to achieve their highest potential.

**School.** The school that was used for this study has an instructional focus on technology, mathematics, engineering, and communication arts. The diverse student body reflects the surrounding community and city in which it is located. Approximately 160 of the 600 students come from outside the home attendance area to participate in a special magnet curriculum that centers on the above mentioned areas of study. This school offers student assistance in a variety of special education classes, English as a Second Language, and an extensive honors and gifted curriculum. Students have the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of academic, athletic, and co-curricular clubs and activities. This building houses only 7th and 8th grade classes.

**Student participants.** The number of students in 7th grade during the 2012-2013 school year was 288. This same class dropped to 282 students in the 8th grade class during the 2013-2014 school year. In the 2012-2013 school year the ethnicity of the school was 44% Black or African American students, 31% White students, 14% Hispanic students, 8% of two or more races, 2% Asian students and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, with 575 as the total number of students. In the 2013-2014 school year, the ethnic makeup of the school was 52% Black or African American students, 27% White students, 11% Hispanic students, 7% of two or more races, 2% Asian students and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, with 508 as the total number of students. In the



2012-2013 school year, 74.09% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. In the 2013-2014 school year, 77.56% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The mobility rate during the 2012-2013 school year was 20.17% and was 20.87% during the 2013-2014 school year.

Independent variables are something that can influence or affect the outcome of the research results. In this research some independent variables included whether students walk to school or received district transportation, whether students received free or reduced lunch or pay full price for their lunch, gender, attendance rates in the morning versus afternoon, and the same students that were in the 7th grade in 2012-2013 that moved into the 8th grade in 2013-2014 school year (Creswell, 2012).

**Faculty participants.** In the 2012-2013 school year there were 43.50 teachers at this school. Out of those teachers, 54.55% of the teaching staff had earned a masters degree or higher. This teaching staff included 98% teachers of White race/ethnicity and 2% of Black or African American decent. In the 2013-2014 school year there were 42 teachers at this school. Out of those teachers, 52.38% of the teaching staff had earned a masters degree or higher. This teaching staff included 100% of the teachers of White race/ethnicity. During both years, 47% of the staff taught core subjects, 38% of the staff taught elective courses, and 14% of the staff taught special education classes.

Six staff members were purposefully selected to participate in the study. The selection was made by the building principal based on two factors. First, each teacher had been employed in the building the year prior to the newly implemented tardy policy as well as taught the first year that the tardy policy was implemented. Second, teachers were selected based on the subject they taught from core, elective, and special education

classes to help examine the difference in perspective of student attendance and tardies in all subject areas. There were three teachers selected from core classes, two teachers from elective classes, and one special education teacher. The number of teachers selected aligns with the percentage of teachers in each subject area in the school. The selected teachers were asked to volunteer their time in participating in a focus group. The selected teachers had the option to turn down participation in the focus group. If a selected teacher would have chosen to not participate, another teacher would have been asked to take the vacant spot.

### **Data Collection**

**Analyzing tardies.** The first step was gathering routinely collected data from the school districts research office. This data was collected from the district data system. The student information system used by this district contains electronic records in which the district records, such as student enrollment information, student attendance, grades, and health issues. Parents and guardians can access the system to see the specific information for their own student which is held in the database. Data is entered once, immediately updated, and is available across the district. The researcher compared data from the first semester of the 2012-2013 school year when this tardy policy was not implemented, to that of the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year once the tardy policy had been implemented using a dependent *t*-test.

**Teacher focus group.** The next step of the study was a focus group of teachers' perceptions. According to Creswell (2012) a focus group is "the process of collecting data through an interview with a group of people, typically four to six. The researcher asks a small number of general questions and elicits responses from all individuals in the

group” (p. 215). Data collected in this phase was that of a focus group. Administration of the building selected six teachers from the school based on being a member of the teaching staff, both the school year prior to the tardy policy being implemented and the school year post implementation. The administration also purposefully selected three teachers that taught core classes, two teachers that taught elective classes and one teacher that taught special education. These selected teachers were asked by the researcher the following questions as it relates to their perception of the tardy policy:

1. Discuss your perceptions of the impact student attendance has in your classes.
2. How do you feel tardies have impacted the delay on starting class?
3. Do you see a pattern with certain groups of students or time of day?
4. Has the new tardy policy impacted providing instruction to students without interruptions?
5. Provide suggestions on what changes or modification, if any, you feel may be needed in order to see better results of success with the tardy policy.

Further questions and clarification took place by the researcher as a result of the discussion that happened among the teacher when asked the above questions. This helped the researcher gather further data on teachers’ perceptions about student attendance and the new tardy policy.

### **Data Analysis**

**School tardy information.** The data collected from the school base data system was analyzed by using a dependent *t*-test to analyze aggregate data, with a two-tailed .05 alpha, to help control for Type 1 errors. It compared students that were in the 7th grade first semester of the 2012-2013 school year when this tardy policy was not implemented,

to the same students moving into the 8th grade the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year once the tardy policy had been implemented. This data analyzed student attendance rates to determine whether the attendance rates of students improved, declined, or stayed the same after one year after implementation.

**Teacher focus groups.** The researcher conducted a focus group with the six teachers chosen by the principal that taught both prior to the tardy policy as well as after the tardy policy was implemented. These teachers were also selected on the class subject that they taught, with three teachers being core teachers, two teachers being elective teachers, and one teacher being a special education teacher. The purpose of this focus group was to address the teacher's feelings about the impact that tardies have on instruction and to find if the teachers believed that providing consistent and timely consequences for students' late arrival had an impact on student attendance. The focus group was videotaped and transcribed word for word. The six purposely selected teachers were asked guiding questions that provided a framework for discussion. The researcher kept a journal to identify any categories and participant opinions that had a similar theme. This was done with the use of coding the findings.

**Data safety.** No names were attached to the data that was collected by the district. It was stored in a safe place so that no tampering of the results could take place. For the focus group, the following procedures were used to protect the confidentiality of the conversation held by the teachers. During the focus group, the researcher videotaped the discussion and kept a journal of what was observed from the conversation in a notebook. The researcher then transcribed the conversation that was recorded during the focus group. During the data collection process, the researcher kept all information in a

secure location. Any computer hosting such files also had password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. The data was then destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

**Trustworthiness.** Qualitative researchers think in terms of trustworthiness when conducting a study that is structured in an interpretive style. Four factors were used when determining trustworthiness of research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bowen, 2005). The researcher insured that trustworthiness was present with this study by allowing the selected teachers the opportunity to refuse to participate, assuring teachers that the topic of study would be useful to others in the education field, providing specific details about how the data collected was revealed, and that the results were that of the teachers who were interviewed and not the opinions of the researcher.

**Credibility.** Credibility is the confidence that the researcher has in the findings of his data (Bowen, 2005). The researcher seeks to ensure that his/her study measures or tests what is actually intended. In this study, credibility was established through tactics to help ensure honesty in the participants, reiterative questioning, and confirmation from the participants about the discussion that was held during the focus group (Shenton, 2004). Ways to ensure honesty in the selected staff that was interviewed were to allow the each person who was asked to participate in the study the opportunity to refuse to participate in the project. Once a participant had agreed to take part in the focus group, the researcher obtained a consent form from the interviewee to stating his/her willingness to participate in the study. This ensured that the data collection involved only those who were genuinely willing to take part and offered their perceptions freely and honestly. When holding the forum, the use of probes to gain detailed data and reiterative questioning from previously raised matters by the researcher were used as a way to pull

out related data through rephrased questions. At the completion of the data collection, a member check with each of the teachers was held to confirm that their perceptions were accurately documented. This allowed the researcher and participants the opportunity to discuss possible flaws in the research format, ideas and interpretations of the researcher. The use of a member check of a focus group was a way to establish credibility. A member check was also used as a way to recognize the researchers' own biases and preferences (Shenton, 2004).

***Transferability.*** Transferability means that other researchers can apply the findings of this study to their own research (Bowen, 2005). It is the responsibility of the researcher to enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were fundamental to the research. It is then the responsibility of the person who chooses to use these results in a different context to judge how rational the transfer would be to his/her research. This study presents findings that could be useful to other research as it pertains to student attendance and how it relates to their success in the classroom with obtaining instruction.

***Dependability.*** Dependability refers to the stability of the findings over time and shows that if the research was repeated in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, similar results would be obtained. To show dependability in the research, the process of collecting data was reported in detail, so a future researcher could repeat the work to possibly gain similar results (Bowen, 2005; Shenton, 2004). To create dependability in this paper, the researcher identified both limitations and delimitations to the study, as well as information about the research behind the study. The researcher also presented in the written description of the paper specifics to the implemented tardy policy

and the guiding questions that were asked of the six selected teachers as well as the supplemental data collected.

***Confirmability.*** Confirmability is to ensure that the findings of the research are the result of the experiences and ideas of the staff that is interviewed, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Qualitative research tends to assume that the researcher brings their own perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the way that the researcher will confirm or corroborate with others to insure that the results are not of their own opinion. In this study, the researcher showed confirmability by the journaling and a member check with the selected teachers to confirm what they perceive about the new policy was documented correctly (Shenton, 2004).

### **Instrument**

**Researcher.** As the researcher, I am a 34 year old female doctoral student at the University of Nebraska in Omaha. I have been in education for 13 years, serving 3 years as an elementary classroom teacher; 4.5 years as a middle school classroom teacher; 2.5 years as a Dean of Students in a high school; and am currently in my third year supporting both a middle and high school as a Student Personnel Assistant, more recently known as a School Support Liaison.

Early in my career I found the importance of students being in class on time so that I could provide instruction needed for them to learn. I firmly believe that they cannot gain the knowledge needed for success if they are not in their classes learning. In my current role as a School Support Liaison, my position often relates to student attendance. I keep track of students' attendance and put interventions in place as an attempt to improve chronic tardies and absences. I noticed that when a student had

chronic absences for entire days, the obstruction of attending school could be that of school anxiety, other health issues, pregnancies, transportation needs in getting to school, family trips, or moving. Sometimes it was due to students refusing to attend school or parents not finding it a necessity for the students to attend. Sometimes older students were expected to stay home to take care of younger siblings that were sick while the parents went to work. In other situations, the students themselves would be expected to have a job in order to help provide financially for the family. Interventions for absences the entire day include parent and student meetings, referrals to outside organizations that work hand in hand with families, possible transportation support, or referrals to the county attorney. Interventions for students who are tardy also include the above listed, but I found that when a student is tardy to a class, it is often a lack of their own urgency to arrive on time. This is the driving force for this research, as a way to help intervene with students arriving late to class and motivate improvement with their attendance.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Data Results for Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

The purpose of this chapter is to report the data collected to see if there was an impact on attendance due to the implementation of a new tardy policy. This chapter first reports the results of the statistical analysis complete to answer the research question and the sub-question finding if there was significance in data post-implementation. The second part of this chapter then reports the data received after transcribing and coding the focus group discussion with teachers to gain their perceptions on student attendance and how it impacts their class. This chapter has the transcribed discussion during the focus group that will be able to answer the research question based on the sub-question based on teachers' perceptions post implementation.

#### **Overview of the Quantitative Results**

This part of the mixed method study is the quantitative piece, looking at statistical data. The study sample included only first semester of the 7th grade class during the pre-implementation to the same students as 8th graders during the first semester of the post-implementation school year. An independent *t*-test was employed to analyze aggregate data, with a two-tailed .05 alpha, to help control for Type 1 errors.

#### **Research Question #1**

The primary research question is, "How does the newly implemented tardy policy impact student attendance?" The sub-question revolving around the quantitative findings in this chapter is, "Based on tardies by semester, was there a significant difference in student attendance from 2012-13 to 2013-14?"

As seen in Table 3, the number of tardies from the 2012-13 year went up after the implementation of the tardy policy in 2013-14 school year even though enrollment went down.

### **Overview of the Qualitative Results**

This part of the mixed method study is the qualitative findings. Six staff members from this middle school were purposefully selected to participate in the study by participating in a focus group. The selection was made by the principal based on two factors. First, each teacher had been employed in the building the year prior to the newly implemented tardy policy as well as having taught the first year that the tardy policy was put in place. Second, teachers were selected based on whether they taught core, elective, and special education classes. This was to help examine the difference in perspective of student attendance and tardies in all subject areas. There were three teachers selected from core classes, two teachers from elective classes, and one special education teacher. The number of teachers selected aligned with the percentage of teachers in the subject area in the school.

### **Research Question #2**

The primary research question is, “How does the newly implemented tardy policy impact student attendance?” The sub-question revolving around the qualitative findings for this chapter is, “How do teachers’ perceive the new tardy policy post implementation?” The following questions will served as a guide.

**Question 1.** Discuss your perceptions of the impact student attendance has in your classes.

Teachers found that when students were not in class on time it was hard for them to get caught up and it became more work for the teachers to try to re-teach a lesson to one student when they missed the classroom instruction to the entire class. The Language Arts teacher felt that students in the middle school level, “are not very good about coming and taking ownership ... to find out what they are missing, so their grades go down rapidly.”

The Spanish teacher stated that in her content area, she struggled to come up with make-up work for students to complete when they came in late because “they don’t really have anything to fall back on...it’s not easy to do a book assignment because they don’t have that foundation...I find that to be a lot of extra work and difficult, because I want them to learn it at the level that everyone else did.” The Spanish teacher goes on to say that if the student is not in class, then it is a disadvantage to them as it is more difficult for them to stay caught up on assignments.

The Music/Technology teacher agreed with the Spanish teacher and went on to state, “...because they have not been there, they do not have the skills or the knowledge to even attempt the work, so either they just kind of throw themselves into the work just to get it done and then it is poor quality or, what I normally have are those students who just give up... they just get to that point of, I guess I would say, hopelessness. I see a lot of hopelessness with the students in attendance; they just get so far behind...”

**Question 2.** How do you feel tardies have impacted the delay on starting class?

Teachers stated much frustration to the delay of class and teaching students who arrived tardy. The Science teacher found it to be a huge challenge when teaching science labs by stating, “With them not actually being there to do the lab, then what am I

supposed to do? I don't even know how to go about doing that. And then ... with our special ed. kids, they're behind and just being in class is hard enough...I find it to be a huge challenge.”

The Music/Technology teacher agrees by discussing that sometimes it is more difficult when a student comes into class tardy to try to get them caught up in that very moment, than it would be if they were gone for the entire lesson and then schedule a time to teach that student the lesson.

Also agreeing was the Language Arts teacher that discussed the chronically late students and the impact it had with their learning. “...right now we are reading a novel and I have a student that hasn't been there... He can't do any of the make-up work because he hasn't read the book and I'm like ... 'you're going to have to take this book home and read it' and he's like 'don't even bother'... so, what do you do with those students? And how do you help them be successful and that's really frustrating because it's kind of at a point that sometimes there's nothing you can do if they are not going to try a little bit.”

When the researcher asked the Math teacher how tardy students impact her class, the response was, “I probably have the easiest subject for make-up work, because there are so many resources available ... but what it boils down to is nothing can replace that teachers instruction and that without teacher instruction no matter what subject, they're going to feel loss.”

When the researcher asked the teachers about their perceptions on the impact that tardies could affect the student in their high school and adult lives, the Math teacher again discussed the students mentality that if it is too hard, as in getting caught up on missing

work, then they are just “not going to make it up and I think that is going to set them up where they don’t know how to problem solve if they reach a point of frustration in their place of work or any problems they need to overcome where they’re not going to know how to overcome it or know how to ask for help or who to ask for help.”

The Language Arts teacher continues with, “And we worry because if they don’t seem to understand the importance of being here or being here on time, how do you teach them that? How are they going to get that in high school to pass high school and how are they going to do that at any job? You try to explain well ‘you can’t come late to a job’, the student responds with, ‘Well that’s different, I’m getting paid. I’ll come’. Well, if you haven’t practiced that skill and you try to explain to them that it is a skill, are they really going to have it? I don’t think so.”

“My biggest concern is when they get into high school,” continues the Special Education teacher, “they’re probably going to drop out because they’re not going to have the grades, they’re not going to have the credits. It’s the hopeless, ‘I’m never gonna be able to get caught up, and so I’ll just go get a job,’ but you don’t have an education, so you’re not going to get a job, and then it’s a whole snowball effect.”

**Question 3.** Do you see a pattern with certain groups of students or time of day?

Teachers stated that they often know the students who will be tardy to class early on in the school year, as it is the same kids over and over again. The Science teacher noted that, “generally the students that I find are not very strong education wise, that maybe don’t want to be there, so they have no drive to get there on time.” The Spanish teacher states that the student, “already know they’re failing or they’re going to fail if they are there, so why show-up?” The Special Education teacher states that 90% of her

students that arrive late are the Special Education students or the students that are in the transition program. In this school district, the transition program is designed to have students spend an allotted amount of time in one room that is more restrictive and prevents them from being in the mainstream of students, due to poor behaviors.

The Language Arts teacher also addressed another group of students that are often tardy due to the social aspect of passing period. These students are, “doing perfectly fine, but they have to be in the mix. They have to know everything that is going on in this building and who is fighting who and they have to spread their gossip around. They’re just too busy talking.” When the researcher asked for the teachers perceptions on these students and their future success, the focus group collectively agreed that these student’s would be fine. In fact, the Spanish teacher went as far to say, “Social, I don’t know. That could blossom into something beautiful.”

**Question 4.** Reviewing the data of tardies both pre and post implementation, the researcher wanted more information about the lunch block. The question of what block lunch was held and the Spanish teacher responded by stating that lunch pre implementation year fell on A5 & B6. The lunch block post implementation took place during A3 and B4. The research then asked if students had the possibility for being marked tardy twice during that block, once to the beginning of class and once after returning from lunch, or were they only marked tardy at the beginning of class? The Spanish teacher responded, “I take attendance within the first 10 minutes of class, regardless of what lunch they have. If students are excessively tardy from lunch, or do not have a valid pass when they return, I email their administrators. This has not been an (post-implementation), but (pre-implementation) I had a group of girls who were coaxing

a staff member in writing the passes every day. The issue was addressed with administration and this staff member.

**Question 5.** There is a huge change during the homeroom class. What changed to make the number of tardies change so drastically between each year?

The Spanish teacher stated that the year of implementation was also the first year where homeroom was implemented daily. Prior to that the school only met on a “need-be basis...maybe once a month.” Whenever the school had homeroom that year, they then implemented an adjusted bell schedule.

**Question 6.** Has the new tardy policy impacted providing instruction to students without interruptions?

Teachers felt that the beginning of the class seemed “more seamless,” in the words of the Spanish teacher. The teacher goes on to say, “the classroom is where you should be, not because it’s fun but because there is that structure. Once you walk in, you know exactly what you have to do and it’s something I don’t have to worry about. I know that they are already taken care of. I just mark it on my attendance and keep going. There isn’t that interruption.”

The Language Arts teacher agreed by saying, “yeah, because before this you would have to stop what you are doing, then you have to write a note, then you have to do this and you have to do that, you have to call home or write that referral. So they (administration) have taken quite a bit off our plate and so our classes can run smoother when those kids come in.”

The Spanish teacher added, “I feel like it could also de-escalate any tension too, because when a kids comes in and you start to ask, ‘where were you,’ ‘why were you

late?’ and they don’t want to talk about it anymore. They could just explode, where this way I don’t even have to ask. It’s like, ‘Alright, come on in’.”

**Question 7.** Provide suggestions on what changes or modification, if any, you feel may be needed in order to see better results of success with the tardy policy.

The Science teacher started first with, “I know that in our 7th grade hallway, it was kind of bad for a while. The administrators started noticing ... once they (the students) ... knew they were getting hall sweeps and they knew that the administrative was going to be there, and they saw the administrators and they were visible, it changed within a week. I think it got better.”

This sparked conversation between the teachers about the times that administration was not out in the hallway during the passing period and whether it was still considered a hall sweep. One teacher questioned if hall sweeps took place every period or just when the administration was there. The Spanish teacher stated, “I guess I think it should just be known...I just email (the administration). I email when that happens then ask ‘confirm?’ and then I’ll hear from them back ‘got it’ or ‘they are on the list.’

The Language Arts teacher added, “I think things just like that, a quick ‘hey here’s a heads up’ is just good communication.”

The Music/Technology teacher brought up history from the past about the previous way of keeping track of tardies before the implementation of the new tardy policy. “The student came in late, you assigned the tardy, you had 2 days to serve it, if it wasn’t served in 2 days you were supposed to call home work it out with the parent and then after that it was good luck getting it served and then you would write a referral, but



the referral would only be worked if you had made a call home and had taken all the steps. Well if you have 3 or 4 per classes, teachers would get inundated, so you would have teachers that would just be like ‘just get in here; I don’t care if you’re on time, just get in here.’ Now when we started the tardy sweeps that improved.” He stated that before the new tardy policy there would be 30 to 40 kids in the hallway, but with the new policy, “we may have 7.... prior to hall sweeps, even when we had visible teachers out there herding the kids, they still didn’t care. You know ‘so and so doesn’t give tardies so I don’t have to be on time,’ but now that we have hall sweeps and we close the doors, they want to be in the room.

When asking for final thoughts, the Music teacher stated, “I wish we could come out with a couple different consequences. I think we have a great policy and a great plan, but I think we fall down on our consequences.” The teachers then went into discussion about previous consequences that were given out to students for tardies prior to the new tardy policy. They spoke to overcrowding in the in-school suspension room in the school auditorium. They also spoke to the large number of students who would receive office detention that would seem to become “like a party...if you had a couple of boom boxes,” according to the Music/Technology teacher. During these office detentions, it would be so overwhelming, that the administration would only make the students stay for a short time and then release them prior to their allotted time due for the detention.

The final discussion was on more options for consequences with the chronic students who are always late. The Math teacher and Music/Technology teacher talked about a consequence that was more severe than a lunch detention for those students who are always tardy to class. The Math teacher suggested something after school. “...yeah,

after school or something that doesn't actually take them out of class. We fall down on the fact that we don't have enough stuff, meaning consequences for the students." The Music/Technology teacher went on to suggest some sort of consequence that would, "take them away from their friends, they hate that!"

### **Summary**

Chapter Four presents the results of the data based on the numerical statistics of tardies both pre- and post- implementation. It also presents the perceptions received from the focus group of teachers. In Chapter Six, the researcher will complete an Analysis of the data and discuss how the quantitative data helped stem discussion for the qualitative collection of teacher perception. It will then discuss the theoretical framework of Covey's Principle-Centered Leadership.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Analysis of Results

#### **How the Quantitative Data drove the Qualitative Discussion**

When the researcher began the focus group discussion, the main focus was to just gain teacher perceptions of student attendance in general and how it impacts their classes. The questions about attendance and tardies were very open ended, so teachers felt comfortable with answering freely and safely. There was no right or wrong answers, only their own perceptions.

The researcher then addressed specific questions that arose while analyzing the numerical data to get a better understanding of the changes that took place from the pre-implementation year to that of the post-implementation year. First was the discussion of when the lunch block took place during both years and if any changes were made to the tardy policy during that class block. Based on the numbers shown in Table 4, the number of tardies to the lunch block decreased from the pre-implementation year to the post-implementation year. While there was a considerable drop in tardies, there was not a significant difference in lunch block tardies from 2012-13 ( $M=267.5$ ,  $SD=33.23$ ) to 2013-14 ( $M=165.5$ ,  $SD=47.38$ ),  $t(2)=2.49$ ,  $p=.13$  (two-tailed).

Due to the student's lunch being moved to a different block during implementation year, the numbers of tardies from the 2012-13 school year increased in the A5 & B6 block in the 13-14 school year, as shown in Table 5.

Next, when looking at the raw number of tardies from post-implementation to pre-implementation, it appears that the number of tardies went up from 2012-13 to 2013-14, while the number of student decreased. By comparing both years, it seems that most

of the change is due to an increase as a result of a large jump in the Homeroom period. Based on information provided by the Spanish teacher, this took place due to the addition of Homeroom to every school day, instead of a need-be basis. If Homeroom was not included in the number of tardies per day, the numerical data would show that while the number of tardies decreased, there was no significant difference in tardies by period from 2012-13 ( $M=400.38$ ,  $SD=354.60$ ) to 2013-14 ( $M=359.88$ ,  $SD=285.29$ ),  $t(14)=1.76$ ,  $p=.80$  (two-tailed). See Table 6.

The final questions that were asked to the focus group were based on the perception of the teachers as to whether they felt the new tardy policy was successful or not. While numbers for the numerical data did not show a significant difference in the number of tardies, it was very evident that the teachers felt that the new tardy policy was a success. They expressed with enthusiasm, the amount of responsibility and work that it took off of them. They also spoke about the mass exodus of students in the hallway after the bell rang, that often it is the same few that you see over and over again. They also addressed the fact that with the new tardy policy, a better system is in place for keeping track of tardies, whereas before, teachers may not keep accurate records of every student tardy due to lack of time, multiple disruptions, and preventing less work for themselves.

### **Conclusions based on Theoretical Framework**

Covey (1990) states that character and skill development is related to natural laws and governing principles. By observing these laws and principles, old habits can change and interpersonal effectiveness can happen. Principle-centered leadership is possibly a way to help students view the risks of being tardy to class and how it can affect more than them just receiving a consequence. In this framework school staff can ask the following

questions, How can we empower students with confidence and competence to solve problems and seize opportunities – without being or fearing loose cannons; How can we encourage the desire in students to change and improve without creating more pain than gain; How can we help students be contributing members of the school culture on mutual respect; Where do we start, and how do we keep recharging the students batteries to maintain momentum for learning, growing, and improving (Covey, 1990, p. 31).

When implementing a new tardy policy, the goal is to motivate the students to be on time, therefore improving student attendance. The framework of principle-centered leadership was addressed often in the focus group discussion with teachers, without having even been referenced or previously discussed. In explaining their perceptions of the newly implemented tardy policy and the impact attendance have on their classes, the teachers discussed the four levels of Covey's Principle-centered leadership as it relates to the students.

First, the "personal" level was discussed with regards to how being tardy to class impacts the students own life. The Spanish teacher spoke to students who are tardy "don't have that foundation" of knowledge needed to stay caught up in class. The therefore "leaves the students feeling hopeless", as seen in the eyes of the Music/Technology teacher. The Science and Spanish teachers spoke to the students not being strong "education wise" therefore having no "drive" to even show-up., "they know they are failing or they're going to fail if they are there, so why show-up?" This then makes them fall even further behind and again presents that feeling of failure and more apt to be a high school dropout. The fear of the Math teacher for "kids that do make it to college. When they are finally reliable on themselves...they will drop out the freshman

year real quick because they are going to make the choice to sleep in because going to class is no longer mandatory.”

Next, level of Principle-Center Framework is the “interpersonal” level and how students tardiness to class affect the relationship he/she has with not only his/her teachers, but impact the learning of his/her classmates as well. Teachers addressed the impact it had on their teaching, when students arrived tardy to class. “When they come in the room it is not usually in the most productive manner,” states the Language Arts teacher. Therefore it is a disruption to the teacher’s instruction and the other students learning. The teachers also spoke to the impact it has on having to find ways to help the student get caught up with make-up work. It takes time away from teachers that they could be lesson planning for full group instruction, as well as can make it uneasy for teachers to come up with an alternative assignment that will provide the same material that the other students learned during the class period. The Music teacher stated that it “ramps up the school environment” or in the words of the Math teacher, “elevates the energy” of the school in a negative way. Teachers also stated that they themselves are not solely responsible for addressing tardy students. The administration team also picks up the responsibility of dealing with the truant students and this therefore impacts the administrations responsibilities.

The third level for students to understand would be that of the “managerial” level or the effect it has on the school as it relates to data of tardies, possible drop-out rates, and funding that is provided based on attendance. While not specifically addressing the funding and specific qualifications needed for state aid and state qualifications for student

attendance, teachers did address the concerns of failing grades, lack of credits, and probable drop-outs.

The fourth and final level is the “organizational” or in this scenario, the level that poor attendance can impact the community with higher possibility of crimes, as well as lower knowledge and skills of employees in the workforce. Again, while the teacher’s discussion did not speak specifically to these factors, the Language Arts teacher did talk about practicing the skill of arriving to class on time, as they will need to do the same for a job. The Math, Language Arts, and Spanish teachers all spoke to students who avoid confrontation when it comes to student tardies and the impact it has on student success. The Math teacher goes into specifics with, “is going to set them up where they don’t know how to problem solve if they reach a point of frustration in their place of work or any problems they need to overcome where they’re not going to know how to overcome it or know how to ask for help or who to ask.” The Music/Technology teacher states that, “I see their parents with a lot of the drama that happens in the hallway. I hear them say things and I’m like ‘you don’t know what that means and if you did you would be really offended, but they are emulating their parents because their parents don’t have filters...it’s learned.”

## **Summary**

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data and how the results of the quantitative data stemmed questions to gather data on the teacher’s perceptions in the qualitative study. It also aligns the theoretical framework to Covey’s Principle-centered leadership as a way to develop character and skill to change old habits so that interpersonal effectiveness can happen. In Chapter Six, the researcher will conclude

thoughts as to what the data implies, how to inform schools of the findings, and what next steps could be done.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

Chapter Six presents a summary of the findings related to the research purpose and reviewed literature. This chapter offers conclusions and implications of the study for practice, policy, and further research. This study is an analysis of data collected to examine the efficacy of a newly implemented tardy policy in a large school district in the Midwest. Using a mixed methods approach, quantitative data was gathered by the use of the districts data system. The researcher then analyzed the data and based on the findings, the researcher completed a qualitative approach by holding a focus group to delve more deeply into the teacher's perceptions of student attendance and how it impacts the classroom.

While much research has been done on the topic of school attendance of students, it continues to be a concern throughout the nation. Schools have tried several ways to improve student attendance with use of both positive incentives as well as consequences for students who continue to arrive late. With the vast amount of research done on student attendance, little research exists regarding teacher perceptions on student attendance. Research that is often used for teacher perception concludes that students cannot learn if they are not in class, therefore effective teachers want their students to have perfect attendance so that teachers can help them learn. Research specific to teacher perception on the implementation of any sort of attendance policy or plan had even fewer results. The primary research question is: How does the newly implemented tardy policy impact student attendance? The sub-questions revolving around these findings are:

1. Was there a significant difference in student attendance from first semester of 2012-13 to first semester of 2013-14?
  - a. Based on total tardies per semester?
  - b. Based on total tardies to each class?
2. How do teachers perceive the new tardy policy post implementation?
  - a. Discuss your perceptions of the impact student attendance has in your classes.
  - b. How do you feel tardies have impacted the delay on starting class?
  - c. Do you see a pattern with certain groups of students or time of day?
  - d. Has the new tardy policy impacted providing instruction to students without interruptions?
  - e. Provide suggestions on what changes or modification, if any, you feel may be needed in order to see better results of success with the tardy policy.

The first question asked if there was a difference in total number of tardies between the first semester of the 2012-13 school year to that of the 2013-14 school year. Based on total numbers of tardies alone, the data analysis led to the conclusion that is shown in Table 3, showing there is not a significant difference between pre and post implementation of the tardy policy, however, once viewing the data after the break down of each class separately, it shows that there was a huge discrepancy during Homeroom between both years, as it shows in Table 6. It also showed a difference between the classes when the student lunch took place, which can be seen in Table 4. While the quantitative data gave insight to changes in the tardy procedures, it did not show a significant difference in minimizing student tardies to class.

The second question used the analyzed data from the quantitative findings in question one, to then explore the perceptions teachers have about student attendance in their class and if these teachers felt that the newly implemented tardy policy was effective in the school. These teachers all agreed that in order for students to learn effectively, they have to be in class. They also agreed that the first few minutes of class are crucial for students to stay up to speed with the instruction that is being provided. While there seemed to be a consensus between all of the teachers that the newly implemented tardy policy had a positive influence on most kids, there were still the few frequent flyers that continue to remain tardy to class.

### **Conclusions Compared to Related Literature**

The major findings/themes that were described in the literature review in this study were compared to principle-centered leadership by Covey (1990). Covey (1990) states principle-centered leadership is a new way of thinking that helps resolve the classic dilemmas of modern living. In this case, the new way of thinking is the implementation of the new tardy policy to help encourage students to arrive to class on time, therefore gaining uninterrupted learning.

The goal with principle-centered leadership is to motivate the students to be on time, therefore improving student attendance. The framework of principle-centered leadership can also affect the implementation of a new tardy policy. First, the student should focus on the “personal” and how being tardy to class could impact his/her own lives. Next, the student should view the “interpersonal” level and how his/her tardiness to class could affect the relationship he/she has with not only with his/her teachers, but impact the learning of his/her classmates as well. The third level the student would need

to understand is that of the “managerial” level or the effect it has on the school as it relates to data of tardies, possible drop-out rates, and funding that is provided based on attendance. The fourth and final factor that the student would need to understand is the “organizational” or in this scenario, the level that poor attendance can impact the community with higher possibility of crimes, as well as lower knowledge and skills of employees in the workforce. (Covey, 1990)

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to receive a better understanding of teacher’s perceptions on student’s attendance, in correlation with a newly implemented tardy policy in their school. While the quantitative data did not show much improvement in the first semester of pre and post implementation, all of the teachers from the focus group concluded that there was improvement made as it pertained to student’s attendance. However, the results of this study suggest three possible implications and recommendations that should be considered when implementing an effective tardy policy.

1. Allow for a longer testing period with quantitative data. When speaking with teachers, they spoke to great success with the tardy possibly even though the quantitative data showed no significant data.
2. Strengthen consequences for students who are chronically tardy to class. Schools will need to create additional consequences that are consistent and timely that will continue to motivate students to arrive to class on time.

3. Implement a life skills piece into the steps of the tardy policy. This will help students gain responsibility on how their actions of tardiness affect not only themselves, but others around them.

**Implication One: Allow for a Longer Testing Period with Quantitative Data**

During the focus group discussion, it was very evident that teachers believed there was improvement in students being tardy to class with the new tardy policy even though the data showed that tardies pre-implementation to post-implementation did not show significant change. During the implementation year, teachers noticed that at the beginning of the year students continued the pattern of arriving tardy to class. It was not until students fully understood that consequences were consistently going to be given, that the tardies to class began to improve. Had data been received during the second semester of both years, there may have been a difference in the data collected.

**Implication Two: Strengthen Consequences that are Consistent and Timely for Students who are Chronically Tardy to Class**

The Music/Technology teacher felt that to improve the tardy policy even more, that more options are needed as consequences for students who are chronically late. He believed that in general, the system set-up impacted the majority of students, but something else was needed for the students who didn't care about lunch detentions. Both this teacher and the Math teacher discussed finding something that would not take kids out of class, but may be a more meaningful consequence that would impact students with continual tardies. When asked what that may look like, the math teacher did not have a solution.

It is important that each school takes a look at the practices that are in place for behavior conduct to assess if they are affective. The school will need to address any concerning areas in a way that best fits the culture of that school to help students be successful.

### **Implication Three: Implement a Life Skills Piece into the Steps of the Tardy Policy**

This again relates back to the Self-Centered Leadership of Covey (1990). For students to change their value of attending class, the need to understand the impact that tardies can have on not only their learning, but also that of his/her classmates, the instruction of the teacher, the culture of the school, and the affect that it has on the community. Schools should implement a life skills learning opportunity in one of the phases of the tardies. This could mean that there may be a visit to the Social Worker or Counselor for a discussion and homework assignment about the effects of coming to class tardy. School may also implement a short instructional lesson during a lunch detention that student would have to attend. To implement a learning opportunity that would help student realize the importance of the attendance in class, may help them to see attending class as a responsibility for success, instead of dread expectation.

### **Future Research**

This mixed methods study focused on the perceptions of middle school teachers in a large school district in the Midwest. As such, an obvious place for continuing research is in the realm of elementary and high school teachers. Further, studies of a similar nature in other regions of the country will provide a more general sense of the perceptions that teachers have towards student attendance. The difference between demographic population of private and public school teachers could also be interesting

areas of further research, as well as more information compared from rural and metropolitan school districts.

Another potential idea for further study would be to prolong the amount of time provided for collecting the quantitative data. Gathering data for an entire school year, both pre and post implementation may provide a clearer picture of any possible changes. An additional area for future research is in regards to different tardy policies used. This study was based on a tardy policy that focused on consistent and timely consequences for student tardies hence; the area of future research would be to find if teacher perceptions would change based on the tardy policy that is implemented in the school.

Consequently, as stated prior in this study, there is little research completed on teachers perceptions of student attendance. Further examination is warranted in any setting to better understand the perceptions that teachers have on student attendance and how it impacts the instruction that is being provided to the class.

## Display of Tables



Table 1

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*Number of Tardies to All Classes and the Consequences that are Provided*


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Tardies	Consequence
1-4	Warning
5	Lunch Detention
6	Warning
7	After School Detention Meeting with Designated Staff
8-9	Warning
10	ISS – 1 day
11	Warning
12	Meeting with Counselor
13	Warning
14	ISS – 2 days
15-17	Warning
18	Parent/Administration/Student Meeting
19-22	Warning
23	SAT Meeting

Table 2

---

*Number of Tardies to the Beginning of School and Consequences that are Provided*


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Tardies	Consequence
5	Lunch detention and parent contact
7	Lunch detention and parent contact
10	Admin referral for an after school detention or 5 days of lunch detentions
15	A meeting will be held with the administration, school counselor, parents, and student
20	ISS – 1 day

Table 3

*Total Tardies*

	2012-13	2013-14
Mean	288	265
Total	3249	3271

Table 4

*Lunch Block Attendance Patterns*

	2012-13	2013-14
Day A	244	199
Day B	291	132
Total	535	331

Table 5

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*Total Number of Tardies During the Lunch Period*


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	2012-13		2013-14
Block A3	244	Block A5	199
Block B4	291	Block B6	132

*Table 6**Tardies by period (Less Homeroom)*

	<i>2012-13</i>	<i>2013-14</i>
<i>Mean</i>	288	265
<i>Total</i>	3203	<i>Total</i> 2879

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## Appendix A

IRB #372-15-ex

**Notification Letter**

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska  
for the Requirements of the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Dear Fellow Educator,

I am a doctoral student from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I am conducting a study on teachers' perception of student attendance and the impact it has on classroom instruction. This research study is specific to the newly implemented policy that began during the 2013-2014 school year at XXXXX Middle School. The purpose of this research study is to establish teacher perceptions of the current tardy policy.

You have been selected to participate in this study, as you were employed with the school the year prior to the implementation as well as the year it was implemented. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to share in a focus group with 5 other colleagues. As the primary researcher, I will lead the group with questions that will hopefully bring meaningful conversation about your perceptions of student attendance.

The following procedures will be used to protect the confidentiality of your study records. During the focus group, I will videotape the discussion and journal what I observe from the conversation in a notebook. I will then transcribe the conversation that was recorded during the focus group. During the data collection process, I will keep all information in a secure location. Any computer hosting such files will also have password protection to prevent access by unauthorized users. I will then complete a member check with each of you to confirm that I have accurately documented your perceptions correctly. The data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The findings will be published but information will be presented in summary format and you will not be identified in any publications or presentations.

The focus group discussion will take place on (date and time to be determined) at XXXXX Middle School. The discussion will last no longer than hour and a half.

If you should have any questions please feel free to contact me by phone XXXXX or by email at XXXXX.

Thank you for your consideration and time,  
Tyree Sejkora

## Appendix B



**Personnel Research Consent Form**

The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska  
for the Requirements of the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Project Name: TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE OF A  
NEWLY IMPLEMENTED TARDY POLICY

Sponsoring Organization(s): The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska

Principal Researcher: Tyree Sejkora Telephone: XXXXX

Project Location(s): XXXXX Middle School

**Participant Rights and Assurances**

I have received a copy of the Notification Letter for the aforementioned research project approved by XXXXX Public Schools. Having read the application I am familiar with the purpose, methods, scope, and intent of the research project.

I understand that during the course of this project my responses will be kept strictly confidential and that none of the data released in this study will identify me by name or any other identifiable data, descriptions, or characterizations. Furthermore, I understand that I may discontinue my participation in this project at any time or refuse to respond to any questions to which I choose not to respond. I am a voluntary participant and have no liability or responsibility for the implementation, methodology, claims, substance, or outcomes resulting in any adverse consequences or disparate treatment due to that decision.

I fully understand that this research is being conducted for constructive educational purposes and that my signature gives my consent to voluntarily participate in this project.

In order to complete a member check of the data collected, please contact me via:

Phone at \_\_\_\_\_

Email at \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_