CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: A TARGETED APPROACH TO REDUCTION IN ABSENCES THROUGH INTERVENTIONS AND INCREASED AWARENESS

by

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(Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry)

ABSTRACT

This study explored the use of targeted interventions as a means for addressing chronic absenteeism at one elementary school in a suburb of the northern United States. Despite the impacts of a global pandemic, the case study members navigated the parameters under which the school system was placed and remained focused in their approach. Based on the guidance of John Hattie and his work on High Leverage Instructional Practices, the team selected and implemented four instructional practices identified by Hattie as having an above average effect size. The Researcher employed Kotter's Change Theory as the foundation upon which the members of the action research study were approached in regards to participation in the study.

By creating a sense of urgency, the members committed to take part in a series of perception surveys, team meetings, a professional learning community, parent outreach sessions, and implementation of instructional practices throughout the course of the ten-week case study. The Researcher conducted a single-case study analysis and utilized input from participating members to construct global themes centered around the research questions which guided the study. The study was informed by both qualitative and quantitative methods with the emergence of three global themes gleaned from perception feedback as well as quantitative data that

revealed trends in response to the interventions of the study. The Researcher noted the prevalence of the findings to those in local school and district level leadership, classroom teachers, and parents. Additionally, the Researcher recognized the limitations of the study, primarily the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the various levels of impact this had on the implementation of and outcomes of the study.

Keywords: chronic absenteeism, high-leverage instructional practices, student engagement

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2021

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May 2021

DEDICATION

To my parents who believed in me when I did not believe in myself. No matter the goal I set, you have remained unwavering in your encouragement, love and support. I could not imagine a more faithful support system. Please know that accomplishing my dreams serves the sole purpose of making you proud as that is the motivation that carries me through. Thank you for the endless number of phone calls and listening to me go on for hours about all things related or not. Words cannot express how much you mean to me. I appreciate and value you both and no matter what you say, “I love you more”.

To Peggy, not just a best friend but truly a member of our family. You too have persevered in the phone call department. Whether I call you in tears or have a ‘story to tell’, you always hear me out and ultimately leave me laughing. Thank you for supporting me through the highs and the lows. My appreciation for you and our friendship is immense and I look forward to our future adventures (now that I will have time)!

To my almighty God. It is your path that I walk and I could not be more thankful for the steps that you have chosen for me. Thank you for holding my hand. *For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you” (Isaiah 41:13).*

To my family, friends and colleagues who have been here every step of the way. Please know how much your encouragement and support have meant to me. You have all been an immeasurable blessing and I am forever grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am overwhelmed with gratitude for all who helped me carry out these ideas from vision to fruition. Foremost I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Dr. Jami Berry for her unwavering support, patience, motivation, enthusiasm and immense knowledge. Dr. Berry's confidence in my ability challenged me to be better than I ever imagined possible. My deepest gratitude also goes to my doctoral committee members for their encouragement, insight, and feedback which proved to make my study stronger and facilitated my growth. Dr. Bryant, I clearly remember the day I called to inform you that I had to leave the program. In that moment, your calm reassurance and keen wisdom truly changed my life.

I would also like to thank my principal for believing in me. Thank you for trusting and supporting me as you allowed me the freedom to engage our staff in the implementation of the study. Your experience, knowledge and advice have been invaluable.

My success would not have been possible without the support and dedication of the members of the action research team. Despite the unprecedented demands of opening school during a global pandemic, you remained steadfast in your commitment. You are true heroes and I am blessed beyond measure to have partnered with you throughout this endeavor.

Special thanks to the members of my UGA 2021 Cohort. From the time I met you at orientation to this moment as we prepare to graduate, you have become family and a support system that I could not have imagined. I am so proud of each one of you and I am honored to be sharing in this accomplishment with you.

Many thanks also to Patricia whose talent for writing and eye for editing was instrumental. Please know the magnitude of my appreciation of your time and support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The importance of regular school attendance has resulted in an abundance of research-based data that confirms the critical significance of daily school attendance and the impact missed days of school can have on students emotionally, socially, and educationally (Rogers, et al., 2017; Balfanz, 2016; Nickodem, et al., 2019; Ehrlich et al., 2018; Sabin, 2015). Initially, this research project focused specifically on chronic absenteeism, the causes, and research-based interventions proven to mitigate student absenteeism. While chronic absenteeism and increasing school attendance continued to be a critical focus, the direction of this action research (AR) project experienced a forced pivot prior to the rollout of the project and the start of the 2020-2021 school year. This shift demanded a change in the planned interventions for reducing student absenteeism. Instead, it became centered on interventions surrounding a focus on student engagement and its role in increasing regular school attendance.

Since the inception of this research project, the world has experienced an unexpected, unprecedented, and deadly pandemic with the outbreak of COVID-19 (Bowles & Sendell, 2020; Byun & Slavin, 2020). This illness has swept through every country, state, and city with a never before seen rate of sickness and death (Pellegrini & Maltini, 2020; Storey & Slavin, 2020). The impact of the pandemic has affected every aspect of public education, including funding, safety, daily operations, presentation of learning/instructional settings (Mintz, et al., 2020). Initially, the focus of this study was a reduction in student absences through the use of interventions that

specifically targeted the identified chronically absent or at-risk students. While this is still the central area of focus, in light of the magnitude of impact that COVID-19 has had on the educational setting in Hope County, the context that drives how the study will intervene, address, and support this need shifted. Upon review of the initial plan of action, the Primary Investigator, Researcher, and Design Team (DT) agreed that we could no longer conduct student goal-setting activities with the provision of incentives for attending school. The team decided that an incentive-based intervention had the potential to spark the desire for children to come to school despite their level of wellness. It was our consensus that the risk of a sick child attending school for the sole purpose of reaching a goal or earning an incentive was not an ethical practice on our part nor a decision that we would present for a student or parent to make.

In light of the delicate variables which we identified, the DT tweaked their approach to reducing student absenteeism by shifting the focus to student engagement. The change in direction required a difference in the intervention as well. The project moved to increase the level of student engagement during daily instruction, thereby increasing the student's desire to be present each day. Ehrlich et al. (2018) report that the interventions implemented must be twofold: improve attendance while addressing academic deficits and need for academic support. They note that one or the other, alone, is inadequate in the effort to support student attendance and academic success.

Absences from school impact a student's ability to gain knowledge and achieve academic success. Once a knowledge or skill gap begins to form, this lack can have negative effects on a student's ability to be academically successful as well as impacting a student's social-emotional wellbeing (Gottfried, 2019). Additionally, chronic absenteeism is a critical factor in the student dropout rate (Rogers et al., 2017). It is with these factors in mind that the DT began their

discussions surrounding their considerations of interventions to implement which would not only increase student attendance but also support students academically.

As the foundation for their work, the DT examined the research regarding the use of High-Leverage Instructional Practices, Visible Learning, and attention to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), (GaDOE, 2020; McLeskey & Brownell, 2015; Lawlor, 2016; Donohoo, et al., 2018). High-Leverage Practices are defined by Cohen (2015) as instructional practices that are "research-based, have the potential to improve student achievement, and support students in learning central academic concepts." (p. 1). Visible Learning refers to the work of John Hattie (2015) and is defined as a measurable method of determining the impact specific instructional strategies have on student learning. Social-Emotional Learning is defined by Lawlor (2016) as the process by which children "apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to identify and manage their emotions; understand another's perspective and show empathy for others; set and achieve positive goals; develop and sustain positive relationships; and make responsible decisions." (p. 1). Through this examination of related research, the DT determined HLP and SEL to be critical components of the intervention in the plight of the chronically absent student and included these two considerations in the draft proposal.

Being mindful of the COVID-19 pandemic and the updates necessary for the AR project to move forward, the implementation and interventions changed. Still, the data driving the interventions, as well as the need for the project, remained pertinent in their initial form and presentation. Analysis of Bell Elementary School's (BES) 2017-2019 attendance data revealed a significant number of students categorized as chronically absent, with 43 students having missed 18 or more days of school. The project was further supported by attendance trend data that found approximately 50% of the students of BES had missed six or more days per year since the 2006-

2007 school year through the 2018-2019 school year. With an overall Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rate of 96.59% for the 2018-2019 school year, the finding that 4% of Bell students have missed 18 or more days of school is unsettling. It presented pause as we considered that the seemingly positive, nearly 97% attendance rate, was in stark contrast to the 19 students habitually absent from school during the 2018-2019 school year. Upon further investigation, the Researcher discovered that this high level of student absenteeism was historically a concern for the students of BES. Analysis of the data determined that this trend could be seen throughout the previous five years and is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Breakdown of Absence Percentiles for BES Students

Year	6-10 Days	11-17 Days	18+ Days	A.D.A.
2015-2016	29%	10%	2%	96.86%
2016-2017	53%	10%	3%	96.57%
2017-2018	38%	10%	3%	96.59%
2018-2019	26%	13%	4%	97.29%

Chronic absenteeism is not a concern that is unique to Bell, as there is a district-wide focus on the academic and social-emotional impact that student absences cause and the best ways to mitigate them. Analysis of trend data from 2015 to 2019 for Hope County finds, of the 20,890 students enrolled each year, approximately 1,500 students county-wide consistently missed more than 15 days of school each school year. This finding is tremendous when considering the impact on academics and social wellbeing that numerous missed days from school has on students. Table 2 displays the trend data for absences in Hope County.

Table 2

Breakdown of Trend Data Noting Absence Percentiles for Hope County

Year	6-15 Days	Over 15 Days
2015-2016	34.2	6.7
2016-2017	35.1	7.3
2017-2018	35.0	7.8
2018-2019	37.2	9.4

When comparing BES to other schools in the state with a similar number of enrolled students and similar economically disadvantaged percentages, from 2015-2018, BES consistently had a higher rate of students missing 15 or more days. Of the eight schools qualifying for comparison, there was only one school during the 2016-2017 school year that had a higher percentage of students with 15 or more days missed than BES. It is remarkable to note that this school was also located in Hope County. This comparison is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Trend Data for "Schools Like Mine", Percentage of Students Missing 15+ Days Per Year

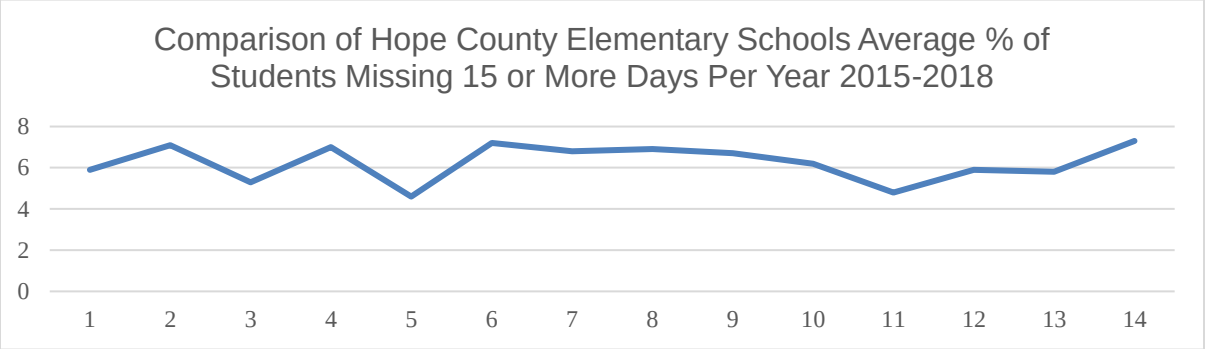
District	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Baker County #1	4.6	2.4	3.7	3.0
Baker County #2	3.1	3.5	4.4	3.3
Baker County #3	3.7	1.6	1.2	1.6
Charlotte County	4.3	2.6	2.8	4.5
Hope County (BES)	6.6	9.3	7.4	5.2
Alachua County	4.9	6.1	4.7	4.3
Marion County	5.9	6.4	5.6	5.2
Putnam County	2.9	5.9	1.8	2.5

Comparison within the district finds BES as the elementary school with the highest average percentage, 7.8%, over three years of students missing 15 or more days. Figure 1 is a

visual representation of how BES (#14) compares to the averages of the other 13 schools in the district.

Figure 1

Hope County Elementary Schools' Average % of Students Missing 15+ Per Year 2015-2018



Based on supporting trend data, there is an identified need for reductions in absenteeism throughout the district. Specifically, at BES, this action research study targeted the students who were presently and historically recognized as being chronically absent and on the cusp of being categorized as chronically absent from school during the 2018-2019 school year. The study targeted those students identified as having 18 or more absences, yearly, throughout the 2018-2019 school year and were trending towards the 18 absences threshold at the time of the study, in the fall of the 2020-2021 school year.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to use targeted interventions to increase the level of student engagement in the classroom, thereby reducing the number of days absent from school for those students identified as being chronically absent in previous years as well as those identified as being at risk of missing 18 or more days of school in the 2020-2021 school year.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do chronically absent students respond to the implementation of targeted interventions aimed at increasing engagement?

2. How does the implementation of High-leverage Instructional Strategies influence daily student engagement?

3. How do teachers perceive the impact of an Action Research Team on targeting chronic absenteeism by way of increasing student engagement?

Key Definition of Terms

Academic Deficit	An area of reading or math that is lacking in skill of ability and falls below the average expectation of a same age peer.
Average Daily Attendance	The number of days of attendance of all students in one school year, divided by the total number of school days in session during that one school year.
Chronic Absenteeism	A student who is absent 18 or more school days during one school year. This can be calculated by individual absences as well as consecutive absences.
Virtual Setting	Instruction of students which takes place in a setting other than the school building and is facilitated through the use of a computer or comparable technology.
Brick and Mortar Setting	Instruction of students which takes place within the school building.
High-risk	A student who is in danger of consequences resulting from current actions or practices.
Intervention	Practices or procedures put into place for the purpose of diminishing a negative and increasing a positive.
School Climate	The overall feeling of the school. An indicator of the level of comfort that students, parents and staff feel based on their experiences there.

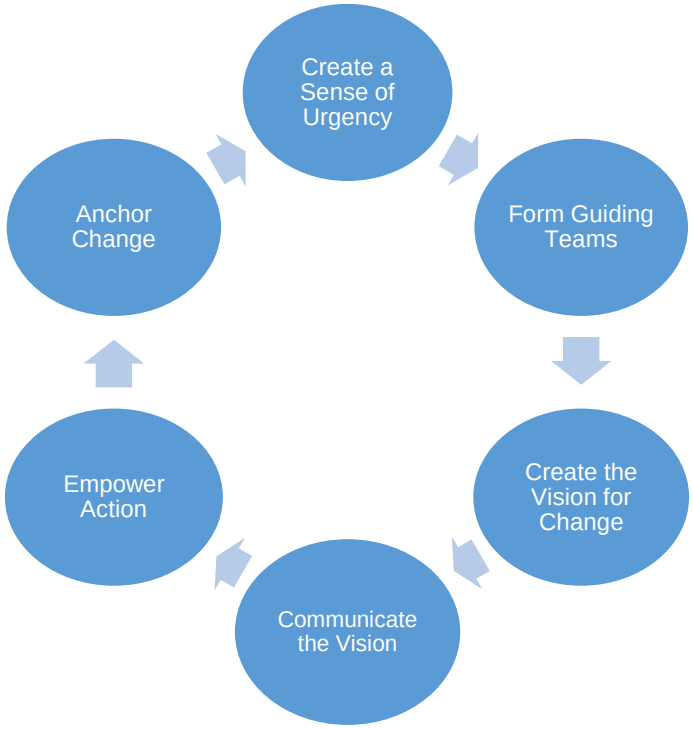
High-leverage Practices	A set of research-based practices that are necessary to support student learning.
Effect Size	A statistical measure of the impact specific educational strategies have on student learning.
Student Engagement	The degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught.
Social-emotional Learning	The process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success.
Visible Learning	When teachers see learning through the eyes of students and help them become their own teachers.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized an abridged version of Kotter's 8 Step Change Model (Figure 2), with a focus on six of the eight steps, as the theoretical framework. Initially published in a 1995 Harvard Business Review article, Kotter's model is geared to facilitate change management in the business setting (Appelbaum, et al., 2012). While initially developed to promote and support change in a business setting, the model is appropriate for this action research study in that there is a mindset regarding student absenteeism that could benefit from a shift in perspective. Through the approach of the change model, we targeted six of Kotter's actionable steps which included: create a sense of urgency, form guiding teams, create the vision for change, communicate the vision, empower action, and anchor change. While the two additional steps were undoubtedly important to this change model, due to time constraints, the team proceeded with implementation of the model without explicit attention paid to "short-term wins" and "don't let up" which are steps six and seven of the original model. Implementation of the chosen six, resulted in data that supported reflection and analysis of our efforts as we worked to create change within our local school.

Figure 2

Kotter's 8 Step Change Model Modified to include the Steps Specific to this Study



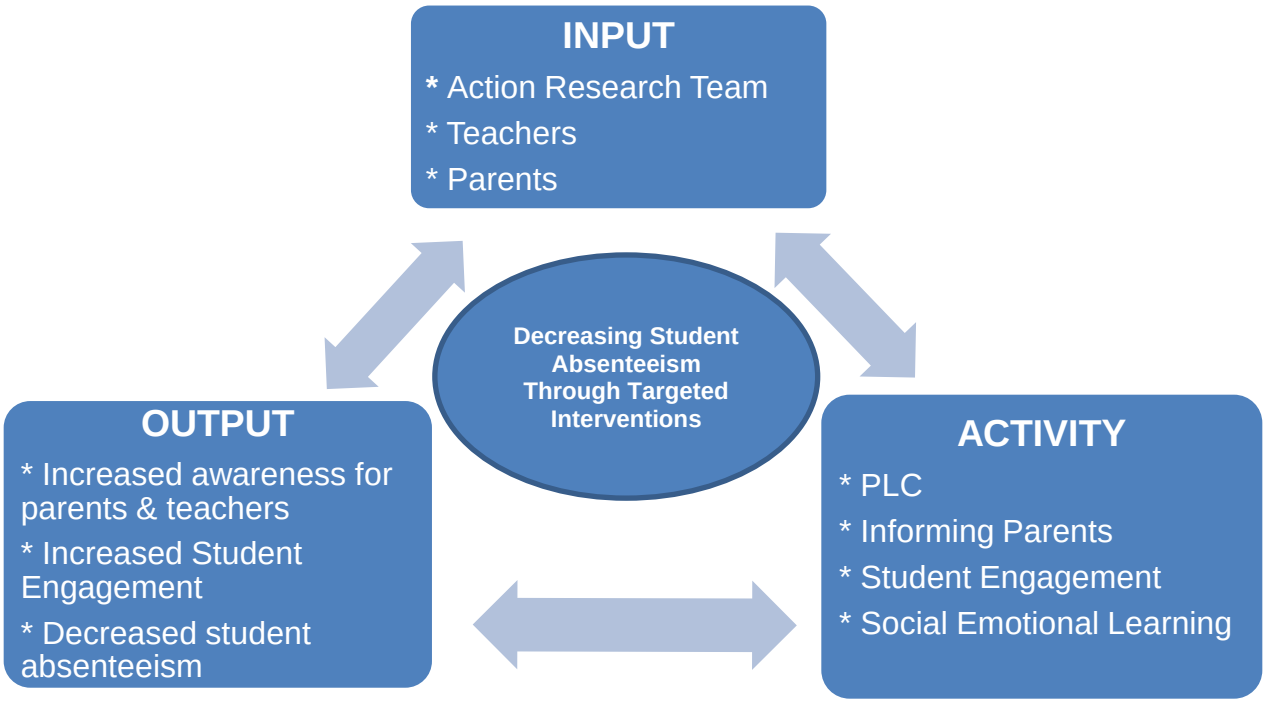
Conceptual Framework

Kotter's change model created guidance for the implementation of this study and served as the foundation for the following conceptual framework. Figure 3 represents a visual depiction of the action steps taken by the research team surrounding Kotter's change model. Implementation of the change effort involved the support of all stakeholders. The initial rollout began with local school leadership and progressed to an audience, which included the staff, parents, and students. Throughout this study, the teams worked collaboratively to spark significant change through the building of positive school relationships, mindset shifts through research-based evidence, and engaging students in action that leads to a more favorable view of

school attendance. This work, when implemented with proper planning, communication, and fidelity, was designed to lead to an increased awareness for all stakeholders while engaging our students with the ultimate goal of reduction in student absenteeism.

Figure 3

Cycle of Action



Overview of the Methodology

To gain buy-in when recruiting participants for the teams, a sense of urgency was created through a detailed presentation given to the staff of BES. Through a presentation to the staff in May 2020, the original focus of the project was delivered (see Appendix B). The driving data were introduced, and a consensus was gained regarding the specific need for attention in the area of absenteeism. Included in the presentation were the statistics related to chronic absenteeism and the impact that missed days of school have on students. Staff was informed of the academic, social, and emotional effects that absenteeism has on students and how the

groups of students are impacted throughout their academic years and beyond. Information shared throughout the presentation included easily implemented strategies that are data-driven along with research-based techniques to increase student engagement and lessen student absenteeism. The presentation closed with a call to action for any who were interested in joining the effort to get our students in school every day and on time by increasing their level of engagement through classroom instructional practices. This call to action was revisited in July 2020, six months into the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States and once the Hope County School Board announced their plan for returning to school for the 2020-2021 school year. The plan included a hybrid attendance model, based on the level of illness within the community, in addition to the options of returning to brick and mortar or in the virtual setting. At this time, the project proposal was revised, and a second staff interest meeting took place (see Appendix F). It was necessary to revisit as it was apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic would impact the number of staff members willing to participate in the study as there was an increased burden placed on them to support the many variables of reopening school during a national pandemic. Duration to enroll all study participants was approximately two weeks, and each participant was required to sign an informed consent document (see Appendix b). The Researcher provided a copy of the signed form to the participant and kept the original document for record of consent to participate.

Following the revised presentation and collection of consent to participate documentation, the Design Team (DT) was formed and began the work of designing the intervention plan which the Implementation Team (IT) would then carry out. The formation of both a DT and IT paved the way for the Professional Learning Community (PLC) to be created. These efforts were followed by identifying the target student group, designing the plan,

implementing the project, collecting/analyzing data, reflecting on our actions, and revising our work as we continued with the implementation cycle(s).

While local school administrators were present as guiding members, the DT analyzed data, reviewed research, and collaborated in drafting the proposed plan (see Appendix H). Following the drafting of the plan, the team used the local school's Managing at Risk Students report (MARS) to identify those students who met qualifying parameters and may have benefited from the action research study. This criterion resulted in 19 students selected for monitoring in the action research subgroup. Upon identifying the students, the data and draft plan transitioned to the IT.

The IT was responsible for carrying out the plan that was created by the DT. As previously stated, it was necessary to note that ten of the thirty participants were members of either the DT and PLC or the IT as well as the PLC, so the team members were quite vested in the work and found the connections between the teams valuable as they carried out the plan. The IT was eager to hear about the work of the DT and both teams were present when the plan was shared for consideration (see Appendix I). While the IT worked with the draft plan created by the DT, the IT members also contributed valuable input and added minor adjustments to the plan before implementation.

Throughout the study, participants engaged in a socially distanced, monthly PLC meeting designed to further educate on the impact of missed days from school and how student engagement in the classroom combatted student absenteeism. This time also provided space to analyze the implementation of the plan and review the data collected in real-time. The topics of the PLC changed monthly and targeted specific areas related to the research project. The PLC held in September focused on social-emotional learning (see Appendix J). The topic during

October was Visible Learning and Hattie's work with High Leverage Instructional Strategies (HLIS), (see Appendix K). The meeting in November included information surrounding student absenteeism and the impact of absences on students academically as well as social-emotionally (see Appendix L). Staff members who participated in the PLC took part in a three-question survey at the close of each session, referred to as a Ticket Out the Door (TOTD), (see Appendix O).

While the teachers participated in a PLC, parents participated in a series of virtual "Y'all Come" sessions, which took place once a month (September, October, November) for approximately 60 minutes per session (see Appendences Q-W). The monthly sessions provided opportunities for them to receive information regarding the importance of student engagement and student attendance in both the virtual and brick and mortar settings. Parents received data and learned about current research surrounding student absenteeism and the impact student engagement can have on daily attendance. The sessions also offered opportunities for parents to learn ways they could support their children at home through the sharing of instructional strategies that were easily implemented by parents. In addition, resources were discussed and provided to facilitate the work of the parents in the home setting. Following the live parent outreach sessions, all who submitted an RSVP received a copy of the presentation as well as the link to the recording of the webinar. The links to the webinar recordings were also placed on the BES local school website for those who may have missed our live sessions as we felt it was necessary to reach as many of our stakeholders as possible.

Perception surveys regarding Student Engagement and Student Absenteeism were distributed to staff members before the start of the action research and again at the close of the research study (see Appendices D, E, and Y). The team distributed the surveys electronically,

and individuals who did not respond within five days received a follow-up reminder. Surveys were analyzed, and data disaggregated into overarching categories of positive views regarding student engagement/attendance efforts, negative views regarding student engagement and attendance efforts, and neutral views regarding student engagement and attendance efforts.

During the first four weeks of the study, staff perception data regarding overall student engagement in reading and math, in addition to concrete examples of the impact of using High Leverage Teaching strategies, were collected weekly. This data was collated and prepared for presentation at the close of the data collection for Cycles 1 and 2. The IT and PLC teams took part in data reviews after Cycles 1 (see Appendix M) and 2 (see Appendix N). Also, student attendance rates were monitored and presented for comparison to the overall perception of student engagement by the teachers and the possibility for the presence of impact in increasing student attendance. The projected data collection began in August 2020 and concluded the first week of November 2020.

Intervention

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and closure of schools in Hope County and surrounding areas, the Researcher deemed it necessary to administer an additional survey. The Researcher presented the staff of BES with a survey regarding their level of concern for student engagement, the instructional practices in place, their willingness to learn or change, and their interest in taking part in an action research project surrounding this topic (Appendix G). Following the completion of the survey, the DT met to discuss the results. The team also addressed the project direction, and how to meet the needs of the school's students and community. In this presentation, the Researcher shared that there would be no visitors allowed in the building due to the pandemic, and adults would be limited to those currently staffed in the

building. The DT discussed, at length, the variables that the pandemic had introduced to the educational system. Student safety, ability to fluctuate between brick and mortar and virtual instruction, and variances in return models were the team's most pressing concerns. The DT diligently considered all variables and worked through a plan that would support the needs of the AR project regardless of the model under which we returned. At the time of the initial meeting, the Hope County School District set a return under a hybrid model as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Hope County 2020-2021, Hybrid Model for August Return of Students Who Chose Brick/Mortar

Grade Level	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
PK, K, 1st, 2nd	Face/Face Learning	Face/Face Learning	Face/Face Learning	Face/Face Learning	Face/Face Learning
3rd, 4th, 5th	"A" Students Attend Face/Face	"A" Students Attend Face/Face	All 3rd, 4th, 5th Participate in Asynchronous Learning or Virtual Small Group Sessions	"B" Students Attend Face/Face	"B" Students Attend Face/Face
3rd, 4th, 5th	B Students Participate in Asynchronous Lessons	B Students Participate in Asynchronous Lessons	All 3rd, 4th, 5th Participate in Asynchronous Learning or Virtual Small Group Sessions	A Students Participate in Asynchronous Lessons	A Students Participate in Asynchronous Lessons

In this model, Pre-K through second grade were returning five days a week for the brick and mortar option and third through fifth-grade students were returning on an A/B schedule. The A/B schedule allowed for "A" students to attend brick and mortar classes on Monday and Tuesday with asynchronous learning taking place on Thursday and Friday. Wednesday was slated as a day of virtual small group or one-on-one supports for any student who might need

additional support, and all students remained at home on Wednesdays. Closure of the school building for students on Wednesdays also allowed for the additional sanitation measures which were now required throughout the district. For those students on the "B" schedule, Monday and Tuesday was asynchronous learning with Wednesdays at home, and Thursday and Friday being face to face for the brick and mortar option. The students who chose the virtual option attended both synchronous and asynchronous classes throughout the week and were assigned a virtual classroom with a virtual teacher who may or may not teach from their assigned home school. For consistency, the district created a list of common materials that would be necessary for both the virtual and brick and mortar classrooms, asking the schools to compile these materials and distribute them to all students regardless of instructional setting. One week before the opening of school for the 2020-2021 school year, over 25% of the parents of BES had chosen the virtual option for their children, resulting in five of our classroom teachers being chosen to become virtual teachers with over 100 of our students receiving virtual instruction.

With the determination of the model for returning students to school for the 2020-2021 school year, the DT began to hypothesize possible avenues for exploration in regards to increasing student engagement in the classroom and using this to reduce student absenteeism. The Researcher presented the DT with research surrounding absenteeism and the connection of student attendance coupled with relationships with teachers at school and overall engagement in the classroom. The team examined John Hattie's work regarding HLIS, known as Visible Learning, and the impact of the use of these strategies on the engagement of students during class time. In his work on Visible Learning, Hattie's meta-analyses of hundreds of instructional strategies examined the meta-cognitive variable of student learning through instructional strategies, which either facilitate or decrease the effect size of the knowledge acquisition

(O'Connor, 2020). Hattie (2016) promotes that educators are the activators and his Visible Learning approach allows for student learning to be measured.

Through this lens, the team determined that the implementation of HLIS would increase the level of student engagement during daily instruction, thereby increasing the student's desire to be present each day. With an emphasis on those strategies that had a larger effect size, the team narrowed the extensive list down to four strategies, which they agreed are easily implemented daily while specifically targeting the areas noted as the most critical to address when desiring to increase student attendance. The team found this connection through the daily use of the following HLIS (Hattie, 2016):

1. Provision of Teacher Feedback
2. Facilitation of Classroom Discussions
3. Scaffolding of Student Learning
4. Implementation of Social Emotional Learning

One significance is that the identified HLIS directly relates to the work of Kirksey and Gottfried, who found that high-interest instruction found in more "seasoned" teacher's classrooms significantly decreased the student's negative view of learning and increased the desire to attend school regularly (2018). The findings align with the work of Sahin et al., who note that the teacher may be the determining factor in a student who stays home as the teacher may, in time, destroy "the student's interest and attention to the classroom life." (p. 201, 2016). Thereby it is essential that teachers are using research-based HLIS that are scientifically proven to be highly engaging and motivational to their learners.

The team then discussed the data collection piece and how the level of student engagement would be quantified. The group expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness and

ease of the data collection for those participating in the project. It is important to note, many of the teachers on the DT also participated in the implementation of the project. They were thinking about the task with their colleagues and themselves in mind. The team agreed that data collection would take place weekly through the use of a Google form, which the Researcher would send to the participating teachers on Friday of each week (see Appendix P). The Google form consisted of the following four questions:

1. Please rate the overall engagement of your students this week in English Language Arts.
2. Please rate the overall engagement of your students this week in Math.
3. (non-homeroom option) Please rate the overall engagement of your students in your lessons this week.
4. Please share one concrete example of how your work on Student Engagement has impacted your students this week.

The proposed responses to the first three questions were based on a Likert scale of 1-10, with one being "low" and ten being "exceptional." The fourth question was open-ended, with a short or long response depending on the level of depth the responding staff member desired. The DT was in agreement that this method of data collection would be convenient for teachers.

In order to fully support the teachers as they provided the intervention, the PLC opportunities were designed to facilitate growth in the instructional practices of the teachers involved. Professional learning was centered around the pedagogy for incorporation of HLIS as well as the HLIS which are research based, providing evidence of effect size and impact on student’s academic performance. As a daily reminder of the intervention, the Researcher prepared a visual which included the specific HLIS which the team was expected to implement

through their instruction each day (see Appendix Z). In addition to the visual, the teachers included notations and activities for incorporating the HLIS in their lesson plans each week.

Significance

The findings of this action research case study will be significant in multiple settings as the data have indicated a need not only at the local school but also throughout the district. While the context of the study is limited solely to the staff members, parents, and students of Bell Elementary, the action research process, interventions conducted, and findings are potentially generalized to similar settings, both elementary and secondary. Also, this research is applicable in the field of educational leadership as leaders are often tasked with discovering innovative means of increasing the performance of staff, raising the bar on student achievement, and decreasing student absenteeism. Through the incorporation of HLIS, administrators can stretch their teachers to grow their skillset while increasing student engagement in a manner that translates to a shift in student mindset, thus a student who once lacked initiative and desire to attend what they perceived as a lackluster and dull class is replaced with personal connections to their teacher, individualized feedback, which fosters academic growth opportunities, and the social-emotional support that our students are craving. The focus on student relationships coupled with a home and school partnership is the approach necessary as we successfully navigate through this era of educational need during a deadly pandemic.

Following a thorough review of the current literature, there is one significant gap that this research addressed: student engagement and attendance during a worldwide pandemic. How the use of HLIS and a focus on social-emotional learning attracted and maintained student attention and attendance in both the brick and mortar and virtual settings is an especially relevant contribution. This action research served not only to increase the competency, efficacy, and

skillset of the participating staff members but also the knowledge base surrounding this topic for both parents and students. Through the invitations to join the parent sessions as well as the work that the staff members participated in during the PLC, the school staff worked to foster the relationship between home and school while strengthening the connections between teachers and students. The knowledge gained through the implementation of this action research project was shared with other leaders in Hope County through the Researcher's participation in the Aspiring Principal Program. This research served as a capstone project requirement, which facilitated the awareness of the results and usefulness within BES and throughout Hope County.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature related to the study and action research project. Chapter 3 includes the research design and methodology as well as the specifics of data collected during the action research project. Chapter 4 is a detailed overview of the case and the problem which includes notes and artifacts relevant to the study. Chapter 5 includes the data collection specific to the research questions as well as the results of data analysis from Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. Chapter 6 includes a summary of the findings, implications and recommendation for others as well as a summary and final thoughts. Chapter 6 is followed by all references and appendices.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Absences from school impact a student's ability to gain knowledge and achieve academic success. Once a knowledge or skill gap begins to form, this lack can affect a student's ability to be academically successful as well as impact a student's social-emotional wellbeing and engagement, and is a key factor in the student dropout rate (Rogers et al., 2017; Balfanz, 2016; Nickodem, et al., 2019). Additionally, with the number of struggling learners in our schools today, it is imperative that we explore all avenues and investigate and address all reasons for this struggle. Excessive numbers of missed days of school is a national crisis that includes more than 6.5 million students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016). With the 2016-2017 national high-school graduation rate of 84.6% having only improved half a percentage point from 2015-2016, it is critical that we address chronic absenteeism and its relation to academic hardships (NCES, 2018). This statistic is further magnified with research that finds approximately 50% of American parents underestimating the impact that missed days of school have on their children (USDOE, 2016). If effective student learning is to occur, it is critical for all students to be present and engaged on a daily basis (Freeman, et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rate is misleading. The ADA data piece is a calculation of attendance on any given day and an issue that may cause the significance of individual student absences to go unnoticed (Nauer 2016). This is due to attendance figures that encompass an entire period of time rather than an analysis of those who are chronically absent (Nauer 2016; Ehrlich, et al., 2018). Recently, federal policies have been leaning towards

the use of "chronic absence" as an indicator of risk rather than ADA; this is a major development as many times ADA is used to determine funding allocation to schools and may be a factor that is unintentionally reducing funds (Ehrlich et al., 2018, p. 138). Chang, et al., (2016) examined the attendance rates of six districts in Connecticut, finding an ADA of 95% while 10 to 25% of the students in each district were chronically absent, i.e., missing 18 or more days of school each year. An update to current attendance monitoring practices is essential as a true picture of individual student attendance is found through monitoring both the number and percentage who regularly miss school (Attendance Works, 2017).

In December of the 2018-2019 school year, 20 students at Bell Elementary School (BES) had 10 or more absences with 13 of those 20 students being just days away from the chronic absentee classification. By May 2019, 95 students had 10 more absences with 19 students having 18 or more missed days. This number is alarming when considering the impacts that missed days of school have on students educationally, socially, and emotionally and that absences are the strongest predictor of dropping out of school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). These students are on the cusp of chronic absenteeism, and the year is only half completed. BES is historically a high performing school with minimal attention paid to the students who miss days and slight regard for the absences, based on the overall success of the school as a whole. Although BES follows all district guidelines regarding appropriate attendance protocol, our local school administration does not counter parents who wish to keep their children home.

Located in an area of affluence, the most common cause of absence for the students of BES is family travel. Although built-in breaks occur throughout the school year, many families extend these breaks by taking days beyond the allotted time. For some families, the five days allotted for Spring Break are extended to 10 or 15 as they have planned a trip overseas. Also, it is

important to note, for Bell students, some parents who have planned vacations for weeks beyond the calendar allotment will withdraw their child and re-enroll once they return from their trip, thus skewing the attendance data because this action does not show the true absence history, thereby increasing the positive tone of attendance. This practice further compounds the concern that true attendance figures are not representational of the accuracy of our attendance rate. If these absences were documented as they should be, the numbers would be even more alarming. While parents of Bell students commonly use the practice of keeping students out of school for an extended period due to vacations, it is not specific to our school. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) note that during their research, parents often took their children out of school for vacation. While this may be a factor that influences attendance for some, it is certainly not one of the largest factors on the scale; most notably it is family hardships that have the largest impact on student attendance rates (Sugrue, et al., 2016).

Elementary absenteeism has been linked to a myriad of "educational consequences." In this light, it is not surprising that the intensity of the search for defining factors has increased exponentially (Kirksey & Gottfried, 2019). Analysis of chronic absenteeism research reveals three main themes that are consistent throughout numerous studies: factors influencing attendance, impacts on academics and social-emotional wellbeing, and interventions positively impacting student attendance. The following is a review of the literature which surrounds the themes above.

Factors Influencing Attendance

Familial Factors

In the elementary grades, attendance is most often the responsibility of the parent. Gottfried (2015) finds that the negative implications and impacts of chronic absenteeism begin in

Kindergarten; this research focuses on the "individual and family-level factors" (p. 161). Nauer (2016) notes that absenteeism is not found in just one "thing" as attendance issues can lie in transportation, health issues, school climate, academic struggles and social issues with peers (p. 30). Each of these grounds for absenteeism is well represented within the body of research with each receiving its level of merit. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) states that school absences "fall into three categories: Can't go, Won't go, Don't go" as they discuss the various reasons that students do not attend; they either have a barrier that prevents them physically from attending, reasons for not going such as avoidance of an issue, or they simply do not attend. (ODE, 2016, p. 4).

It is important to note that the Oregon Department of Education found that students who are not chronically absent do have a higher number of absences incurred due to family vacations which extend beyond the allotted time frame of the school calendar (ODE, 2016). Sahin, Arseven, and Kihc state, "the causes of school absenteeism and school dropouts are mostly originated from family, school, and student." (2016, p.196). They continue by noting that parents and guardians of students who have attendance concerns may perpetuate the behavior through lack of communication, authority, and expectations for positive school habits (2016). This finding is further supported by the U.S. Department of Education in their findings that 49% of parents believe that students missing school three of more days a month will have no academic impact (2016). Research supports findings that family factors may influence attendance rate in areas that are out of the control of those parents and guardians who are responsible for the home. The allowance of missed days with parent approval could be due to the "common misconceptions that missing school is only harmful when many consecutive days are missed." (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016, p. 4). Sahin et al. note that funerals, domestic

violence, divorce, and parental experience with education all play a part in the attendance issue (2016).

The work of Sugrue et al. (2016) finds that chronic absenteeism is more an indicator of an economic struggle than a problem with the family in general, with poverty being the underlying cause as their work contends that "economic need" was the "primary factor contributing to children's school absenteeism" (p. 144; McCaslin-Timmons, 2020). There is particular cause for concern regarding statistics for absenteeism among homeless students as it is estimated that this demographic accrues missed days at a rate that is double that of the general student population (Da Costa Nunez, et al., 2012). With families including children being one of the fastest growing homeless demographics, exploring all aspects of cause is necessary in order to properly reach our chronically absent population (Pang Si En, 2019). Additional factors that create barriers to attendance are noted in the work of Smerillo, Reynolds, Temple, and Ou (2018) as they find social-emotional maturity, cognitive abilities, retention, special education placement, and parent involvement are all critical variables that impact student attendance in the elementary years.

Student Engagement

Student engagement in the classroom setting and the desire to attend school based on school climate or environment is an additional factor that often results in decreased attendance. Epstein and Sheldon note that students are less likely to attend class when they feel that the environment lacks order and structure (2002; Fitzpatrick, et al., 2020). Fitzpatrick, et al. further report that familial factors at home contribute to a students' lack of engagement and knowledge acquisition in the classroom as it limits their ability to focus on the learning; this inability is magnified when the classroom environment lacks the supports necessary to properly engage

these students (2020). Kirksey and Gottfried find that the teacher plays an integral role in the overall classroom environment and note that more experienced teachers have fewer student absences (2018). While the findings of Kirksey and Gottfried (2018) support that seasoned teachers are more effective in reducing student absenteeism, the work of Sahin et al., (2016) finds that the teacher may be the determining factor in a student who stays home as the teacher may, in time, destroy "the student's interest and attention to the classroom life." (p. 201; Sakiz, 2017). The work of Fauzi (2020) reports the importance of student engagement through the use of hands-on learning which excites students and increases student desire for learning, In Fauzi's 2020 study on student engagement, students reported boredom as a main reason for disengaging in the lesson.

School engagement is a critical component in the acquisition of knowledge for students at all grade levels with the time period for initial importance of engagement, as it is related to student learning, being as early as preschool (see, e.g., Fitzpatrick, et al., 2020; Hernandez, Eisenberg, Valiente, Thompson, Spinrad, Grimm, et al., 2017; Hattie, 2015). The Tennessee Department of Education (2016) finds that an increase in the number of absences has an "immediate negative impact" on engagement and literacy while having long-term negative impacts on graduation rates and "post-secondary" success (TDE, p. 2, 2016; Sahin et al., 2016). This finding is further supported by Gottfried (2015) who notes that chronically absent students not only impede their own learning but also decrease social engagement with their peers as those peers develop an awareness of the impact that the absence of others is having on the pace of instruction and reduction of educational outcomes for the class as a whole. The work of Kirksey and Gottfried incorporates the research on a student's social-emotional engagement in the classroom and how intertwined this social attachment is regarding absences and attendance rate;

the pair contend that social attachment to peers is a key variable in reducing absences (2018). Flores and Brown (2019) further support these findings through their study regarding student engagement as they confirmed the importance of positive adult and peer relationships and the impact of these relationships on student engagement (Godber, 2020).

Student engagement in the classroom is not solely related to the social-emotional aspect of student relationships with peers and adults. Student engagement in the classroom is also directly related to the instructional strategies by which the information is being taught (see, e.g., Graham, et al., 2015; Chen & Hwang, 2019; Messenger, et al., 2017). In a 2015 study, Graham, et al. found a direct correlation between the instructional strategies used and an increase in student vocabulary and comprehension performance. The work of Ocumpaugh, et al. (2020) further supports this finding as they note the importance of educational strategies which require higher order thinking as a defining component of increased student engagement. The finding that engagement is increased through the use of higher order thinking was explored in a 2018 study which used science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activities to provide students with hands-on engagement opportunities with findings of impact on both level of engagement and achievement (Shin, et al.).

High-leverage Instructional Practices were found to be key in engaging students of poverty, fostering an intrinsic drive to learn which resulted in increased academic achievement in reading (Kennedy, 2018). Several researchers found that the effectiveness of instructional strategies is directly related to student engagement and achievement (Hattie, 2018; Breathnach, et al., 2017). Rosenshine (2018) found student engagement in teacher-led groups, including feedback and discussions, to be 84 percent higher than during those times of independent learning. (p. 42). John Hattie shed light on the importance of student engagement with his work,

coining the term, “Visible Learning” in 2009 when he first published his study on “metasynthesis” and “determinants” of student achievement (Fleckenstein, et al., 2015, p. 27). In this work, Hattie concluded that instructional practices could be measured for effectiveness with specific strategies having a larger impact on student achievement, thus making the learning “visible” (2015). Regardless of the methodology used to actively engage students in learning, action must be taken. There must be an intentional focus surrounding all “relevant research” in the work to promote student achievement. (O’Connor, 2020, p. 149).

Student Health

Additionally, students may have health-related issues that impact their school attendance, but most often, there are also school related environmental factors that impact a student’s desire to attend (Smerillo et al., 2018). Jacobson, Meeder, and Voskuil note that student health concerns are a critical component to the attendance concern and often the result of many missed days for those who are chronically absent (2016; Harden, et al., 2019). Berman et al. find that the location of schools contributes to child wellness and rate of absence. They note many schools populating areas with pollution, both ground and water, which may contribute to student illness, resulting in increased absences from school (2018; Gaffron & Niemeier, 2015). They also note that the condition of school structures often increases student illness, with improper ventilation and rodent allergens as contributing factors to the decline of student health, impeding appropriate attendance (2018). Research recognizes that students may also feign illness to stay home from school; it is typically the parent who is deciding for them to remain home (Jacobson, et al., 2016).

Harden et al., (2019) examined implications for the use of a multi-faceted system of support through the bolstering of home and school connectedness, working to increase student

attendance and performance by increasing the positive relationship between the teacher and family. The research team found that an intentional focus on positive relationships did increases students' academic achievement and overall feelings of positivity towards school and teachers (Harden et al., 2019). There is no doubt of the magnitude of concern surrounding missed days of school and the implications student absenteeism has for academic success, mental health and far reaching impacts which may carry into adulthood (Thatsum, et al., 2019).

Impact on Academics and Social-emotional Wellbeing

Academics and social-emotional wellbeing are two areas that chronic absenteeism has been shown to impact. With students struggling to read by third grade and increased dropout rates for students with a history of absences, there is cause for attention to the chronically absent. London, et al. (2016) note that chronic absenteeism in the early years of schooling may impact how a student views attendance in the remaining years of their education, resulting in reduced motivation to attend due to perceived inadequacies between themselves and their peers (see, e.g., Lara, et al., 2018; Sakiz, 2020). D'Agostino et al. (2018) find that absences from school impact not only how students achieve academically, but may have lasting long term effects which increase teen pregnancy rates, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency and "both family and home-school disengagement" (p. 483). A study conducted by Arif, et al. found peer victimization to be a defining component in shaping how students see and feel about attending school, with a connectivity to the development of "mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression." (2019, p. 844). With the findings of a 2015 study noting that approximately 13% of school aged children worldwide suffer from mental health concerns, the focus on social-emotional wellbeing is essential. (Polanczyk, et al.).

Chronic absenteeism presents academic deficits in students at all grade levels. The correlation is simple: a student cannot learn if he or she is not in school to receive instruction. Chronic absenteeism is most notably associated with below level reading ability by third grade for those students who were chronically absent throughout their formative elementary years (Ehrlich et al., 2018). The concerns in this finding are heightened by additional research that notes the correlation between the ability to read at grade level and the social-emotional impact for those who are not able to read at grade level (Ehrlich et al., 2018; Sabin, 2015). Jacknowitz and Brannegan find that there is a direct impact on academic performance in the year that student absences occur (2017). A 2016 report from the Oregon Department of Education states, "Long-term outcomes for chronically absent students are significantly worse than for students who are not chronically absent." (ODE, 2016, p.4). The ODE finds that only half of chronically absent 5th-grade students move on to matriculation from high-school while nearly 30% more of their average attendance peers are graduating. The Oregon Department of Education does point out that they are not representing this as causation but more as a need for awareness as we work to better support students. (ODE, 2016). Gottfried (2014) further supports the social-emotional aspect in noting a connection to chronic absenteeism in kindergarten with decreased academic success and socioemotional development in later grades.

The work of Sabin (2015) affirms the importance of overall social-emotional stability of the classroom environment in a correlational finding between the aspects of a positive student teacher relationship and increased student engagement as they relate to a student's academic achievement in reading. As teachers play a "key role" in the social-emotional development of their students, the teacher-student relationship is a pivotal factor in how students respond to school from year to year (Sakiz, 2020). Ruzek, et al. (2016) found, it is the effect of the teacher-

student relationship which fosters academic engagement in the classroom. The impact is not only prevalent in the early years but is found in the later years as well. Research finds that when focusing on the attendance of older students, “substantial educational gains” are possible (Ehrlich et al., 2018).

Gottfried (2019) reports that the negative academic impact of increased absenteeism not only affects absent students but carries over to the classroom as a whole; having a negative academic impact on all students as it disrupts the progressive flow of the curriculum when chronically absent students demand additional teacher attention once they return to school and attempt to catch up on lost time and instruction. These findings are further supported by Gottfried’s research in two separate classrooms, one which had alternating student absences and one which had a set of chronically absent students. The data indicate that the students in the classroom with the set of chronically absent students fared less well than those in the alternating absences class, as there was a greater demand placed on the classroom teacher and peers (2019). The findings support the idea of an academic deficit that chronic absenteeism creates, with those students having lower reading and math scores when compared to like peers with average attendance. The findings are significant as they speak to the earlier discussion on the use of Average Daily Attendance and the chronically absent classification. The peer effect of students who are lacking in reading and math skills is supported by Cho’s 2012 study which examined the impact of second language learners with reduced academic ability in reading and math and the influence on native English speakers. This study found a statistically significant negative impact of students with decreased academic abilities in reading and math and the academic gains of their peers (Cho, 2012). This “spillover effect” was tested by Fletcher (2010) by studying the impact of students with significant emotional needs and the academic successes of their typical peers (p.

13). Fletcher (2010) found students with increased needs are more demanding of teacher time and attention which impacts the learning of students without these specific demands. A generalization of Cho and Fletcher's findings can be made to include a negative impact on peers by those students who are chronically absent.

Gottfried (2019) states that the academic impact on those who are chronically absent is far more significant and much larger than those with "average absenteeism." (p. 25). A 2016 finding by the Oregon Department of Education reports, chronic absenteeism was significantly evident in the success of 5th-grade students who met or exceeded standardized tests as opposed to those students who regularly attended (ODE, 2016). The work of Smerillo et al. (2017) and London et al. (2016) supports this finding as they note, chronically absent math students are scoring two months behind those students with average daily attendance. They further note that this carries over to the middle and high school years as these students have lower high-school completion rates.

Interventions Positively Impacting Student Attendance

Aligned with many concerns plaguing our educational system today, the most effective way to address student absenteeism is through the implementation of research-based interventions. For example, Dejager, et al., found a token economy to be twice as effective in increasing student engagement as compared to the implementation of alternative methods (2020). Interventions that are well planned, targeted and implemented with fidelity are the key, while interventions that lack fidelity, follow through, and specificity can become contributors to the problem (Sugrue et al., 2016, PBIS Rewards, 2020). The question is, however, which intervention is the most effective and will have the largest impact based on the specifics of the population and the needs of each student. D'Agostino et al. note that we need to focus our efforts

on the “early warning” signs and ensure that we are identifying the students who are “at risk” (p. 488). Ehrlich et al. (2018) report that the interventions used must be twofold, improve attendance while addressing academic deficits and need for academic support as they note that one or the other, alone, is inadequate in the efforts to support student attendance and academic success. In addition, Freeman et al. find that a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is helpful in providing a continuum of supports that is differentiated to meet student needs (2020). Furthermore, Ehrlich et al. report that the intensity of the intervention should vary based on the need of each student (2018). It is important to note, although the literature is abundant on the positive aspect of research-based interventions improving attendance rates, Sugrue et al. (2016) note that the research on effective interventions is limited and the studies finding interventions with lasting impact are even more limited.

Partnering with families and increasing the home-school connection is a key component in absence reduction. Relationships with guardians’ increase student attendance (Kraft & Rogers, 2015). Kraft and Rogers (2015) show that it is the education of those who are responsible for getting the students to school which is the most effective, targeted approach as they must be fully aware of the myriad of reasons for students attending each day. They continue to note that provision of “comparative information” may be helpful, as those responsible are often “unaware” of how their child measures in relation to the other students in the class; previous research indicates that parents felt that their child was “average or above average” for attendance as compared to their peers (p. 3). Furthermore, many parents believed that their child’s attendance rate was “better” than their peers (Rogers & Feller, 2016). Harris (2015) found that increasing parent communication is key and that this communication should begin as early in the elementary years as possible. The data suggest that there is an increase in student attendance

rates through the incorporation of targeted family and community efforts as a support methodology for absence prone students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Communication in a different form is supported by the work of Ehrlich et al. (2018). They note a need for parents to communicate and socialize with one another as a factor that positively influences students' attendance in the pre-k years, while communication from pre-k teachers to kindergarten teachers is also a critical component. Furthermore, the TDE finds that identifying students early in the year decreased the chances that they would become chronically absent as the year progressed (TDE, Division of Data and Research, 2016). This finding is further supported by Epstein & Sheldon (2002) who note that schools "rarely" involved families until the problem was so "severe" that the students were suffering academic ramifications due to the enormity of missed instruction (p. 309). Epstein and Sheldon go on to state, "Giving parents the name and telephone number of at least one person who is officially designated to discuss attendance issue may help parents guide students to more regular attendance." (2002, p. 315). Contact names and numbers paired with opportunities to attend parent workshops which serve to inform parents of the importance of attendance and how the school can support them as they support their children is an additional variable that has proven to be successful in academic studies (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Collaborative efforts involving all stakeholders is key to building effective partnerships which provide students with "increased opportunities for success." (NACC, 2019).

One intervention found great success with its use in a three-year pilot program receiving praise by Balfanz and the team of researchers at Johns Hopkins University, with 58 of the 100 schools seeing a reduction in chronic absenteeism; the team attributed this success to the use of school mentors who checked in on students on a daily basis (Nauer, 2016). Jacobsen et al. found that supportive adults are key and note that a partnership with the school nurse is a critical factor

in ensuring that student health needs are addressed at school; the relationship between students and the school nurse is far-reaching, specifically when it comes to whether a student attends school or stays home (2016; Stone, 2019). Nauer (2016) notes the work of C. Yorke of Cleveland Public Schools as the school's most at-risk students were "divvied up" and each student had an adult with a dedication to checking in on them (p. 32).

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports recognizes the impact of using rewards and incentives in encouraging students towards positive behavioral changes (www.pbis.org). A research brief from the Oregon Department of Education notes that they are pairing programs with schools like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as a positive way to target those who are missing the most days. This increases the positive school climate and sends the message that all students are wanted at school each day (ODE, December 2015). In efforts to make the school climate a friendlier place, Kirksey and Gottfried note a unique approach which ensures "classmate familiarity" as a positive way to help students feel more comfortable at school (2019, p. 225). The importance of the role a classroom teacher plays in the wellbeing of their students is addressed by the work of Freeman et al. (2020) as they state:

> Educators have the important opportunities and responsibilities toward making classrooms and school positively reinforcing and safe places for all students and includes delivering effective instruction, developing contextual and culturally relevant and positive relationships, modeling student expected behaviors, and delivering frequent, overt, and regular positive reinforcement. (p. 6)

The work of C. Yorke found tremendous gains in the area of reducing student absenteeism through the implementation of a system of "events and prizes" for students who reduced their absences (Nauer, 2016). Yorke is credited with reducing absences by 90% or more

for some and turning some students into “perfect attenders” (Nauer, 2016, p. 32; Freeman et al., 2020). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) further support the findings in noting that directly targeting students with tangible incentives yielded reductions, year after year, in absenteeism and consistently increased daily attendance averages.

Conclusion

To truly address and have a lasting impact on the reduction of the number of students who are chronically absent each year, our focus must extend beyond the discussion of students missing days of school and drill down to the root causes for each student. Our solution approach must move away from a “one size fits all” mentality as we work through each case based on need. The work of Ehrlich et al. presents the urgency of identifying students who begin to trend as absent and intervening early, as they note that the cycle of absenteeism begins as early as four years old and these early habits carry throughout the elementary years and have lasting implications on future school success (2018). While noting the importance of early identification and intervention, the Oregon Department of Education cautions that absenteeism, perhaps not occurring in the early years, can become a concern in the “later grades” and is an area that requires consistent focus and fidelity in implementation of the intervention (ODE, 2016). In 2017, 37 states included an attendance focus under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); this is a critical step in tracking and monitoring attendance concerns in those schools who may need “support and strategies for improving student attendance” (Ehrlich et al., p. 148; Aucejo & Romano, 2016). The Tennessee Department of Education presents the magnitude of the issue as they discuss the amount of instructional time that chronically absent students are missing over their formative years; the authors note that chronic absenteeism results in students missing months of instructional time and receiving nearly half of the instruction of their average

attendance peers (TDE, 2016). They state, “Chronic absenteeism does not drive the achievement gap, but it contributes to its magnitude.” It is with this in mind that we must consider the most disadvantaged students as chronic absenteeism only serves to magnify their struggles (TDE, 2016, p. 11). Kirksey and Gottfried’s findings support the concept of familiarity in the classroom with both peers and teachers as it relates to school and classroom environment and increase desire to attend (2019). While there are some implications for policy change regarding student absenteeism, research supports the need for continuing conversations and a need for more accurate documentation and monitoring of at-risk students (Gottfried, 2019). Increasing awareness for all stakeholders, bridging connectivity between schools and families, and “proactive strategies” which facilitate a “connectedness” are critical as we work to reach our chronically absent students (Arif, et al., 2019, p. 847). Through this, we will gain a more informed understanding of the “extent to which chronic absenteeism impedes outcomes for a population of students” facilitating a more targeted approach which addresses the “specific needs for those students” (Gottfried, 2019, p. 8). Overall, schools need to increase their parent and family communication while also listening to the voices of the children that they serve. Targeted, specific, tiered, individualized interventions and supports, with early implementation, are critical to circumventing the cycle of those who are chronically absent from year to year (Attendance Works, 2020). Without action, these students are missing irreplaceable instructional hours that often lead to educational struggles which impact them not only academically but socio-emotionally as well. It is imperative that action is taken to educate, support, and intervene at both the student and family level.

Contributions

Overall, the literature reviewed provides a specific focus for areas of need and attention in the effort to reduce excessive absences and decrease the ramifications which result from missed instructional time. The included studies provide a detailed account of the tracking and data analysis conducted for each subgroup and area of concentration. Through the specific foci of each research study and review of current literature, the urgency for early identification and intervention is clearly apparent. The current literature serves to inform districts and local schools with research-based interventions which target the needs of specific demographic populations.

Strengths

Research studies and data indicate overall consensus in the reasons that students miss school as well as the interventions that are beneficial to supporting those who are chronically absent. There is agreement that early intervention is best practice and carries the most weight in achieving the largest impact in the reduction of absences and reduction of those who are chronically absent from year to year. John Hattie's research suggests and provides effect size on many of the most widely used interventions; this adds value and weight to the consideration of which interventions and strategies will be most useful once implemented. There is strength in the information gleaned from studying the social-emotional impact on students as this is an area noted as being often overlooked while academic achievement typically receives the most attention. In addition, social-emotional variables are key factors cited in the current literature regarding the link between chronically absent students and the national drop-out rate.

Weaknesses

Many of the studies were limited to one community with a specific set of conditions and parameters, with the bulk of the literature centered around children and families of poverty and

lower socio-economic status. The research could be better supported by studies that specifically pinpoint factors that impact students with demographics and socio-economic status that are similar to Bell Elementary. One can further enhance the research by providing a more in-depth study of the myriad of familial factors that obstruct student attendance for families of affluence, while providing interventions and strategies that are proven to work with this demographic. This attention to detail would serve to differentiate interventions and support while guiding community supports that may best serve the family and community needs. Finally, a focus on student health awareness and its role in absenteeism from school are a largely unconsidered area at the local school level. While there is plenty of research addressing this topic individually, the majority of the literature focuses on a collection of variables not including student health concerns. The inclusion of a focus on student health concerns is a valuable perspective as chronic illnesses go hand in hand with chronic absenteeism and the current research has seen an influx in chronic illness in students over recent years.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized an abridged version of John Kotter's 8 Step Change Model (Figure 4), with a focus on six of the eight steps, as the theoretical framework. The foundation of Kotter's change model surrounds the process of change and how "successful large scale change" happens (Kotter, 2002, p.2). Kotter (2002) notes that large scale change is "complex" and takes place in "eight stages" (p. 2). While Kotter's change model was initially developed to promote and support large scale change in a business setting, the model is appropriate for this action research study in that there is a mindset regarding student absenteeism that could benefit from a shift in perspective. The team hoped that the mindset shift would result in parents increasing their awareness of the importance of daily school attendance and begin getting their children to school each day. The team also hoped that the teachers would experience a shift in thinking relative to student engagement and the importance of engagement in its impact on how students view school and their desire to attend. In order for this change to take place with the parents and staff members of BES, the change process required scaffolded support at each of the stages.

Through the approach of the change model, we targeted six of the critical areas for the purpose of this study. It is important to reiterate that the DT agreed that all 8 steps in the original model held value but due to the limited timeframe of the study there was a push to move through the stages in a more expedited manner. The team members concurred that the intent of the study

could be accomplished despite the necessary paring down of the model. The team selected the following stages and turned them into actionable steps:

Step 1. Create a Sense of Urgency

Step 2. Form Guiding Teams

Step 3. Create the Vision for Change

Step 4. Communicate the Vision

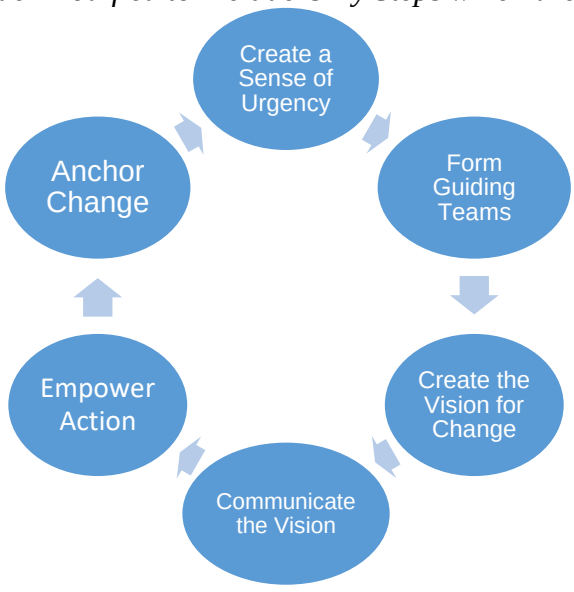
Step 5. Empower Action

Step 6. Anchor Change

The implementation of these six stages resulted in data that supported reflection and analysis of our efforts as we worked to create change within our local school. This model also served as a "check and balance" system which guided the work of the Researcher and DT in our efforts to ensure that we were providing the level of supports necessary to facilitate the change we desired to accomplish.

Figure 4

Kotter's 8 Step Change Model Modified to Include Only Steps which are specific to this study



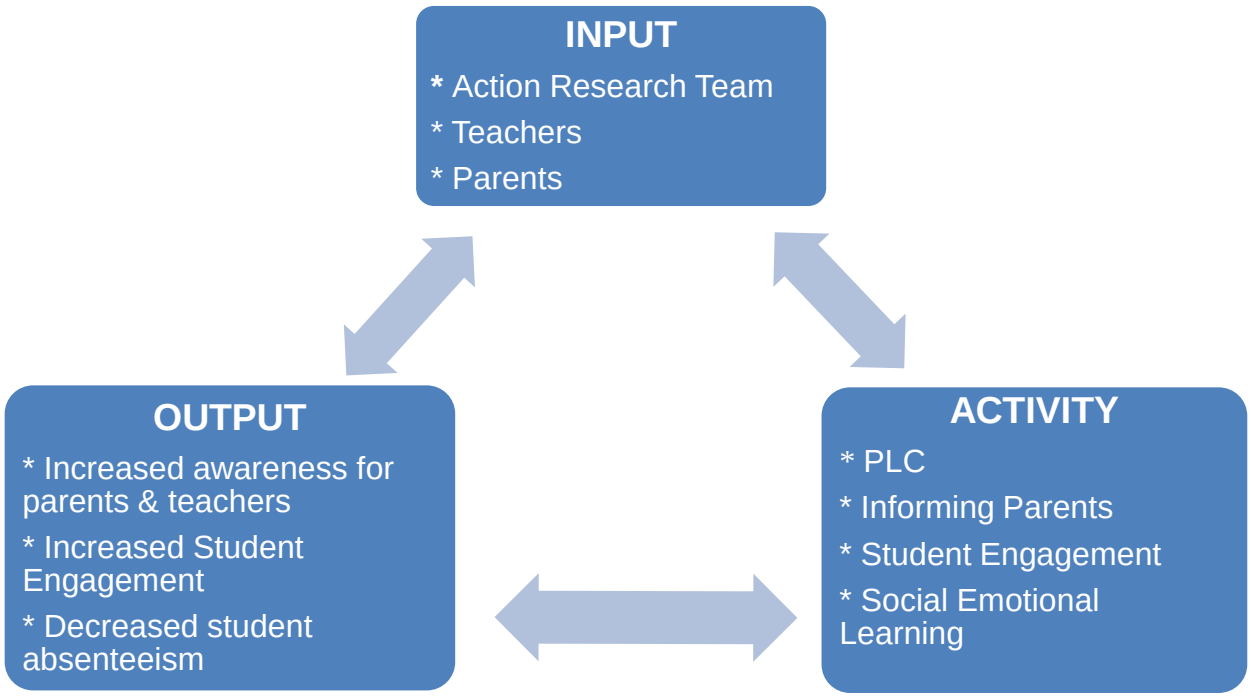
Conceptual Framework

Kotter's change model created guidance for the implementation of this study and served as the foundation for the following conceptual framework. Figure 4 represents a visual depiction of the action steps taken by the research team as they related to Kotter's change model. As previously noted, all steps of Kotter's Change Theory are important but due to the time restrictions placed on this study, the determined that these six of the eight were the most relevant to the current AR study. Implementation of the change effort involved the support of all stakeholders. The initial rollout began by creating the sense of urgency with local school leadership and progressed to an audience, which included the staff and parents. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the guiding teams consistent only of staff members of BES but input from parents was included in a latter portion of the study. The vision for change was created and communicated.

Throughout this study, the teams worked collaboratively to spark significant change through building positive school relationships, shifting mindsets through research-based evidence, and engaging students in action that lead to a more favorable view of school attendance. The teachers were empowered as they engaged in professional development which increased their awareness and enhanced their skillset as they used HLIS to engage their students daily in their classrooms. While the teachers honed their skills, parents attended a webinar series where they worked to learn the importance of regular school attendance and the critical role they play in ensuring this happens for their child. This work, when implemented with proper planning, communication, and fidelity, was designed to lead to an increased awareness for all stakeholders with the ultimate goal of anchoring the change with a reduction in student absenteeism.

Figure 5

Cycle of Action

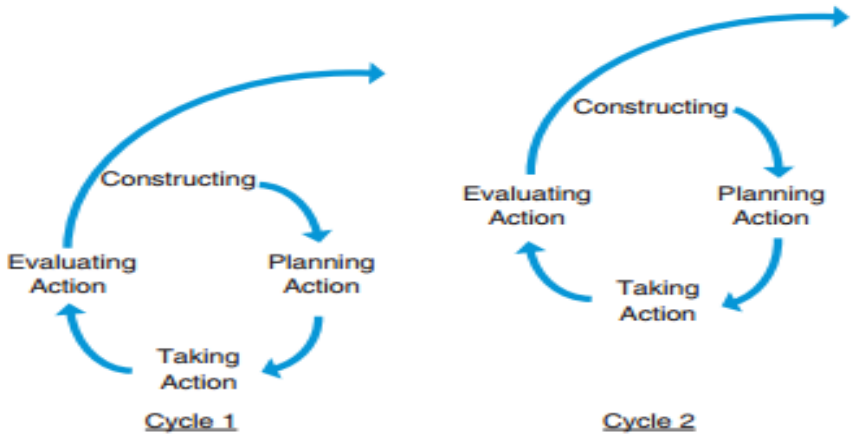


Action Research

The action of the research project was completed in two cycles with the first cycle consisting of a span of six weeks in August and September 2020, and the second cycle consisting of a span of six weeks in September and October 2020. The study included both a pre- and post-cycle which supported the initial planning as well as the data collection actions taken following the close of Cycle 2. The AR cycles followed the iterative process of an intervention implementation plan (see Figure 6). The continuation and conclusion of data analysis took place in early November, with the entire process of the action research project concluding in mid-November.

Figure 6

Action Research Cycles



Note. The figure depicts the Action Research Cycles adapted from the work of Coghlan & Brannick (2014).

The pre-cycle began during the week of preplanning, before the return of students to the building, by convening the DT to draft the plan before presenting to the IT. The DT began by reviewing the interventions which were research-based and proven to be effective in reducing student absenteeism. The pool of possible interventions included ideas in each of the following categories: social-emotional, academic, and family-based. The interventions involved support that worked directly with parents, students, and teachers. As previously discussed, the primary intervention that the team considered was the use of adult mentors, chosen from our parent volunteer program, partnered with goal setting and a reward or incentive-based program for students. Due to the parameters surrounding the COVID-19 limitations, the DT refined their scope to focus more on the academic and social-emotional interventions which met the Center for Disease Control guidelines and did not increase the risk of transmission of infection for any participant, parent, or student in the school. It was through this focus that the DT explored the

use of HLIS and the research surrounding the impact of increasing student engagement while supporting knowledge acquisition as well as closing academic gaps that had undoubtedly widened throughout the pandemic school closures and ensuing summer months without instruction. Also, the team incorporated the social-emotional aspect by implementing designated social-emotional learning time into their daily classroom schedule. It is this approach that met the team's desire to increase each student's connection to school by facilitating and growing the relationships that the students had with their teachers and peers.

The DT carried on with the original plan to facilitate a PLC for participating staff members as this opportunity allowed for new learning and collaboration of staff members who were implementing the interventions. The PLC sessions were held once per month for three months. An additional piece of the intervention plan was the inclusion of parent outreach sessions. Designed to increase parental awareness, the sessions detailed the importance of parental involvement to set their children up for success in both the virtual and brick and mortar settings as the home/school partnership is critical in working to reduce student absenteeism and increase student engagement. The parent outreach sessions were held one time per month for three months.

The DT was confident that the use of these instructional strategies would increase the engagement of students in a manner in which their desire to come to school each day would also increase. The team members agreed that the social-emotional component would be beneficial through both the increase of positive connections with those at school as well as the increased confidence that this component fosters in students. The selection and implementation of these interventions were informed by the conceptual and theoretical frameworks in that there was a necessity to educate all involved for change to take place. As we worked to implement the AR

project, the team collaborated to create the plan, which was then shared with the collective groups and implemented with fidelity. The AR cycles of the conceptual framework guided the team through the process of implementation, reflection, and revision, which further enhanced the project by ensuring the attention to any problems or roadblocks during the implementation cycles. Per Kotter's Change Model, the team turned the ideas into actionable steps, reflected, updated, and maintained communication of the vision with all stakeholders. The literature surrounding student absenteeism supported the identified interventions as research-based and proven to be effective in the reduction of student absenteeism.

Action Research Design Team

The AR Design Team was selected through response to a Google survey sent to staff following the overview presentation of the AR project in July, 2020. Through the survey, eighteen staff members expressed their interest in taking part on the DT. Those who committed to participate represented various areas of instruction and support within the school. The following details the staff who comprised the DT: Instructional Coach, prekindergarten through 5th grade teachers, Paraprofessionals, English Speakers of Other Languages teacher, School Counselor, and Media Specialist. It is important to note, 10 of the 18 members of the DT participated in the initial meeting. The overall composition of the team remained intact as there were a number of teachers who were unable to attend but the group still contained representation from each grade level.

Action Research Implementation Team

The AR Implementation Team was selected through response to a Google survey sent to staff following the overview presentation of the AR project in July, 2020. Through the survey, 21 staff members expressed their interest in taking part on the IT. Those who committed to

participate represented various areas of instruction and support within the school. The following details the staff who comprised the IT: Instructional Coach, Kindergarten through 5th grade teachers, Paraprofessionals, English Speakers of Other Languages teacher, School Counselor, and Media Specialist. It is important to note, participation in the initial IT meeting consisted of 17 of the 21 members who initially expressed interest in joining the meeting. The overall composition of the team remained intact as there were two teachers who were unable to attend but the group still contained representation from each grade level. In addition, one teacher asked to be removed from the participation list as the staff member shared that the circumstances of COVID-19 and impacts on classroom responsibilities and stress levels led to a decision to decline participation in the AR project. An additional member of the team also declined to participate when they learned that the intervention was more teacher-led and did not lend itself well to implementation by a support staff member.

Action Research Timeline

This AR project took place over the course of eighteen weeks during the time period of July 20, 2020 to November 20, 2020. The project consisted of a pre-cycle period which spanned four weeks. The pre-cycle contained the process to identify the targeted students as well as the initial presentations to staff, creation of the AR teams and the initial data collection staff surveys. Cycles 1 and 2 of the project each spanned five weeks and contained the daily implementation of the HL strategies in addition to the weekly data collection from the IT members. The PLCs and parent outreach sessions were also conducted during this time period with two of the three PLCs taking place in Cycle 1 and the third session taking place in Cycle 2. The first parent outreach session was conducted during Cycle 1 and the final two sessions took place during Cycle 2. The post-cycle consisted of two weeks and was used to conduct the end of project staff perception

surveys as well as the end of project staff perceptions focus group meeting. Additional time conducting data analysis was spent during the two weeks of the post-cycle time period. An overview of the timeline and the activities conducted in each cycle is outlined in table 8.

Table 5

Project Timeline and Activities Conducted

Pre-cycle	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Post-cycle
7-20-2020 to 8-21-2020	8-24-2020 to 9-25-2020	9-28-2020 to 11-6-2020	11-9-2020 to 11-20-2020
Identify Students	Implementation of Strategies	Implementation of Strategies	Staff Feedback Survey
Presentation to Staff	PLC #1	PLC #3	Staff Survey St. Attendance
Obtain Staff Consent	Parent Outreach Session #1	Parent Outreach Session #2	Staff Survey St. Engagement
Create DT	PLC #2	Parent Outreach Session #3	AR Team Focus Group
Create IT	Weekly Data Collection	Weekly Data Collection	
Determine PLC Participants			
Staff Survey St. Attendance			
Staff Survey St. Engagement			

Intervention

High-Leverage Practices

Student engagement is a research-based component previously proven to decrease student absenteeism. Additionally, based on the work of John Hattie, the use of HLP and the Visible Learning model are effective in increasing the level of student engagement and learning in the classroom setting, proving that student learning is measurable (Hattie, 2015). These findings align with the work of Ehrlich et al. (2018). They reported that the interventions implemented must be twofold, improve attendance while addressing academic deficits and need for academic support as they note that one or the other, alone, is inadequate in the efforts to support student attendance and academic success. Absences from school impact a student's ability to gain knowledge and achieve academic success. Once a knowledge or skill gap begins to form, this

lack can have effects on a student's ability to be academically successful as well as impacting a student's social-emotional wellbeing and is a critical factor in the student dropout rate (Rogers et al., 2017). It is with these factors in mind that the implementation of HLP became crucial components of the intervention plan for the AP project. The HLP chosen for implementation were: use of scaffolding, feedback to students, facilitation of classroom discussion, and implementation of a social-emotional component to building relationships between the staff member and students.

The implementation of HLP began during the second week of the 2020-2021 school year. The teachers included implementation with fidelity of three HLP in their daily instruction of English Language Arts (ELA) and Math with an additional social-emotional component included daily. For those participating staff members who instructed students in areas that did not have ELA and math, these staff members included the strategies in their lessons. They were provided a separate question for the response to the weekly engagement survey (see Appendix N). This addition supported the participation of any staff member who wished to be part of the IT, regardless of the subject area for instruction.

Professional Learning Community

A PLC convened monthly to review and discuss the data collected throughout the project (see Appendix H, I, J, J.1). The participants in the PLC were provided with learning that was specific to the project, focusing on student engagement, student absenteeism, and social-emotional learning. The staff members engaged in pre and post perception surveys in addition to a set of three closing questions, Ticket Out the Door, that followed each monthly PLC meeting (see Appendix M). The closing questions provided the opportunity for participants to give feedback on the content of the sessions, specifically in the area of usefulness, as one of the main

goals of the PLC was to provide staff with timely strategies, easily implemented upon their return to their classrooms in the following days and weeks. In addition, the participants of the PLC completed a final survey regarding the overall usefulness of the professional learning time (see Appendix T).

Parent Sessions

The Researcher invited parents of BES students to attend a webinar series conducted by the Researcher and participating members of the AR project team. The first of the three-part series was titled, "Setup for Success: Keeping Kiddos Present & Engaged," held on September 9, 2020. All sessions were conducted via the Zoom webinar platform. The second and third sessions of the series were completed in October and November 2020. Throughout the sessions, attendees were able to interact with panelists through a question and answer feature of the webinar. Additional feedback was solicited through the provision of a Google survey sent, electronically, to all participants following the presentation. The feedback garnered through the parent survey was used to drive the subsequent sessions as well as inform the AR team regarding the effectiveness of the sessions in regard to parent perception of helpfulness. The previously discussed intervention plan is outlined in the following table.

Table 6

The Intervention Plan

Proposed Intervention	**Action Research Team Activities**	**Anticipated Outcomes/Connection to problem, theoretical framework**	**Proposed Timeline**	**Data Collected to Evaluate the Intervention**
Daily implementation of High-leverage instructional practices.	Daily implementation of the following High-Leverage instructional strategies: Social-Emotional Learning, provide feedback, class discussions, scaffolded learning	High-leverage instructional practices would: -increase the level of engagement -strengthen the teacher/student relationship -increase the student's desire to be	July 2020 through November 2020 Cycle 1: August 24, 2020 through September 25, 2020	Teacher received a rating scale each week: Likert scale rating student engagement in Reading and Math from 1-10, with ten being the

Proposed Intervention	Action Research Team Activities	Anticipated Outcomes/Connection to problem, theoretical framework	Proposed Timeline	Data Collected to Evaluate the Intervention
	Team members of who did not teach these specific academic content areas implemented the four strategies during their lessons with students.	present in class each day -reduction in student absenteeism Connection to Problem: Implementing research-based strategies, proven to promote student engagement, increase student/teacher relationships, relating directly to student attendance. Kotter's Change theory: -Created sense of urgency -Teams were formed and a vision created and communicated -Continuous review of data and update of plan as necessary -Ensured that the intervention was appropriate and impactful -Mindset shift regarding absenteeism and student engagement	Cycle 2: September 28, 2020 through October 30, 2020	highest level of engagement. Weekly submission of short answer response regarding a concrete indicator of increased student engagement for that week. Staff members who participated in the IT also completed the survey but responded to a Likert scale that was generalized to meet the needs of their lessons.
Monthly Professional Learning Community	PLC meeting dates: August 25, 2020 September 29, 2020 October 22, 2020 PLC team reviewed data collected during Cycle 1and Cycle 2 Topics Covered Session 1-Social Emotional Learning Session 2-High-Leverage instructional strategies Session 3-Chronic absenteeism	Anticipated outcome: Increase the skillset and awareness of participating members Connection to Problem: Participating members were more aware of the types of supports necessary and the "why" behind the need to have students attend school each day. Staff implemented research-based strategies proven to promote student engagement and increase student/teacher relationships, which are directly related to student attendance. Kotter's Change theory: -Created sense of urgency -Teams were formed and a vision created and communicated -Continuous review of data and update of plan as necessary -Ensured that the intervention was appropriate and impactful -Mindset shift regarding absenteeism and student engagement	July 2020 through November 2020 Cycle 1: August 24, 202 through September 25, 2020 Cycle 2: September 28, 2020 through October 30, 2020.	Each PLC closed with a Ticket Out the Door regarding thoughts on information received Feedback was used to drive direction of the following sessions Participating members completed a perception survey regarding the impact of the action research project at the close of the Cycle two.
Monthly parent, "Y'all Come" sessions	Monthly Zoom Webinars: September 9, 2020 October 6, 2020 November 6, 2020 Sessions Topics Session 1: -Student engagement in virtual & brick and mortar settings -importance of student attendance -impact of student	Anticipated outcome: Increased awareness regarding importance of daily school attendance and student engagement Connection to Problem: Shared research-based strategies, proven to promote student engagement, increase student/teacher relationships which are directly	July 2020 through November 2020 Cycle 1: August 24, 202 through September 25, 2020 Cycle 2: September 28,	Anonymous submission of perception data and feedback following each session Implementation Team analyzed responses and integrated feedback into consideration for changes to the plan

Proposed Intervention	Action Research Team Activities	Anticipated Outcomes/Connection to problem, theoretical framework	Proposed Timeline	Data Collected to Evaluate the Intervention
	absenteeism -ways that parents can support their student's attendance and engagement Session 2: -Navigation of student learning platform -Reading success in virtual/brick & mortar -Motivating students in virtual/brick & mortar settings -Incorporating movement to increase engagement Session 3: -Parents as Learning Coaches K-5 -Modeling reading instruction parents can do at home -Parents using text features & supporting writing success	related to student attendance. Increased awareness for parents as their support in bringing their children to school each day was critical. Kotter's Change theory: -Created sense of urgency with the delivery of the data and literature surrounding student absenteeism and engagement -Teams were formed and a vision created and communicated -Continuous review of data and update of plan as necessary -ensured that the intervention was appropriate and impactful -Mindset shift regarding absenteeism and student engagement	2020 through October 30, 2020.	following the data collection period in Cycle one. Feedback influenced topics of Session 2 & 3

Research Design

Focus Group

A focus group was used to gain insight, gather information, and affirm conclusions drawn from individual participant surveys. The use of focus groups is valuable as the format allows the Researcher to capitalize on the knowledge and experience of the participants (Zepeda, 2015). The focus group included members who served on the IT as well as those who participated in the PLCs. The use of the focus group was purposeful in that it afforded the opportunity to hear the collective voice or consensus of the group. It allowed the Researcher the opportunity to confirm the preliminary findings as well as the themes of the study by eliciting group consensus regarding the interpretation of the data, thus allowing the group an opportunity to speak candidly and at greater length than the opportunities provided through the various surveys. The focus

group was recorded and transcribed by the Researcher. The transcription identified the interview participant by code letter only. The Researcher coded the focus group transcript while the AR team affirmed the analysis of the data. In addition, the Researcher used the focus group to clarify any questions found during the data collection and analysis portion of the study.

Coding

Upon completion of the data collection process, the data was shared with the AR team for confirmation of the Researcher's analysis. The Researcher conducted a minimum of three reads as a part of the analysis process. The first read allowed the Researcher to become familiar with the content; the second, third, and any additional reads allowed the opportunity to confirm emerging themes or trends within the information contained. The data was coded by the Researcher based on the predetermined code developed by the Researcher which categorized the data by the research question to which it answered. The Researcher used a series of colored markings which served to color code the information based on the theme and research question in which is supported. The data was marked using pink, green, and blue highlighters. This allowed for a clear visual representation of the collection of data and its corresponding theme.

The AR team reserved the right to revise the coding structure if deemed necessary. If the coding structure required revision, all documents analyzed through the coding structure were adjusted to reflect the final coding structure. Ultimately, there was no need to revise the coding structure and the Researcher moved forward with the chosen system. Identity of the participants were masked using the predetermined letter system of the letters A through Z, where each participant was coded as a letter of the alphabet. The determined themes as well as the participant statements which supported the themes was presented to the participants during the

focus group meeting. During this time the team members checked the findings and consensus was gained regarding the themes.

Surveys

Surveys were the dominant source of data solicitation and collection throughout the AR project. Survey research is defined by Check and Schutt (2012) as "the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions" (p. 160). This methodology for data sampling and collection was valuable as it allowed for the collection of opinions and views from a sample that is "representative of the population" (Pronto, 2015, p. 169). All surveys were delivered through the Google Forms platform. Data from surveys were merged to provide overall perceptions and disaggregated to provide more detailed insight into the perceptions of a smaller section of the surveyed participants. For those survey questions which received responses based on a Likert scale, mean scores were calculated and trend analysis conducted. Surveys conducted for feedback were analyzed for overarching themes and trends which informed the direction of both the PLC and parent sessions. Data collected through the survey process was analyzed by the Researched for emerging themes through the use of a process which incorporated colored highlighters. The data which pertained to each specific theme was noted through the use of the specific color; pink, green, yellow, or blue. This allowed the Researched to easily collate the participant responses and identify the areas of concurrence or disagreement among the teams.

Data Triangulation

As noted by Creswell (2014), the use of surveys and interviews gathered from various sources, i.e., teachers, staff members, and parents, served to inform the AR study and facilitated an assurance of qualitative validity. The information collected came from a participant sample

that included both novice and veteran teachers as well as staff members who were either homeroom, support, or special areas. The research sample further allowed for variety with the inclusion of parent feedback, which provided the AR team reflection from both internal and external stakeholders. Analysis of surveys and interviews afforded the AR team opportunities to find trends and themes while the analysis of AR team focus group provided a format that allowed for a more individualized experience of the AR project and additional insight into the thinking of the participants while affirming the general conclusions made by the Researcher.

Table 7

The Research Plan

Research Question	Anticipated Data to be Collected	Analysis Approach	Proposed Timeline
1. To what extent do chronically absent students respond to the implementation of targeted interventions?	Student attendance data were collected using the local school data platform, Infinite Campus. Attendance reports were generated bi-monthly.	Attendance reports were analyzed for trends of student absences and changes in trends based on previous year's history. This comparison was drawn between the absences accrued during the first three months of school for the 2019-2020 school year and the absences accrued during the first three months of the 2020-2021 school year.	The implementation of the Action Research project began August 24, 2020. Cycle 1 of the project ran from August 24 through September 25. Cycle 2 of the project ran from September 28 through October 30, 2020. The project was completed in full by mid- November 2020.
2. To what extent does the implementation of High Leverage Instructional Strategies influence daily student engagement?	Participating staff members received a rating scale each week with a Likert scale for rating student engagement in Reading, Math, and "other" from 1-10, with ten being the highest level of engagement. Participating staff members also submitted a short answer response regarding a concrete indicator of increased student engagement for that week.	This data was collected on a weekly basis, merged, and analyzed. A mathematical mean was determined for each Likert scale response. In addition, the data was analyzed for trends in teacher perception of increased levels of student engagement. This trend data was then compared against the data collected for student absences. The team looked for a correlation between increased engagement and decrease in missed days of school.	The implementation of the Action Research project began August 24, 2020. Cycle 1 of the project ran from August 24 through September 25. Cycle 2 of the project ran from September 28 through October 30, 2020. The project was completed in full by mid- November 2020.
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of an Action Research Team on targeting	The staff members took part in surveys regarding their perception of student absenteeism and student	This perception data was collected and analyzed for trends related to a shift in the mindset of the participating staff members surrounding the importance	The implementation of the Action Research project began August 24, 2020. Cycle 1 of the project ran

chronic absenteeism by way of increasing student engagement?	engagement. The staff members also took in a focus group regarding their perception of the action research project and its impact at the close of Cycle	of daily student attendance and the impact of the actions taken by the Implementation Team over the course of the action research project.	from August 24 through September 25. Cycle 2 of the project ran from September 28 through October 30, 2020. The project was completed in full by mid- November 2020.

Selection

Bell Elementary Staff members were contacted by staff email and invited to be the audience of an informational presentation that described the Action Research project, data driving the topic, and the work participants in the project would be completing. This initial presentation was originally scheduled to take place, in person, at BES. Due to the COVID-19 closure of all Hope County schools during the second week of March 2020 the presentation took place virtually via the Zoom platform. The presentation shared the statistics and impact of chronic absenteeism on students as well as impact of increased student engagement on daily attendance. The initial staff presentation took place in May 2020 and was revisited with revisions due to COVID-19 in July 2020. The staff were then polled using a Google Survey as to the specific team that they would be interested in supporting. This polling was confirmed in July 2020 with a follow-up Google Survey. All members of the staff of BES were eligible and invited to participate in the project. Ultimately thirty staff members agreed to take part in the AR project and participated in one or more of the available teams. A follow-up presentation of the project was conducted during the initial week of preplanning in July 2020. During this presentation, the staff was updated on the limitations which were binding the direction of the study and the impact of operational guidelines of a school opening, during a pandemic, on the proposed interventions.

Informed consent was ensured via email. The consent form was sent to potential participants for review during the week before the staff members returned to the building for

preplanning. All staff members who indicated some level of interest were provided with the electronic version of the consent document. Staff members were provided with hard copies of the consent document during the follow-up staff presentation during the first week of preplanning. The Researcher maintained a list of all interested participants and used this as a checklist once the signed consent was received. Those who expressed interest but did not return the signed consent form received an in-person follow-up by the Researcher where a hard copy of the consent document was presented, and the participant was able to sign and return the document immediately. At each presentation of the consent document, participants were specifically reminded that they had the right to quit the project at any time, regardless of the reason. The participants were also reminded that their confidentiality would be maintained through the use of a lettering system, which would take the place of their names. The Researcher assured them that she would be the only individual with the identifying information related to the code for pseudonyms.

The parents of all students enrolled at BES were invited to participate as their inclusion, and awareness of the impact of student attendance is a critical component. Parents who chose to attend the Y'all Come session were not required to sign consent in order to attend. Consent for parent participants was only required for those parents who wished to complete a "Ticket out the Door" and gave permission for their information to be used for the purpose of the study. Parents were also reminded that their confidentiality would be maintained through the use of a lettering system which would take the place of their name. The Researcher assured them that she would be the only individual with the identifying information related to the key for coding of pseudonyms. Informed consent was obtained in July 2020 for staff and September 2020 for parents. Staff members were only included if they signed consent to participate; they were

excluded if they did not wish to continue to participate or for any other unforeseeable reason which arose. Parents/guardians were only included if they signed consent to participate; they were excluded if they did not wish to participate or for any other unforeseeable reason which arose. This project did not exclude any student based on gender or minority group.

For the purpose of the study, individual students were not utilized due to the limitations of the variables present during the COVID-19 pandemic. With this noted, a targeted group of students was identified in July 2020 through the use of attendance reports for 2017-2020. Once identified, the attendance patterns of the students were monitored by the Researcher. This attendance data was used for comparison purposes during the meetings held by the IT at the close of Cycles one and two as well as the monthly meetings of the PLC. Despite initial planning to identify and intervene with specific individual students, the Design Team agreed that the tracking of the student data was sufficient for overall attendance purposes and contributed to the context of this study. Students were identified using attendance reports for the previous three years. Students were considered eligible if they missed 15 or more days in a year for any or all three years (2017-2018, 2018-2019, 2019-2020). The data were only tracked for students who were currently enrolled BES.

Perception surveys were completed by all participants at the start and close of the study. Depending on the team in which they participated, staff members took part in completing various data collection instruments. All AR members completed two perception surveys at the start of the project and one overall perception survey at the close of the AR project. Members also participated in a Focus Group at the close of the AR study. The members of the PLC completed the perception surveys in addition to completing a Ticket Out the Door at the close of each PLC meeting. The parents who participated in the Y'all Come sessions completed a Google Survey

for feedback at the close of each session. The AR teams were comprised of staff members with all levels of experience, having a minimum of three years of classroom teaching experience and a maximum of thirty years of teaching experience. The group collectively brought a total of 390 years of educational experience. The respondents are a diverse group of educators, which included representation from Pre-K through 5th grades as well as staff members who taught special education, English Speakers of Other Languages, and held various support staff positions. The teams worked collectively and cooperatively, as they discussed. As members would present different viewpoints, other members would affirm the perspective, validate the thinking, and then the team would discuss until reaching consensus. This methodology was valid for both the Design and Implementation Teams as both teams worked together to share ideas while supporting differing thought processes but ultimately finding unity in their approach.

While the AR Teams consisted of members who are more willing to share or voice their opinions, no conflict arose among team members in this regard. Those who were first to speak up did so, while those who were less inclined to speak first followed up with affirmations of the presented ideas or thinking. The participating staff members, for the most part, had a long history of working together at BES and had participated in many learning experiences together. The previous experiences together facilitated the cohesive nature of the teams and provided a level of comfort that may not have otherwise been present. Overall, the teams were happy to meet, discuss, participate, and respond accordingly to the needs of the AR project. The members were respectful to one another and willing to listen, discuss, and concede to majority consensus for the overall good of the project.

The students were identified based on the following factor(s): 10 or more absences from school during the 2019-2020 school year, and/or previous history of 15 or more absences during

the 2018-2019 school year. The decision to reduce the required number of absences for the 2019-2020 school year was due to the COVID-19 closure, which shut schools down for the brick and mortar setting on March 13, 2020. Due to the shortened period of months for which the schools were open, these students had fewer opportunities for in-person attendance. Thus it was prudent to reduce the requirement to allow for the sample to capture those who would likely have met the 15 or more criteria had school remained open in the face to face setting through the remainder of the school year.

Data Collection Methods

The Researcher used a qualitative design, also informed by quantitative data, for the purpose of this action research study. This methodology is based on the work of Creswell (2014), who states, "a Researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzes them separately, and then compares the results to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other" (p. 219). This approach allows for the use of multiple data sources coupled with analysis through triangulation of the data sources, offering additional insight into the findings and ability to determine the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the implemented interventions. The Researcher incorporated the use of individual perception surveys and feedback opportunities as the sources of data collection throughout the AR project. The perception questions had been previously used to elicit information and collect data for a case study surrounding the same general topic. They were selected based on their applicability to the study at hand.

The instruments and methodology were chosen as they would afford the AR team an opportunity to analyze for overall trends and themes while providing an opportunity for a more detailed approach as necessary. The instruments were chosen to ensure reliability and validity in that they are only completed by participants in the AR project who have provided informed

consent and agree to the parameters of the study. The coding of the information ensures the reliability of the data maintained by the Researcher and provides anonymity of the participants. The analysis of the data by the AR team allowed multiple perspectives to converge as one for categorical determinations regarding trends and themes.

Data Analysis

The perceptions surveys for staff members were collected and the responses were disaggregated into overarching categories of positive views regarding their relationship to the three research questions which guided this study. Feedback surveys were collected at the close of each Y'all Come session and were analyzed for overarching categories of positive views regarding attendance and engagement efforts, negative views regarding attendance and engagement efforts, and neutral views regarding attendance and engagement efforts, in addition to specific parent requests/needs regarding supports/information. Data collected were linked using a coding system of alphabet letters, which stood as identifiers for each of the participants. Participating parents were identified with the same system as the staff, except the parents were identified using numbers as opposed to letters. All systems for coding and corresponding key were maintained throughout the duration of the AR project in a locked filing cabinet located in the office of the Researcher. The Researcher was the only person who had access to this filing cabinet.

Reliability and Validity

The Researcher was acutely aware of the internal bias created by the reviewed literature and case studies surveyed prior to the implementation of this project. While this awareness facilitated a cognizance of the necessity to remain unbiased, that alone was not at a level that

negated doubt. Throughout the process, the heavy lifting was conducted by the AR team, with the Researcher's influence only taking the lead in the initial stages of introduction and roll out.

The Researcher's previous experience as a classroom teacher and administrator did afford additional opportunities for insight that a layperson would otherwise not possess. It was with intention and diligence that these experiences did not intentionally cloud the Researcher's judgment or cause prejudice during the process. While fully aware of the risk of their participation in the data analysis portion of the project and any inherent bias they may have imposed, the Researcher remained committed to the efforts of objectivity and in no way purposefully inflicted personal bias on the findings. Throughout the cycles of the project, the Researcher maintained a written log of thoughts surrounding the data as an aid in personal reflection and subjectivity.

Chapter Summary

The information covered in chapter three speaks to the foundation of the study through the introduction of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The process of the AR study was detailed in a step by step manner which spoke to the "why" and "how" behind the purpose of the study and the manner in which the team carried it out. Due diligence was evident in every aspect of the process as the team members were carefully selected and supported throughout the study. It was noted at great length the level of planning and preparation necessary to carry out the study from start to finish. In addition to a thorough review of the initial planning process, this chapter delved into the intervention and articulated the connection of the actions taken by the team and the research which frames and supports the importance of the approach. The chapter concluded with the summary of the data collection methods and analysis while ensuring the subjectivity of the Researcher throughout the study.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASE

The Context

Described as a meticulous blend of rural roots with urban convenience and amenities, Hope County, Connecticut is located in the Southern Crescent Region of Metropolitan Hartford (www.hopecountyga.gov). Established in 1871, Hope hosts a population of over 115,000 and covers a land area of over 250 square miles which includes three cities and two towns. Life in Hope County is desirable for several reasons. A few of the main attractions include eight golf courses, premier shopping, family-friendly dining, and proximity to major highways and interstates.

Located in the heart of Hope County, Connecticut, Bell is revered as being one of the county's best-kept secrets. Established in 1959, Bell boasts over 20,000 acres of development with a population of just over 30,000 people. Unique to Bell are the 150 miles paved trail ways as Bell is a nature loving community and its residents are avid nature enthusiasts. Well above sea level, Bell is located in the Piedmont region of Connecticut and is considered part of the Metro Hartford area. Home to some of the best fishing in the area, three main lakes provide over 1,500 acres of recreational opportunity (www.bell.org).

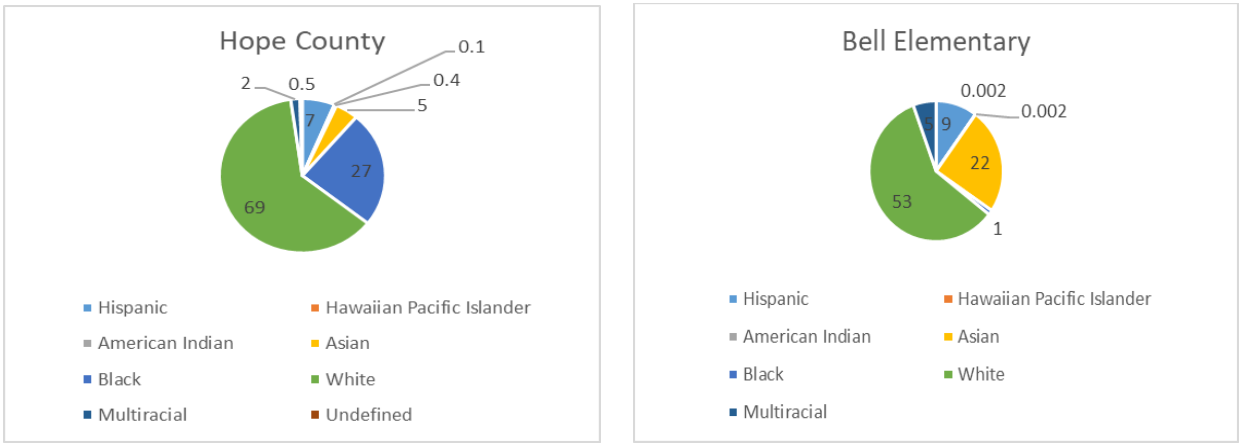
Nestled in the Southern region of Hope County, Bell Elementary is one of seven elementary schools and serves pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The Hope County Public School system is comprised of 24 traditional schools and one non-traditional high school. As of October 2018, the county served 20,315 students in grades K-12 (www.bell.org). A

breakdown of the student demographics for Hope County finds that .11% are Hawaiian Pacific Islander, 0.33% are American Indian, 6.69% are Asian, 27.52% are Black, 47.63% are White, 5.61% identified as Multiracial, and 0.06% identified as undefined (Statewide Longitudinal Data System). Bell Elementary School currently holds an enrollment of 489 students.

The following is a breakdown of the demographics for enrolled students: 55 Hispanic, 1 American Indian, 105 Asian, 42 Black, 1 Native Hawaiian, 259 White, and 26 students identified as Multiracial. Two percent of students at Bell Elementary receive free and reduced price lunch, 9% are students with disabilities, 16% are English Language Learners, and Bell has a student mobility rate of 13.4% (Governor's Office of Student Achievement). The overall performance of Bell Elementary is greater than 96% of all elementary schools in the state of Connecticut (Connecticut School Grades Reports).

Figure 7

Ethnic Demographics of Hope County and Bell Elementary



Bell Elementary boasts a highly qualified staff with the majority of staff members holding more than one college degree in addition to their multiple certification areas. The staff of BES consistently push themselves to further their learning, regardless of their current teaching assignment. A recent survey finds that 81% of our staff hold endorsements and certifications

outside of their current assignment. Of the 32 certified staff members, five hold Gifted certifications, five ESOL endorsements, nine special education certifications, four math endorsements, four leadership certifications, and five media/technology certifications. The faculty of BES shows their committed support in that 60% of our certified staff has taught at BES for five or more years, with 34% teaching for 10 or more years and 14% with 20 or more years of service to our school. As of the 2019-2020 school year, BES has zero beginning teachers on staff.

Bell Elementary is fortunate in the abundance of parental support received through the local school Parent Teacher Organization as well as volunteer programs for adult males called the Watch D.O.G.S. [Dads of Great Students]. This volunteer program is a well-known family and community engagement organization which began in 1998 (Watch D.O.G.S.) Each year the Watch D.O.G.S. program harnesses the power of "hundreds of thousands of fathers and father-figures," making positive impacts on millions of children across the nation (Watch D.O.G.S). The children of BES benefit from this program as the fathers and father-figures enter the school each day with a commitment to working with our students, setting positive examples, building positive relationships, and completing tasks which support both the teachers and students. The Watch D.O.G.S. program, and the men who volunteer, is an invaluable resource for the students of BES.

As a local school administrator in the Hope County School System, the Researcher's role is vast as they work to support students, families, and staff at both the school and county level. Daily, they analyze data, provide instructional support, manage behavioral concerns, facilitate parent meetings, and work to carry out the vision and the mission of Bell and Hope County. The Researcher is consistently identifying, targeting, and addressing areas of impact for academic

achievement in accordance with our vision for academic excellence; this task is paramount to the daily activities that they perform. Through this lens, with data indicating it as an area of concern for Bell Elementary, a plan for addressing chronic absenteeism was devised.

Problem Framing in the Context

As noted in chapter 1, analysis of Bell Elementary School's 2017-2018 attendance data revealed a significant number of students categorized as chronically absent, with 17 students missing 18 or more days of school. This was further supported by attendance trend data that found approximately 50% of the students of BES have missed six or more days per year from the 2006-2007 school year through the 2017-2018 school year. The Average Daily Attendance rate of 96.59% for the 2017-2018 school year masked the underlying problem for the group of students who were habitually absent from school. Upon further investigation, the concerning trend was visible over the past four years. Chronic absenteeism was found to be a district-wide concern with a focus on the impact that student absences caused and the best ways to address them. Of the 20,890 Hope County students enrolled each year, approximately 1,500 students county-wide were consistently missing more than 15 days of school each year. This finding is deeply troubling when considering the academic and social-emotional impact on students with numerous missed days from school. The urgency to intervene with the students of Bell is affirmed through review of data comparing Bell Elementary to other schools in the state. Bell Elementary consistently had a higher percentage of students missing 15 or more days. Of the eight schools qualifying for comparison state-wide, there was only one school during the 2016-2017 school year that had a higher percentage of students with 15 or more days missed than Bell Elementary; it is remarkable to note that this school was also located in Hope County.

Problem Framing Based on the Site

Based on supporting trend data, there is an identified need for reductions in absenteeism throughout the district and specifically at BES. This action research study targeted the students who were presently and historically identified as being chronically absent or on the cusp of being categorized as chronically absent from school. The study targeted those students identified as having 18 or more absences yearly, throughout the past three years or who were trending towards the 18 absences for the current year. For purposes of identifying targeted students for the current year, those students with 10 or more absences were chosen for the study, as the trend data indicated that students with 10 or more absences by the mid-point of the school would typically accrue the additional eight absences within the following five-month period. The number of missed days and percentage of the student population missing this amount of school is a problem in that missed days from school are missed opportunities for academic instruction and often this missed instructional time results in areas of academic deficit and detriment to social-emotional wellbeing. Resolving the issue of chronic absenteeism is critical and must be addressed to maximize instructional time for our students in order to adequately prepare them for college and career readiness.

In the effort to lessen student absenteeism and increase the level of accountability for student attendance, Hope County adopted a set attendance protocol for student absences. This protocol is detailed on the county homepage as well as included in the student code of conduct that is distributed to parents and students each year. At the elementary level, parents were asked to sign and return the last page of the student code of conduct as a record that they had received and read the document. Contained within this protocol is the following information: for students ages 6-16 years old, the school will notify parents following the 5th cumulative unexcused

absence (per semester) and 10th unexcused absence per semester. This notification will provide the possible consequences for students who are repeatedly absent from school (HCBOE, n.d.). For those students who reach the 10th unexcused absence, the letter serves to notify parents and students of the intent to submit attendance record to the Student Attendance Protocol Committee and a determination made regarding court action and "formal interventions." (HCBOE, n.d.). Students who are ages 16-17 years of age will receive a letter from the attendance/residency office which outlines the possible consequences as well as the law regarding school attendance for those who are licensed drivers (HCBOE, n.d.). The summary of consequences stated by the Hope County Board of Education is as follows:

> Any parent, guardian, or other person who has control of any child who on the tenth unexcused day of absence or the tenth unexcused tardy per semester, and after the child's school notifies the parent, guardian, or other person who has control of any child, upon each day's absence/tardy from school shall be guilty of a misdemeanor or court action may be pursued for formal intervention (n.d., p. 145).

This statement is followed by a notation which serves as a warning that those who do not abide by such policies are subject to penalties which include: a fine-no less than $25.00 and not more than $100.00, imprisonment-not to exceed 30 days, community service, and/or any combination of the penalties as the court decides (HCBOE, n.d.). The Hope County attendance protocol also included a provision which addresses the use of "personal notes" from parents/guardians to receive an excused absence. This provision notes that the school administrator may request medical documentation once the student returns to school as the verification of the purpose for the absence (HCBOE, n.d.). While the county does recognize that there are valid and excusable reasons for missed school days, these are limited to those regarding

the death of immediate family members, personal illness, and instances involving religious, political or court-ordered matters (HCBOE, n.d.).

At the time of this study, Bell Elementary loosely followed the procedure of contacting parents on the third day of student absence. While the majority of teachers were in contact with the parents, some failed to contact on day three but made contact on day four, while others were unable to reach parents and left messages instead. Once teachers made contact with parents, the administration would typically receive notice of the parent contact and the reason for the child being absent from school. Often the teachers would report that the student was absent from school due to an extended vacation which stretched beyond the scheduled holiday or break for the school system. At times, parents who had planned a trip to visit relatives in another country, withdrew their children from school and reenrolled them once their travels were completed. In cases such as personal illness, the administration checked back in with the teacher upon the child's expected date of return. If the child had not returned to school within a reasonable length of time, the administration would reach out to the parent to inquire of the child's well-being. In most cases, the parent would update that the child continued to suffer from an illness and would offer a new projected date for return to school.

Based on attendance history, the administration would discuss the proper documentation required to receive excused absences upon to return to school. If the child continued to be absent well beyond the expected date for return, administration contacted the parents as well as the county social worker who may stop by the home to check on the welfare of the student. These steps were taken in addition to the parent notification that is outlined in the Hope County attendance protocol. It is important to note that attendance matters at the elementary schools are handled a bit differently than the middle and high school levels, as the elementary school does

not work with truancy officers to enforce the attendance expectations while the middle and high school level do employ this strategy. The protocols and procedures in place serve a critical purpose when it comes to the education and well-being of the students of Hope County. The importance of regular school attendance has resulted in an abundance of research based data. This data confirms the importance of daily school attendance and the necessary urgency in provision of intervention for those who are chronically absent from school.

Due to the focus of this AR study, it is pertinent to note a portion of the history of student absenteeism at the state and federal level. In 2015 President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This act sparked efforts which called for increased accountability regarding student attendance and required states to report absenteeism to the federal level; it is the current plan in place at the date of this study. ESSA is touted as an advancement in the fight to target and support chronically absent students as it made it allowable for schools to spend federal dollars on interventions to reduce student absences (Kinvolved, 2017). Prior to ESSA, the states were held to a level of accountability through No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Under NCLB, there was no specific requirement for the measure or reporting of chronic absenteeism, only “stipulations for truancy.” (Kinvovled, 2017). This requirement for states to include this data in their submissions to the federal government is promising as the hope is that this will hold districts and local schools more accountable while increasing efforts to support those students who are consistently missing 10 percent or more school days per year. (www.attendanceworks.org, 2015).

The Story and Outcomes

Planning for the AR study began in May, 2020. As noted in Chapter 1, the staff was surveyed twice and consent was secured prior to participation in any portion of the study. While

the parameters of the global pandemic shifted the efforts and shaped the final result, the intention of the study did not waiver and the DT continued its mission to create an intervention which effectively targeted chronically absent and at-risk students. Following the drafted plan by the DT, the IT met to review the proposed methodology. The IT received the information which the DT considered as they worked through the thinking and creation of the plan. The IT had the opportunity to ask questions, and the Researcher provided feedback. The Researcher, as well as several IT members who were also members of the DT, worked to respond and provide clarification for the questions posed by the IT team members. There were only two minor updates that were included in the feedback from the IT: adding dates to the weekly survey and having a non-homeroom teacher option for the weekly engagement survey. Ultimately the IT embraced the work of the DT and agreed to the decisions they made and the parameters under which the implementation would take place. The response to the data collection piece and strategies chosen were positive. The team expressed their appreciation for the efforts and commitment of the DT. At the close of this meeting, the team determined that there was no need to bring the draft back for revision by the DT. The draft was confirmed as final and set to implement starting August, 2020.

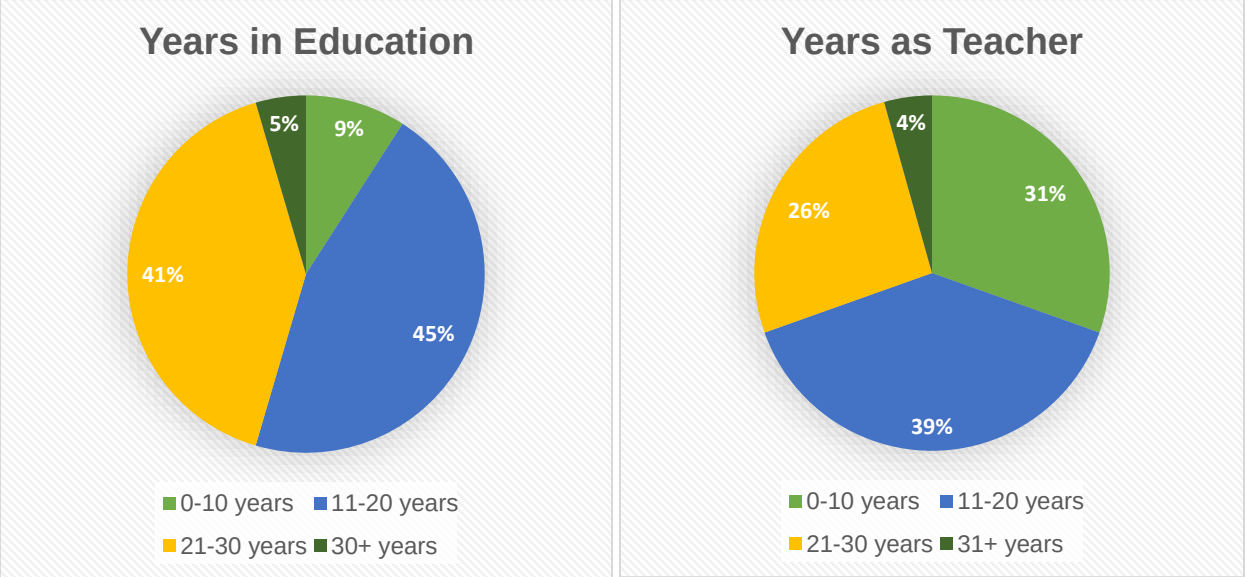
Pre-Cycle

To more profoundly and collectively understand the problems, challenges, and opportunities of this AR project, we conducted two surveys with participating staff members. The first survey questioned the staff regarding their thoughts and level of concern with student attendance (see Appendix B). The second survey questioned the participants regarding their opinions and level of concerns regarding student engagement (see Appendix?). Information gathered was a critical component to understanding the mindset of the participants and their level

of understanding, concern for, and dedication to implementing the AR interventions. The following outlines the information collected from the Student Engagement and Student Attendance surveys.

Figure 8

Staff Survey Regarding Student Engagement, Years of Experience

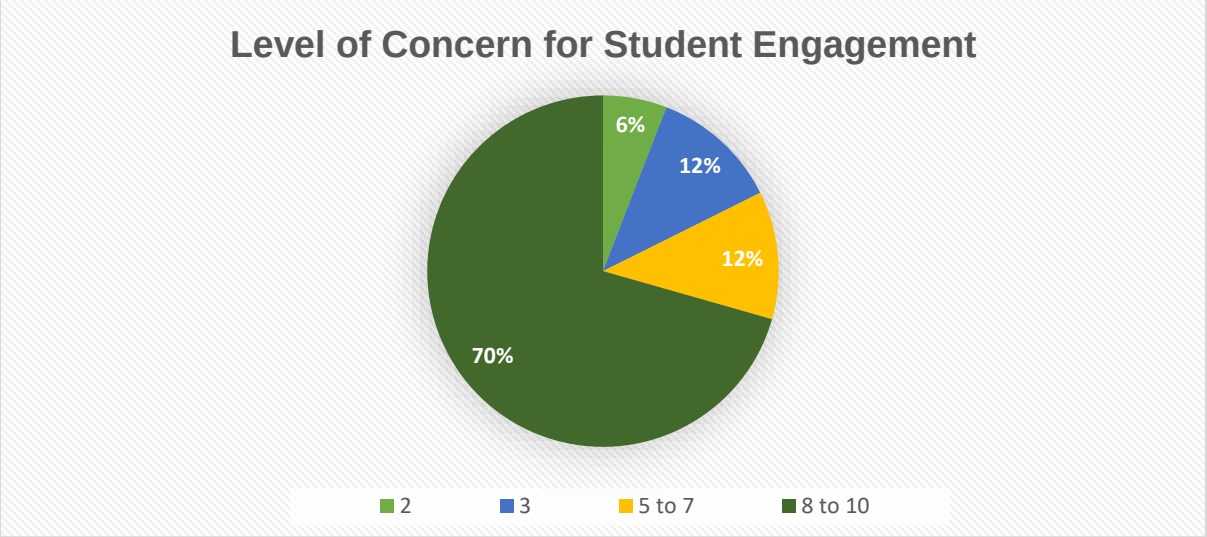


The survey yielded the following information regarding teacher perception of student engagement. Twenty-one staff members, with a collective 392 years in the field of education, responded to the survey regarding student engagement. With 321 of these collective years being in the classroom setting, it is fair to consider this group experienced in their instructional approach and practices. The average years spent as a classroom teacher was approximately 15 years per respondent; this group of participants was considered veterans in the field of education with three years of classroom experience on the lowest end and thirty-three years of classroom experience on the highest end. It is important to note that the most novice of the group, the teacher with just three years of classroom experience, had spent the previous fourteen years as an

instructional paraprofessional in the classroom before earning her teaching degree. The respondents were an approximate split between those who serve Pre-Kindergarten to second grade, 42.9%, and those who serve third through fifth grade, 57.1%.

Figure 9

Staff response Regarding Level of Concern for Student Engagement

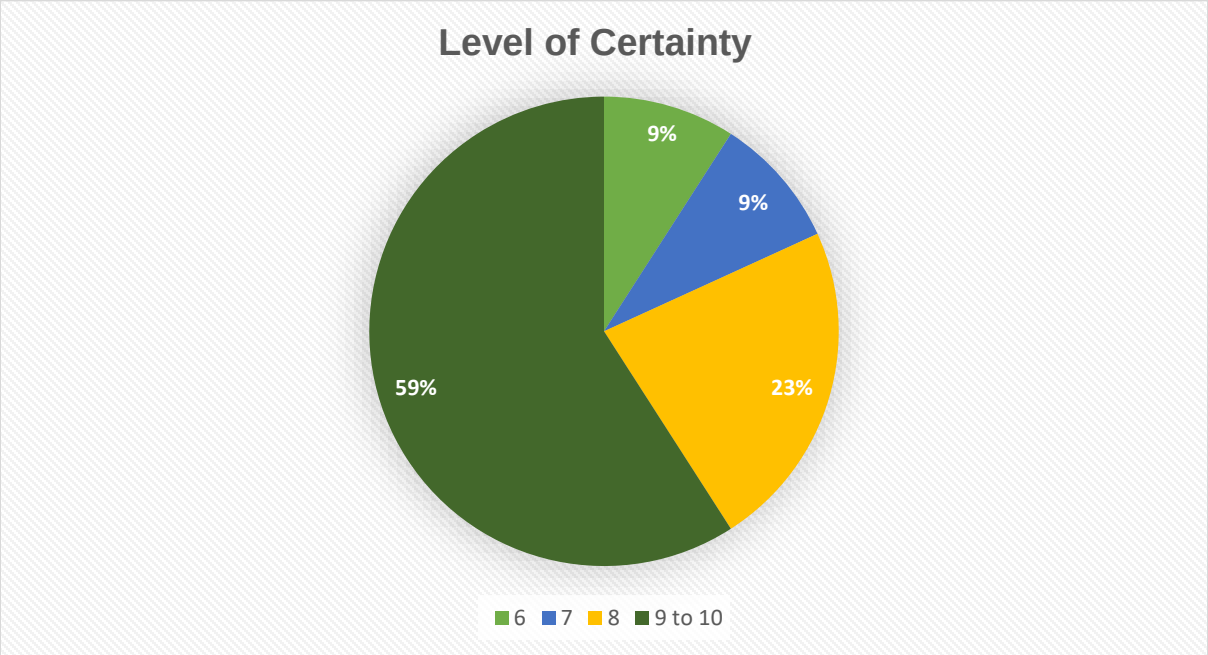


Responses regarding the level of concern with student engagement varied for the group with the majority, 70%, selecting a level eight to ten on the Likert scale for high concern in this area. In comparison, 12% chose a level five to seven for a relatively higher concern, 12% chose a level three with much lower concern, and 6% chose a level two, which was the lowest level of concern selected for this question. This information was thought-provoking in that it prompted new thinking and the need for clarifying questions when interviewing the participants farther into the project. The researcher wondered if the wording of the question determined the response as the participants could have understood it to mean several different scenarios. One scenario being that teachers are aware of the need for high engagement of students and work to ensure that this

is happening in their classrooms; therefore, they are not as concerned because their students are engaged. An additional option for the perception of the question is staff members do see engagement as a concern regardless of what they are doing in their classrooms to address it. Overall, 67% of the respondents felt that student engagement was an area of concern for their classroom and responded at a level seven or higher.

Figure 10

Level of Certainty for Effectiveness of Current Educational Practices



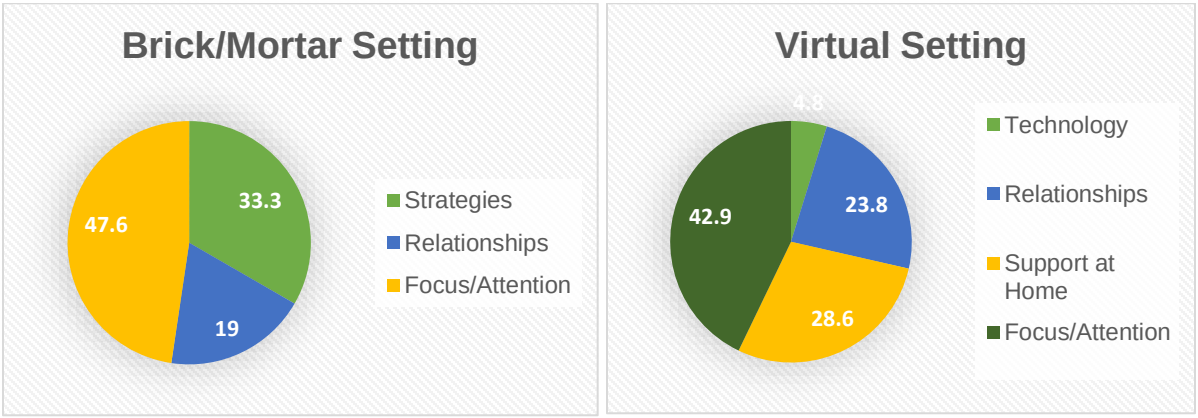
When asked about instructional practices targeting student engagement, participants overwhelmingly responded with a variety of research-based techniques that targeted both the academic and social-emotional wellbeing of their students. The activities noted were hands-on, collaborative, and differentiated; these included HLIS designed to engage, motivate, and individualize student instruction and recognition in the classroom setting. Participants indicated that their practices are fluid and change to meet the needs of the children in their classrooms.

These specific needs included consideration regarding behavior, special education, and English language acquisition. The majority of the participants felt sure about the level of effectiveness of their engagement approach, with 81% of them choosing a level eight to ten on the Likert scale for effectiveness and the remaining 20% selecting levels six and seven.

It is apparent in this survey that the majority of participants align their instructional practices with the focus on the social-emotional wellbeing of their students as this was the most communicated response when asked what they do "differently for those who struggle with engagement?". The level of differentiation increased in this response as participants noted that they use their relationship with their students to further assess learning needs while providing them individualized attention in the form of differentiation, goal setting, feedback, and 1:1 time with the teacher. The researcher noted that only two of the 21 respondents chose communication with parents as an avenue of support. While the previous questions evoked a range of levels of response from the participants, the collective group was open to incorporating new or different strategies into their instructional routine as 100% of them chose level eight to ten on their likeliness scale.

Figure 11

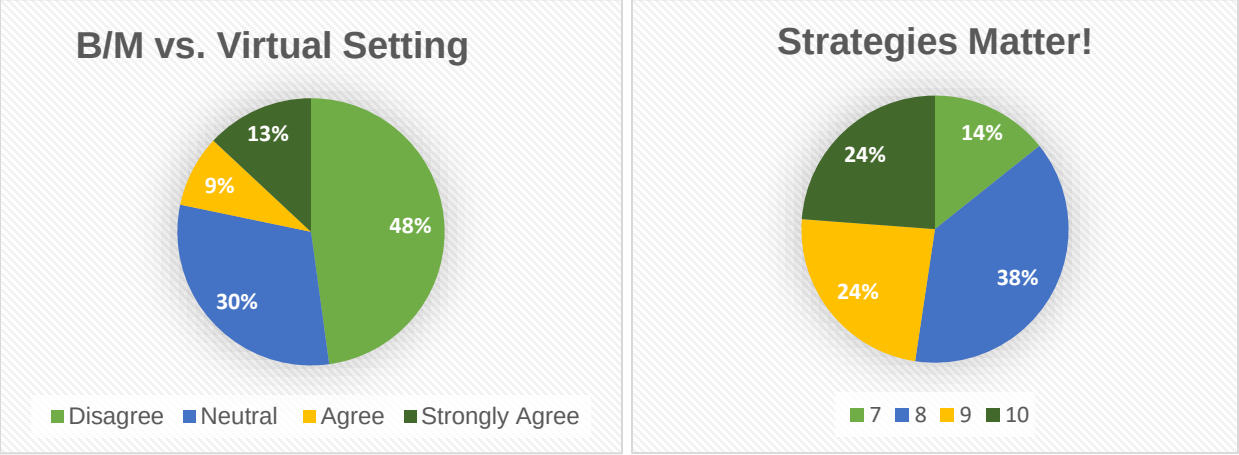
Staff Perception of Factors Influencing Student Engagement



While the participants had various ways in which they responded to the question regarding the factors that influence student engagement, their responses all fit into the same relative categories (see Appendix V) with attention and focus as the largest perceived factor in both the virtual and brick and mortar settings. It is important to note that the personal touch that comes with face to face interaction remains high. At the same time, there is a notable shift in responsibility when it comes to the virtual setting as the participant responses revealed that the support of parents and guardians becomes a critical component and instructional strategies fell more into the area of student "boredom" than the skillset of the teachers. In the figure above, it is clear that the ability to capture and maintain student focus and attention are perceived as essential components in student engagement, no matter the setting.

Figure 12

Interchangeability of Instructional Practices for Brick and Mortar and Virtual Settings

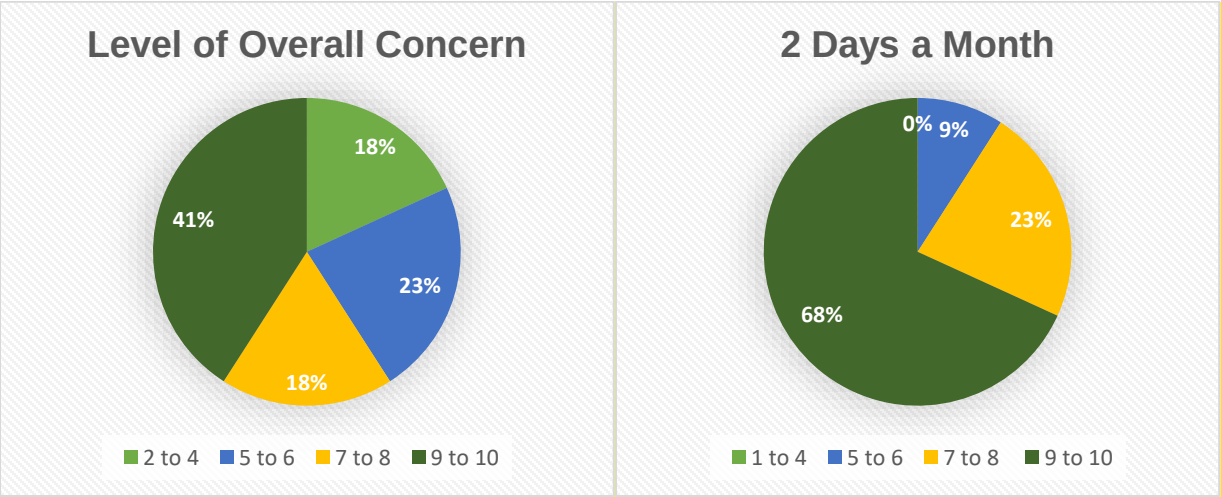


When it comes to the interchangeability of instructional practices, 38% of respondents disagree with the idea that engagement strategies of the brick and mortar classroom are as effective when attempting to engage students in the virtual setting. Although 14% of participants agree with this statement, 27% were neutral in their perception of the effectiveness in the virtual

environment. While the respondents differed in their perception regarding the duality of engagement strategies, they did agree as a majority that with the "right strategies" in place, all students can be effectively engaged no matter the setting, with 85% rating this as an eight or higher on the Likert scale. Concerning what staff members would like to see from the school/district, the responses fell into three overarching categories. Respondents included increasing knowledge base or skillset with strategies proven to be useful in both settings, accountability with a home/school connection, and opportunities to increase relationships with students in the classroom by allowing teachers more autonomy to focus on instruction/social-emotional components rather than expectations regarding testing.

Figure 13

Staff Survey Regarding Level of Concern for Student Absenteeism

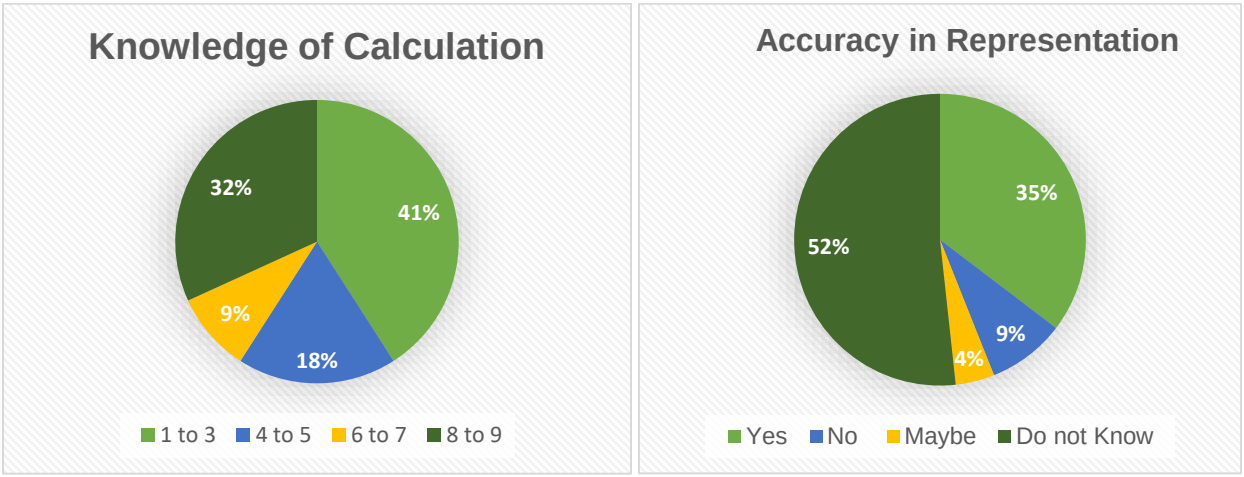


The same 22 participants responded to the survey regarding student absenteeism as responded to the survey regarding student engagement. Hence, the collective years in education and classroom experience remain as previously reported and portrayed in Figure 4. Figure 9 depicts the level of concern that the respondents had for student absenteeism at the start of the

AR project. The individuals rated their level of concern using a Likert scale with a range of one to ten, with one being a low concern and ten being highly concerned. The majority of individuals, 41%, responded with a range of nine to ten for the level of concern with a relatively even split among the remaining responses. The lowest level of noted concern was the range of two to four with one person responding at a level two, one person responding at a level three, and two responding at a level four. This response prompted additional reflection by the Researcher as the response of the participants may have been influenced by the question design. Perhaps these respondents have a lower level of concern due to their experience with students attending regularly. The majority, however, responded as expected, with a high level of concern regarding student absenteeism. It is important to note, the level of concern regarding student attendance increased significantly with the addition of a numerical qualifier to the question. With the inclusion of the specific number of missed days, two, 68% of the respondents shared a level of concern in the nine to ten range, with none of the participants reflecting a level of concern below a five.

Figure 14

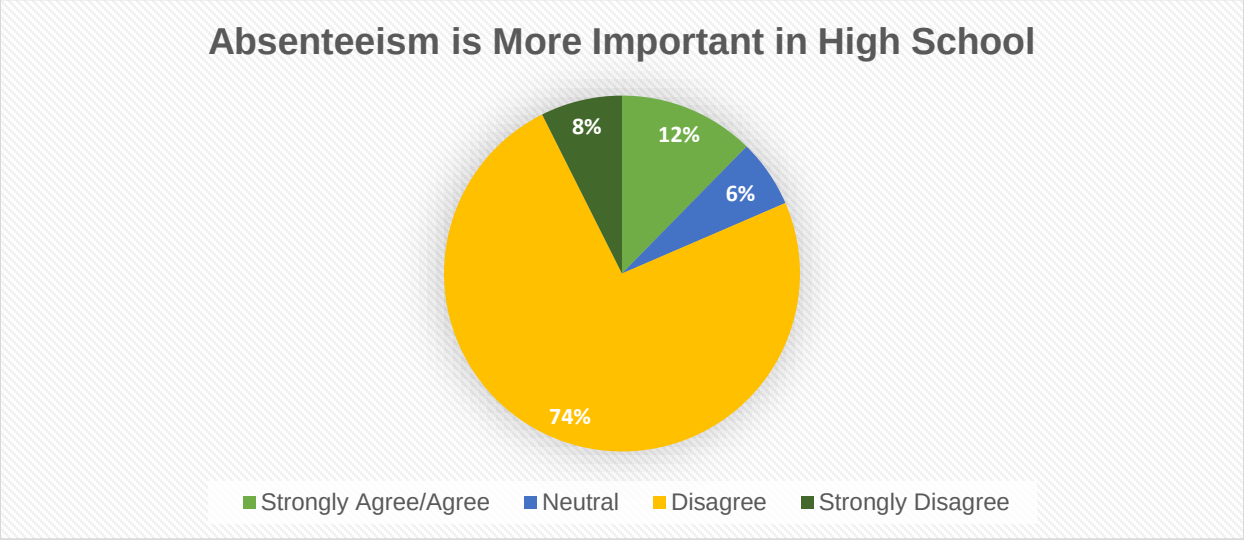
Staff Level of Knowledge Regarding Average Daily Attendance Rate



The previous figure depicts the results of responses from participants when asked about their level of knowledge regarding the calculation of the school's Average Daily Attendance (ADA) rate. While 32% of those responding rated their level of knowledge at an eight to nine on the scale regarding a high level of understanding, 41% of those responding rated their level of expertise at a one to three on the Likert scale, placing themselves as having little to no knowledge of calculation of ADA. When asked if ADA was an accurate representation of absenteeism at BES, 52% of the respondents noted that they did not know while the next largest group, 35%, responded in an affirmative that it was an accurate representation. While the majority fell within the two preceding response groups, 4% responded in the maybe category, and 9% responded in the no category.

Figure 15

Targeting and Supporting Student Absenteeism at the Secondary Level



When questioned about their perception of the most important time to address or intervene in chronic absenteeism, the overwhelming majority, 74% disagreed that it was during

the secondary level of schooling. For the remainder of the respondents, 12% agreed that targeting and intervening for those who are chronically absent is more important at the secondary level, while 6% remained neutral in their stance. Timeline for interventions aside, 100% of the respondents agreed that chronic absenteeism could impact the high school graduation rate.

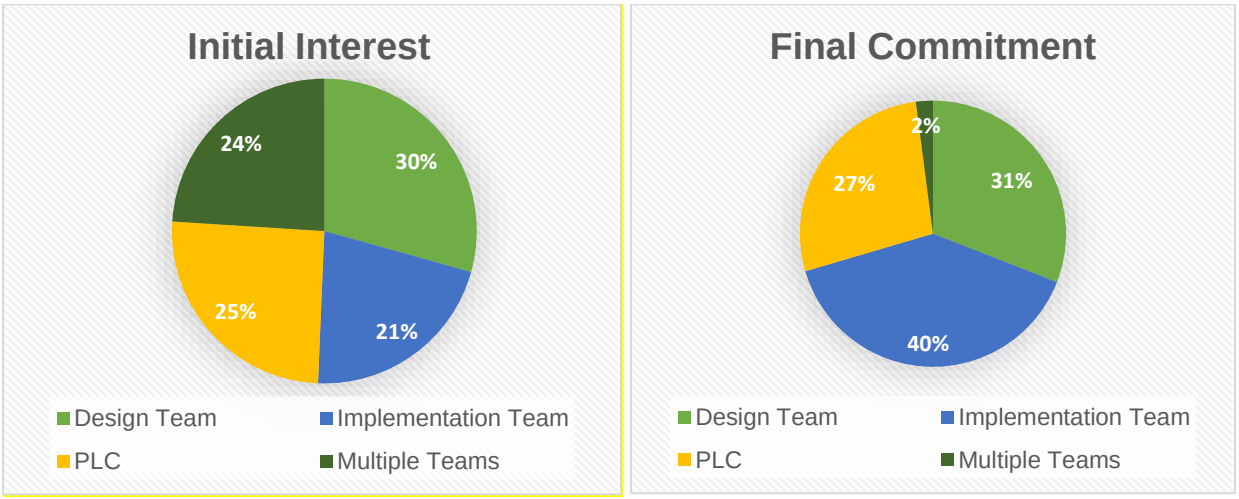
Questions regarding current classroom practices to combat absenteeism, as well as feedback on what staff members would like to see in regards to school and district level support for chronically absent students, were also included in the survey on staff perception of student absenteeism (see Appendix W for the full survey and results).

An additional staff survey was conducted in late July 2020 regarding the change in focus of the Action Research project, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the staff's commitment to the AR Project (see Appendix E). With this subsequent survey, the staff was allowed to review their commitment decision they had previously given in May, as they now had a more concrete understanding of the hardships they were facing with the start of the new year. For some, the participation in the AR project was no longer something they felt they could take on in light of the additional obstacles faced with the return to school during a pandemic.

This sentiment was held by only a few of the participants who had originally committed to take part in the AR project. This was welcomed by the Researcher as there was initial fear that the AR study would no longer be possible due to the parameters surrounding the pandemic impacting participant response. Ultimately this was not the case and the support for the AR project was noted as “overwhelming” by the Researcher in that there were more participants that wanted to support than were actually necessary for the completion of the project. The following depicts the results of the initial and follow-up Commitment Confirmation Surveys.

Figure 16

Survey Results for Commitment to Participate in the Action Research Project, 2020.



The problem, following Critical Milestone 1, remained with a central focus surrounding the concern over student absences. The approach, however, did change slightly due to the circumstances and parameters involved with the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than implementing a tangible incentive for students to set goals each month and earn rewards for reaching those goals, teachers implemented an incentive that centered around instructional strategies and increasing engagement in the classroom. This approach significantly reduced the concern that students would come to school, despite being ill, for the sole purpose of receiving the reward or incentive. Instead, the research contained in the reviewed literature indicated the need for students with high absenteeism to be engaged instructionally in the classroom while establishing a relationship with their teacher. These two factors significantly increased a student's desire to attend school more regularly.

With this in mind, the DT structured the implementation of the intervention to include four HLIS that are research-based and proven to have a larger than average effect size on student learning. The incorporation of the social-emotional learning component was implemented as an

avenue for relationship building, which further supported the students and attempted to reduce the barriers, as reported through the reviewed literature, which are standing in the way of more regular school attendance. An additional change took place with the makeup of the IT; the membership of the IT changed slightly as the school was no longer able to have parent volunteers enter the building nor work with students. This change in available adults eliminated the work that the initial planning drafted, where the WATCH D.O.G.S. mentoring group paired with individual students as a support partnership within the building. Instead, the IT consisted only of staff members of BES.

During the presentation of the data to the DT, there was one area where differing perceptions of meaning were encountered, discussed, and resolved. This disagreement occurred during the discussion of student engagement and the difference between behavioral engagement and emotional engagement. The team examined the definitions of each term and noted that emotional engagement was less easily observed and, therefore, less measurable. For this AR project, the DT chose to view student engagement through the lens of behavioral engagement as this fit the parameters of their understanding of the research project and was determined to be the more easily measured of the two.

The AR team responded overwhelmingly positively to the survey and the request for participation. Of the twenty-four staff members who responded to the confirmation survey, 50% of them selected to participate in two teams, with 30% of respondents choosing to participate in all three opportunities. Following the close of the survey, five additional staff members emailed the researcher to express their lament for having missed the deadline in responding to the survey and relayed their desire to participate if there was an opening. This brought the response to participate to approximately 50% of the total staff desiring to participate in at least one of the AR

teams. This participation number was quite pleasing as the risk of low participation due to current levels of stress surrounding COVID-19 concerns and the uncertainty of our return for the 2020-2021 school year was ever-present in our initial planning.

Cycle 1

Throughout Cycle 1 the IT participated in the implementation of the four instructional strategies during their daily instruction for ELA, Math, and SEL. For those team members who were not homeroom teachers, they used the strategies in their instructional lesson regardless of the topic. The IT received a Google Form at the close of each week which contained the Likert scale upon which they rated the overall engagement in each of the specific areas. This form also included an open ended question where the team noted one specific example of student engagement from that week. In addition to the weekly engagement ratings, Cycle 1 also contained the first virtual parent outreach session and first meeting of the PLC. The parent outreach session focused on SEL and the important of setting students up for successful engagement in both the virtual and school environment. The initial, virtual, parent outreach session was facilitated by the local school Instructional Coach, Media Specialist and the Researcher.

Precautions were taken to present this information in a parent-friendly manner and the Researcher designed the presentations to be easily understood. The parent sessions took place via the Zoom Webinar platform. The researcher distributed a promotional flyer invitation to the September webinar (see Appendix P) to all parents of BES. The invitation contained a request for parents to RSVP. Once we received the RSVP, a Zoom link for the session was provided. The team required an RSVP as a precaution due to the security risks recently associated with meetings conducted through the Zoom interface. The invitation also notified parents of topics to

be discussed and the appropriateness of content for our families who had chosen the brick and mortar setting or virtual option. The Researcher and members of the IT facilitated the sessions. Content presented discussed ways for parents to increase student engagement in the home setting as well as the importance of student engagement in the virtual and brick and mortar settings (see Appendix O & Q). These sessions included attendees who were parents and as well as staff members of BES. Throughout the series of sessions, parents received easy to implement strategies to increase student engagement and daily attendance in both the virtual and brick and mortar settings. Attendees were provided and asked to complete a three-question exit survey at the close of each session (see Appendix S). This exit survey solicited feedback used to inform the topics of the next sessions. It is relevant to note that our webinar sessions garnered attention throughout the district from administrators and county office personnel. Our webinar format was subsequently used as the model for parent outreach session by multiple schools within the district.

The initial PLC meeting centered around the importance of SEL. The content included easy to implement SEL activities which engaged students and served to build relationships with adults and peers at school. Prior to the PLC meeting, the participants received content related to the topic and assigned a task for which they would be prepared to engage in during the meeting, using the assigned content. In addition, the PLC included opportunities to collaborate with peers while sharing personal experiences and strategies the teachers were currently using in their classrooms to facilitate students' engagement and social-emotional wellbeing. The PLC was facilitated by the local school Instructional Coach and the Researcher. All facilitators were members of the AR team.

The feedback received from both the parent and PLC sessions facilitated the planning for the subsequent sessions. Parents and staff members were invited to complete a Ticket Out the Door at the close of the outreach and PLC meeting sessions. Based on the feedback submitted by parents, the second session of the parent outreach series was geared more towards engagement and success of the virtual students. Feedback received from the teachers who attended the PLC indicated that the PLC was appropriate in meeting their needs and the teachers agreed with the predetermined focus of the PLC. The teachers also noted that they were appreciative of the resources shared and desired more strategies which were easily implemented in their daily instruction.

The IT met again following the close of AR Cycle 1 to review the data collected to that point in time and discussed the effectiveness of the project. The team also discussed the process of revising the project, at that time, should the data indicate this as necessary. Based on the data reviewed by the team at the close of Cycle 1, the team determined that there was no need for revision as all data indicated that the plan was effective and should continue as it was. The dates, activities completed and types of data collected during Cycle 1 are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Overview of Cycle 1

Date	Activity	Data Collected
August 24, 2020 to Sept. 25, 2020	Implementation of Strategies	Weekly Engagement Rating
August 25, 2020	PLC #1	Staff Feedback (TOTD)
September 9, 2020	Parent Outreach Session #1	Parent Feedback (TOTD)

Cycle 2

The implementation of the High-leverage Practices and weekly collection of data continued throughout Cycle 2. The IT completed the same Google Form at the close of each week during this 5-week cycle. Cycle 2 contained the second and third virtual parent outreach sessions as well as the second and third meeting of the PLC. The parent outreach sessions were facilitated by the local school Instructional Coach, Media Specialist, and the Researcher. The PLC sessions were facilitated by the Researcher and the local school Instructional Coach. Parents and staff members were invited to complete a Ticket Out the Door at the close of the outreach and PLC meeting sessions. The feedback received following the second parent session included multiple requests for support with the Learning Management System that the virtual students were using, as well as the need to motivate and engage the virtual students. The feedback from the teachers who participated in the PLC noted a continued appreciation for the information presented and resources provided.

The IT met one final time following the close of Cycle 2, as they reviewed all data collected and analyzed the efficacy of the project as a whole. The overview of Cycle 2 including the dates, activities, and types of data collected is detailed in the following table (see table 9).

Table 9

Overview of Cycle 2

Date	Activity	Data Collected
Sept. 28, 2020 to Oct. 30, 2020	Daily Implementation of Strategies	Weekly Engagement Rating
September 29, 2020	PLC #2	Staff Feedback (TOTD)
October 7, 2020	Parent Outreach Session #2	Parent Feedback (TOTD)
October 20, 2020	PLC #3	Staff Feedback (TOTD)
November 4, 2020	Parent Outreach Session #3	Parent Feedback (TOTD)

Post-cycle

Post-cycle activities were conducted following the close of Cycle 2 and included a meeting of the IT as well as the AR team focus group. The IT team met to review the final data collected from Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 as well as the information received from the feedback provided by the parents following the parent sessions. The parent feedback from this final parent session was lacking when compared to the feedback from the first two sessions. The team felt that this was, in part, due to the predetermined length of the webinar series being only three sessions. Feedback shared with the Researcher outside of the Google survey form indicated that the parents were hopeful that the school would continue to provide the parents an opportunity to collaborate with the school as we continued to navigate the current school year. This feedback, regarding the desire for the team to continue the webinar series, was shared with the members of the AR team and a plan for additional sessions was discussed.

The preliminary analysis of data collected from Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 indicted a positive impact in the areas of student engagement and attendance. However, the team was careful to note that a number of variables were to be considered as having impacted the results of the study and effectiveness of the intervention. These variables and their possible impact are explored in Chapter 6.

The IT reviewed the feedback for the following trends regarding positive, negative, and neutral perceptions of the information presented and resources provided during the parent outreach sessions. The IT also reviewed the information provided by the Researcher regarding the analysis for trends in perceptions determined through participant responses regarding the impact of the AR project on the attendance of students at BES.

Table 10

Overview of Post-cycle

Date	Activity	Focus
November 5, 2020	Final Implementation Meeting	Data Presentation/Trend Analysis
November 10, 2020	Action Research Focus Group	Feedback/Analyze Data for Trends
February 15, 2020	Focus Group	Member Check Themes

Focus Group

Following the Researcher's data analysis related to the findings and the overarching themes of the data collected by participants, a focus group was held. The focus group was an invitation to all members of the AR study and served as an opportunity for the participants to hear the findings and ensuing themes and provide statements of agreeance or disagreement. The group consisted of twelve members and was a combination of the DT, IT, and PLC groups.

The Researcher began with an overview of the findings in the areas of student engagement, HLIS used, member participation, and trends in student absences. The trends or lack thereof was discussed for each area along with an overall summary statement related to the finding of each specific area. The members of the group asked clarifying questions. The clarifying questions asked were for purposes of understanding only and were not indicative of error in the analysis of the data or presentation of the findings. The members of the focus group concluded that they were in agreement with the findings of the Researcher and concurred with the specific notations of trends and overall summary statements.

The focus group also participated in a review of the overarching themes found through the coding and data analysis of the participant surveys. Three themes were noted and discussed: Increased Awareness, Positive Impact of HLIS and Student Engagement, and Correlation

between Student Engagement and Reduction of Absences. The team reviewed the supporting evidence for each of the three themes and agreed that the participant responses mainly fell into these three categorizations. It was also noted during this portion of the focus group meeting that a number of the participants found great value in the AR study as they expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate.

Researcher Journal Notes

August 7, 2020

Initial DT meeting: The Zoom format appeared to impact the level of participation as it was clear that some participants allowed those who were more vocal to speak while they remained quiet. The virtual setting presents a challenge when more than one person tries to speak as it does not allow for two voices to be heard at once. Many participants nodded in agreement while C was speaking. When E spoke up and offered a different opinion, L acknowledged the perspective and some nodded in agreement but C continued speaking. Once C finished speaking it was almost as if E had not presented another idea and the team quickly agreed to move forward with the suggestions made by C. The team, including E, were all quite agreeable and the work was completed in an orderly fashion. All team members were excited about the work and ready to share their plan with the IT. It is important to note that I remained quiet for the majority of this meeting. Other than sharing the initial information, I let the silence do the heavy lifting. I remained cognizant that I did not want my thoughts or perceptions to influence the teams' decision and the direction in which they chose to go in order to design the plan. While it was difficult, I maintained my silence.

August 10, 2020

Initial IT meeting: Many of the participants were unsure of their role and whether they had signed up for this team or not. Some members of the DT stayed to hear what was being shared as they were interested in what the IT thought about the drafted plan. The participants listened intently as the information was shared. All members of the IT agreed with the proposed plan and the process by which it would be implemented. There was a suggestion made by L to include a component in the weekly Google survey which allowed non-homeroom teachers to be accounted for separately from those who had a homeroom class. An additional suggestion was offered by F to include a date at the top of the Google survey in order to track the weeks of the data collection and cross reference that data collection to any holidays or breaks in the school calendar. The participants asked a few clarifying questions regarding the logistics of the survey. Overall the team was excited to begin the work. The plan was accepted and implementation set for the week of August 24th.

August 25, 2020

Initial PLC meeting: The majority of the participants arrived for the meeting on time and prepared for the learning task. Three of the participants had not read the articles presented prior to the meeting and they were unsure of which team they were to join. The Researcher had assumed that all would be aware and prepared and neglected to make note of the teams. There was some initial juggling to get the groups settled. As the team members discussed the reading, it was impressive how passionate they were about the content and connecting it to the instruction and activities taking place in their classrooms. The conversations were rich and task centered. It was noted that G was not as engaged as the other members of the team and had brought a classroom task with her. Once the facilitator came close to listen in on the group discussion, G

set the task aside and was more engaged in the group discussion. Overall the participants had a thought provoking and engaged work session with many noting their appreciation for the resources provided and articles used for the activity.

September 9, 2020

Initial Y'all Come session: The parent participation in this session was better than expected. In total, 42 parents RSVP'd for the event. The parents strayed from the purpose of the meeting and many of the questions they asked were related to the COVID pandemic. It was understandable that the parents were concerned about COVID and since they had not been allowed into the building there had been very few opportunities to speak with representatives of the school and ask the questions they had. The Researcher noted the need to be more pointed and intentional prior to the following session in order to more clearly define the parameters of the webinar series and the opportunity for parents to ask questions and receive answers. Perhaps if a more clearly defined explanation were given, informing parents that we would only be able to respond to questions regarding the topics contained within the session, we would avoid the COVID questions. We would be certain to note where they could go for answers and to receive information related to the county's handling of the pandemic. The facilitators did an excellent job and the parents were engaged throughout the session. Feedback provided at the end let us know that the virtual parents were struggling with at home instruction and needed support in all areas of virtual learning, specifically reading.

September 24, 2020

This was the second meeting of the IT. The participants were on time and prepared to engage in the discussion. The Researcher began by taking a pulse of the room with opportunities for participants to share their thoughts regarding the study thus far. Overall the team agreed that

the implementation is going well. There were no questions at this time and all were doing well with completing the Google survey each week. One participant (A) noted that she had been more cognizant of the engagement of her students now more than she ever had in the past and this was enlightening. She also shared that this awareness being tied to student attendance presented additional reflection opportunities when her students were absent. It was discussed that the A/B Hybrid schedule was presenting difficulty for both students and teachers as it was greatly impacting the flow and consistency of instruction with only two days of week for face to face instruction for each group of students. The data was shared and the team agreed that the Hybrid schedule was undoubtedly a factor in student attendance. There was consensus among the group that the students were attending school because they were grateful to have the opportunity to come and they missed their teachers and friends. The team agreed that the project continues to be appropriate and there was no need to make adjustments. The team will continue to implement with fidelity and collect weekly data.

September 29, 2020

This was the second meeting of the PLC. The meeting began with an overview of the current attendance data to date and a review of the mean engagement data being collected by the members of the IT. The PLC members came to the same conclusion about the data that the IT did, that attendance is being impacted by the strong desire to be back in the building after so much time away due to the pandemic. The teachers were given a task prior to the meeting today and asked to prepare their thoughts regarding Visible Learning and any strategies that they are currently implementing in their classrooms that would be categorized as Visible Learning. The teachers were more prepared this time than last with eight of the ten who attended prepared to work in their discussion groups. During the discussion of Hattie's work, B spoke to the group

about her experience with Visible Learning strategies and implementing them in her classroom. Other members of the team (G, A, and F) shared similar stories as a testament to the power that these strategies give in the push to ensure that students are engaged and learning. Teacher H shared her surprise that many of the learning strategies that she had used during daily instruction, for years, had some of the lowest effect sizes of all that were shared on Hattie's list. This provision of Hattie's rank order list was an eye opening experience as noted by a number of the team members.

October 6, 2020

This was the second session of the Y'all Come parent outreach webinar series. This session had 52 RSVP responses with a number of parents who responded in order to receive the link following the live session but being unable to attend in person. The Researcher began with the clarified explanation of the question and answer portion of the session. The facilitators did an amazing job of sharing the information and engaging the parents in the session. The parents asked many questions related to the content of the session and were respectful of the guidance given prior regarding COVID related questions. The session went well. The parents thanked us and shared how grateful they were for our support and communication.

October 22, 2020

This was the third meeting of the PLC. The meeting began by sharing the current attendance data and the mean engagement data collected through the weekly Google surveys completed by the IT. It is important to note that the attendance totals shared during this meeting were inflated due to an error on the part of the Researcher. The Researcher caught this error at a later point and clarified with the team. During this meeting the participants were grouped by an assigned strategy: scaffolding, discussion, feedback, and SEL. The PLC members were asked to

discuss as a group their most poignant example of their given strategy in their classroom and then add that example to the provided chart paper. The facilitator and Researcher circulated the room and listened in on the conversations as they took place. It was evident that the team members were making connections to the current learning and the instruction that was taking place in their classrooms. The group then participated in a gallery walk of the posters created by each of the four teams. One member of each team was assigned to each one of the posters and responded to any questions that the visiting team members had. The closing activity was well received by the group and noted as their "favorite part of the session". The participants were asked to complete a template which read, "I used to think _____, but now I know _____." The members gathered in a large circle and shared out their statements with the group. The statements shared can be found in the Action Research Team Artifacts portion of this chapter.

November 5, 2020

This was the final meeting of the IT. All members of the team were present although two of the team members arrived after the start of the meeting. The meeting began with an overview of the AR study and an opportunity to share out regarding thoughts or experiences regarding the implementation of the intervention or participation in the study. Teacher E and H shared out regarding their experience and noted it as positive. They were grateful for the opportunity to be included and thanked the Researcher for the materials provided as they were also participants in the PLC sessions. Teacher A shared that she will continue to implement the strategies in her daily instruction and will forever be more cognizant and careful when her students come to her with a history of absenteeism or begin to show a pattern while in her classroom. The team concurred with this sentiment and agreed that participating in the study has impacted them in the

same manner. The team also acknowledged that the data was valuable but the variables due to COVID were unfortunate in that there was no way to know the magnitude of their impact nor the magnitude of the impact of the study since both were so closely intertwined. Overall the group was positive and looked forward to continuing the work going forward.

November 10, 2020

This was the third and final Y'all Come parent outreach webinar session. There were 35 participants who submitted an RSVP. Per parent feedback, this session focused on supporting parents as Learning Coaches as they worked to support both the students who were learning in the virtual setting at home and those who were brick and mortar but were noticeably struggling and needed additional supports from their parents. This session was facilitated by the Researcher, Media Specialist, Instructional Coach, and three teachers. The teacher panel represented Kindergarten, early primary ($1^{st}/2^{nd}$), and upper primary (3^{rd} to 5^{th}) grades. The teachers modeled easy to implement teaching strategies that parents could use at home when working to support their children. This format and information presented was well received by the audience with many of them noting their appreciation at the close of the session. Two of the parents who attended the session are also teachers in our building and they sought out the Researcher the following day to share their impression of the session and appreciation for the work that the team was doing. It was noted that only one parent completed the feedback survey. The team hypothesized that this may be due to the notification that this was the final session in the series.

February 15, 2021

This is the final meeting of the AR project members as they participated in the Focus Group activity. Available members met to take part in member checking the conclusions drawn from data collected and analyzed throughout the ten weeks of the AR project. The meeting took

place by Zoom due to continued concerns in regards to social distancing and the pandemic. The members who attended were excited to hear the results and eager to provide feedback. Twelve members of the AR team were on the Zoom call. Overall the team agreed with the findings. The team asked clarifying questions but these were not related to assumption of error in the data analysis. Once the questions were answered, the members agreed to the findings and overarching themes presented by the Researcher.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided the foundation from which the AR study was formed. Included in this chapter are the specifics regarding the problem as it relates to BES and why the selected students were chosen for attendance monitoring. In addition, the story of the AR study is detailed from pre-cycle to post-cycle with a description of the study during each portion of the process and, as a result, what happened next. This explanation included any changes or updates that were made to the intervention along the implementation timeline. Also included are the Researcher's notes which provided an anecdotal insight to the staff and parent sessions. The chapter closes with a detailed account of the information collected from the staff members following the close of their PLC sessions through the use of the TOTD as well as the parent feedback provided at the close of each Y'all Come session using the Google survey form. This information offers additional insight into the project and why the AR team chose the topics and resources shared through the PLC and parent outreach sessions.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to use targeted interventions to increase the level of student engagement in the classroom, thereby reducing the number of days absent from school for those students identified as being chronically absent. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do chronically absent students respond to the implementation of targeted interventions aimed at increasing engagement?
2. How does the implementation of High-leverage Instructional Strategies influence daily student engagement?
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of an Action Research Team on targeting chronic absenteeism by way of increasing student engagement?

This chapter includes a description of the data collected in connection to the research questions, the specific data collected during the Pre-cycle, and data collected in and findings from AR Cycle 1 and 2. In addition, an overview of the findings for the entire study is detailed. Furthermore, the themes developed through analysis of information received through surveys and questioning of the AR team are presented as they related to the research questions. The findings of this study are both qualitative and quantitative in the approach to determining the impact of the intervention on the participants.

Data Collection connected to Research Questions

Data collected in response to research question one included student attendance data. The data was tracked for the 24-day period of Cycle 1 and the 25-day period of Cycle 2 for both the 2019 and 2020 school years. This data was then analyzed for trends based on the student attendance history during the specific time period from one year to the next. This comparison was valuable in that the time was specific and aligned to the start of each school year. In addition, this data allowed the IT to analyze increases or decreases in trends based on the known circumstances surrounding the students and the COVID 19 pandemic. This data was also used in a comparison to the student engagement data to determine if there was a relation to the trends noted in student attendance and student engagement.

Data collected in response to research question two was acquired through the use of a weekly response by the teachers on the IT. The teachers used their judgement to gauge student engagement during their ELA and math lessons. This level of engagement was recorded using a Likert scale of 1-10 with ten being the highest level of engagement and 1 being the lowest level of engagement. The participating members who were not homeroom teachers used the specific HLS during instruction of their counseling, special education, and ESOL lessons and rated student engagement using the same Likert scale. This method afforded the team a visual representation of the data regarding student engagement over the ten-week period. The IT was then able to analyze the results for trends as well as make note of any areas of significant increase or decrease which appeared as outliers from the overall norm of the responses from the team.

Research question three was addressed through data collected in the pre- and post-teacher surveys. This data and ensuing findings was member-checked during the focus group

held at the close of the study. This perception data was analyzed for trends related to a shift in the mindset of the participating staff members surrounding the importance of daily student attendance and the impact of the actions taken by the IT over the course of the action research project. In addition, survey results were analyzed for overarching themes related to the mindset of the IT. These themes supported research question three in addressing the extent of impact on the mindset of the members of the AR study and how this mindset remained or changed from the start of the study to the conclusion of the study. This data was paramount in the determination of the impact of the AR study on the participants.

Results from Action Research Cycle 1

As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, student engagement data was collected weekly through a Google survey completed each Friday by the members of the IT. The team responded to three questions; two were on a Likert scale of 1-10 and the third was an open ended response related to the HLS that they found to be most successful with student engagement that week. This data was collected and organized by weeks one to five and categorized in the following manner; English Language Arts, Math, and submissions by non-homeroom teachers. Following the categorical organization, a mathematical mean of the ratings was calculated (Table 11).

Table 11

Mean Calculation of Student Engagement Ratings for Cycle 1

Week	ELA	Math	Non-HR
1	8.00	8.57	8.00
2	8.25	8.33	7.33
3	8.23	8.53	8.00
4	8.07	8.57	7.33
5	8.13	8.40	8.00
Total	40.68	42.40	38.66
Overall Mean	8.13	8.48	7.73

The previous Table summarizes the information gleaned from the two Likert scale questions on the Google survey document. A review of the student engagement data contained in Table 11 did not denote any significant trends related to the overall engagement ratings submitted during Cycle 1. It was noted that the level of engagement began at a relative high with a mean calculation above eight for all but two of the fifteen calculations. The two times that the rating fell below a mean of 8 occurred during week two and week four and were reported by the non-homeroom participants. During the five-week period of Cycle 1, all engagement ratings remained within three-tenths of a percentage point of one another which indicated a relative consistency in response and no apparent outliers to consider. Overall, this was a positive finding as we desired the students to be engaged and this is affirmation that there was a solid foundation for student engagement from the start of the AR project.

The information collected from the open ended question was not as clear cut in the team's effort to categorize it. To that end, the IT determined that they would organize the comments by the HLS each encompassed, which allowed for the following categorizations: Discussion, Feedback, Scaffolding, SEL. For the majority of the participant responses the category each belonged in was clear. A small portion of the responses which were not as clear were noted by the Researcher as "other". The Researcher then shared the "other" comments with the IT during the IT meeting at the close of Cycle 1. The IT read each comment and determined in which category it belonged. This allowed for all responses to be categorized within the four HLS. The strategies noted per each individual response of the survey are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12 shows the HLS noted by the participants as being the most impactful to student engagement for that particular week. The data indicated the finding of the discussion strategy

being mentioned most often, with 34% of the respondents noting it as being the most impactful for that week. The use of SEL and provision of feedback were second and third in regards to impact, while scaffolding learning was mentioned by only 16% of the respondents. It is important to note that the participants were implementing all four strategies, daily, with fidelity. This information was captured in response to which of the four strategies the respondents felt was the most impactful in engaging their students during that particular week.

Table 12

Strategies Noted per Individual Response Cycle 1

Week	Discussion	Feedback	Scaffolding	SEL
1	7	3	2	4
2	5	3	2	4
3	6	4	0	5
4	5	4	3	5
5	4	4	6	3
Total	27	18	13	21
Percentage	34%	22%	16%	26%

It was important to the Researcher that the IT remained committed to the implementation of the plan as well as the data response portion of the study. At the start of the study, based on the burden of the pandemic and the additional responsibilities faced by the IT there was concern that the IT may struggle with data exhaustion. This was considered by the DT and the structure of a weekly data collection, as opposed to daily, was determined in order to mitigate this concern. Table 13 denotes the percentage of participation in the weekly data collection by the members of the IT throughout the five weeks in Cycle 1.

Participation in Cycle 1 was relatively consistent as Table 13 shows that no fewer than 15 of the 17 members of the IT responded to the student engagement survey each week. Weeks four and five of Cycle 1 had 100%-member participation while weeks two and three had 15

respondents. The Researcher did send a “gentle reminder” on the following Wednesday to those participants who had not responded to the survey for the previous week. This typically resulted in increased participation. Overall this was a satisfactory level of participation and the concerns discussed previously regarding data exhaustion were not noted as a trend during Cycle 1.

Table 13

Participation Rate of Response to Weekly Likert Scale Cycle 1

Week	# of Participants Responding	% Responding
1	16	94%
2	15	88%
3	15	88%
4	17	100%
5	17	100%
Total	80	94%

In response to research question one, student attendance data was tracked for the 24-day period during the 2019 school year and the 24-day period of the 2020 school year. While there are a number of variables that impacted this specific data set, those variables will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The attendance data of the 19 students for Cycle 1 is summarized in Table 14. Table 14 indicates a decrease in absences in all five grade levels with the most significant decrease occurring with our fifth grade students who previously missed five days of school during the first 24 school days of 2019 and now had missed zero days during the first 24 school days of 2020. Overall, each grade level experienced no less than a 50% decrease with a combined reduction in absences at 76% for the five grade levels; reducing 38 absences from the start of the year in 2019 to nine absences for the start of the year in 2020.

Table 14

Student Attendance for Cycle 1

Grade Level	# of Students	Total Days Absent 8-26-19 to 9-27-19	% Days Missed 2019	Total Days Absent 8-24-20 to 9-25-20	% Days Missed 2020	% Increase/ Decrease absences
K to 1st	5	11	45%	2	8%	81% Decrease
1st to 2nd	4	9	37%	3	12%	66% Decrease
2nd to 3rd	3	6	25%	3	12%	50% Decrease
3rd to 4th	5	7	29%	1	4%	85% Decrease
4th to 5th	2	5	20%	0	0%	100% Decrease
Totals	19	38	26%	9	6%	76% Decrease

Results from Action Research Cycle 2

Student engagement data continued to be collected weekly through a Google survey completed each Friday by the members of the IT throughout Cycle 2. The team responded to three questions with two being a Likert scale of 1-10 and the third being an open ended response. These data were collected and organized by weeks five to ten and by categories: English Language Arts, Math, and submissions by non-homeroom teachers. Following the categorical organization, a mathematical mean of the ratings was calculated. This summary of information is contained in Table 15.

While not statistically significant, there was a relative increase in student engagement from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 in all engagement categories. Engagement in ELA increased by 0.43, with engagement in Math showing an increase of 0.15. Engagement noted by the non-homeroom teachers garnered the most significant increase with a 0.63 growth from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2. There did not appear to be any outliers to consider during this five-week cycle as the mean of the responses for each of the three categories remained within three-tenths of a point of one another. The Researcher found it important to note that the relatively small increase in percentage was

due to the starting point for student engagement at the beginning of the project already being at level eight, thus making it difficult to show significant growth based on a ten-point scale.

Table 15

Mean Calculation of Student Engagement Ratings for Cycle 2

Week	ELA	Math	Non-HR
6	8.53	8.76	8.50
7	8.66	8.75	8.33
8	8.40	8.50	8.33
9	8.76	8.61	8.33
10	8.53	8.53	8.33
Total	42.88	43.15	41.82
Overall Mean	8.56	8.63	8.36

The previous Table summarizes the information gleaned from the two Likert scale questions on the Google survey. The information collected from the open ended question was not as clear cut in the team's effort to categorize it. To that end, the IT determined that they would organize the comments by the HLS each encompassed which allowed for the following categorizations: Discussion, Feedback, Scaffolding, SEL. For the majority of the participant responses the category each belonged in was clear. There was a small portion of the responses which were not as clear and were noted by the Researcher as "other". The Researcher then shared the "other" comments with the IT during the IT meeting at the close of Cycle 2. The IT read each comment and determined in which category it belonged. This allowed for all responses to be categorized within the four HLS. The strategies noted per each individual response of the survey are contained in Table 16.

Table 16

Strategies noted per individual response for Cycle 2

Week	Discussion	Feedback	Scaffolding	SEL
6	1	4	6	4
7	2	3	7	3
8	4	3	5	3
9	5	2	8	1
10	1	1	11	3
Total	13	13	37	14
Percentage	16%	16%	48%	18%

While answers to the open-ended questions were entirely the respondent's choice, it was interesting to note the findings of Cycle 2 and compare those to the findings in Cycle 1. In Cycle 1, discussion had the highest percentage of mentions by the respondents at 34% while Cycle 2 found it mentioned by only 16% of the respondents. In Cycle 1, scaffolding was reported by the teachers the least number of times with only 16% mentioning this in their comment. In Cycle 2 scaffolding surpassed the other three HLS with a mention by 48% of the respondents as being the most impactful on student engagement during this five-week period. The IT considered this finding relative to the timing of the year and the pacing of the instructional calendar. The first few weeks are typically a review of previously learned skills, specifically this year with the impact of the school closures in March and the impact this loss of instructional time may have had on students. By the fifth week of school the students were learning new information, which may have driven the need for more scaffolding by the teachers as they worked to support their students' acquisition of information and skills.

It was important to the Researcher that the IT remained committed to the implementation of the plan as well as the data response portion of the study. At the start of the study, based on the burden of the pandemic and the additional responsibilities faced by the IT, there was concern

that the IT may struggle with data exhaustion. This was considered by the DT and the structure of a weekly data collection was determined in order to mitigate this concern. The concern regarding data exhaustion was heightened throughout Cycle 2 as the demands of the teacher's duties and responsibilities, in response to the Pandemic, grew. Percentage of participation in the weekly data collection by the members of the IT throughout the five weeks in Cycle 2 is denoted in Table 17.

Table 17

Participation rate of response to weekly Likert Scale for Cycle 2

Week	# of Participants Responding	% Responding
6	15	88%
7	15	88%
8	15	88%
9	16	94%
10	16	94%
Average Participation Rate	77	90%

Cycle 2 saw a decline in IT member response to the weekly rating scale with a drop of 4%, going from 94% responding on average in Cycle 1 to 90% responding on average in Cycle 2. Additionally, Cycle 2 found zero weeks of 100% participation in contrast to this level of participation which occurred twice in Cycle 1. Three of the five weeks fell to 88% participation while only two of the five weeks in Cycle 1 held this percentage. With this decrease noted, overall the commitment to the data collection piece remained solid as no fewer than 15 of the 17 IT members consistently responded to the survey each week. This was a positive finding for member participation.

In response to research question one, student attendance data was tracked for the 24-day period during the 2019 school year and the 24-day period of the 2020 school year. While there

were a number of variables that impacted this specific data set, those variables will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The attendance data of the 19 students for Cycle 2 is summarized in Table 18.

Table 18

Student Attendance for Cycle 2

Grade Level	# of Students	Total Days Absent 9-30-19 to 11-1-19	% Days Missed 2019	Total Days Absent 9-28-20 to 10-30-20	% Days Missed 2020	% Increase/ Decrease in absences
K to 1st	5	11	44%	6	24%	45% Decrease
1st to 2nd	4	5	20%	10	40%	100% Increase
2nd to 3rd	3	7	28%	6	24%	14% Decrease
3rd to 4th	5	11	44%	1	4%	90% Decrease
4th to 5th	2	2	8%	0	0%	100% Decrease
Totals	19	36	24%	23	15%	36% Decrease

Student attendance in Cycle 2 did not find the same success as Cycle 1. Cycle 2 noted an overall reduction in student absences of 36% compared to a 76% overall reduction in Cycle 1. During the five-week period of Cycle 2, four of the five grade levels saw a decrease in absences with second grade being the only grade level seeing an increase. The IT noted that this increase in absences was specific to one student and was related to parameters in place due to COVID 19 protocols that the local school was bound to abide by. Aside from this outlier, the other grade levels collectively experienced decreases, though some were more significant than others. As noted in Cycle 1, one grade level experienced a 100% decrease while Cycle 2 boasted two grade levels experiencing this accomplishment. Despite the uptick from second grade there remained an overall, collective, reduction of 13 fewer absences during weeks five though ten of the 2020 school year as compared to the same five-week period for 2019.

Overall Results from Action Research Cycles 1 and 2

The preceding Tables summarize the data collected during Cycles 1 and 2 of the AR study. Table 19 presents the information with an analysis of the entire ten-week data collection period. The level of student engagement, as reported by the members of the IT, remained consistent throughout the duration of the AR study. The respondents began the study with a rating at a level eight and this remained relatively consistent from week to week. Analysis of the data collected in Cycles 1 and 2 found a variance of two tenths of a percentage point between the mean response of the IT in the areas of ELA and Math. A variance of .34 separates the mean of ELA respondents and non-homeroom team members and a variance of .54 separating the mean of the Math respondents and non-homeroom team members. This finding of less than one percentage point is not statistically significant in the overall analysis of the data. A conclusion that can be drawn here is that the students consistently maintained a relatively high level of engagement throughout the ten week course of the study as reported by the members of the IT.

Table 19

Overall Mean Calculation of Student Engagement Ratings for Cycles 1 and 2

Week	ELA	Math	Non-HR
1	8.00	8.57	8.00
2	8.25	8.33	7.33
3	8.23	8.53	8.00
4	8.07	8.57	7.33
5	8.13	8.4	8.00
6	8.53	8.76	8.00
7	8.66	8.75	8.33
8	8.40	8.50	8.33
9	8.76	8.61	8.33
10	8.53	8.53	8.33
Total	83.56	85.55	79.98
Overall Mean	8.35	8.55	8.01

This analysis of trends spanning the ten-week period of data collection as they related to the HLS and the student engagement was informative to the overall effectiveness of this AR project. The following Table presents the summary of the HLS and the number of times each strategy was mentioned in the open-ended response opportunity on the Google survey. This summary allowed for identification of trends from the start of Cycle 1 throughout the close of Cycle 2, as noted in Table 20.

While Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 found marked differences in the HLS noted by the respondents as being the most impactful, the analysis of data in Table 20 concludes a more evenly distributed finding. Scaffolding remained the most impactful with an overall rating of 32%. The HLS Discussion and SEL were relatively equal with only five responses equaling three percentage points separating them. Provision of Feedback was the least mentioned overall but fell within four percentage points of SEL. There was a noted trend in the use of Scaffolding as it increased over the course of the study while Discussion experienced a downward trend with Feedback and SEL remaining relatively consistent throughout the ten-week period.

Table 20

Overall Strategies Noted per Individual Response for Cycles 1 and 2

Week	Discussion	Feedback	Scaffolding	SEL
1	7	3	2	4
2	5	3	2	4
3	6	4	0	5
4	5	4	3	5
5	4	4	6	3
6	1	4	6	4
7	2	3	7	3
8	4	3	5	3
9	5	2	8	1
10	1	1	11	3
Total	40	31	50	35
Percentage	25%	19%	32%	22%

Integral to the findings of the study was the fidelity in which the teachers implemented the HLS and reported the engagement of students in their classes. The previous portion of this chapter has noted the participation of the IT in the weekly rating scales as they were received for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. Table 21 presents a summary of the participant responses to the engagement survey for the duration of the AR project.

The DT initially considered concerns regarding the fidelity of the participation of the IT; overall the team maintained a consistent level of participation throughout the ten-week study. Analysis of Table 21 finds that a minimum of 15 respondents were fidelis in their response to the weekly engagement survey for all ten weeks of the AR project. Weeks one, nine, and ten found 16 of the 17 members participating with weeks four and five having all 17 members contribute. This level of commitment is significant when considering the demands that the IT members were under due to the COVID 19 pandemic. An overall 92% participation is a success and has served to support the findings of the study through the provision of data to be collated and analyzed by the team.

Table 21

Overall Participation Rate of Response to Weekly Likert Scale for Cycles 1 and 2

Week	# of Participants	% Responding
1	16	94%
2	15	88%
3	15	88%
4	17	100%
5	17	100%
6	15	88%
7	15	88%
8	15	88%
9	16	94%
10	16	94%
Mean/Percentage	15.7	92%

The main purpose of the AR project was to increase student engagement in order to reduce student absenteeism. The following Table represents the student attendance data from the start of the study through the close of the ten-week study. While there were a number of variables to consider when analyzing the student attendance data and the impact of the study on student attendance, Table 22 represents a depiction of the success of the study in regards to the reduction of student absences.

Analysis of student data collected during Cycles 1 and 2 indicated a positive impact on student attendance across the ten-week period of the AR project. Table 22 shows our fifth grade students with a 100% decrease in absences from the start of the project to the finish. Our 4th grade students had the next largest decrease with 88% while our kindergarten students saw a 63% decrease. The second grade was the area with the least amount of reduction of absences with only a 7% decrease. As previously noted in Cycle 2, this was due to variables that were beyond the control of the student or parent and related to procedural policies regarding the pandemic.

Overall the data indicated a positive finding in relation to the reduction of student absences during the AR project, with a 56% decrease in absences for the first 49 days of school in 2020 when compared to the first 49 days of school in 2019. The students who we were tracking for this project reduced their absences by 42 days, going from 74 missed days to 32 missed days. This is significant, especially in the light of the world-wide pandemic with periods of illness and quarantine as a daily factor in the lives of the students of BES. Despite these hurdles, the students continued to come to school each day as their teachers worked to ensure that the content they were teaching was engaging and the SEL needs of their students were being met. A summary of these findings is displayed in Table 22.

Table 22

Overall Student Attendance Cycle 1 and 2

Grade Level	# of Students	Total Days Absent 8-26-19 to 11-1-19	% Days Missed 2019	Total Days Absent 8-24-20 to 10-30-20	% Days Missed 2020	% Increase/ Decrease in absences
K to 1st	5	22	44%	8	16%	63% Decrease
1st to 2nd	4	14	28%	13	26%	7% Decrease
2nd to 3rd	3	13	26%	9	18%	30% Decrease
3rd to 4th	5	18	36%	2	4%	88% Decrease
4th to 5th	2	7	14%	0	0%	100% Decrease
Totals	19	74	25%	32	10%	56% Decrease

Thematic Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data collected throughout the research study resulted in findings of specific themes related to the research questions that guided the study. The themes are a result of the Researcher's analysis of the participant responses collected through the pre- and post-surveys. While the determination of the themes was based on the analysis completed by the Researcher, the themes were then confirmed and agreed upon by member checking during the focus group completed at the close of the study. A summary of the thematic findings related to the research questions is illustrated in Table 23.

Table 23

Summary of Findings of Themes Related to Research Questions

Research Question	Theme
1. To what extent do chronically absent students respond to the implementation of targeted interventions?	Theme: Impact of Intervention on Student Attendance
2. To what extent does the implementation of High Leverage Instructional Strategies influence daily student engagement/attendance?	Theme: Impact of High Leverage Strategies on Student Engagement.

Research Question	Theme
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of an Action Research Team on targeting chronic absenteeism by way of increasing student engagement?	Theme : Impact of Action Research on Teacher Growth

Theme 1: Impact of Interventions on Chronically Absent Students

Prior to the start of the AR study, the connection between actions on the part of the teacher and students attending school more regularly received mixed reviews. While 50% of the participants responded favorably and rated their level of agreement as an 8 to 10 on the Likert scale, 27% of respondents rated this as a 5 to 7 for level of agreement, and 23% rated their level of agreement as 3 or 4. When asked about the reasons that students are absent from school, participant responses fell into two overarching categories; illness or doctor related being 50% and parent sanctioned being 41%. The responses given prior to the start of the study varied greatly from the responses received at the close of the study. Based on the post survey responses, it was evident that the views of the participants had shifted as their approach to student engagement shifted and the days absent for their students decreased. This mindset shift is captured through the responses. Participant D shared the following response, *The targeted strategies did increase student engagement. Sound strategies help students gain understanding and confidence. This confidence grows curiosity and further engagement. All of these strategies, I believe increases attendance.* Participant F shared similar sentiments in their response, *Yes, I think when students are engaged and active, they are more likely to attend. Student excitement leads to higher student attendance.*

It is important to record the voice of those who did not feel strongly regarding the impact of the strategies and student attendance. This viewpoint was shared by participant M with the

following response, *Targeted strategies have been moderately effective. Personal family events and quarantine have been the primary reasons for my students' absences.*

With all factors related to the pandemic considered, the participants were excited to hear the overall findings related to student attendance during the course of the ten-week study. While there was not a collective consensus that the decrease in absenteeism was solely related to the interventions, there was agreement that the interventions likely played a part in the student's desire to be at school as it related to a more engaging learning environment which made regular school attendance more attractive to the students.

Theme 2: Impact of High Leverage Strategies on Student Engagement

Data collected through participant survey prior to the start of the AR study presented a predominant focus on instructional strategies, with 61% of the respondents mentioning an instructional strategy or instructional focus in their approach to student engagement. The remaining 39% responded with a more varied approach to increasing engagement. A more detailed breakdown of the overarching categories resulted in the following: instructional approach 52%, building relationships 19%, rewards or incentives 15%, and attention to SEL 15%. A number of the respondents included all of the categories in their response to these questions as demonstrated by participant P:

> *Variety is key for me for student engagement. Keeping lessons filled with rigor while meeting students' needs. Math groups that are fluid to meet needs for units*
>
> *Integrating technology that promotes discussion with We Video, Flipgrid etc*
>
> *Creating a team approach --- make each member of the class feel a part of something bigger than themselves. Math talks and discussions --allowing for others students to hear and explain how they understand a concept. I like to keep things student led as much as*

possible with me speaking as little as possible from the front of the room---lots of small group and partner work. Finding the good in each and every kid. Watching my words and the way I speak to them.

While the majority of participants in the pre project survey noted an instructional focus, this was not necessarily an instructional strategy that would follow Hattie's categorization as a HLS. A sample of responses regarding the types of strategies mentioned is noted in the following. Participant A shared the following response, *I create anchor charts with students and then rotate what charts are on the wall, depending upon the focus, so that students notice when there is something new vs. same displays all year long.* Participant K's response is an additional example of the mention of an instructional focus but not rating highly in regards to effect size, according to Hattie, with small group and use of technology both falling below the average with regards to impact on student learning (Hattie, 2016). *Small group instruction that meets the student's needs, flexible seating to make it feel more like a home, and using educational technology to reinforce skills.*

Analysis of survey results at the close of the study found a more focused approach in the detail with which the participants responded. The connection to HLS strategies and student engagement was clearly evident as noted by the following samples of participant responses. Participant J shared the following response, *The targeted strategies did increase student engagement. Sound strategies help students gain understanding and confidence. This confidence grows curiosity and further engagement. All of these strategies, I believe increases attendance.* This connection was also shared by participant G who shared the following, *The strategies have been effective in engaging students and getting the students excited about learning new concepts.*

Participant D noted that there was no difference this year but that was due to the use of these strategies as a general instructional practice prior to participating in the survey and responded with the following, *These are my bread and butter strategies, meaning I always use them. So it's not that I saw a difference, rather I see them work daily.*

It is important to note that the responses related to the impact of the HLS did vary in the level of connection felt by the participants, with participant C sharing, *Targeted strategies have been moderately effective.* Two of the respondents noted the pandemic and the difficulty in making that connection with so many other variables to consider. This viewpoint was acknowledged by the IT and Researcher and was included in the overall findings of the study.

Theme 3: Impact of Action Research on Teacher Growth

Data collected prior to the start of the AR study provided insight regarding the thinking of the teachers and their actions for students who missed days of school. Initial responses included the majority, 40%, of participant responses who mentioned contacting parents while 32% of respondents noted sending missed work home for completion and 24% reporting one-on-one support for the child when they returned to school. In the initial survey, only one participant responded with a more proactive vs. reactive approach. Participant K noted, *Connect with all parents at the beginning and build a relationship with them to be proactive and deter possible absences (talking about activities that require classroom participation, special projects students will want to be a part of, timing of both.*

This response was in contrast to the level of awareness that was present for the participants when they completed the post survey. The mindset shift as it related to the response to this question was evident as 100% of the respondents mentioned the importance of instructional engagement and its relation to student desire to attend school. Additional analysis

found that 46% of the respondents were aware of the relationship between engagement and attendance with half of those respondents noting the study as a reminder to the importance and increasing their level of cognizance during instructional planning. The following shares the thinking of two individual respondents as it related to this response. The first is shared from participant B, *Prior, the importance of considering the impact was present, especially attendance. Post, it is now more illuminated and has significantly impacted planning for discussions.* The second is shared by participant L who stated, *I think we always think about the impact of our instructional strategies, we just may not be as in tune to how they affect student engagement/attendance until we are specifically looking at the impact it has.*

The finding of the data analysis related to Theme 3 was an overall positive impact for the majority of the respondents regarding their specific growth in this area through completion of the AR study. The analysis revealed that 54% of the respondents had not considered the connection between student engagement and student attendance prior to the AR study. A sampling of participant responses as it related to this finding are noted by the following. Participant C shared, *I have thought about instructional strategies and the impact of engagement but not on attendance.* Participant G also reflected on the impact of the AR study and how it facilitated the connection of engagement and attendance and stated, *I think we always think about the impact of our instructional strategies, we just may not be as in tune to how they affect student engagement/attendance until we are specifically looking at the impact it has.* While Participant K reflected on the specific strategies and how those have shaped their mindset regarding instructional planning, *I did know that scaffolding and providing immediate feedback in First grade was an important component for my students. I had not considered the SEL component*

and now really try to "check in" with my students individually so that we have a strong rapport and they want to learn and are intrinsically motivated.

Data analyzed surrounding Theme 3 was significant as it revealed that all of the participants experienced growth from start to completion of the AR study. Whether this was in their approach to planning, increased awareness of the relationship, or a mindset shift as it related to the use of instructional strategies and the relationship student engagement has with attendance, all participants experienced a positive impact and growth in specific areas.

Chapter Summary

Analysis of data completed throughout the ten weeks of the AR project finds an overall positive impact on student attendance with all five grade levels experiencing a decrease in student absences. While some grade levels experienced greater decreases than others, the tracked students missed 42 fewer days during the start of school in 2020 than they missed during the start of school the previous year. This is a significant finding in light of the circumstances the students and their families were facing during this period of the COVID 19 pandemic. The AR participants remained engaged throughout the study and included the HLS with fidelity in their daily instruction. Student engagement was consistently reported to be relatively high throughout the study and the HLS were determined to be relatively close in percentage regarding the level of importance as it related to impact on student engagement. Analysis of data collected through the pre and post surveys resulted in connections made to the research questions where three major themes emerged. Exploration of the themes and overall analysis of data found that there was a direct and positive connection between the AR study and the AR participants as well as engagement and attendance of those students who were tracked.

Consideration of the variables related to the pandemic were noted as the third through fifth grade students were subjected to the hybrid schedule during Cycle 1. With the exception of one student in second grade, the team determined that it is impossible to know the true impact or lack thereof that resulted from the completion of an AR study during a world-wide pandemic.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Summary of the Findings

The findings of the study indicate an overall positive impact on student attendance with a 56% reduction in absences across the grade levels. While some grade levels experienced greater decreases than others, the tracked students missed 42 fewer days during the start of school in 2020 than they missed during the start of school the previous year. This finding is notable in light of the circumstances the students and their families faced during this unprecedented time of COVID-19. Despite the additional burden that the pandemic caused, the AR participants remained engaged throughout the study and included the HLS with fidelity in their daily instruction.

Student engagement was consistently reported throughout the study. Engagement of the students was initially reported at a relatively high level and maintained this level throughout the study. The chosen HLS were determined to be relatively close in percentage regarding the level of importance as they related to impact on student engagement. Analysis of data collected through surveys completed by the participants resulted in the emergence of three major themes. Exploration of the themes and overall analysis of data found that there was a direct and positive connection between the AR study and the AR participants. This positive connection was also determined between engagement and the attendance of those students who were tracked.

Major Findings Related to the Literature Reviewed

The findings of the research noted in the empirical table (appendix A) speak to the necessity for districts and local schools to identify and intervene with those students who are

chronically absent or at-risk of becoming chronically absent. Review of current literature displays the trend and common theme among the studies as it relates to missed days from school and academic deficits which, many times, result in student dropouts. With early identification and intervention, supports can be provided to include both the student and the family which result in a decrease in missed days of school and increase in academic achievement and high-school graduation rates.

The current literature has noted strategies and interventions which have proven to be effective in engaging students and families in improved school attendance. The success of these interventions and the ability to break the cycle of chronic absenteeism are the driving force of this research study. The actions throughout this study were taken as an effort to identify and intervene with BES' chronically absent and at-risk population in order to better support the students and their families by increasing their awareness of the harm that missed days can cause and thus increase their school attendance rate. The following highlights the major findings of this study and their relation to the literature reviewed.

Finding 1

Analysis of the data confirms a consistent and relatively high level of student engagement throughout the duration of the AR study paired with a relatively low level of student absenteeism. The AR study included three HLIS; provision of feedback, scaffolded learning, and class discussions which were research-based and proven to have a higher than average effect size. These strategies were used in tandem with a specific focus on the SEL of the students in the classroom. The student engagement component of this study was based on the work of Kirksey and Gottfried as their studies revealed the connections between student engagement, student attendance and the role of the classroom teacher (2018). This finding is further supported by the

work of Fauzi (2020) who noted the use of learning strategies that increased student engagement in the classroom, thereby increasing a student's desire to learn (see, e.g., Graham, et al., 2015; Chen & Hwang, 2019; Messenger, et al., 2017). To further support this finding, the work of Flores and Brown (2019) confirmed the connectivity of student engagement with positive adult and peer interactions at school. Further bolstering this finding are the works of Hattie, Breathnach, and Rosenshine who specifically studied HLIS and their impact on student engagement and attendance through which they concluded the effectiveness of HLIS on increasing student engagement and decreasing student absenteeism (2018).

Finding 2

Partnering with families and increasing the home-school connection is a key component in absence reduction. Through the use of specific and targeted parent outreach sessions, this study used the electronic Zoom Webinar platform as a means of parent connectivity which had otherwise been greatly reduced if not completely eliminated due to the restrictions and parameters of the COVID-19 protocols and procedures schools were mandated to enforce. Despite the restrictions, our live parent outreach sessions served as a support to our families through an informational aspect that provided content that we as educators knew parents would benefit from as well as an opportunity for families to ask questions and receive immediate answers. In addition, parents had the opportunity to submit feedback following the session, this feedback was used to guide the next session which worked to further ensure that the needs of our stakeholders were being addressed. At the close of each session, those who presented shared their contact information and encouraged parents to reach out at any time and with any question as it was critical to the team that the parents knew that the line of communication was open and welcomed.

This finding is supported by the work of Kraft and Rogers (2015) who noted the importance of relationships with guardians and the connection of these relationships and the increase of student attendance. Harris (2015) found the connection of parent relationships with student attendance to be of the highest importance during the elementary years of schooling while Epstein and Sheldon (2002) noted the importance of this communication being targeted and specific to the needs families. Epstein and Sheldon went on to state, "Giving parents the name and telephone number of at least one person who is officially designated to discuss attendance issue may help parents guide students to more regular attendance." (2002, p. 315). Furthermore, the increase in awareness that was presented to parents may have contributed to the increase in student attendance as the work of Rogers and Feller found in 2016 when they studied the connection between increasing the parental awareness surrounding the importance of attendance and decrease of student absenteeism.

Major Findings Related to the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to use targeted interventions to increase the level of student engagement in the classroom, thereby reducing the number of days absent from school for those students identified as being chronically absent. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent do chronically absent students respond to the implementation of targeted interventions aimed at increasing engagement/attendance?
2. How does the implementation of High-leverage Instructional Strategies influence daily student engagement?
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of an Action Research Team on targeting chronic absenteeism by way of increasing student engagement?

Findings Related to Research Question 1

Analysis of student attendance data indicated an overall positive impact on student attendance across the ten-week period of the AR project. While some grade levels experienced a more significant decrease in student absenteeism, there was a reduction in absences across all five grade levels. Despite the noted variables which impacted this study, the data indicated a positive finding in relation to the reduction of student absences during the AR project. The extent to which student absenteeism was impacted was measured by a 56% decrease in absences for the first 49 days of school in 2020 when compared to the first 49 days of school in 2019. The students tracked for this project reduced their absences by 42 days, going from 74 missed days to 32 missed days. This is significant, especially in the light of the world-wide pandemic with periods of illness and quarantine as a daily factor in the lives of the students of BES.

Findings Related to Research Question 2

The IT team determined that the analysis of trends spanning the ten-week period of data collection as they related to the HLS and student engagement was not significantly informative to the overall effectiveness of this AR project. While Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 found marked differences in the HLS noted by the respondents as being the most impactful, the overall analysis of the data concluded a more evenly distributed finding. The level of student engagement, as reported by the members of the IT, remained consistent throughout the duration of the AR study. The respondents began the study with a rating at a level eight of a possible ten; this remained relatively consistent from week to week. A conclusion drawn here was that the students began with and consistently maintained a relatively high level of engagement throughout the ten week course of the study.

Findings Related to Research Question 3

The mindset shift as it related to the response to this question was evident, as 100% of the respondents mentioned the importance of instructional engagement and its relation to student desire to attend school. This was in contrast to the level of awareness that was present for the participants prior to the start of the study. Analysis of pre-study survey found that 46% of the respondents were aware of the relationship between engagement and attendance with half of those respondents specifically noting the study as a reminder to the importance of and increasing their level of cognizance during instructional planning. Data analyzed surrounding research question three was significant as it revealed that all of the participants experienced growth during from start to completion of the AR study. Whether this was in their approach to planning, increased awareness of the relationship, or a mindset shift as it related to the use of instructional strategies and the relationship student engagement has with attendance, all participants experienced a positive impact and growth in specific areas.

Limitations of the Current Study

The limitations of the current study are most notably affected by the study having taken place during a world-wide pandemic which impacted nearly every aspect of modern education as we have known it. As mentioned previously, the initial approach to this study included the use of adults in the building with whom the students could build positive relationships. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, this relationship was essentially limited to the homeroom teacher, with some students experiencing this relationship through a computer monitor as they received their instruction in the virtual setting. While the homeroom teachers worked hard to overcome this limitation, this undoubtedly impacted the level of connection and number of positive

relationships that the students of BES were afforded and experienced during the 2020-2021 school year.

The true impact of the interventions on student attendance was a significant limitation of this study. Prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year, the students of BES had experienced a three-month closure of school preceding the summer of 2020. This closure greatly impacted not only the academic progress but also the SEL well-being of the students. As the start of the 2020-2021 school year approached, there was uncertainty regarding what the return to school would look like or if there would even be a return to school. As it turned out, there was a level of return but it did not look like anything that our students had previously experienced at school. The school week was divided into days of attendance by students in Group A and students in Group B, face coverings or masks were an expectation in grades 2 through 5 and strongly encouraged in grades K through 1. Social distancing was enforced in all grade levels and students no longer traveled to the media center to check out books or the art room to build clay structures. There was no singing in music class or playing of recorders. All student clubs were cancelled. Students ate lunch in their classrooms and parents and visitors were not allowed beyond the front office.

Despite all of this, the students who returned to the brick and mortar setting were simply happy to be back at school. To be back with their friends, albeit six feet apart. The opportunity to see them and interact each week was a tremendous dose of positivity as they previously had no interactions with their peers. For some, the return to school was the first time that they had seen their friends since the last day of school in March. Could this desire to be back with peers be a cause for the decrease in student absenteeism? Absolutely, this could be one possible cause. There is no way to know for sure the actual impact of the implementation of the HLS on student attendance.

In addition, the previously discussed causes for student absenteeism were no longer reliable as they related to this study, as prior to this study there had been no consideration given to variables related to a pandemic. Illness related to COVID and absences related to quarantining of exposed individuals or those with suspected exposure became the reasoning behind student absenteeism. As time passed, "self-imposed" quarantining became a term that was used as the parents heard of possible COVID positives within the school and decided to keep their student(s) home despite there being a lack of confirmation of a positive case. Parents also used the self-imposed quarantine to prepare to travel for the holidays, taking it as a period to allow for little to no contact with any members outside of the immediate family in order to reduce the risk for the family members that they were traveling to visit.

The findings of this study are also limited in that the study took place in one school, on a relatively small scale, with seventeen participants in the IT and the tracking of attendance data for only nineteen students. Larger schools would find a larger target population for addressing chronic absenteeism and allow for a larger scale for data collection and analysis. This larger scale would allow additional opportunity to examine the data for trends and potential impact.

The engagement ratings provided by the teachers were subjective as there was no specific parameter in place to ensure continuity in thought regarding how they rated the level of engagement of their students. While the use of an engagement instrument was suggested at the mid-point of this study, the implementation of this instrument was not a viable option as the study was already in its fifth week. This variable was also noted as an implication for future researchers.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

The findings of the present study offer implications for practitioners at BES as well as practitioners throughout Hope county and other school contexts. Most importantly, the findings from this study suggest the strong relationship between HLS and intentional integration of said strategies when planning for instruction as it related to student engagement in the classroom. This component is critical and should be in the forefront of conversations, professional development, professional learning communities, and planning related to student engagement and student attendance.

The value in Hattie's work on effect size and the implication for use of the HLS, which have the largest effect size, during instruction is the foundation upon which this study was built. The findings support the inclusion of HLS as having an impact on student engagement while Hattie's work supports the inclusion of these strategies as it relates to the impact on student learning. The partnership between the two has an undeniable implication of positive impact on the overall success of students at school.

In addition, the findings of this study support the use of alternative methods to increase student engagement and attendance. The review of the literature noted much success with implementation of interventions which included a tangible reward system as a methodology for engagement and motivation to attend school regularly. In contrast, the methods of this study focused on the intrinsic motivation or desire to be present at school by increasing the level of engagement of the students during instruction.

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

The largest implication for future researchers would be to conduct a study similar to this when the world is not experiencing a pandemic. The variables related to the pandemic made it

impossible to come to any firm conclusions regarding the impact of the interventions on student attendance. The study did, however, provide proof of impact on the participants as it related to their mindset shifts and overall growth as they made connections to the relationship that the use of HLS has on student engagement and the possibility of this being related to an increase in student attendance.

An additional implication is related to the reliability of the engagement ratings reported weekly by the participants and how they came about making the determination as it related to the level of engagement. This clarifying point was not one that was considered by the DT at the start of the study. While it was brought to the attention of the Researcher at the midpoint of the study, it was too late to include an additional tool. The use of an engagement observation instrument would be of benefit to future studies in that it would allow for a more clearly defined definition of what student engagement and the expectation of student engagement would look like across settings. The use of the engagement observation tool would also allow for a form of member checking in which the Researcher and the participant are both evaluating the level of engagement. The comparison of these two ratings would serve to inform the level of cohesiveness regarding the understanding of the expectation as it related to engagement.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy Makers

The present study may offer implications for policy related to local schools as well as larger school districts. Participants at BES consistently implemented the HLS strategies through intentional planning and delivery. The participants also took part in professional learning which contributed to their level of knowledge surrounding the level of impact and effect size of the HLS. School districts may consider a large scale district-wide professional development or PLC

surrounding the work of Hattie, effect size, and HLS as it relates to the research based impact on student learning.

A district-wide recognition of the relationship of HLS to student engagement and the potential for impact on student attendance may have far reaching impacts on the buy-in that is gained for the support of the effort. Creating a sense of urgency through local school and district data may serve as the initial step in a targeted focus towards a district-wide effort to target chronic absenteeism. The plight of the chronically absent would also gain traction through changes in how student attendance data is reported to the public. An update to the reporting of ADA would allow for a more accurate representation of student attendance concerns.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

The challenges experienced during the completion of this study have served to increase the level of appreciation and gratitude that our teachers deserve as they fulfilled the actions of their calling in education. Despite the various unknowns, the fears surrounding COVID, the risk to their health and the daily reminders of the severity of illness, our teachers did not waiver in their commitment to their students or the fidelity in their commitment to this study.

The data collected can serve to support a number of angles; it can be what we make of it due to the variables which impacted the study. Through this lens, however, we can see the foundational worth of the study and the positive impacts that the HLS had on these students regardless of the pandemic. We can also see the impact of the SEL component and how our students thrived in the classrooms with their teacher and peers as they maneuvered an experience that none of us had dreamed we would encounter.

While there are no profound statistical findings or hard facts to present as absolute truth, there was a level of community that was unexpected and a cohesive effort that prevailed through

a period of time in which the Researcher feared a zero percent participation rate. This finding supersedes all others as it speaks to the character, passion, and dedication of this group of participants with a generalization to every teacher in the field during this moment in time.

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Appendix A

Empirical Findings Table

Author(s)/ Date	Title	Purpose	Method(s)	Sample	Result(s)	Conclusions	Implications
Berman, J. D., McCormack, M. C., Koehler, K. A., Connolly, F. Clemons-Erby, D., Davis, M. F., Gummerson, C., Leaf, P. J., Jones, T. D., & Curriero, F. C. (2018)	School environmental conditions and links to academic performance and absenteeism in urban, mid-Atlantic public schools.	A study of how the school environment influences academic performance and student attendance.	The team analyzed academic performance data, school environmental data, school climate surveys, and community characteristics.	The study included public school students from Baltimore City schools in grades 3rf through 8th. A total of 158 schools (126 elementary and 91 middle schools) were included with the exception of nine alternative programs which served special needs students.	The study found that conditions of the school building, physical environment and variables in the community all impacted academic performance. Conditions of the school, air quality, school safety, and area crime significantly impacted school attendance figures.	A myriad of factors influences student absenteeism and academic performance at school. This study notes that school safety and overall conditions of the school are the largest influences impacting attendance and academics.	School safety, climate perceptions, environmental data, and academic performance data are all valuable pieces of information that leaders have access to at the local school level. An analysis of these may provide insight and areas for targeted support when working to increase student attendance and academic performance.
Ehrlich, S. B., Gwynne, J. A., Allensworth, E. M., & Fatani, S. (2016).	Preschool attendance: How researchers and practitioners are working together to understand and address absenteeism among our youngest students.	To determine the academic impact of chronic absenteeism for very young students, primarily those in pre-kindergarten.	The team analyzed the attendance patters of all pre-k students and its relation to the student's grasp of kindergarten readiness skills. Student backgrounds as well as pre-k absences, and later outcomes were also analyzed.	The study included 3 and 4-year-old student enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs in Chicago public school. Approximately 26, 0000 students were included in the study.	Once a pattern of absenteeism is created, the student is more likely to continue this trend as they progress through school. As student absenteeism increased, academic proficiency decreased. High absenteeism was also shown to increase undesired student behaviors and poor work habits.	Targeting student absenteeism in early grades is a critical component to both academic and behavioral success for students.	District and local school level personnel would benefit from a focus on student absenteeism in the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Early intervention could result in increased academic and behavioral performance for those who may have otherwise been at-risk for deficits.
Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002)	Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through	To determine the impact of a family-school-community partnership in the effort	Data were collected over a three-year period through a voluntary activity conducted by Johns Hopkins University.	Eighteen schools participated in returning baseline, midyear, and final surveys. The sample	Students with high absenteeism rates increased their attendance when	The study suggests that schools are more likely to reduce student absenteeism when they take an approach	District and local school leaders who are looking to reduce student absenteeism may benefit from a targeted focus on student, family

	family and community involvement.	to reduce student absenteeism.	Surveys were given, collected and analyzed.	included 12 elementary and 6 secondary schools.	specific activities and interventions were in place that rewarded them for coming to school. Positive partnerships between home, school, and community resulted in a reduction of student absenteeism.	that involves families, students, and the community while focusing on a positive approach. The study also notes a need to sustain efforts over time.	and community involvement with a positive spin.
Gottfried, M. A. (2019)	Chronic absenteeism in the classroom context: Effects on achievement.	To determine the impact that chronically absent students may have on the achievement of their peers.	The team collected records of absence, demographic data, and academic information for 3rd and 4th grade District of Philadelphia public school students. The student absences and correlating academic achievement were monitored and analyzed over a period of five years. Comparison of high absence student achievement and their average attendance peers was conducted.	Data set included 23, 386 3rd and 4th-grade students from 175 public schools over a five-year period.	Chronically absent students have deficits in both reading and math when compared to average attendance peers. Data indicates that a classroom with a number of chronically absent students has a negative impact on the overall performance of their average attendance peers.	Chronic absenteeism has negative implications for both the chronically absent student and their average attendance classmates. This study specifically targeted the impacts on reading and math achievement.	District and local school leaders may benefit from this research as they prepare class lists for the coming year. The data indicates that chronically absent students "strain" the classroom environment and this may be a variable they can control when considering how to place those students who are chronically absent so they ensure that there is not more than one per classroom.
London, R. A., Sanchez, M., & Castrechini, S. (2016)	The dynamics of chronic absenteeism and student achievement.	To investigate the relationship between chronic absenteeism and student achievement.	Students were tracked as they moved from elementary to middle to high schools. Student data analyzed included attendance patterns and academic performance results.	Student participants were included from 21 schools and two school districts. There were 16 elementary and five high schools.	The highest rate of absenteeism was among the youngest students and the lowest was in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. While there were a number of variables, attendance history had the largest impact on student achievement performance.	Of all the grade levels studies, kindergarten had the largest number of students who were chronically absent. Data indicates that the academic deficits incurred in this formative year, carried over throughout the grade levels as the students progressed through elementary, middle and high school. Of the many factors	Targeted interventions in the kindergarten years are critical in breaking the cycle of continued student absenteeism and academic impacts. Administrative supports for family factors may be beneficial in targeting the area of need and reducing chronic absenteeism.

						which contribute, student family situations have the largest impact on student absenteeism.	
Rogers, T., Duncan, T., Wolford, T., Ternovski, J., Subramanyam, S., & Reitano, A. (2017)	A randomized experiment using absenteeism information to "nudge" attendance.	To reduce student absenteeism.	Postcards were mailed to the parents/guardians of those students who were identified as having extreme, high, and low absenteeism. The postcards contained one of two messages, one encouraged the guardian to send the student to school and the other encouraged the guardian to send the student to school but also contained student attendance history.	*Control Group 14, 192 *Encourage Condition 14, 190 *Encourage + Self Condition 14, 179 *Encourage + Self + Social Norms Condition 8, 636 Total 51, 197	Contacting parents/guardians had a positive impact on student absenteeism as the number of student absences decreased.	The school to home communication resulted in a decrease in student absenteeism. There was no definitive finding that it increased school attendance at any specific grade level. The idea that a postcard home can have such a large impact is a powerful finding.	Increasing guardian awareness and positive home to school communication can be a great tool for building leaders as they work to reduce student absenteeism.
Sahin, S., Arseven, & Z., Kihc, A. (2016)	Causes of student absenteeism and school dropouts.	A qualitative approach to investigate the causes of student absenteeism and link between absenteeism and student dropout rates.	A "case study" design which consisted of a study group, data collection, and data analysis. Interviews consisting of nine questions were administered pre and post-study.	The study group consisted of 64 school principals from the primary, middles and secondary grade levels.	The study finds five main themes related to the causes of student absenteeism. 1. Family-child Relationships 2. Ignoring of Absenteeism 3. Family Problems 4. View of Education 5. Economic Impossibilities The impact of administrator and teacher behaviors was an additional factor that was gathered during the study as a contributor to both absenteeism and dropouts.	Five main categories were determined as the main causes of student absenteeism and school dropouts. The study also included that the school setting plays a large role in how students feel about school attendance and whether or not they are going to continue on or dropout.	This study is important in that it offered interventions which support each of the five main themes as well as the additional school setting variable. This information is beneficial to those who are looking for research-based interventions to target their specific areas of need.

Smerillo, N. E., Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., & Ou, S. (2018)	Chronic absence, eighth-grade achievement, and high school attainment in the Chicago longitudinal study.	To assess the association of chronic absenteeism in the early middle grades (4th, 5th, and 6th grades) with attainment of high-school graduation with either a GED or diploma.	The study team began collecting data on participants as they enrolled in their kindergarten year of schooling and followed them through elementary, middle, and high school until graduation. Variables considered included student demographics, behavior, academic proficiency, family history, economic standing, absenteeism, and whether or not the student earned a GED or high-school diploma.	Data was collected from 1, 148 kindergarten participants through the Chicago Longitudinal Study which began in 1985. Student were followed from kindergarten enrollment through high-school graduation (provided they remained enrolled in school).	Children who were chronically absent, on average, performed at a rate that was two months behind their average attendance peers and many did not achieve graduation from high-school.	Students who were chronically absent in the early middle grades were significantly less proficient in both reading and math and had a lower rate of high-school graduation by diploma. This data indicated that these children are at risk for economic and health struggles as they become adults.	Schools need to identify and support students who are chronically absent or at risk of becoming chronically absent. It is important to intervene with these students early on and promote engagement with not only the students but the families as well.

Appendix B

Action Research Initial Presentation to Staff

Agenda

May 2020

Welcome & Thank You

Overview of Data Driving the Topic

a. Brief review of current literature

b. Gap in literature for Bell Elementary

c. Theoretical & Conceptual Frameworks

Overview of Local School Data

a. 2015 through 2019

Discussion of Action Research

a. Role of Design Team

b. Role of Implementation Team

c. Professional Learning Community

5. Action Research Process

a. Team Meetings

b. Time Commitments

c. Timelines

6. Questions

Appendix C

Initial Staff Survey for Action Research Participation

May 2020

BES Targeting Absenteeism

Hello all!

Thanks in advance for taking your time to consider supporting this effort! I appreciate your willingness to consider one (or more) of the following teams. I promise to work hard to keep the time commitment as minimal as possible. Please know that your response here is not set in stone and you can feel free to rescind your interest in the Fall or at any time. Responding here simply allows me to get a pulse for the interest from the staff.

Thanks again!

1. I am interested in the Design Team. [The Design Team will meet in July/August to determine the plan of action (how we will target/support those who are absent). This plan will be tweaked to fit the model we return under.]

Yes

Maybe

2. I am interested in the Implementation Team. [This team will carry out the plan that is created by the Design Team. This team will meet 1 time a month for July –November.]

Yes

Maybe

3. I am interested in the Professional Learning Community (PLC). [This team will meet 1 time per month August-November. We will review school data and research-based practices that have been proven effective in targeting and supporting students who are chronically absent.]

Yes

Maybe

4. I prefer to live life on the edge! Please surprise me with a team as I would LOVE to support however you may need!

Yes

Maybe

Appendix D

Staff Survey Regarding Student Attendance

Questions

1. How many years have you been in education? (short answer)
2. How many years have you been a classroom/support teacher? (short answer)
3. What grade level do you teach/support? (short answer)
4. What is your level of concern regarding student absenteeism? (Likert scale 1-10)
5. What is your level of knowledge regarding how Average Daily Attendance is calculated? (Likert)
6. Considering your level of knowledge, do you feel that Average Daily Attendance is an accurate representation of absenteeism at your school? (Likert)
7. A student who consistently misses two days of school per month is a concern for me as a teacher/support staff member. (Likert)
8. Targeting and supporting absenteeism is more important at the secondary level of schooling. (Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree)
9. Missed days of school in the elementary years can impact students in the following ways: (Academically, Socially, Emotionally, College Graduation Rate, All of the Above)
10. What practices are currently in place in your classroom to support students who miss days of school? (or the students that you work with if you are not a classroom teacher) (short answer)
11. How effective (overall) do you feel these practices are? (Likert scale 1-10)
12. What do you do differently for those who miss multiple days of school? (short answer)

13. How likely are you to incorporate new/different strategies if it means your students attend school more regularly (missing 5 or less days per school year)? (Likert scale 1-10)

14. Attendance strategies in the brick & mortar classroom are as effective as those in the virtual learning environment. (strongly disagree-strongly agree)

15. If you could only choose ONE factor, what would you say is the main reason that students are absent from school in a brick and mortar classroom? (short answer)

16. If you could only choose ONE factor, what would you say is the main reason that students are absent from class in a virtual setting? (short answer)

17. With the right strategies in place, all students can be effectively engaged. (Strongly disagree- Strongly agree)

18. How could the school/county improve the approach to addressing student engagement in both the brick and mortar and virtual classrooms? (short/long answer)

Appendix E

Staff Survey Regarding Student Engagement

Questions

1. How many years have you been in education? (short answer)
2. How many years have you been a classroom/support teacher? (short answer)
3. What grade level do you teach/support? (short answer)
4. What is your level of concern regarding student engagement? (Likert scale 1-10)
5. What practices are currently in place in your classroom to support student engagement for your entire class? (or the students that you work with if you are not a classroom teacher) (short answer)
6. How effective (overall) do you feel these practices are? (Likert scale 1-10)
7. What do you do differently for those who struggle with engagement? (short answer)
8. How likely are you to incorporate new/different strategies if it means your students are more engaged? (Likert scale 1-10)
9. Engagement strategies in the brick & mortar classroom are as effective as those in the virtual learning environment. (strongly disagree-strongly agree)
10. If you could only choose ONE factor, what would you say is the main reason that students lack engagement in a brick and mortar classroom? (short answer)
11. With the right strategies in place, all students can be effectively engaged. (Strongly disagree- Strongly agree)
12. How could the school/county improve the approach to addressing student engagement in both the brick and mortar and virtual classrooms? (short/long answer)

Appendix F

Action Research COVID shift Presentation to Staff Agenda

July 2020

1. Welcome & Thank You
2. Overview of Data Driving the Topic- Shift Due to COVID-19
    a. Brief review of current literature
    b. Gap in literature for Bell Elementary
    c. Theoretical & Conceptual Frameworks
3. Discussion of Action Research
    a. Role of Design Team
    b. Role of Implementation Team
    c. Professional Learning Community
4. Action Research Process
    a. Team Meetings
    b. Time Commitments
    c. Timeline
5. Questions

Appendix G

Action Research Confirmation of Interest Survey

July 2020

Good afternoon,

You are receiving this form because you responded with interest in the initial survey that I sent in May. I want to start by saying THANK YOU to each one of you. In what we will likely refer to as the most tumultuous period in modern history, I was overwhelmed by the response and your continued willingness to go above and beyond to not only support our students but to support me as well.

Many of you have asked where I am with the project and how we will proceed. I have been trying to wait to reach back out to everyone as I was hoping to have a solid direction/answers to share with you but as you know, I do not. This will keep things interesting as this project will be another jet in our fleet that we will build while we are flying it!

I do, however, want to ensure you that this WILL happen and we will get started as soon as we have confirmation of how we are returning! I can tell you with 100% certainty that if we return on yellow, the focus will shift to decreasing student absences by increasing student engagement in the classroom. I did not feel that encouraging attendance through goal setting and rewards (in a time that staying home is a must when you are not feeling well/sick) was not a sound direction for us to take. If we return on red, we will focus on student attendance but in the form of logging in/engaging in lessons/work completion.

At this time, I would like to do a confirmation of the area of interest that you expressed in May. In the survey, you will see that I have removed the 'maybe' choice as I would like to get a final list of "yeses" for our committee groups. Please know that you are welcome to serve on one, two, or all three. I have included the original descriptions if you need a refresher but please know that these may change slightly

depending on the manner in which we return to school. Please feel free to email me with any clarifying questions that you may have!

With all of my heart, I thank you (again) and I look forward to navigating this year with you!

1. I am interested in the Design Team. [The Design Team will meet in July/August to determine the plan of action (how we will target/support those who lack engagement). This plan will be tweaked to fit the model that we return under.

yes

2. I am interested in the Implementation Team. [This team will carry out the plan that is created by the Design Team. This team will meet 1 time a month for July-November.]

yes

3. I am interested in the Professional Learning Community (PLC). [This team will meet 1 time per month August-November. We will review school data and research-based practices that have been proven effective in targeting and supporting students who lack engagement]

yes

Appendix H

Action Research Design Team Meeting

Agenda

August 7, 2020

1. Welcome & Thank You
2. Housekeeping
    a. Norms
    b. Consent
    c. Timeline of the Project
    d. The Work
    e. The Data
    f. Next Meeting
3. Overview
    a. Roles of the Teams
    b. Implementation Cycles
    c. Professional Learning Community
    d. Completion Date
4. Student Engagement
    a. Behavioral vs. Emotional
5. High Leverage Instructional Strategies (HLS)
    a. John Hattie
    b. Quantification of Impact
    c. Discussion surrounding HLS

d. Determination of HLS for the Project

6. Data Collection Decision

    a. Electronic vs. Paper Based

    b. Response Type

        i. Likert Scale vs. Short Answer

Discussion

Review & Finalize Team Decisions

Questions

Appendix I

Action Research Implementation Team Meeting

Agenda

August 10, 2020

1. Welcome & Thank You
2. Housekeeping
    a. Norms
    b. Consent
    c. Timeline of the Project
    d. The Work
    e. The Data
    f. Next Meeting
3. Overview
    a. Roles of the Teams
    b. Implementation Cycles
    c. Professional Learning Community
    d. Completion Date
4. Student Engagement
    a. Behavioral vs. Emotional
5. High Leverage Instructional Strategies (HLS)
    a. John Hattie
    b. Quantification of Impact

c. Discussion surrounding HLS

d. Determination of HLS for the Project

i. Class Discussion (.82 effect size)

ii. Scaffolding (.82 effect size)

iii. Teacher Feedback (.70 effect size)

iv. Teacher/Student Relationships (.52 effect size)

6. Data Collection Decision

a. Weekly Electronic Survey

b. Response Type

i. (2) Likert Scale & (1) Short Answer

7. Discussion

a. Accept/Argue

8. Implementation in a Nutshell

a. Next Steps

i. Begin week of August 24th

ii.PLC begins end of August

9. Questions

Appendix J

Action Research Professional Learning Community

Meeting Agenda

August 25, 2020

1. Welcome & Thank You
2. Review of Norms
3. Overview of the Action Research Project
    a. Data Driven
    b. Design Team
    c. Implementation Team
    d. COVID-19 Shift
4. Social-Emotional Strategies
    a. Morning Meeting
    b. Use of Protocols
    c. SEL and COVID-19

Article Activity

    a. Chart Creation/Share Out
    b. Discussion

Social-Emotional/Engagement Resources

Questions/Ticket Out the Door

Appendix K

Action Research Professional Learning Community

Meeting Agenda

September 22, 2020

1.Welcome & Review of Norms

2.Overview of the Action Research Project

- a. Current Data
- b. Update from Parent Session
- c. Implementation Team & Close of Cycle 1

3.High Leverage Instructional Strategies

- a. Hattie's Work
- b. Effect Size (Visible Learning)
- c. High Leverage Instructional Strategies
  - i. Teacher Feedback
  - ii. Class Discussion
  - iii. Scaffolding
  - iv. Social Emotional Learning

4.Article Activity

- a. Chart Creation/Share Out
- b. Discussion

5. High Leverage Instructional Strategies Resources

6.Questions/Ticket Out the Door

Appendix L

Action Research Professional Learning Community

Meeting Agenda

October 2020

1.Welcome & Review of Norms

2.Overview of the Action Research Project

a. Current Data

b. Update from Parent Session(s)

c. Implementation Team & Close of Cycle 1

* Review of Student Attendance Data

3. High Leverage Strategies in Action

Part 1:

a. Group Discussion

b. Chart Creation/Share Out

c. Discussion

Part 2:

a. Creation of Groups

b. Gallery Walk

c. I Wonder…I Like… (post-its)

Part 3:

a. Circle Up

"I used to think…but now I know…"

5. Resources/Questions/Ticket Out the Door

Appendix M

Action Research Implementation Team Cycle 1

Meeting Agenda

September 24, 2020

1. Overview of the Project

    Results from Implementation Team meeting

    Cycle 1 8-24-20 through 9-25-20

    Cycle 2 9-28-20 through 10-30-20

    PLCs August, September, October

    Project Completion Projected for November 1, 2020

2. Timeline for Completion

3. The Work

- 3 target strategies (with fidelity)
    - ELA & Math lessons
    - 2 months
- Engagement Rating Survey
        - 3 Questions
        - Completed Weekly
- Team meeting
        - Cycle #1
        - Cycle #2

4. The Data

Google form emailed each Friday (at the end of the day) with 3 questions:

- (2) Likert Scale 1-10
    - (1) English Language Arts
    - (1) Math
- (1) Open ended question
- Review of Engagement Ratings
- Review of Current Attendance Data

5. Next Meeting

Appendix N

Action Research Implementation Team Cycle 2

Meeting Agenda

November 2020

1. Overview of the Project

    Cycle 1 8-24-20 through 9-25-20

    Cycle 2 9-28-20 through 10-30-20

    PLCs August, September, October

    Parent Sessions September, October, November

2. Timeline for Completion

    Project Completion Projected for November 1, 2020

3. Participation of Implementation Team

- 3 target strategies (with fidelity)
    - ELA & Math lessons
    - 2 months
- Engagement Rating Survey
        - 3 Questions
        - Completed Weekly
- Data Collected

4. Engagement Findings

Google form emailed each Friday (at the end of the day) with 3 questions:

    1. Average Weekly Engagement Rating

    2. Preliminary Findings

3. Overall Use of Strategies

Data Shared

5. Attendance Findings

1. Data Share

2. Preliminary Findings

6. Closing

Appendix O

Professional Learning Community

Ticket Out the Door

Sessions 1, 2, & 3

3 A's Protocol

1. Tell me one idea you agreed with today.

2. Tell me one idea you would argue with/about?

3. Tell me one idea you will apply in your classroom this week.

Appendix P

Action Research Weekly Engagement Rating Survey

Implementation Team

1. Please rate the overall engagement of your students, this week, in ELA and Math.

2. English Language Arts Engagement (Likert scale 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being exceptional)

3. Math Engagement (Likert scale 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being exceptional)

4. (Non-homeroom teacher option) (Likert scale 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being exceptional)

5. Please share one concrete example of how your work on Student Engagement has impacted your students this week.

Appendix Q

Action Research Y'all Come Parent Outreach Session 1

Agenda

September 2020

1. Welcome
2. Housekeeping
3. Introductions
4. Setup for Virtual
5. Setup for Routines & Schedules
6. Setup for Time Management
7. Setup for Zoom
8. Setup for Attendance
9. Setup for Reading Resources
10. Resources
11. Thanks
12. Google Survey

Appendix R

Flyer for Parent Outreach Session 1

SETUP FOR SUCCESS

KEEPING KIDDOS PRESENT & ENGAGED

SEPTEMBER 9 @ 4:00

PLEASE JOIN US FOR A ZOOM WEBINAR TO EXPLORE

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES
VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT SETUP
ZOOM ETIQUETTE
ROUTINES AND SCHEDULES
TIME MANAGEMENT FOR ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING
ATTENDANCE FAQS
ONLINE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LEARNING

RSVP

coppola.stacie@[redacted]o

receive the Zoom link.

Open to all [redacted] families - Virtual & Brick/Mortar

Appendix S

Action Research Y'all Come Parent Outreach Session 2

Agenda

October 2020

1. Welcome

2. Housekeeping

3. Introductions

4. Setup for Schoology

5. Setup for Reading Success

6. Setup for Motivation & Movement

7. Resources

8. Thanks

9. Google Survey

Appendix T

Action Research Y'all Come Parent Outreach Session 2 Flyer

Appendix U

Action Research Y'all Come Parent Outreach Session 3

Agenda

November 2020

1. Welcome

2. Housekeeping

3. Introductions

4. Setup to R. E. A. D.

5. What do Good Readers Do?

6. Setup for Reading Success in 1st & 2nd

7. Setup for Reading Success in 3rd, 4th, and 5th

8. Setup for Reading Success: Text Features

9. Setup for Writing Success

10. Google Survey

11. Resources

12. Thanks!

Appendix V

Action Research Y'all Come Parent Outreach Session 3 Flyer

Appendix W

Action Research Y'all Come Parent Outreach Sessions 1 & 2

Feedback Survey

September & October

Hello,

Thank you again for joining our session today. We hope that you found the information useful and we would love to hear your thoughts! If you would take a moment to provide a bit of feedback, it would be greatly appreciated. Regards,

1. I am the parent of: (may select multiple)

-PK student

-1st grade student

-2nd grade student

-3rd grade student

-4th grade student

-5th grade student

2. I found this session helpful.

-Strongly disagree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly Agree

3. Which strategy/tip did you find most valuable?

4. Please share an area that you would like to hear about in a future session.

Appendix X

Professional Learning Community

Feedback Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gain insight into the overall effectiveness of the professional learning activity. This information will be used to guide future learning and provide opportunities that are tailored to your needs. Responses to this survey will be confidential.

1. What is your grade/position?

2. What was the title of the professional learning?

3.. The content of the professional learning met my needs (with 5 being the highest).

Likert scale 1-5

4. The presenter was knowledgeable and effective. Likert scale 1-5

5. The instructional strategies and techniques used supported me in the learning process.

-strongly agree

-agree

-disagree

-strongly disagree

-not applicable

6. This professional learning offered sufficient opportunity to collaborate with my peers.

Likert scale 1-5

7. The professional learning was relevant and I can implement knowledge/skills learned immediately. Likert scale 1-5

8. I will continue to explore this professional learning topic on my own.

Likert scale 1-5

9. Resources provided during the sessions supported my learning.

-Yes

-No

10. I feel more confident in my ability to implement this skill in my daily classroom activities.

Likert scale 1-5

11. The level of difficulty was appropriate

-Yes

-No

12. This professional learning will support my efforts to increase the engagement and attendance of my students.

-Strongly Agree

-Disagree

-Neutral

-Agree

-Strongly Agree

13. To build/maintain my confidence in this area, I need:

14. Additional comments are welcome. Thank you for your insight and time!

Appendix Y

Staff Survey (Post)

1. What role do instructional strategies play when targeting student engagement/attendance?
2. How have the targeted instructional strategies (Scaffolding, Feedback, Discussions, SEL) informed your instruction?
3. Prior to the Action Research project, had you considered the impact of instructional strategies on student engagement/attendance? If so, please explain.
4. Please share your thoughts on the connection between student engagement and student attendance. Do you feel that there is a correlation?
5. How effective have the targeted strategies been at increasing student engagement/attendance in your classroom?
6. Would the continued use of high-impact instructional strategies benefit students (regarding increasing engagement/decreasing absenteeism)?
7. How could the school/county improve our approach to addressing chronic absenteeism?
8. Please share any additional thoughts regarding the Action Research project.

Appendix Z

Teacher Poster Daily Strategies

Appendix a

Action Research Team Artifacts

PLC#1 TOTD	8-25-2020
Questions	Responses
1. Tell me one idea you agreed with today.	-Having a consistent routine -The importance of building relationships -Importance of establishing routines in the virtual environment -Teaching children how to reflect -The importance of student engagement in the classroom -Helping students learn how to reflect is an important piece of SEL -Whether virtual or B/M, maintaining relationships and connections is key! -Students deserve to be heard -Build relationships with your students - I agree that kids need positive relationships (that may have nothing to do with academics) with their teachers. These positive relationships can inspire them to like school.
2. Tell me one idea you would argue with/about.	-Having enough time to implement -I honestly did not have anything to argue with -I would argue about the absolute importance of metacognition!

	-Some could argue that young kids are not developmentally ready to think about thinking. -How SEL needed to be added to the teacher's workload and it needed to be mandated without teacher individuality being included in the decision by the lawmakers/county office. -Students not being able to opt out. I agree they shouldn't always have this option but sometimes I think they might need time to process in situation if they are asked to share. -None -I would argue that there are both good and bad reasons for lack of engagement. We have to go in with reasonable expectations so as not to beat ourselves up about something we could not control in the first place. We need to counter as many reasons as we can to the best of our ability.
3. Tell me one idea that you will apply in your classroom this week.	-I want to immediately try the specific, individual feedback. I think that has the fastest way to help students feel good about themselves and make them want to be engaged at school. -Building relationships and specifically recognizing certain traits and things that are done well by students. -Modeling reflection and taking ownership of mistakes -Model metacognition: What did I feel successful with in this activity? What was challenging in this activity?

	-I want to research the morning meeting components to see if I can use a part of one in the classroom. -SEL discussion time with students and communicating effectively are two areas I will work on. -Modeling constructive feedback -Rate a character in a book we read on the 5 point scale. -Making sure all of my kiddos know they are respected and why. -Building relationships with the students -Trying a new strategy each week to build relationships
PLC #2 TOTD	9-29-2020
Questions	Responses
1. Tell me one idea you agreed with today.	-Specific Feedback -Feedback is important to help students grow in their abilities. -Feedback is very important for students to hear and to give to one another. -Providing students with feedback allows students to know where they stand. -Changing the student attitudes over making mistakes. Seeing them as opportunities. -FEEDBACK!!! It is so important. From kids--to the kids. From the parents to the parents. When they feel involved and connected, they work to be involved.

	-The important role that feedback plays in PBL. -The importance role that feedback plays in PBL. -Feedback is important to help students understand and make growth. -Impactful feedback is good for students.
2. Tell me one idea you would argue with/about.	-Nothing to argue about-some of the ideas were too advanced for young children. -I do not agree with project based learning for all levels of individuals and that they are the best way for every student to learn concepts. -I think that some younger students might not do well with very technical rubrics. -There really wasn't anything. -Hmm... I agreed with what we said. -One idea is that Hattie just might not be the guru of PBL knowledge and practices. The article recognizes his work helped you to appreciate his contribution. -The opinion of some that Hattie may not be the "GOAT" in his knowledge and practice of PBL. The related article was impressive regarding work.

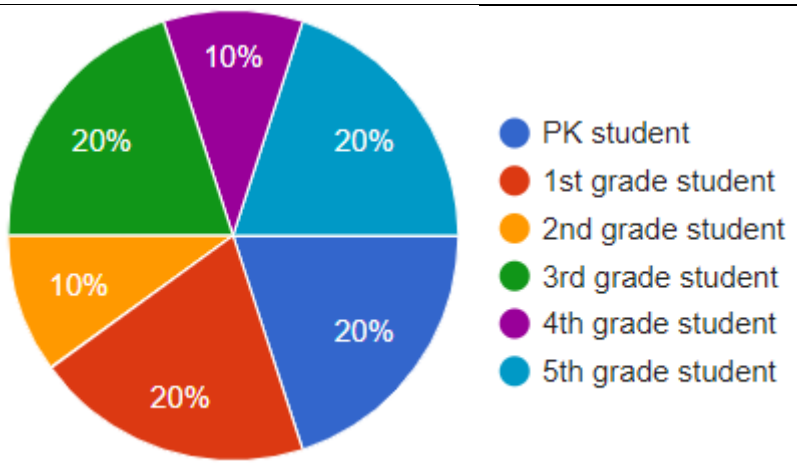
	-On the Hattie chart I would say that class size would be ranked higher, because with fewer kids you can build stronger relationships. -I don't necessarily agree with Hattie at the highest level, but I do understand what he is trying to say and do.
3. Tell me one idea that you will apply in your classroom this week.	-Not Yet philosophy with kids -I will provide specific feedback to students on a daily basis. -In my classroom, I will remind my students that failure is something we all do and it does not define who we are as a person. -I can provide whole class and individual feedback to my students from all things ranging from academics to time and material management. -Work to help my kindergarteners view mistakes as opportunities to learn. -How I can get feedback more from my students. I need to know more about how they are doing versus me just giving the feedback. -Emphasize the importance of students learning to recognize the importance of feedback. -Helping students to grow in their awareness of the importance of accepting and seeking feedback. -Being more specific with feedback in Schoology comments.

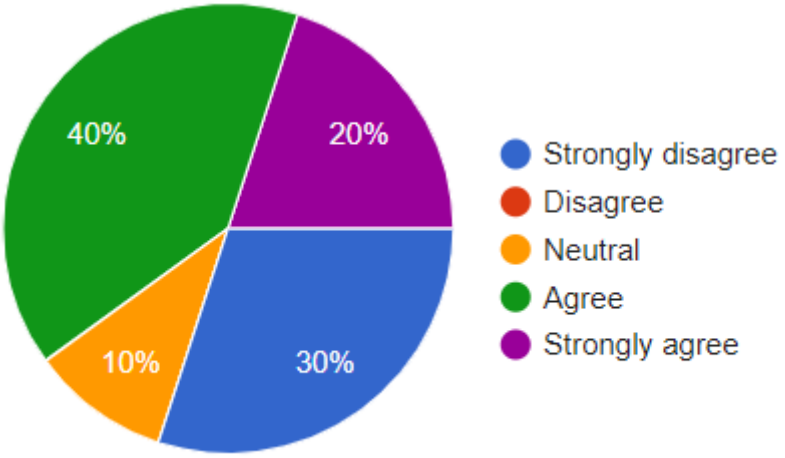
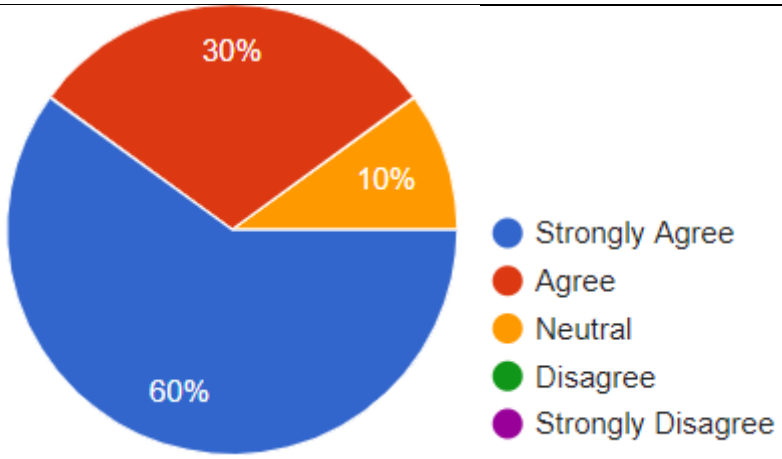
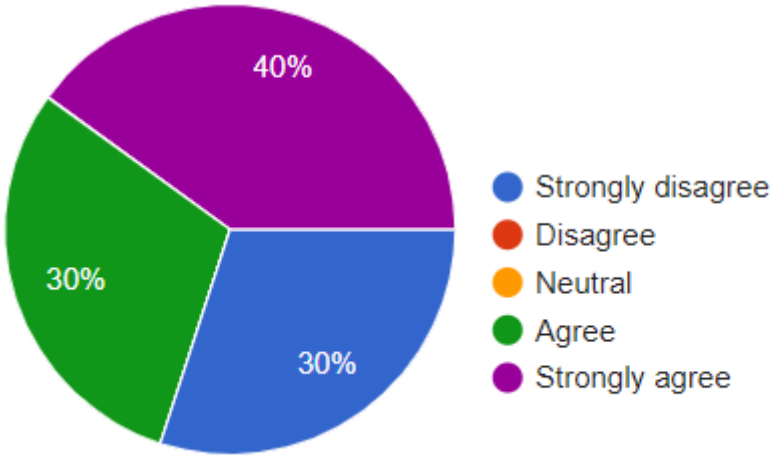
	-I will apply the strategy of giving feedback after the student(s) score themselves.
PLC #3 TOTD	10-22-2020
Questions	Responses
1. Tell me one idea you agreed with today.	-Discussions are very powerful for students. They can allow them to express their understanding and see other strategies or ways of thinking they perhaps would not have seen on their own. -Feedback can be very quick and easy to be effective. -Putting yourself in a character's role in a book. -Feedback is important to helping students grow and learn from their mistakes. -SEL has an important place in the classroom. -SEL helps build classroom relationships, especially in the virtual setting. -Social and Emotional Development is fostered at school, not only at home. -Teaching SEL in the classroom is beneficial to student growth and development. -I agree that SEL should have a dedicated time each day. -I really like changing perspective in SEL thinking. As a school, we are a part of making sure the kids feel connected.

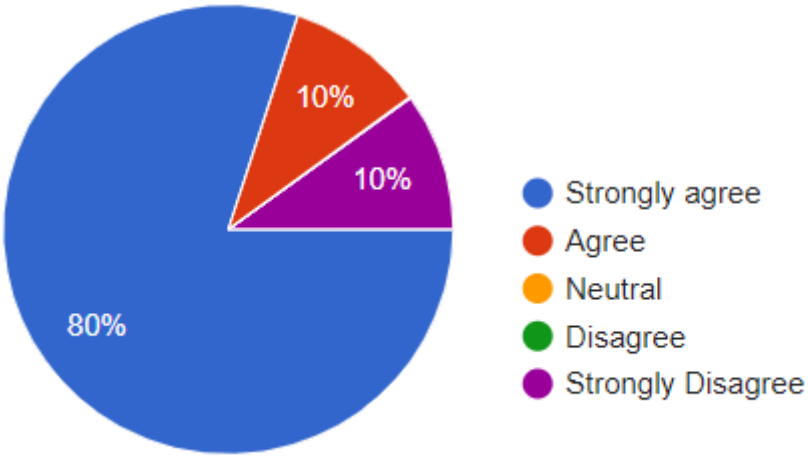
	-Small groups are important in many ways: discussion and feedback.
2. Tell me one idea you would argue with/about.	-I would argue that feedback doesn't have to come from only the teacher. If taught, students can provide feedback for each other. -Didn't see anything I would argue about. -I can't think of any we discussed this week that I would argue about. -Feedback needs to be intensive for it to be valuable. -None -Many great points made so honestly can't think of one. -I would argue that we need to push for feedback in ALL classrooms through this team sharing their learning. -I didn't really have one today. -I'm not a proponent for all or nothing. I think using a variety of discussions methods creates a flexible and cohesive classroom.
3. Tell me one idea that you will apply in your classroom this week.	I will use discussions in my classroom to keep students engaged. -I will intentionally plan 1 quick and easy feedback strategy for each class. -Putting yourself in a character's role in a book. -Letting students explain their thinking in math.

	-Using a Google doc as a safe space for students to complete an -SEL check-in -We will continue to develop the student relationships by sharing our book character pumpkins. -I will check in with my students more often and be more in tune to those needs. -Encouraging students to put themselves into the characters of others. -I will work to give kind, specific feedback to teachers I work with! -More scaffolding. Kids of all levels need to challenge at their own pace. I need to make sure I am not just focusing on my kids who need reinforced instruction, but also my gifted learners who need to be challenged. -I am working on scaffolding certain students who need to be challenged. I need to see how far they can be "pushed" in reading and math
PLC #3 Closing Activity	10-22-2020
Question	Responses
I used to think _____ but now I know _____.	-SEL didn't need its own segment and was just infused throughout the day; intentional time and activities improve the overall learning environment and teaches specific life skills.

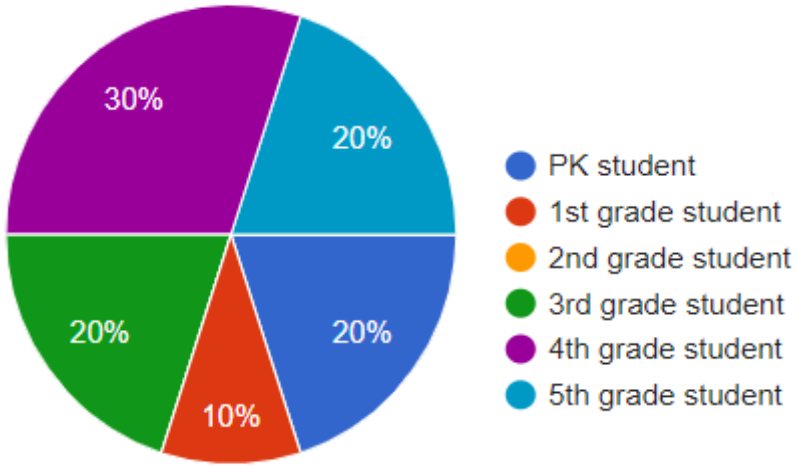
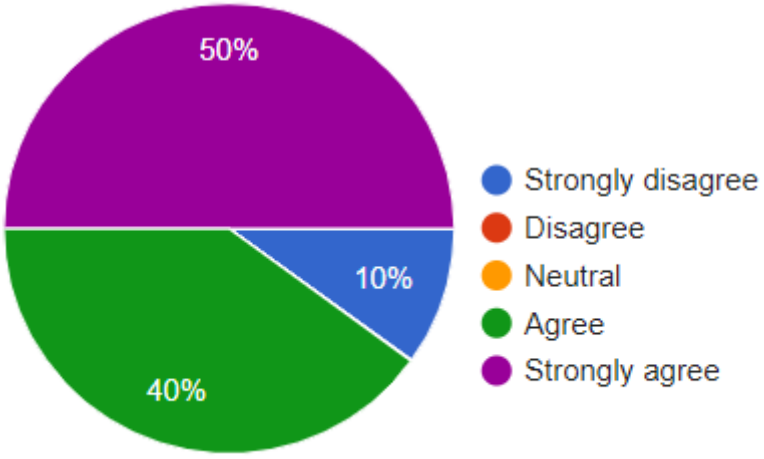
	-Social and emotional lessons were best left to parents; emotional development should be a part of education to help students to interact with one another. -Direct teaching was effective; allowing students to use creative thinking skills for resolution helps them to expand their problem solving skills. -That social emotional learning didn't have a time slot in the classroom; we can create meaningful opportunities for students and staff to work through feelings and bond. -Social and emotional learning was something we had to squeeze in; it is important to include it as much as possible. -That conversations were powerful around instruction; they are when combined with action research! -SEL (student relationships) would be built throughout the year- not in an intentional meeting during the day; it helps (especially virtually) to have that time of day to build the relationships. Students get to know each other and learn each other's likes and interests. -Social emotional was only addressed at and important at home; social emotional should be addressed more at school. -Social emotional was fostered mostly at home; it is our responsibility to build those relationships as well.

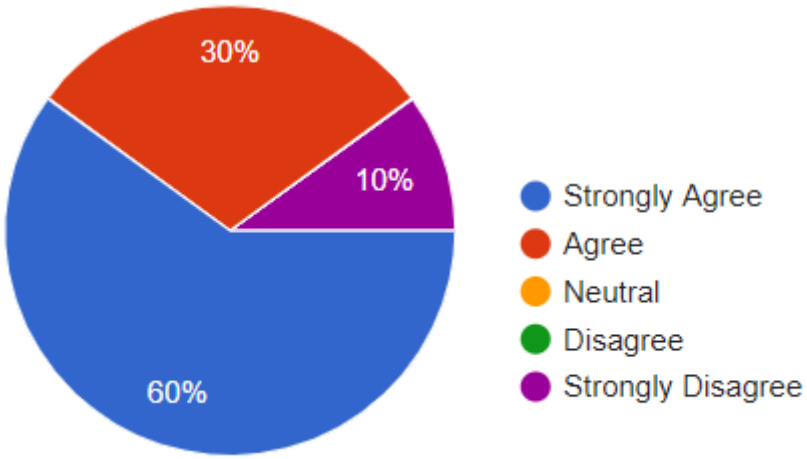
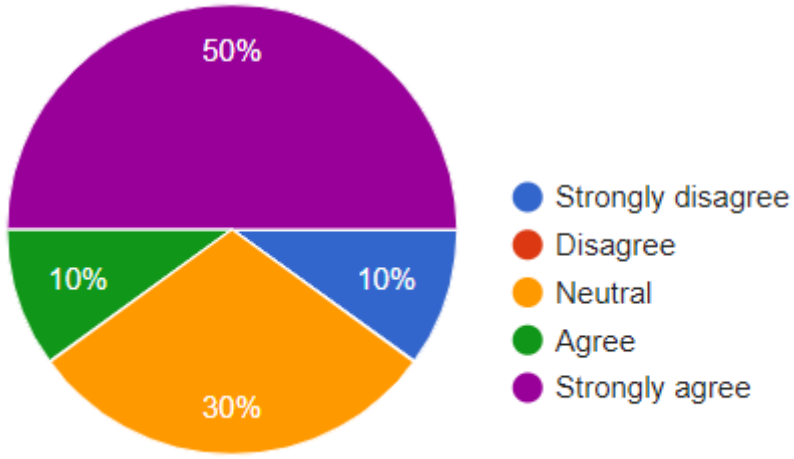
	-SEL was just about the student as an individual; it is the connection to make with the student. -SEL was a specific activity; can be used throughout the day -That giving feedback needed to be more intensive/time consuming than it really needs to be; that a quick check-in/feedback session goes a long way to help engage students and push them to do better work -Discussions and feedback was necessary when writing and completing mathematical tasks; feedback is absolutely a necessity in helping kids to open their minds and clarify their own thinking.
Parent Feedback from Y'all Come	Session 1
Questions	Responses
I am the parent of:	

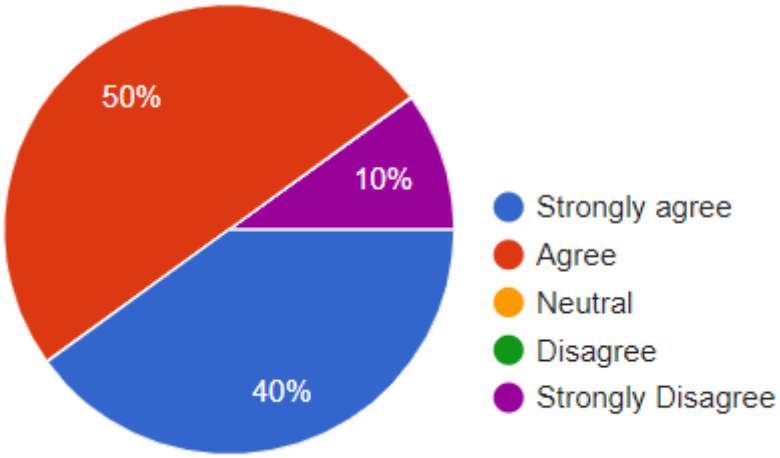
Overall I found this session helpful.	
The information on student engagement in the virtual setting was helpful to me.	
The information on student attendance was helpful to me.	

The information on reading resources was helpful to me.	
Which strategy/tip did you find most valuable?	-Reading, reading, reading. -Setting a schedule for at home learning -Reading to my child 20 minutes every day will go a long way to improve their vocabulary. -Engaging with my child while reading a story and having an appropriate setting for learning -To still read to my students even if they are 5th graders -Reading resources -The specifics on the impact of missed days -Reading -The online reading resources, and the reminder of how important a distraction-free environment is. -😖👹🔑

Please share an area that you would like to hear about in a future session.	-About arts! Ideas of what to continue that at home. more on reading resources. I missed some of that part and would love a written list of reading and book resources -I would love to learn about ideal screen time for a child. -Additional resources to supplement the curriculum and more info on the gifted program, if offered at the school. -Long term effects of screentime for students taking virtual classes, staring at computer screen for at least 4hrs a week. -General Activities in the school for Kindergarten -More practical hints on how to balance giving a student a place to work but also finding a way to make sure they stay motivated and do their work -Suggestions for Virtual Interaction Activities between kids ....ie Wednesday zoom for kids dances or workouts on YouTube together or Virtual PlayDate while on kids messenger. -Schoology interactive training. I've seen the videos- but I'm not comfortable navigating to find all the materials for assignments -As a BES parent who has no BES teachers, and has been virtual from the get go, I have some thoughts. All around the webinar will be useful for first timers but there are certainly some notes I'd love to share. Feel free to reach out
Y'all Come	Session #2

Questions	Responses
I am the parent of:	
Overall I found this session helpful.	

The information on Schoology was helpful to me.	
The information on Reading & Reading Strategies was helpful to me.	

The information on Movement & Motivation was helpful to me.	
Which strategy/tip did you find most valuable?	-Indeed, all of the session topic are great as it gives us (As a family) idea about how to use schoology, and the available resources for reading, as well as the motivation criteria that should be used to motivate our kids for learning. -How the grading system works, also, rewarding or commending 20mins of reading daily. -Reading books -The comparison about working out 100% vs reading to the Lexile level and not letting them go down was so obvious but so needed to hear it to realize the mistake I have been doing. -The best ways to access my child's schoology in order to monitor her assignments and grades -See how Schoology is laid out for reporting grades. -Schoology and reading strategies

Please share an area that you would like to hear about in a future session.	-Helping your child cope with access to seeing all grades- not getting weighed down by grades that might not be weighted so heavily -We would like to hear more about the available activities. we understand the COVID-19 stop everything, but that would be a good idea to plan it for future. or any tips you have it in the BES to send or kids for more attractive way. -How to recognize when a parent is putting too much pressure on a child to learn. -Reading books every day 20 minutes -I would love to hear some tips for doing arts at home! -x -Setting up good homework habits. Working on math facts---the importance of it. -You all are doing a great job covering information
Y'all Come	Parent Session #3
Questions	Responses
I am the parent of:	-PreK student
Overall, I found the session helpful.	-Strongly disagree
The information on empowering parents to be	-Strongly agree

more helpful when supporting their Kindergarten reader was helpful to me.	
The information on empowering parents to be more helpful when supporting their 1st & 2nd-grade readers was helpful to me.	-Strongly agree
The information on empowering parents to be more helpful when supporting their 3rd to 5th-grade readers was helpful to me.	-no response
The information on using Text Features was helpful to me.	-Strongly disagree
The information on Readers as Writers was helpful to me	-Strongly agree

Which strategy/tip did you find most valuable	-How to read to the student explanation by Dr. White
Please share an area that you would like to hear about in a future session.	-How to use available resources via school

Appendix b

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

Chronic Absenteeism: A Targeted Approach to Reduction in Absences Through Interventions and Increased Awareness.

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator: Jami Berry

Department: University of Georgia

Contact Information: berry.jami@uga.edu

Co-Investigator: Stacie Coppola

Department: [redacted]

Contact Information: coppola.stacie@mail.fcboe.org, [redacted]

We are studying the impact of a targeted approach to reduction in student absenteeism by increasing awareness for families and providing interventions for at risk students. We are also interested in the work that classroom teachers do in their classrooms to support or intervene for students who miss many days of school. If you agree to be in our study, we will invite you to complete a perception survey. You will also be asked to take part in an intervention design team and/or a professional learning community. You do not have to be in the study if you don't want to: it is your choice.

You can also agree to be interviewed but not be in a professional learning group. You can change your mind at any time and there will be no penalty. You and Stacie Coppola will decide together

how many interviews you will have, and when they will occur. The interview/professional learning may happen over the span of 6 months, if you agree.

We know that student absenteeism can be a sensitive topic. Also, some people may be upset or angry if they hear others in the focus groups expressing views different from their own. You do not have to share any information that you are not comfortable sharing. You can stop participating in the conversation at any time. We will be careful to keep your information confidential, and we will ask you and all the design team/professional learning group members to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept secure. The files will be encrypted and password protected. You can decide whether you want your name used.

• I give my consent to have discussions recorded: ____ (initial)

After we complete the interviews and professional learning groups, we will remove anything that identifies you. The recordings will be destroyed after the transcription is complete. We may continue to use the de-identified transcripts and may share them with other researchers for future studies. If you have any questions about the study, contact Stacie Coppola. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRB@uga.edu or 706-542-3199. If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____ _____ _____

Name of Researcher Signature Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.