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A Case Study of the Effects of a Counseling Program in a New Jersey High School

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A Case Study on the Effects of a Counseling Program in a New Jersey High School

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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

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Abstract

The purpose of this convergent mixed-methods study was to explore what influence, if any, a specific mental health program in a Northeast high school had on absenteeism and tardiness for students serviced by the school. The qualitative portion of this study looked at the overall impact the counseling program has had on the High School. It was important to utilize both quantitative and qualitative measures to ascertain an overall understanding of the effect on the High School.

The convergent mixed-methods approach was the best fit for this research study. The first part of this study focused on conducting the quantitative aspects of the research. The data were then subject to descriptive statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was chosen due to the limited population size. In the second phase of this research, a qualitative collection of text data was gathered through structured interviews. These interviews were used to explain further the perceptions of the impact that administration and teachers felt the counseling program had on the High School overall. These interviews allowed for additional insight into the program that quantitative research alone would not have been able to identify.

The study found no impact on the attendance and tardiness of the students who were engaged in the counseling program. Through the interviews, it was determined that both the administration and the teachers felt that it had a positive impact on the High School. By helping the most high-risk students receive the necessary counseling, there was a positive effect on the general population in that they had increased access to guidance services.

Keywords: mental health, absenteeism, tardiness, teacher–student relationships

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing husband Shawn and my remarkable daughter Elizabeth. I consider myself the luckiest woman in the world because I get to spend each day with you both. It is a wonderful life we are building, and we continue to grow in love each day.

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Chapter I
Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The effects that absenteeism has on student achievement and mental health are an ongoing debate by national, state, and local officials. However, there has been a lack of research regarding the impact that mental health services have on student absenteeism rates. The relationship between mental health and absenteeism rates requires further analysis. The information gathered from this research has the potential to be used to guide attendance policies as well as have an impact on providing mental health services for high school students. Both mental health and absentee rates have been examined in isolation. However, researching the impact that mental health has on high school absenteeism and tardy rates will add to ongoing research to increase student achievement, psychological and physical well-being, and absenteeism rates. Although most high schools provide guidance counselors and varied mental health services, it is essential to examine the efficacy of mental health counseling in schools. Absenteeism contributes to a decrease in test scores and the overall achievement of the school and the community (Ehrenberg et al., 1991). The connection between students' mental health and absenteeism rates is an important one to address and examine to build more influential schools and overall academics.

Absenteeism and tardy rates have a bearing on student performance and academic achievement (Sheldon, 2007). Absent students lose continuity of their education, which is interrupted, and impacts it negatively. Schools with lower absenteeism rates can perform higher on standardized tests than schools with high absenteeism rates (Ehrenberg et al., 1991). Researchers have found that various factors impact attendance rates. Lamdin

(1996) stated that attendance rates and socioeconomic status are related and that there is a positive correlation between paying full price for lunch and attendance. Parents have a strong influence over student attendance and can instill in their children from an early age the importance of attending school (Sheldon, 2007).

Mental health issues in high school have the potential to interfere with students' learning and social development, which can ultimately lead to disruptions in the school and the classroom. Providing mental health services in school and various school-based interventions have shown to target the growing mental health, emotional, and behavioral issues that face students and schools (Hoagwood et al. 2007). Adelman and Taylor (2006) indicated that diagnosable mental health disorders for people under the age of 18 are 12% to 22%. The statistic rises based on the socioeconomic status of the school in urban schools, where 50% of the students show significant learning and behavioral and emotional issues (Adelman & Taylor, 2006). Rossen and Cowan 2014 remarked that untreated mental health issues of students lead to classroom disruptions, deterioration of school climate, and an increase in student discipline issues. It is necessary to address mental health issues to maintain continuity of education.

This study examined the impact, if any, of a specific high school mental health-counseling program on absenteeism and tardy rates for the students who utilize the services. Through interviews, the research gained a greater understanding of the perception that administration and teachers feel the program has had on the overall impact of the High School. The impact looks at whether the culture, absenteeism, and general population of the school was effected by the counseling program. There is currently a lack of research on this specific mental health program and the effects that it

has had on student attendance rates in a high school. This study will add to the growing literature regarding the importance of providing mental health services in public schools.

Background

Attendance and Tardiness

Students who do not attend school are at a disadvantage to those students who are continually present. When a student misses a day of school, they lose valuable instructional time, which can lead to gaps in education. School attendance is one of the reports used to create a school's report card in New Jersey. The state recognizes that attendance has a critical impact on a student's academic success. Decreased attendance and excessive tardiness have shown to be linked to poor scores on standardized tests as well as a lowered grade point average (Cassell, 2007).

Lack of attendance does not only affect the academic aspects of the school; it has a profound effect on the social-emotional component of the school. When a student is absent, they typically need to make up the work they have missed or face a lower grade. This amount of work can lead to increased anxiety in students (Hinz et al., 2003). Although there are myriad reasons for students to be out of school, including sickness, transportation issues, or lack of motivation, students need to be excited and stimulated when at school to maintain their interest in school and learning.

Another marker on how well schools are performing in New Jersey is based on absenteeism rates, specifically chronic absenteeism. Chronically absent students are defined as students who are absent 10% or more of the days enrolled during the school year. The New Jersey State Report Card keeps specific track of students in each grade

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level of high school who are chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism has a profound effect on students, teachers, and the classroom environment.

Fisher (2009) stated that engagement in the classroom is related to school achievement and performance. When students feel confident about their ability to succeed in school, their drive and motivation to continue on that path will propel them to attend school regularly. Attendance at school is typically overlooked when determining the success or failure of a student. However, it dramatically affects students' overall academic and confidence within a school (Roby, 2003).

Teacher–Student Relationships

The teacher–staff and student relationships built and cemented over the school year are vitally important to the student's academic success. When students feel that teachers are committed to their well being, they work harder and are more engaged in school (Muller, 2001). For this relationship to grow, there needs to be a significant amount of time spent to cultivate this dynamic. Split et al. (2011) stated that the secondary school day's structure undermines the teacher–student relationship because there is not as much time as in the elementary schools to cultivate the interpersonal link.

When students feel that their teachers understand their learning style and need for dynamic lessons, they will engage in school and commit to learning. Asking questions is an essential component of the teacher–student relationship. Students who feel more comfortable in the classroom will ask questions that they might not have otherwise asked or thought that it is a "silly" question (Frymier & Houser, 2000). When students feel at ease enough to ask questions, the engagement in learning grows, and interest in the subject deepens. The relationships between teachers and students help to incentivize

students to come to school and learn. A student, who otherwise would have been lost in class, instead feels engaged and understood, which leads to a higher attendance rate. Teacher–student relationships need time to be built so that the bonds can deepen students' commitment to learning and one another.

The education of the whole student has become increasingly important in today's world. Student attendance, mental health, and teacher–student relationships all contribute to students' overall success as they prepare for college and careers. Even though positive results on standardized assessments continue to be the goal for most schools, it is essential to look at other factors as tools for predicting the accomplishments of a student as they remain in high school and into the future.

Teachers play a crucial role in identifying students who potentially need mental health services (Reinke et al., 2011). Teachers and school personnel have the responsibility to build key relationships to help students who need to seek mental health services while in school. Although most teachers are not explicitly trained in providing mental health services, they can often be the first people in the school students turn to when they need mental health assistance (Reinke et al., 2011).

Mental Health in Schools

Rossen and Cowan (2014) remarked that "raising awareness of the many children who come to school with mental health issues and treating them appropriately is the best way to ensure they achieve their potential in school and life" (p. 1). The ability to address student health for many students is a "prerequisite to learning and achievement" (Rossen & Cowan, 2014, p. 1). Students who go for an extended period without the necessary mental health treatment have issues growing and continuing to progress in society

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(Rossen & Cowan, 2014). Dube and Orpinas (2009) stated, "Absenteeism is an indicator of anxiety, depression and risky behaviors" (p. 1). Mental health becomes an obstacle to school attendance for students struggling with any one of the many mental health issues that face students.

Having programs in place to help students achieve better mental health has a positive impact on the student and the school community as a whole. Interventions that assist students in ameliorating risky and unhealthy behaviors and promoting healthy social development foster students' positive practices (Adelman & Taylor, 2006). When schools provide in-school assistance, they can help students who struggle. Merkangas et al. (2010) stated that one in five students have struggled with severe mental illness. These numbers do not even factor in the students who might not have an acute mental health concern but are struggling to find their way and place at home, within themselves, or within the school community. Developing programs that allow students to have easy access to within-school services help them to navigate experiences that are challenging (Rossen & Cowan, 2014).

Many obstacles might prevent students from receiving proper mental health services outside of school. Families may choose to ignore or not address the mental health concerns of their children. There are also financial challenges that families face when trying to provide counseling for their children (Swick & Powers, 2018). Other barriers may include language barriers, lack of flexibility of parents to leave their job, transportation, and inadequate access to health care (Swick & Powers, 2018). Providing counseling and mental health services within schools eliminates the myriad barriers that families may face when trying to help their child. There is an ever-growing need to

address mental health concerns within schools to help students become productive and positive members of the school community and, ultimately, society.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework that has been used as the basis for this research is founded on Maslow's hierarchy of needs that was developed in 1943 (McLeod, 2013). Maslow's hierarchy of needs builds on the theory that there are five different stages of development that each human being needs to have satisfied. The lower needs must be met before a person can move onto the next phase of development. The five various stages vary from the lowest, which are physical needs, to the high levels, which are more emotional needs (McLeod, 2013).

Stage one is physiological; these needs include air, water, and food (Hopper, 2020). The second stage is safety; these needs encompass personal safety, resources, and health (Hopper, 2020). The third stage is love and belonging, which comprise interpersonal relationships with people (Hopper, 2020). The fourth stage is esteem, which states people need respect, self-esteem, and freedom (Hopper, 2020). The fifth and final stage is self-actualization, which talks about the desire to reach one's potential (Hopper, 2020).

This theory relates to the research that is being conducted. If a student does not feel safe at school as a result of mental health issues, they will not be able to move onto the next phase, which potentially will hinder them from functioning in a school setting. When looking at student needs through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it becomes vital that schools address the concerns of the whole student and not just academic concerns that

may arise. This conceptual framework becomes the basis for learning and growth for each student.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this convergent mixed-methods study was to explore what influence, if any, a specific mental health program in a Northeast high school had on absenteeism and tardiness for students serviced by the school. "Convergent mixed method is a form of mixed methods design in which the research converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 15). Although numerous studies have been published looking at the overall impact of counseling programs, none has looked at this specific program or focused on the students' absences and tardy rates. The mixed-method approach was appropriate for this study because it integrated quantitative and qualitative data to allow for a total overview of the program. The mixed-method approach allows for a deeper understanding of the program while still examining a specific aspect of the program's impact at the High School. If the study had been just quantitative, a valuable component of understanding the administration and teacher's perceptions would be lost. Conversely, had the research merely been qualitative, it would have been more challenging to ascertain the impact it has had on absences and tardy rates. The mixed-method approach allowed the study to examine both perceptions of the administrators and teachers as well as the impact the program has specifically on absences and tardiness.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the mean and the median of a small sample or population (Witte & Witte, 2010). There are only 19 students who have consistently been in the counseling program. As a result, the use of descriptive statistics

was appropriate for this study. The use of descriptive statistics allowed the researcher to compare the means of absences and tardy rates for the years with and without the counseling program (Witte &Witte, 2010). By looking at the students' attendance and tardy rates, it would be possible to determine the effect, if any, the counseling program has on the attendance rates for this specific group of students. Descriptive statistics also allowed the researcher to determine the median of both attendance and tardiness. By comparing the means and median, it would be possible to decide whether the counseling program has affected attendance and tardy rates.

The qualitative portion of the research allows for a deeper understanding of the program's impact on high school. The interviews were conducted in a natural setting and face to face to gain a deeper understanding of the high school and the counseling program (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The convergent mixed-method approach allows for a holistic understanding of the impact of the program.

The effects of absenteeism and mental health have been an ongoing debate among educators. However, there is little research the looks at both factors together. There has also been no research conducted on the impact that this specific counseling program has had on the High School. This research will contribute to the ongoing debate of absenteeism and mental health services and this particular counseling program.

Research Questions

The research questions were developed to explore the strength of the relationship between absenteeism rates and tardiness and the impact that a specific mental health provider has had on student attendance. The quantitative overarching research question for this study was the following: What influence does this particular mental health service

have on absenteeism rates and tardiness for the students that are serviced in the counseling center?

The qualitative overarching research question for the study is the following: What is the perception of school administration and teachers regarding the impact, if any, of the counseling program at the High School? When discussing the High School impact, the research is looking to see if there has been an overall change positive or negative that has occurred as a result of the counseling program. The impact was looking at the High School as a whole and researching: besides the mental health counseling that these specific students are receiving, are there broader effects for these particular students and the general population of students. What have been, if any, the far-reaching effects of the counseling program beyond those pertaining to the specific group of students receiving mental health services?

Research Question 1: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on attendance rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 2: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on tardy rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 3: What is the perception of school administration and teachers regarding the impact, if any, of the counseling program at the High School?

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: It was not possible to determine central tendencies between the counseling program and attendance rates for students who receive counseling services in the High School.

Null Hypothesis 2: It was not possible to determine central tendencies between the counseling program and tardy rates for students who received counseling services in the High School.

Design and Methodology

This study was a convergent mixed-method study that used data contained on the High School's student database system. This research study anonymously looked at students attending individual and group counseling and determined whether since beginning the program, their attendance rates and tardiness have been influenced. This program began in February of 2019 and has been continually running since that time, even providing counseling for specific students during the summer months. The quantitative portion of the study focused only on this high school and the impact that the counseling program has had on absenteeism and tardy rates since its inception.

The qualitative portion of this study focused on the perception that administration and teachers have on the overall impact of the counseling program on the High School. This will allow the research to expand its view of the program and the influence it has had on the High School since its inception. To ascertain the administration's and teachers' perspectives, an interview was conducted with each administrator, teacher, and counselor. The administrators and the counselor who were interviewed have been critical to the overall implementation and continuation of this program. The teachers who were

interviewed have all been exposed to the counseling program and have knowledge of the program. Each individual was asked a series of six questions. The questions all pertained to the overall impact that the program has had on the high school.

Independent/Predictor Variables

The independent variable was the students who have received individual or group counseling with a certified, licensed psychotherapist. Student variables include student mobility and other mitigating variables that influence students. This study looked at the impact that the counseling has had on attendance rates and tardiness.

Dependent/Outcome Variables

One dependent variable was the attendance rates and tardiness of the students who have received individual or group counseling through this specific mental health service in the high school. This study's potential sample is any student at high school who has received sustained individual or group counseling with this service.

Significance of the Study

Policymakers and educators emphasize the importance of mental health services for students to improve education for students. Although there has been some research done looking at how psychological health services within a school impact attendance rates, and specifically at this High School, there has been no research conducted since the inception of this program. For students to compete in a globalized marketplace, they need to attend and be engaged in school. Chronic absenteeism is a college and career readiness indicator on the NJ Performance Report. It is considered a significant predictor of how well a student will perform once they graduate from high school. Therefore, more

research must be conducted around absenteeism and mental health to increase student attendance in high school.

Providing comprehensive mental health services in school has continued to grow, as more and more students are diagnosed with mental health issues or face social and emotional problems. There has been a push to educate the whole student in education, not just what needs to be taught in the classroom daily. The various impacts this program has had overall on the High School can be better determined by interviewing administration. The interviews with teachers allowed for a greater understanding of the impact the program has had on the High School. This research can assist policymakers at both the state and local levels and administrators when making decisions related to budgeting and providing mental health services in school. This research will add to the overall discussion of the impact that mental health has on student success. Looking at this specific mental health service related to attendance will also add to the research on its importance and its ability to predict a positive educational experience for students.

Limitations of the Study

Certain limitations are related to this study. The information reported in this study is a snapshot of a short period since the inception of this mental health program at the High School. The improvement of grades or the overall mental health of the students receiving the counseling services falls outside of the scope of this study, although there may be impacts on both of these areas for the students.

This study did not account for the number of times that a student may have missed a counseling session due to outside influences beyond the control of the student or the school. This study did not consider the effectiveness of the counselor who was providing

the services or whether the student was receptive to the counseling sessions. This study did not account for students who may have been involved in any harassment, intimidation, or bullying investigation conducted by the school. The subject of what the counselor discusses with the student or the reason why a specific student was referred to the counseling center is outside of the scope of this research.

The results of this study cannot be generalized due to the limited number of students in the population as well as the small number of participants who were interviewed. The results of this study are specific only to this one High School in this particular district. All participants were assumed to be open and honest in their responses to the interview questions. Limiting the study to this one High School, which had a limited number of students participating in the counseling program, limited the ability to generalize the quantitative findings. During the qualitative research the participants provided answers based on their own experiences and beliefs. The administrators who participated in the study were also closely involved in the implementation and success of the program. Therefore, their answers may reflect specific views that cannot be generalized and may not apply to the entire school population. There were only a small number of teachers interviewed; therefore, their opinions cannot be widespread. This researcher hopes that this study will add the ever-growing literature on providing mental health services to students.

Definition of Terms

"Absenteeism" is the practice of regularly staying away from work or school without good reason.

"Chronic absenteeism" is defined as missing 10% of the academic year for any reason including excused and unexcused absences, suspensions, and time lost due to changing schools.

"Convergent mixed-method study refers to a study in which the qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed during a similar timeframe.

"Counseling" is assistance and guidance in resolving personal, social, or psychological problems and difficulties, especially by a professional.

"Mental health" refers to a person's condition concerning their psychological and emotional well being.

"Tardy" Delayed or delayed beyond the right or expected time; late. For this study it is the time a student is considered late to school.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Each chapter provides essential information for the subsequent chapter.

Chapter I identified the broader context and overall purpose of the study. It provided a historical background regarding the significance and potential impact of the research. It also outlined the limitations of the study.

Chapter II provides an introduction to the literature on the topics of absenteeism/tardiness, teacher/student relationships, and mental health services.

Chapter III focuses on the convergent mixed methodology design of the study. This chapter includes information that is specific to how the research was conducted.

Chapter IV presents the results and findings of the study.

Chapter V summarized the findings and discussed the potential impact that the research may have on future studies.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Literature Search Procedures

Research studies and other pertinent information were found through the use of the Seton Hall University online access to educational databases. The online databases used for the research of this literature review included ERIC, ProQuest, JSTOR, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and SAGE. Peer-reviewed journals included but were not limited to *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, Sociology of Education, Journal of School Health, Journal Humanistic Psychology, Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry,* and *The Journal of Educational Research*. The data that were obtained for each variable were used by searching various related terms such as "student absenteeism," "student mental health," and "student tardiness." The researcher read each article to ascertain its relevance to the topic.

For the research to be included in the literature review, it had to be published from 1992 to 2019. The literature review included peer-reviewed studies that were qualitative and quantitative, as well as essential reports and broadcasts from the New Jersey Department of Education. The studies focused on student chronic absenteeism/tardiness and the impact that it has on students. The research included findings on the effect that teacher–student relationships have had on educational outcomes. Concerning the theoretical framework, information that discussed Maslow's hierarchy of needs was included. Research studies also looked at the impact of mental health services that were implemented in schools. Although there is research on mental health services and

absenteeism/tardiness, there is insufficient research regarding how these two entities are connected.

Tardiness

Although there has been extensive research regarding the impact of chronic absenteeism on student achievement, there has been a lack of research that looks specifically at tardiness. Tardy students are students who arrive late to school. Tardiness is determined to be an indicator of future chronic absenteeism (London et al., 2016). Also, as a result of the lateness, the students have potentially missed relevant material that was taught. Tardiness also affects the entire class because it interrupts the course's flow when a student walks in late to the classroom (Tyre et al., 2011).

Tyre et al. (2011) found that chronic tardiness is a problem that can significantly decrease instruction time at the secondary level. When students arrive late, the teacher will often recap what was taught or delay instruction, which results in loss of education for all the students in the classroom. Tyre et al. (2011) remarked that this loss of instructional time harms the academic outcomes for the entire student population. This study's goal was to examine the effects of positive behavior support (PBS) to prevent chronic tardiness. The PBS consists of three different parts teaching and reinforcement of behavior expectations, consequences for violating school rules, and the use of data to intervene and monitor outcomes (Tyre et al., 2011).

This individually diverse middle school and high school was experiencing an increased amount of tardiness. The data collected supported this anecdotal evidence that this was an issue (Tyre et al., 2011). The administration first examined the transition time that was needed to travel from classroom to classroom. The school also implemented

varying degrees of consequences dependent on the number of times a student was tardy (Tyre et al., 2011).   The staff was trained in the new system to ensure continuity among teachers. The students were instructed to complete a postcard that was mailed home each time they were tardy (Tyre et al., 2011).

The results of the interventions helped to reduce tardiness at the school. There were various changes that the school made to the program over time. Students initially received a verbal warning instead of filling out the postcard, because this took away valuable instructional time. The increased supervision in the hallways during periods of transition also had a positive effect on reducing tardiness (Tyre et al., 2011). The administration also discussed the need for increased positive reinforcement for students who were consistently on time. Even though there is little research regarding the effect of tardiness, this study offers various school-based interventions to mitigate tardiness.

Effects of Tardiness

London et al. (2016) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the effects of chronic absenteeism and student achievement. The students who were chronically absent from year to year became a predictor of attendance for the following year. They found that one of the predictors of students' chronic absenteeism was excessive tardiness. London et al. discussed that the family situation, mental health, and various other reasons have the potential to contribute to chronic absenteeism and tardiness.

London et al. (2016) commented on implementing interventions to combat chronic absenteeism and tardiness in their research. One of the approaches they discussed was looking at a comprehensive plan. The detailed proposal included positive communication with parents and school-based programs that help address the underlying

issues that prevent students from attending school. As tardiness is a predictor of chronic absenteeism, it is vital to address this issue with both the students and the family before the lateness comes to an absentee issue. London et al. discussed that, currently, there are no uniform policies that exist. Therefore, it falls to the principals and teacher to address any underlying barriers that might prevent a student from being on time or coming to school (London et al., p. 23). Once a student has excessive tardiness or absences, they will most likely repeat this pattern. By addressing issues early on it can help to combat chronic absenteeism in students.

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) briefly discussed how tardiness contributes to a pattern of chronic absenteeism. Balfanz and Byrnes categorized tardiness as "why students will not go to school" (p. 31). Balfanz and Byrnes talked about some of the contributing factors that become hurdles to students attending school on time and attendance in general. Students stay away from school because of perceived or real embarrassment that they have felt. Other contributing factors to tardiness and chronic absenteeism are "poor planning, family needs, or unpredictable transportation that lead to a student being late" (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012, p. 31). Balfanz and Byrnes discussed that sometimes the consequences of being tardy, such as detention, even become deterrents of school attendance. Balfanz and Byrnes remarked that at kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade, there are spikes in chronic absenteeism. These are the times of significant physical and emotional change in a student's life. It is also the years that students potentially will be attending a new school and face adjustment issues.

Kearney and Bensaheb (2006) discussed the difference between students who may not be able to attend school because of a health condition and those who refuse to

come to school or are chronically late. School refusal refers to when a child is physically capable of attending school, but for other reasons, arrives late, leaves early, or is absent for the school day. Kearney and Bensaheb stated, "Tardiness to school may affect 4.4–9.5% of youths" (Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006, p. 24). Kearney and Bensaheb discussed that one of the contributing factors to school refusal and tardiness is when students internalize problems such as general and social anxiety, worry, fear, and depression. As a result, these mental health issues manifest themselves as physical ailments such as headaches or stomachaches. These school refusals and tardiness result in consequences for the students in years to come, such as school drop-out and legal and financial difficulties. These potential consequences are a result of underlying mental health issues. It becomes imperative for psychologists, educators, and health professionals to address these causes. Kearney and Bensaheb remarked that it takes an entire team of professionals, such as the school nurse and a mental health professional, to mitigate school refusal behaviors that a student may exhibit.

School-Based Health Programs and Tardiness

Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2014) looked at the link between school-based health centers (SBHCs) and the overall effect they had on academic outcomes. SBHCs are facilities set up in schools that address the physical needs of the students and the mental health issues that a student may be experiencing. This study had 793 students from three schools in a large Northeastern urban metropolis participate in the study. These students represented students from an elementary school, middle school, and high school. Administrative records and data were used to determine the effects of the SBHCs as well as surveys. Tardiness, attendance, and grades were critical components of the data that

the researchers looked at (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2104). The study consisted of 61 questions divided into three sections: demographics, school health center usage, and school connectedness.

The study found that students who used the SBHC felt a deeper connection to the school community. Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2014), when looking at the administrative data, stated, "There was a statically significant difference in the percentage of students promoted to the next grade level. Specifically, 90 percent of middle and high school SBHC users were promoted to the next grade compared with 83 percent of nonusers" (p. 87). The study also found that there was a "statistically significant difference in tardiness among users and nonusers. SBHC users were late on an average of 9.5 days, whereas nonusers averaged five tardy days" (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2014, p. 87). Strolin-Goltzman et al. discussed that even though tardiness was increased for SBHC users, they were still more likely to be promoted to the next grade level. This finding suggests that the increased connection they felt to the school as a result of the SBHC offset any adverse effects of tardiness that could have occurred without the program. Strolin-Goltzman et al. remarked on the importance that school social workers play in creating a connection to the school, which ultimately results in increased academic success.

Positive Teacher Interactions and Tardiness

Caldarella et al. (2011) discussed the effects of using teacher-written praise notes to reduce tardiness in elementary school students. Both principals and teachers consider tardiness to be a widespread issue, which has negative repercussions on academic achievement. "Tardiness during the early school years may set a pattern for habits of poor punctuality that could follow students into their later years and beyond" (Caldarella et al.,

2011, p. 105). Tardiness in secondary school is associated with low achievement academically and increased dropout rates. This has an effect beyond school for students who can potentially carry these behaviors to the workplace. The majority of interventions used to decrease tardiness are punitive; this study looked at positive reinforcement to reduce tardiness.

Caldarella et al. (2011) remarked that positive praise has the potential to help students stay on task during the school day. Positive interactions between the teacher and the student can create a stronger relationship and contribute to a healthier learning environment. This study consisted of six specific students who all had either a history of tardiness, truancy, or behavioral issues that interfered with academic performance. The teachers who participated were asked to provide a handwritten note of praise to the student who arrived on time, and if the students were tardy, to ignore the behavior as much as possible. The intervention improved all of the students' on-time behavior. Caldarella et al. remarked that although this study's result was positive, the sample size was minimal and only included a select number of students. However, it does suggest that praise notes may be an effective intervention to decrease tardiness. Tardiness needs to be addressed in schools as soon as the pattern is noticed to stop it from becoming a chronic absenteeism issue.

Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is defined on the NJ Performance Report in 2018 as follows: being absent 10% or more of the total days enrolled. NJ Performance Report goes on to state that a student's absences impact their ability to grow academically. Gottfried (2015) highlighted the chronic impact absenteeism has on the absent students and their class as a

whole. Chronic absenteeism impacts various educational outcomes, both socially and emotionally, for students (Balfanz, 2016). Any absence that students take during the school year potentially contributes to their chronic absenteeism rates. The NJDOE states that even if the absence is medical or excused, the student is still considered absent. In a typical 180-day school year, students who receive more than 18 absences during the school year are considered chronically absent. Nauer (2016) wrote, "Educators and policymakers have historically overlooked absenteeism-an irony, given how much effort goes into improving schooling on the assumption that students are actually attending regularly" (p. 30). This critical detail of making sure that students are in school to learn is the assumption upon which educational policy is built. However, Balfanz found that 6.5 million public school students are chronically absent each year. The United States education system is built on the assumption that, barring the occasional illness or family issue, students are learning and engaging in the curriculum (Balfanz, 2016). If this is not happening, all stakeholders need to examine the underlying causes to properly educate the future population of the United States.

Patterns in Absenteeism

Shoeneberger (2012) stated this disengagement from school can begin as early as first grade and becomes increasingly problematic as students progress through their educational careers. It is essential to gain a more profound knowledge of the factors that contribute to absenteeism to direct resources and policies that will positively affect them. At an early age, it is vital to stress the importance of attending school. Parke and Kanyongo (2012) found that as grade levels increase, attendance rates decrease. Hinz et al. (2003) found that one of the underlining reasons students were absent from school was

physical and mental health issues. Other research had found that when these issues were not met with understanding, the absences continued, which led students to become increasingly disengaged from the educational process. This makes it all the more imperative that schools respond to students' needs on an individualized basis by using a range of strategies and interventions to keep them in school (Hinz et al., 2003).

Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), in their study of chronic absenteeism across fives states, reported that student absences can be generalized into three categories:

1. Students who cannot go to school.

2. Students who will not go to school.

3. Students who do not go to school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 5).

The students who cannot attend are those who have medical reasons for not attending such as allergies, flu, or other childhood ailments. A recent federal survey reported that 6% of students miss more than 11 days of school due to medical reasons (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who cannot attend school usually are absent because of housing instability or family obligations. Examples are students who have to work to help pay the rent or watch younger siblings while their parents work. Families who are homeless also have a difficult time sending their children to school because of instability in their housing arrangements (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 30). Finally, students who will not attend school often stay away because of a real or perceived threat from someone in school. These are students who avoid school because of bullying and harassment saturations. Other reasons students will not attend school can include the lack of appropriate clothing, unpredictable transportation, or self-consciousness regarding their academic ability (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 31). For the students who do not attend

school, there is no specific reason or deterrent for them. They choose not to attend school because they or their parent/guardian does not see the benefits of school. It is essential for parents from an early age to instill in their children an appreciation for school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, p. 31). These broad categories of student absences allow for an understanding of overarching issues that students encounter.

Impact of Absenteeism

There are resounding adverse effects on students when they are continually absent from school. Research has found that there are various academic impacts on students who do not regularly attend school. Hinz et al. 2003 found that the effects of missing school are so severe that students who were absent 20% of the time scored 20 points lower on tests than their peers who attended regularly. Parke and Kanyongo (2012) found that there is a correlation between success in school and attending school. Their study also showed that students who came to school regularly did better on the Grade 11 Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) standardized test. Philips (1995) stated that as a result of missed educational time, students' grades were poor, which led to frustration and further absenteeism rates. Nauer (2016) found that absenteeism rates were a strong predictor of how well the students would do academically and the school's overall performance. Nauer went on to state that "a school's rate of chronic absenteeism was more useful for predicting a school's test scores than other common measures, including the school's percentage of students in special education, English Language Learners, or students receiving free or reduced-price lunches" (p. 30). This shared success of both schools and individual students makes attendance rates such an important topic when discussing educational outcomes.

Chronic absenteeism has been studied in the past, but it is only comparatively recently that schools and educators are taking a closer look at its effects on overall school performance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Great Britain has determined that it is the most crucial factor for increasing literacy rates in schools (Roby, 2003). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) stated that on the Florida Achievement test scores for ninth graders, there is "an essentially linear relationship between missed days and lower test performance" (p. 26). Gorman (2014), through research at the National Bureau of Economic Research, has indicated, "Poor attendance can account of up to a quarter of the math achievement gap between poor and non-poor students" (p. 1). And Balfanz and Byrnes found that absenteeism rates had a more significant effect on math scores than English language arts scores. The reason for this is that English language arts is more subjective, and students use reading and comprehension skills across multiple disciplines. While math is much more linear, these students who miss two consecutive days of school are missing specific math lessons that might not be taught explicitly for the remainder of the year.

Chronic absenteeism is a predictor of whether a student will complete high school (Wilkins, 2008. Shoeneberger (2012) stated that students who have attendance rates lower than 80% represent a reduction in effort and can be predictive of ultimately dropping out of high school. There are profound effects on a person's life when high school is not completed. Wilkins (2008) noted that those who fail to do so have higher incarceration rates, unemployment, and dependency on welfare than those who graduate. These adverse effects make it even more imperative that schools understand the factors that contribute to absentee rates. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found a high correlation between poor attendance and high school dropout rates. Students who drop out of high

school tend to have a history of distancing themselves from the school's cultures and the learning process (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Poor attendance is an indication of disengagement from the educational environment and possibly stronger external influences such as family resources (Schoeneberger, 2012). Continual absences leave the students feeling anxious when attending school because of their perceived lack of ability as a result of missing content; this anxiety ultimately has the potential to lead to the decision to dropout (Gershenson, 2016; Shoeneberger, 2012).

Case Study of Absenteeism

Mac Iver et al. completed a critical study in 2008. This study followed a cohort of sixth-grade students for 7 years from the Baltimore City Public School System and examined the effects of chronic absenteeism on student graduation rates. This sample consisted of 9,176 students who were in the sixth grade in 1999. The majority of the students were African American (85.7%) and had low socioeconomic status (85.4%). When the study commenced, there were a large number of students who were chronically absent (17.1%). Over the next 7 years, there remained high numbers of chronically absent students. The students continued to be either chronically absent, which the researchers defined as having 79–88% attendance rates, or severely chronically absent, which the researchers categorized at <79% attendance rates. The highest chronically and severely absent rates occurred in the fifth year of the study; 39.8% of students were severely chronically absent, and 16.6% were chronically absent. Out of the entirety of the cohort, only 26% of the sixth grade was never chronically absent. At the end of this study, only one in three students graduated on time from high school. The chronic absenteeism was

so pervasive in the district that it had a profoundly negative effect in all students' educational outcomes (Mac Iver et al., 2008).

Absenteeism Link to Economically Disadvantaged Students

The impact of chronic absenteeism is of such a concern that the NJDOE report discusses it at length. It identified several types of chronic absenteeism, such as that among economically disadvantaged students and those of various races/ethnicities. It is crucial to isolate multiple student identifiers when discussing chronic absenteeism because research has shown that subgroups such as economically disadvantaged students have a higher rate of chronic absenteeism (Balfanz, 2016). Rates of absenteeism continue to climb as students go through high school. Missed educational time leads to lower grades and a persistent feeling of frustration with the school, which compounds the effects of already being absent (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). Sadly, but not surprising, students in lower socioeconomic groups tend to be more likely to drop out of high school than their affluent peers (Schoeneberger, 2012). Schoeneberger discussed that the resources of a family could potentially impact these students' attendance rates. The student may need to work after school, thereby impeding their ability to focus on their schoolwork (Schoeneberger, 2012). Teachers can easily conclude that a chronically absent student lacks the ability when, in fact, the underlining reason for their poor performance is the result of having missed so many classes (Schoeneberger, 2012; Wilkins, 2008). This cycle leads to disengagement in school and students dropping out (Schoeneberger, 2012). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) reported, "The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools," goes further than most other scholars in emphasizing the primacy of poverty in chronic absenteeism. Their

extensive research into factors that contribute to absenteeism stated that they have only

been able to identify one factor that is universally predictive of attendance rates.

> The data indicates that chronic absenteeism cuts across gender and geographic
>
> location. It is not a male or female, or urban or rural issue. What is still unknown,
>
> however, is if the causes of absenteeism vary by gender and region even if the end
>
> result is largely the same. The primary characteristic of students who miss a lot of
>
> school is that they live in or near poverty. (p. 22)

They noted that these lower income students would benefit the most from going to school

consistently because it would help more of them graduate from high school, a critical

stepping-stone on the pathway out of poverty.

Impact of Absenteeism on the Classroom

As noted earlier, absenteeism frequently harms the education of an entire class.

When a student is absent, a teacher will often stop to allow the missing student to catch

up. This is a valuable loss of instructional time and affects the flow of the educational

process for the entire class. Parke and Kanyongo (2012) found that classes with higher

absenteeism rates had to spend longer on remedial work and basic skills than other

classes. The research also revealed that they would be less likely to engage in innovative

teaching strategies because they had to spend a significant amount of time helping

students who had missed class (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). And a classroom that is

focused on remedial work cannot engage in higher order thinking, so important to

students on success on standardized tests. As discussed, Nauer (2016) stated that chronic

absenteeism rates are a more significant predictor of how a school will score on tests. A

school that cannot follow the prescribed curriculum will fall behind other schools where attendance is not an issue.

Strategies to Combat Absenteeism

There is considerable research that discusses how to keep students coming to school. One way to combat chronic absenteeism is by reaching out to parents directly. Hinz et al. (2003) and Sheldon (2007) found that when parents are engaged with the school, their children have better attendance rates. Nauer (2016) found that when schools make a personal phone call home to discuss a student's attendance rate, it has had a positive effect. To combat chronic absenteeism, New York City put signs on the Metro bus and subways that read, "It's 9 a.m. Do You Know Where Your Children Are?" (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012 p. 35). This type of direct message to parents helps to highlight the importance of attending schools. The onus of having their child attend school falls mostly on elementary school parents. This is also the time when parents have more influence over their children than their peer group. Shoeneberger (2012) stated that research has indicated that students' attendance rates in first grade are predictive of their attendance rates throughout the remainder of their academic careers. This early identification pinpoints students on their pathway to disengagement from the academic system; it is necessary to reach students early in their educational careers (Gershenson, 2016). Early on in their education, children form habits that are either positive or negative towards school. These become predictors of long-term outcomes, both good and bad, when they reach their high school years (Gershenson, 2016). This research highlights why schools must find practical tools to help elementary school parents create

a positive attitude towards schooling their children and emphasize attendance. At the same time, they have maximum influence over them and not their peer group.

Schools and teachers play a vital role in keeping attendance rates up once students walk through the doors each morning. The overall climate of a school can affect absenteeism rates. In 1883 The Trustees of Boston University Weekly published an article that urged schools to be places where students feel welcomed. It went on to note how this was a way to ensure that students attend school. Over a hundred years ago, educational experts recognized this culture plays a role more recently. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) and Harnett (2008) found that school culture plays a role in their experience. When students feel a sense of belonging within their school's social structure, this can increase attendance rates. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) also found that when students feel less anonymous, they would attend school regularly because they feel they are a part of something bigger than themselves. Balfanz (2016) found that one reason students disengage is that they feel no one cares if they attend. Once they lose that vital human interaction between themselves and the school, it has a resounding effect on their academic progress.

Another factor in how students are affected by a school's school culture, especially in high school, is the peer group they choose to associate with; as students progress through the education system, the people who influence them changes. In elementary school, it is their families that have the greatest impact. Sheldon (2007) discussed the importance of primary school of having parents engaged in the education process and fully informed of the importance of having their children attend school. Sheldon and Epstein (2002) found that elementary school calls home to the family had a

positive impact on attendance rates. However, as students become older, friends become more influential in their decision-making (Hartnett, 2008) if their peer group influences how they interact with school culture (Hartnett, 2008). By being a part of a peer group that does not value the importance of coming to school, absenteeism rates will increase, as the student gets older.

There is research that implicates teaching and lesson planning as a factor in student absenteeism. Boredom and lessons that are stale have the potential to contribute to student absenteeism (Hinz et al., 2003). When students are engaged in the learning process, they take ownership of their learning, which helps them understand how education contributes to their future success (Hinz et al., 2003). Nauer 2016 found that students disengage from the education process because they feel that little happens in the classroom. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) have found that students are more likely to skip class when they think the lesson is dull or the classroom is chaotic. In high school, where students typically change levels every period, this is hard to accomplish in a class period's limited time constraints (Hartnett, 2008).

Other notable studies have, however, come up with somewhat different findings. In 2012 The Utah Education Policy Center published comprehensive research regarding chronic absenteeism in its state. In this study, they identified four characteristics to predict chronic absenteeism: "low income, special education, English proficiency and racial minority" (p. 2). The odds of absenteeism for each group were then computed. The results of these were reported as a change in odds ratios (p. 3). An odds ratio greater than one indicates that the specific group has an increase in being chronically absent compared to a non-member of the group. The research found that low income was the most

significant predictor of whether a student would be chronically absent. This group had an odds statistic of 1.9; this means "students who receive free and reduced lunch were 90 times more likely to be chronically absent than students who did not receive free and reduced lunch" (p. 3). Each of the different characteristics identified that the students had a higher chance of being chronically absent; however, limited English proficiency was only 20% higher than students who did not fall into this category.

Studies on Absenteeism

There have been various longitudinal studies completed to research the impact of chronic absenteeism on academic outcomes for students. The Utah Education Policy Center (2012) also reported trends in chronic absenteeism across grade levels in schools. The report found that elementary school students in kindergarten and first grade had the highest probability of being chronically absent. Throughout the remainder of primary school, there was a decline in chronic absenteeism. However, as students entered middle school, the rates steadily increased each year, ultimately reaching the highest level in 12th grade. This report found that of the "35,508 students in the longitudinal data set, 9,847 (27.7 percent) were chronically absent between 8th and 12th grade" (p. 8). "Of those 9,847 students who were chronically absent, at least once 5,015 were chronically absent in more than one year" (p. 8). This study found that once a student was chronically absent for one school year, their chances of being chronically absent during another school year increased the possibility of being chronically absent by nearly 13 times. This study also looked at the correlation between chronic absenteeism and its ability to predict whether students will drop out of school. Their research found that starting in eighth grade, if a student was chronically absent, they were 5.5 times more likely to drop out in

the future than their peers who attended school regularly (p. 9). This study highlights the correlation between chronic absenteeism and dropout rates for high school students.

London et al. (2016) conducted a longitudinal study in California that looked at the characteristics of students who were chronically absent and their ability to achieve academically in school. This was a longitudinal study that was conducted over 3 academic years from 2008-09 to 2010-11. They grouped students into four cohorts by grade level to complete the analysis. This study only included students who are enrolled in the school district for all 3 years. The students in the kindergarten and first-grade cohort were not included in the achievement analysis because they did not take any standardized tests within the 3 years of the study. To study achievement, the researchers used the California Standards Test (CST); they used both the English language portion and math section of this exam.

London et al. (2016) found that the highest rates of chronic absenteeism were kindergarten and 12th grades. They found students, who were chronically absent for one year, had a higher possibility of being chronically absent for the subsequent year. If students were chronically absent in the "base year, 44.7% went on to be chronically absent in the second year, and 25.8% were chronically absent in both years two and three" (p. 12). London et al. found that the most significant predictor of whether a student would be chronically absent the following year was their attendance rate in the previous year (p. 18). The students in the kindergarten cohort who were most likely to be absent had parents who had graduated high school but had not received a college degree. In middle school and high school, students who were English language learners were significantly more likely to be chronically absent than students who did not fall into this

category (p. 15). Across all grade levels, students who received free and reduced lunch were more likely to be chronically absent than those who did not qualify for free and reduced lunch prices.

This study found that in elementary school, chronically absent students had scores of 0.18 and 0.22 standard deviations below the mean on the ELA portion of the CST. In math, students who were only chronically absent for one year scored .17 below the standard deviation, which students who were chronically absent for multiple years scored .32 below the mean. Although the difference was not as significant in middle and high school, the students performed below their peers who attended school regularly (p. 15). London et al. (2016), however, did remark that students who fall into the chronically absent category have other indicating factors that have the potential for them to perform below the mean on the CST. Students' academic growth was hindered even more if they were chronically absent for multiple years. This longitudinal study underlines the detrimental effect of numerous years of chronic absenteeism on students' ability to grow academically.

Coelho et al. (2015) published a longitudinal study focused on student achievement related to chronic absenteeism. This study looked at all students who were enrolled in Wisconsin Public Schools; there were 340,332 students involved in this study. The study used the test scores from the third-grade standardized test called Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE), which assesses students' ability in mathematics, reading, social studies, science, and language arts. The researchers confined their research to math and reading scores and controlled variables that have been found to impact test scores such as free and reduced lunch eligibility, students with disabilities,

and English language learners. Their study found that there is "a negative relationship among the number of school days missed and third-grade math or reading scores" (p. 14). Students absent for 14 or more days scored 4 to 7 points lower than students who missed the average number of days of school. Interestingly they found that there is a stronger relationship between math scores and absenteeism than between the latter and reading test scores.

Another critical study was by Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), who worked in conjunction with the New York City public schools to combat chronic absenteeism. In their report "Meeting the Challenges of Combating Chronic Absenteeism," they discussed the impact of various interventions on absenteeism rates for 3 years. There were three significant findings from the interventions. The first was that students who stopped being chronically absent saw academic improvements and a rise in their GPAs (p. 6).

The study's second findings were that there are cost-effective ways to improve absenteeism rates significantly. The schools that implemented the new strategies experienced statistically meaningful improvements in attendance rates across elementary, middle, and high schools and gained more than a month of school attendance.

The creation of the Success Mentor program proved to be the most effective strategy for reducing absenteeism. These were mentors who provided personalized support for students and families to help them overcome obstacles to attending schools. The mentors fell into three categories: "external," such as social workers, AmeriCorps volunteers, and retired professionals; "internal," such as teachers, coaches, security officers, and so forth, and "peer," a select group of 12th-grade students. Success Mentors

who reached out and created relationships with families and students had the most significant impact. Making a student feel valued and cared for helped make school less impersonal and friendlier.

The third notable finding of the Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) study was that the attendance-improved interventions could be embedded in the consciousness of school personnel and into school policies. When their research began, most principals were unaware that their schools faced a problem of chronic absenteeism and unaware of its impact on their students. The availability of data, training, and other strategies helped focus on absenteeism as a norm in the schools participating. The result showed significant improvement in attendance rates and an accompanying improvement in academic performance.

In summary, as has been detailed, the research has shown a significant impact on academic achievement when students are chronically absent. There are many predictors of attendance rates; one of the most notable is if a student qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Other various mitigating factors play a role in attendance rates such as classroom engagement, student–teacher relationships, school culture, and mental health issues.

Teacher–Student Relationships

A critical aspect of a student's education is building relationships with teachers. It becomes the basis for learning and growth throughout a student's academic career. Although not all teachers can connect with all students, when teachers do, it enhances their classrooms (Hartnett, 2008). With the increased focus on standardized testing, teachers have less time to build dynamic lessons each day. In high school, teachers typically take attendance each period, which subtracts from the overall instructional time.

Hartnett (2008) found that a slow-paced classroom that allowed teachers to build personal relationships with students added to overall student learning. They looked forward to coming to class and the positive culture that had been created. Research has shown that when students feel a personal connection with teachers and their school has an overall positive culture, they are more likely to come to school. Teachers work within time constraints, making it challenging for them to complete everything they must do with limited instructional time (Hartnett, 2008). Gershenson (2016) found that when there is a sense of community in the classroom, students typically attend class more frequently than when such a feeling is absent. Building these essential student–teacher relationships takes time to have them grow and deepen.

Instructional Time & Teacher–Student Relationships

The seminal work *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, noted that American students lag behind the rest of the world in education. One of the changes it proposed to increase academic achievement was to change the traditional high school scheduling. In 1993 Tom Donahoe suggested that schools rearrange scheduling to promote an active culture of learning (Queen, 2000). Queen found that when there is an increase in instructional time, there is an improved school climate and a higher teacher–student rapport and more individualized instruction (p. 216). With an increase in instructional time, teachers can move away from the traditional lecture style of teaching and engage in cooperative learning groups and hands-on learning. This type of learning experience provides all types of learners the ability to achieve academically.

School Achievement & Teacher–Student Relationship

Roorda et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analytical study to determine the influence of a productive teacher–student relationship on school achievement. They found that a favorable teacher–student relationship could support student engagement and learning, while the converse is also true: A poor connection can often hinder a student's progress. One of the frameworks used to conduct their study was self-system theory, introduced by Connell and Wellborn. This theory postulates that three needs must be filled for a student to succeed: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Teachers help fill them in various ways, such as by caring, setting clear rules, and giving students a choice. If these conditions are met, students will receive high grades. Teacher–student relationships are considered especially important for at-risk students, such as lower socioeconomic ones and those with learning difficulties. To conduct their research, they reviewed 92 papers, which described 99 studies and analyzed them to determine the effect of teacher–student relationships. They coded these studies for various indicators such as grade level, socioeconomic status, gender, and overall outcomes (p. 15). The study also found that teacher–student relationships are student-driven and indicate a pattern of behavior over time based on various influences in the student's life (p. 26). Another finding was that teacher–student relationships had a more significant effect on students during high school than in elementary school (p. 26). A student's age and the closeness they feel towards a teacher become more critical to their academic success (p. 27). Other findings were that teacher–student relationships had a more significant impact on boys than girls (p. 28). Lower socioeconomic students were more influenced by their relationships, and negative associations had a more profound effect on academic outcomes than positive ones (p. 29).

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Overall this study highlights just how vital teacher–student relationships are to student educational outcomes. By building those essential relationships with teachers, school personnel can identify students who are struggling with mental health issues and help connect them with services to help.

Another notable study that examined the impact teacher–student relationships can have on education outcomes was conducted by Barile et al. (2012). It used assessments made by a group of students during their sophomore and senior years (p. 10) from the Educational Longitudinal study of 2002. The students were carefully chosen so that they were representative of the overall American public high school population. Among other things it examined was how teacher evaluation systems affected student–teacher relationships. One of its findings—with interesting policy implications—was that evaluation schemes based on student input could create a stronger bond between teachers and students than other kinds, such as ones that tie teacher compensation to students' academic performance (p. 22).

Overall, Barile et al. (2012) also concluded that strong teacher–student relationships positively affect student academic performance and their school experience, such as whether they remain in high school. In a study of relevant literature, they also found that such relationships increase academic achievement, especially in math. They are also strongly correlated with high graduation rates. The authors argued that when students feel ownership of their learning and feel engaged in the educational process, they work harder and do better academically (p. 8).

Among other noteworthy findings, Barile et al. (2012) concluded that the students who need "the best" teachers do not get them, which is detrimental to their education and

adversely affects graduation rates (p. 19). These students typically do not feel that there is a positive bond between them and their teachers (p. 19); when students feel that they have a supportive relationship with their teachers, they are more likely to remain in high school, even if they struggle academically (p. 19). Higher socioeconomic districts had better teacher–student relationships (p. 20); that as the population of a high school increases, the teacher–student relationship climate cools (p. 20). The peer group a student associated with was an indicator of their overall feelings of the strength of the relationships they had with their teacher. It found that students who associated with those who did well academically had more positive feelings towards their teachers (p. 21). One of the policy implications that Barile et al. discussed was that evaluation models that allow students to rate teachers show a significantly more positive teacher–student relationship (p. 22). Overall, this study found that teacher–student relationships impact whether students will choose to remain in high school.

      McClure et al. (2010) administered surveys to 10,044 students for 3 consecutive years to measure how their perceptions of student–teacher relationships affected their performance on the language arts standardized test and their overall GPA. More specifically, they wanted to see how two factors changed these perceptions. The first was a recent reassignment from larger high schools to smaller ones to promote a more personalized connection between students and teachers. Although the new schools remained in the same buildings as the larger ones had been, they were split into different schools with varying structures and guiding principles. The second factor was participation in a new mandatory advisory program.

Based on their surveys, McClure et al. (2010) found that students who have positive interactions with adults at school typically have an increased commitment to the school, which usually results in higher academic achievement. They further concluded that "an overall positive relationship exists between student perceptions of personalization and the two academic outcomes included in the analyses WGPA and ELA scale scores" (p. 10). They found a clear positive correlation between students feeling a sense of community and a personal relationship with faculty members and better scores on ELA. This sense of community helps foster more significant academic gains. On the other hand, they warned that when schools are under pressure to decrease staff and increase student–to–teacher ratio, the sense of community can be lost (p. 11).

Interestingly, they found that the impact of mandatory student advisory periods did not significantly affect ELA test scores or GPA. One explanation for this was that the advisory program was inconsistently implemented at different high schools. Another suggested by the researchers is that a more authentic, voluntary interaction between teachers and students is more effective than a contrived mandated one. McClure et al. (2010) confirmed the positive impact that productive teacher–student relations have on academic outcomes.

Muller (2001), while looking at the impact that teacher–student relationships have on academic outcomes, approached the research through the theoretical lenses of social capitalism. Social capital exists in a teacher–student relationship because both parties expect a "pay-off" from investing in the relationship (p. 242). According to the theory, teachers are more likely to spend their time on students they feel will yield the greatest

reward. Thus, the onus falls on the teacher to set the tone of the relationships with students.

Muller (2001) used assessments that were given to both teachers and students to rate one another and the effect that the evaluations had on student academic progress (p. 243). He identified 6,007 tenth grade students who met the criteria to be included in the study. The study focused on how their relationship with the teacher affects their performance in mathematics.

The study's results found that a positive teacher–student relationship is predicated on the fact that a student is perceived as being committed to the educational process. Muller (2001) found that African American male students, and in some cases, Latino students, "were judged by their teachers as giving less effort" (Mueller, 2001, p. 248). Prior effort in previous grades tends to affect teachers' perceptions of students' current effort (Muller, 2001, p. 248). Mueller (2001) also found that students would expend more effort when they feel their teachers are invested in their academic success (p. 248). Thus students, who are at risk of dropping out of high school, are likely to make more academic progress in math if they feel their teachers care about their success (p. 250). Mueller's study convincingly shows that caring teachers thus can motivate at-risk students, provided however, the students must show an effort such as completing homework and attending in class (p. 252). This study underlines the importance of having positive interactions between teachers and students, especially for the most vulnerable ones.

Establishing Teacher–Student Relationships

Students' perceptions of how their teachers view them begins long before high school and can shape students' academic careers. In a longitudinal study conducted by Jan N. Hughes in 2012, she assessed teacher–student relationship quality in second and third grades related to academic, behavioral, and future achievement (p. 1). Hughes stated that students who have positive interactions with teachers tend to make more significant strides academically. The opposite is also true; students who have negative interactions tend to be retained and struggle academically (p. 1). These findings are consistent with previous studies involving teachers and students of various ages.

For the study, Hughes (2012) carefully selected 714 second and third graders for evaluation. They came from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and took into account those whose first language was Spanish rather than English. Using the Network of Relationships Inventory, a "structured interview that asks children to rate the person in their social network with respect to six types of social support (affection, admiration, intimacy, satisfaction, nurturance, and reliable alliance) and conflict," she had the study participants rate the people in their networks (Hughes, 2012, p. 7). The students used a Likert-type scale to evaluate their level of support for each question. Teachers were also asked to rate each student's classroom behaviors. Students rated their perceived competencies using the Competence Beliefs and Subjective Task Values Questionnaire (p. 8). Students underwent IQ testing, with researchers using The WJ-III Test of Achievement to ascertain a baseline of academic potential for each child.

Hughes's study took 4 years to obtain a longitudinal assessment of the effects that teache–student relationships have on students. She revealed that even though students

may perceive a high level of conflict with their teacher, they might also recognize that teacher is emotionally supportive (p. 11). However, "when teachers report conflict in the relationship, children are more likely to perceive high conflict and lower levels of support" (Hughes, 2012 p. 12). Positive measures in teacher–student relationship quality, she found, had a statistically significant effect on students' self-views. Still, overall Hughes found that teacher–student relationship quality had a small impact on academic achievement (p.12). However, she argued that minor positive effects can play a significant role in the child's development. Contending that the small effects may show up in later years, students who feel confident in their math ability will take an honors course as a challenge, thanks to positive reinforcement early on in their educational careers. Overall, Hughes concluded that teacher–student relationships have a significant impact on how students perceive their academic ability and that these perceptions, which are formed early in school, have the potential to shape their educational futures (p. 14).

Teacher Support and Achievement

In their study, Klem and Connell (2004) discussed the link between teacher support and student achievement. They outline various factors that have been found to contribute to maintaining high performance in schools, such as high academic standards, engaging lessons, and personalized learning environments (p. 262). One of the primary factors that encourage achievement, they noted, are students feeling that their teachers support them. Specifically, they need to understand the expectations teachers set for them and may talk with teachers regarding important school-related decisions to help establish a solid foundation (p. 262). Such a productive and positive relationship between teachers and students laid the foundation for future learning.

The second component that leads to academic success Klem and Connell (2004) found is when students feel challenged and engaged in the learning process. According to Klem and Connell, "by high school as many as 40% to 60% of students become chronically disengaged from school...not counting those who have already dropped out" (p. 262). To combat this chronic disillusionment, they discussed two different types of student engagement that happen in schools. The first is behavioral, which occurs when students work on tasks and engage in thought-provoking work. The second is emotion occurs when students have feelings of successful accomplishments and are active within the school community. Because each type of engagement is vital in promoting educating the whole student, because students are not engaged, it leads to various adverse outcomes such as absenteeism and dropping out of school (p. 263).

The methodology they used to arrive at their conclusion involved applying the "first things first" conceptual framework to their longitudinal data; this consisted of input from several sources over several years. It included the multivariable Student Performance and Commitment Index to assess student achievement and behavior (p. 264), a teacher-generated Likert-type scale measuring student engagement, and a student-generated questionnaire measuring student perception of the support that their teachers provided them (p. 265).

From these data, Klem and Connell (2004) developed a "risk threshold" scale to measure a student's engagement/disengagement with school. One who scored high on the disengagement axis The researcher first coded the administrative interviews for the various themes. The researcher then coded the teachers interviews for the various themes. The researcher then compared the themes from the administrative interviews and the

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teacher interviews to determine if there was any overlap in the two interviews or to determine if they were different., they found, was at high risk of dropping out of school (p. 265). At the same time, one who was highly engaged, by contrast, would have good attendance and a high probability of graduating (p. 265).

In elementary and middle school, Klem and Connell (2004) found that approximately 35% of these students felt disengaged from school (p. 266). In comparison, 75% of middle school students with a high level of engagement were 75% more likely to do well on attendance and achievement than ones who displayed a high level of disengagement. Middle school students whose teachers rated their engagement as high were twice as likely to do well on attendance and achievement than one whose teachers found them to be disengaged. And middle school students who reported low levels of teacher support were 68% more likely to be disconnected from school and thus at high risk of dropping out, among other things. Overall, their findings indicated that middle school students were "almost three times more likely to report engagement if they experienced highly supportive teachers, while elementary school students with supportive teachers were 89% more likely to report engagement in school than those with typical levels of support" (p. 270).

Klem and Connell's (2004) findings highlighted the critical role of teacher support in creating a positive learning experience for elementary and middle school students. They suggested that personalized teacher support maintains student engagement, which is a crucial element in positive student performance.

Mental Health in Schools

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

When looking through a theoretical framework to understand the potential importance of providing mental health services in school, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a natural fit. Maslow developed his theory in 1943. This theory consisted of a pyramid of different phases that a person has the potential to achieve; however, someone cannot move on to the next stage until the previous one has been satisfied (McLeod, 2013). The first phase of the pyramid is physiological. This phase refers to the basics of being able to exist. The phase indicates that all people need to have their physical needs, such as food, water, breathing, and sleep satisfied. Without these needs being met, the person would focus solely on obtaining these items for survival (Desautels, 2014). The second phase on the pyramid is safety. The safety phase refers to security around the body, family life, resources, and social security (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The third phase is focusing on love and belonging. Within this phase, there is a need to foster relationships around friendship, family, and to attain a connection with other people (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The fourth phase is the self-esteem phase which is focused on confidence, achievement, respect of others, and the need to be a unique individual (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The fifth phase, one which is very difficult to achieve, is self-actualization. This phase concentrates on morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and inner potential (Desautels, 2014).

For students to achieve academically in school, they must be able to make more than just the basic rungs on Maslow's pyramid. "The lower needs must be satisfied before the high ones can be reached" (Burleson & Thoron, 2014, p. 1). The physiological needs

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of a student must be met for them to be able to focus on learning. These needs are basic food, water, hygiene, and rest; without this, students will not be able to attend to class. Students must have their need to feel safe met to be able to focus on learning. If a child has a home life where parents are fighting, abusive, or absent, it will be challenging for them to focus on what needs to be done. The same safety necessities apply to school; if a student is bullied or belittled by a teacher, they will not be able to achieve (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). In the love and belonging phase, students must be able to make and maintain peer relationships, as well as family and teacher relationships. Students need to feel that they belong in the world or school to meet this need (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). Burleson and Thoron (2014) divided self-esteem into two groups: A person desires confidence and strength to face any challenges, and in the second part the person wants a reputation, recognition, and prestige (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). The self-actualization phase focuses on people being spontaneous and able to problem-solve.

With regard to the physiological needs, although a school would not necessarily be able to satisfy all of them, by providing free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs, it helps to alleviate some of this burden. If students are hungry in class, they might act out because that need has not been met, and they cannot focus on the classroom tasks (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). A classroom can help students feel safe by having clearly defined routines and rules. The students know the expectations are consistent every day in the class. Students can also feel secure by having a trusted adult, whether that is a teacher or a counselor, to whom they can turn if they need help (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). To feel a sense of belonging and self-esteem needs, teachers and staff need to reinforce positive behaviors they see in students. They were praising students for

their efforts and contributions that they make to the school community. This will help students to create a positive self-image of themselves (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). By assisting students in moving through the rungs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, they can achieve loftier academic goals. When schools can provide mental health services to students, it helps not only the students but also the school community (Desautels, 2014).

Mental Health Services in Schools

Implementing mental health services in schools is becoming more of the norm in public schools across America. In the article, *Improving Mental Health in Schools*, by Rossen and Cowan (2014), the history and the need for and implementation of mental health services in schools are discussed. Rossen and Cowan stated that students who are struggling emotionally cannot succeed academically because there are a variety of barriers that stand in their way. By allowing these psychological issues to go untreated, students are a risk for various problems, as they become adults. Some of these issues are unemployment, substance abuse, poor health, or incarceration (Rossen & Cowan, 2014).

Although national attention is focused on when tragedies such a school shooting occur, most students struggle quietly with mental health disorders. Rossen & and Cowan (2014) stated, "More than one of five students at some point experiences a serious mental health disorder... it equates to about 10 million students who need professional help in the K-12 public schools nationwide" (p. 3). However, many students face obstacles in acquiring the necessary mental health treatment. Some of the barriers include negative stigma around mental health issues or limited access to health insurance coverage. Schools, as a result, become the touchstone for many students to receive the necessary services. Rossen and Cowan stated, "Among the children who receive mental health

services, an estimated 70% to 80% of them initially receive those at school" (p. 5). School employees have regular contact with students, which helps build relationships with students and their families; this allows them to monitor the progress that students are making.

Rossen and Cowan (2014) remarked that the introduction of mandatory public education for students in the late 1800s was partially put in place to overcome inequality barriers and contribute to society in general. Initially, mental health services in school sought to segregate students from the general population; however, for many years, integrated services began to be put into place (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). In 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act was put into place. Later in 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) brought a more individualized and comprehensive approach to educating students with educational differences. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act was a limited grant program to address school safety and violence prevention programs; this provided funds for mental health services (Rossen & Cowan 2014).

When mental health issues remain untreated, it affects not only the student but also the school community in general. Some problems that arise for students can be lack of focus, challenging behaviors, difficulty dealing with emotions, and maintaining positive friend relationships.

Rossen and Cowan (2014) suggested implementing a multi-tiered system of support for students in schools. These services would encompass dealing with chronic stressors such as depression, anxiety, all the way to more serious mental health issues such as bipolar disorder. Tier 1 interventions would include universal screeners for

problems such as depression and implement social-emotional learning curricula. Tier 2 would be used to address specific issues in a group or classroom setting. These issues would include social skills, anger management skills, or grief. Tier 3 would provide direct mental health services to students, such as counseling and therapeutic interventions, coordinated by a mental health professional (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). All three levels seek to meet the diverse needs of a school community. This multi-tiered system lowers barriers that traditionally exist when trying to gain access to mental health services. It allows for a collaborative approach between school personnel and families. It also provides school personnel to help families reach out to various resources that may be available in their community (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). Rossen and Cowan stated there are a variety of barriers that may exist in schools that limit access to mental health services such as funding. However, with proper training, even if financing is not available, schools came to make a difference in the mental health of students (Rossen & Cowan, 2014). Rossen and Cowan end by stating providing mental health services ultimately benefits the entire school community and society in general.

Obstacles to Receiving Mental Health Services

Swick and Powers (2018) wrote the article, *Increasing Access to Care by Delivering Mental Health Services in Schools: The School-Based Support Program*, which discusses the program used in North Carolina to bring mental health services into the schools. Swick and Powers stated, "Approximately 25% of youth ages 5-18 experience a mental disorder during the past year, and more than 30% of children and adolescents are expected to experience at least one mental health condition during their lifetime" (p. 130). Some of these conditions include but are not limited to depression,

anxiety, and behavior conditions. However, most students do not receive the necessary mental health treatment to assist with these conditions (Swick & Powers, 2018, p. 130). When these mental health conditions are left untreated, it leads to a host of various issues such as rates on absenteeism, inattentive issues in the classroom, and cognitive abilities. This can also lead to high school dropout rates and lower test scores in reading and math (Swick & Powers, 2018).

Although students must receive proper mental health services, there are a myriad of factors that stand in their way. Some of these barriers that families face are appointments at inconvenient times, location of services, and transportation issues. It is especially difficult to receive mental health services in rural communities (Swick & Powers, 2018). Another problem that faces families is the financial burden that comes with seeking out mental health services. "Data from the National Survey of Children with Special Health Care need indicated that 25% of parents reported the reason they did not get their child mental health care or counseling he or she needed was because the services cost too much" (De Rigne et al., 2009 p. 177). One other reason that Swick and Powers discussed as a barrier is a stigma that comes along with seeking out mental health services.

Many schools currently have social workers and school psychologists on staff; however, the ratio of social workers to students is 1:491 and 1:1,381 for school psychologists (Swick & Powers, 2018). Although there are anti-bullying programs and some targeted interventions for students, those students who need a high level of care are referred to outside counseling. When students are seen outside the school, their families may face the many barriers that were previously discussed.

Case Study of School-Based Counseling

One example of mental health services in school is the School-Based Support (SBS) program. The goal of this program was to overcome any previously discussed obstacles that students may have to receive mental health services. The purpose of the SBS program was to meet students' mental health needs and alleviate the barriers that stand in their way to achieve success in school. The SBS program is designed to partner with schools to meet their unique needs. This particular district in North Carolina had an exceptionally high rate of students being referred for special education testing because of behavioral and emotional issues. The school district provided office space, a part-time parent liaison, computers, and telephones. The mental health services offered a full-time program manager along with a licensed counselor. The University that oversaw the program and was in charge of evaluating the program provided social workers who worked as field assistants. Data were collected on each student who entered the program in behavioral scores as well as grades. "A hierarchical linear model was used to analyze student outcomes over the course of one school year"(Swick & Powers, 2018, p. 138). Three hundred twenty-two students participated in the study over six elementary schools. The results showed that math and literacy scores improved significantly over the course of the year (Swick & Powers, 2018). The students who were currently receiving special education services at the time of being referred to the SBS program also saw a positive trend in their math and literacy scores. Swick and Powers concluded that providing mental health services in schools can help the students overcome many of the traditional barriers that families face with seeking mental health treatment. Swick and Powers

commented that providing these programs is an investment in the students' health and the overall community.

Teacher Perception of Mental Health Services

The article, *Supporting Children's Mental Health in Schools: Teacher Perception of Needs, Roles, and Barriers*, by Reinke et al. (2016) explored the teacher's perception of mental health needs in their schools. It also looked at the role that teachers feel they play when dealing with mental health issues of students. Reinke et al. (2016) stated that approximately 20% to 25% of school-age children require mental health services. Although research has supported expanding mental health services, many schools have yet to do so for a plethora of reasons. As a result, teachers are often asked to implement school-based interventions; they are typically the person who would initially refer students (Reinke et al. 2016). Reinke et al. stated that if universal inventions are to be successful, there must be support from the teachers. However, in many cases, teachers do not feel equipped to handle this role; therefore, proper training must be utilized to support a successful outcome.

This study had 292 participates from early childhood to elementary school teachers, which spread across five districts. The districts encompass rural, suburban, and urban communities. The experience level of the teachers ranged anywhere from 1 year to 37 years. The survey the teachers received consisted of three different parts demographic information, perceptions towards to role of schools in children's mental health, and attitudes towards evidence-based practices in school (Reinke et al., 2016). Specifically, the survey was broken down into five different sections (1) mental health concerns; (2) knowledge, skills, and training that they have with regards to providing mental health; (3)

barriers that schools face when providing mental health services; (4) the reasons students fall through the cracks; and (5) the role of school personnel in delivering various services (Reinke et al., 2016).

The survey results from Reinke et al. (2016) showed that 38% of teachers strongly agreed, and 51% agreed that schools should be involved in providing mental health services to students. When asked if they had the level of expertise to address students' mental health needs, 31% were neutral while 36% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed. Teachers indicated that the most training they have received was from workshops and in-services that they have attended. Teachers were asked to indicate the top three areas they wanted additional training:

1. strategies for working with students with behavior issues

2. recognizing and understanding mental health issues

3. training in classroom management techniques (Reinke et al., 2016).

Reinke et al. 2016 concluded by discussing the fact that most teachers who participated had referred a student for mental health services. They also reported working with students who were disruptive in the classroom. The majority of teachers also felt they needed additional training to meet the needs of the students adequately. Teachers felt that school psychologists should play a more prominent role in addressing mental health concerns; however, they thought it was their responsibility to implement behavioral interventions. Overall, teachers who were surveyed felt that school had an obligation to provide mental health services to students. However, most teachers indicated a vital need to receive additional training in this area (Reinke et al. 2016).

Access to Mental Health Services

Adelman and Taylor (2006), in the article, *Mental Health in Schools and Public Health*, discussed the growing need to provide universal interventions to address the ever-increasing mental health issues that children under the age of 18 are currently facing. Adelman and Taylor stated that for many large urban schools, 50% of students can exhibit learning issues, behavior issues, and emotional problems. Many of these issues are associated with lower socioeconomic means, such as challenging living conditions and limited opportunities (Adelman & Taylor, 2006).

Adelman Taylor (2006) stated that many of the behavior and emotional concerns that students face are a result of their environment and external challenges rather than an internal pathology. They stated that there needs to be a continuum of services that schools provide to address various issues:

(1) public health protection, promotion, and maintenance that foster positive development and wellness; (2) pre-school age support and assistance to enhance health and psychosocial development; (3) early-schooling targeted interventions; (4) improvement and augmentation of ongoing regular support; (5) other interventions before referral for intensive and current targeted treatments; and (6) intensive treatments. (Adelman & Taylor, 2006, p. 2)

This continuum of services allows schools to address and foster healthy social and emotional growth in students, thus potentially equipping students with the skills to lead a healthy lifestyle and have the benefits of personal well-being. These interventions should also focus on addressing the issues that students face in the home environment. Adelman and Taylor (2006) discussed the importance of providing parents with the help and

education that they need to provide a healthy home environment. These educational

services, such as after-school programs and learning opportunities for the community,

have an overall positive effect on students' social and emotional health (Adelman &

Taylor, 2006).

Adelman and Taylor (2006) advocated for universal screening for students to

determine the significance of the issues that students face. First level screening allows for

and indicates that something might be wrong and that the student may need assistance.

Once these screenings are conducted, Adelman and Taylor (2006) discussed the need for

school and public services to work closely together to address any needs that have been

indicated. Adelman and Taylor addressed the trend they predicted to begin to take place

that schools provide more comprehensive mental health services within schools to

address the ever-growing needs of students. Adelman and Taylor concluded by stating

that any public health intervention that is to be successful when addressing the mental

health concerns around children under that age of 18 must include the schools with their

plan.

Gaps in Literature

Although there has been an increased amount of literature regarding mental health

services in school, this remains a relatively new venture for most schools. Traditionally,

schools would have a child study team and guidance counselors but bringing in and

paying an outside company to provide intensive therapy during school hours remains

uncharted territory. Schools potentially spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to bring

these programs into the school; therefore, it becomes imperative that their validity and

effectiveness are examined. There is very little research that explores specific programs that high schools have begun to use.

This research will add to the growing body of literature that looks at the importance of mental health services. Mental health affects every aspect of a student's life; therefore, it is vital to understand its ramifications on attendance and tardiness rates. Attendance and tardiness affect all academic areas; this research will examine the overall effect that mental health services have had on both of these areas, potentially affecting overall graduation rates, grades, and future employment (Shoeneberger, 2012). Although some research has been conducted around mental health programs in schools, this remains a relatively new area of study.

This research will take a closer look at the overall impact this program has had on the school. By looking at the overall effect on the High School, this research will add to the literature around mental health services in schools. As more and more schools move to increased mental health services, it becomes essential to understand the impact that they have on the school community.

Summary

When trying to understand the needs of students, examining them through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs becomes vital. This helps educators to understand the various requirements to achieve student success. Desautels (2014) discussed the different stages a student has to pass through. The first phase of the pyramid consists of physical needs, such as food and sleep. The second phase talks about the importance of the student feeling safe and secure in their environment. The third phase focuses on love, belonging, and building strong relationships with those around them. The fourth phase

focuses on self-esteem and confidence. And the fifth and final stage is self-actualization. According to Maslow, each of the previous steps must be achieved before it is possible to move to the next. Through this theoretical lens, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the needs of a student and help them achieve both during school and beyond.

Tardiness and absenteeism have been shown to have lasting adverse effects on a student not only in high school but far into the future (Shoeneberger, 2012; Wilkins, 2008). Tardiness is a precursor for possible chronic absenteeism and needs to be taken as seriously to prevent an escalation in school refusal behavior (London, 2016). Chronic absenteeism is a predictor of academic achievement, high school dropout, incarceration, and unemployment (Wilkins, 2008. The seriousness of the long-term effect of chronic absenteeism makes it imperative that educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders look for ways to combat and address this issue.

One of the contributing factors to tardiness and chronic absenteeism is socioeconomic status (Balfanz, 2016; Shoeneberger, 2012). Students who fall into these categories tend to have higher dropout rates. Another possible predictor of tardiness and chronic absenteeism is social and emotional issues that prohibit students from attending school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). These emotional issues become a hindrance to school attendance and can lead to disengagement from the school culture and academic expectations. These emotional issues need to be addressed to alleviate any obstacle that will lead to chronic absenteeism.

By creating strong teacher–student relationships, students feel that they are an essential part of a community (Gershenson, 2016). Through these critical connections

between teachers and students, students can be identified as being at risk for chronic absenteeism and referred to, as possible, mental health services within the school. Without these connections between teachers and students, a student can go unnoticed and disengage from school.

Studies have shown that more than one of five students has experienced some sort of mental health disorder that would require professional intervention (Rossen & Cowan 2014). When a student is referred to counseling, it becomes important for schools to provide these services within the school building. There are a plethora of obstacles that prohibit students from receiving the mental health services that they require. Swick and Powers (2018) remarked that appointments at inconvenient times, location of services, and health insurance issues are some challenges families face when trying to provide mental health services to their children. When these services are offered in the school building, the impediments that students and families face no longer become barriers.

Research has been conducted on tardiness and chronic absenteeism. There has also been various research, which looks at the positive impact of school-based counseling programs. However, given the extent that tardiness and absenteeism ultimately become a predictor for academic success and the future trajectory of student's life, it is essential to add to this growing body of literature to examine the possible connection between these two entities. As students often require mental health services, it becomes vital that these programs are reviewed to determine their effectiveness within the school community.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this convergent mixed-methods study was to explore what influence, if any, a specific mental health program in a Northeast high school had on absenteeism and tardiness for students serviced by the school. "Convergent mixed method is a form of mixed methods design in which the research converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 15). Although numerous studies have been published looking at the overall impact of counseling programs, none has looked at this specific program or focused on the students' absences and tardy rates. The mixed-method approach was appropriate for this study because it integrated quantitative and qualitative data to allow for a total overview of the program. The mixed-method approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the program while still examining a specific aspect of the program's impact at the High School. If the study had been just quantitative, a valuable component of understanding administration's and teacher's perceptions would be lost. Conversely, had the research merely been qualitative, it would have been more challenging to ascertain the impact it has had on absences and tardy rates. The mixed-method approach allowed the analysis to examine both perceptions of the administrators and teachers as well as the influence the program has specifically on absences and tardiness.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the mean and the median of a small sample or population (Witte & Witte, 2010). There are only 19 students who have consistently been in the counseling program. As a result, the use of descriptive statistics

is appropriate for this study. The use of descriptive statistics allowed the researcher to compare the means of absences and tardy rates for the years with and without the counseling program (Witte &Witte, 2010). By looking at the students' attendance and tardy rates, it would be possible to determine the effect, if any, the counseling program has on the attendance rates for this specific group of students. Descriptive statistics also allow the researcher to determine the median of both attendance and tardiness. By comparing the means and median, it would be possible to decide whether the counseling program has had any effect on attendance and tardy rates.

The qualitative portion of the research allowed for a deeper understanding of the impact the program had on the High School. The interviews were conducted in a natural setting and face to face to gain a deeper understanding of the High School and the counseling program (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The convergent mixed-method approach allowed for a holistic understanding of the impact of the program.

The effects of absenteeism and mental health have been an ongoing debate among educators. However, there is little research that looks at both factors together. There has also been no research on the impact this specific counseling program has had on the High School. This research will contribute to the ongoing debate of absenteeism and mental health services and this particular counseling program.

Research Design

The theory behind conducting a convergent mixed method research approach was to provide the researcher with a clearer understanding of a research problem more than just quantitative or qualitative could alone. The mixed-method plan was developed to integrate two forms of data that involve a specific theoretical framework (Creswell,

2014). Tashakkori and Cresswell (2007) state "We have broadly defined mixed-methods here as research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry" (p. 4). This approach can also be used to explore different research questions that fall under a study. If the sample or population is limited, the additional research method could provide a clearer understanding of the research questions.

The convergent mixed-methods approach was the best fit for this research study. The first part of this study focused on conducting the quantitative aspects of the research. The data were then subjected to descriptive statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was chosen due to the limited population size of students who have received counseling at the High School. This analysis strategy was also selected because it allowed the researcher to compare the mean, median, and standard deviation of the attendance and tardy rates for the year with and without the counseling program. Descriptive statistics helps describe, show or summarize data in a meaningful way, it organizes data so that it can be easily understood (Trochim, 2020).

In the second phase of this research, a qualitative collection of text data was gathered through structured interviews. These interviews were used to help further explain the perception that administration and teachers felt the counseling program had on the overall impact on at the High School. These interviews allowed for additional insight into the program that quantitative research alone would not have been able to identify (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative data were used to determine if any difference could be determined related to absences and tardy rates of the students who

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received counseling services. The qualitative component was conducted as a second part of the study and used to explore the program's overall impact at the High School.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on attendance rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 2: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on tardy rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 3: What is the perception of administration and teachers regarding the impact, if any, of the counseling program at the High School?

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: It was not possible to determine central tendencies between the counseling program and attendance rates for students who receive counseling services in the High School.

Null Hypothesis 2: It was not possible to determine central tendencies between the counseling program and tardy rates for students who received counseling services in the High School.

Sample Population

The sample population came from a small diverse High School in Northern New Jersey. In 2018-2019 approximately 50% of the students were categorized as receiving free and reduced lunch. The sample population for this study included all students from Grades 9 through 12 who had received this specific counseling service through the High

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School. The High School has students who receive both special education services as well as English language learner classes. The High School has a very diverse population of students. This study included 19 students who are still currently receiving services. All students were included in this study regardless of grade level, or if they had a specific classification such as receiving services within an Individualized Education Plan or English language learners. The students had to enroll in the High School since February 2018 to be able to compare the 2 years of attendance records. A smaller qualitative component was conducted as the second part of this research. The principal, supervisor of pupil personnel services, and the mental health professional who provided these counseling services were interviewed. These three people were chosen because they have worked most closely with the program since its inception and can speak to the possible overall impact that the program has had on the High School.

Three teachers were interviewed who have knowledge and have had exposure to the counseling program. A letter of solicitation was emailed to the High School faculty explaining the research and asking for volunteers. The first three teachers who responded to the email were chosen for the study. All three of the teachers who responded to the email had knowledge of the program and either had or currently have students who attended the counseling program. Although there are more than these three teachers who have experience with the counseling program, these were the first three teachers to respond to the letter of solicitation and met the necessary criteria to participate in the study. Therefore, these were the teachers who were chosen to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Quantitative

This study's initial phase focused on determining if the counseling program affected absenteeism rates and tardy rates for the students who have been receiving counseling services. The counseling program at the High School has been in place for a full calendar year. The majority of the students who have received individual counseling or group counseling have been with the program since its inception. Before beginning this study, the researcher obtained approval from the board of education to conduct this research. No names of the students who are receiving these services will be identified for this research. The approval from the board of education was made with the stipulation that the name of the High School would remain anonymous as well as the name of the counseling service. The students would not be contacted or interviewed in any way to maintain their anonymity. Once the board of education approved the research, the researcher was provided with a list of students who were currently receiving counseling services through the program. The researcher has access to attendance rates and tardy rates for all students through the school district's student database system. Through the use of the student database system, the researcher was able to determine the mean, median, and standard deviation of absences and tardy rates that each student had for the previous year before the counseling services were put in place compared to the number of absences that the student had for the year they have received the counseling services.

Data Analysis. The determination was made to use descriptive statistics for two reasons. The first was the number of students who received services at the High School. Only 19 students at the High School received counseling services, whether it was

individual or group counseling. Other students at lower grades and elementary schools

received counseling, but the focus of this study was explicitly high school. The second

was that descriptive statistics provide the ability to determine the mean, median, and

standard deviation of the data, which would provide the researcher with an overview of

the absenteeism and tardy rates for the year before the counseling services were put in

place and the year that the students received the services (Witte & Witte, 2010).

Reliability and Validity. The data used in a study must be both reliable and valid

to ensure the research's validity. To ensure that only High School students entered the

study, the researcher checked the grade level of each student. The researcher also

confirmed that the list of students provided to the researcher are currently still receiving

counseling services. The data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, which completed

the necessary calculations for the descriptive statistics utilized. Through the Excel

spreadsheet, mean, median, mode, and standard deviation were determined from the raw

data gathered. The data were checked multiple times to ensure their reliability. All

student information was kept confidential to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Qualitative

The second phase of this research focused on interviews conducted with the two

administrators, who oversaw the implementation and the running of this program, and

with the counselor who provided the mental health services to the students. Three

teachers were also interviewed to understand their perspective of the counseling program.

The interviews were used for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. In the qualitative

interviews, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants (Cresswell &

Creswell, 2018). The interviews were unstructured, and the interviewees were presented

with generally open-ended questions to determine the views and opinions of each participant (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

The technique for qualitative data collection was in-depth, semi-structured open-ended questions. The exact wording of each question was determined in advance of the interviews. There were a total of six questions that were asked of each participant. The six questions were the same for all six participants to ensure that they were standardized and focused on the same criteria. These questions were determined after looking at the literature on mental health services in schools. The literature speaks about the various impacts that mental health services have in schools. These questions were derived from understanding the overall impression that these services potentially have on schools. The questions looked to ascertain and understand the far-reaching influence that this program has had. Therefore, all six questions that were asked pertained to that general focus.

The participants were assured of confidentiality before the interviews began. The researcher also received a signed consent of participation from each interviewee. Participants were asked to consent to provide information regarding the school's counseling program and various questions about the program's specifics and the overall impact of the program. The content of the interviews was used to gain greater insight into the counseling program. The interview protocol included six open-ended questions. The questions were used to determine the impact on the High School, obstacles that the program has faced, how students are referred to the counseling program, and gains that the students have made since being in the program.

The researcher recorded and transcribed all the interviews. A total of six participants were interviewed for this study. All participants volunteered their time for

each interview. Even though this is a small interview sample, it involved the entire

essential personnel, who worked with the program in the school district and could

provide the most considerable amount of insight. Once the administrators and teachers

agreed to participate, the researcher provided them with further details regarding the

length of the interviews and the measures to protect their identities. All conversations

were recorded to assist in the analysis of interview notes and ensure that all quotations

were accurately reported. All interviewees were given a code number to protect their

identity.

Interview Questions.

1. What have been the biggest changes you have seen since the program's inception?
2. What have been the greatest obstacles of implementing and running the program?
3. Have you seen an improvement with regards to attendance or tardiness?
4. How do you identify students for counseling services?
5. Do you feel there has been a positive or negative impact on teacher/student relationships?
6. What impact, if any, has this program had on the overall High School?

Data Analysis. The researcher followed a specific protocol to analyze the qualitative

data. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interviews were then member

checked to ensure that validity. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher

began to look for overarching themes with the data. Once the various themes were

determined, the researcher coded each of the themes. The term coding refers to how the

researcher configures their data to make something new (Elliot, 2018). Coding allows

researchers to look for different themes and break down ubiquitous amounts of data into

manageable portions of data. Through these themes, trends and information can be

gathered to determine an emerging pattern within the research (Elliot, 2018). A chart was

created with the various themes that came out of the interviews to determine if any

similarities and patterns were resulting from the discussions conducted. The table was then analyzed to identify themes that recurred during each of the meetings and within each of the questions. These quotes and themes were further examined to determine any sort of pattern within the data. The researcher then checked the validity of the coding by recoding the data for a second time. The researcher addressed any discrepancies and adjusted accordingly (Elliot, 2018). The researcher first coded the administrative interviews for the various themes. The researcher then coded the teachers' interviews for the various themes. The researcher then compared the themes from the administrative interviews and the teacher interviews to determine if there was any overlap in the two interviews or to determine if they were different. The researcher also compared the chart to the original text to ensure that the data were accurately represented. From this chart of the various themes, it was determined if any overarching ideas stood out as having made an impact on the high school. It was from this chart of items that the researcher was able to answer the research question.

Reliability and Validity. To ensure that the data for the qualitative portion of the study were reliable and valid, multiple steps were taken. These questions were determined after looking at the literature on mental health services in schools. The literature speaks about the various impacts that mental health services have in schools. These questions were derived from understanding the overall impression that these services potentially have on schools. Once these initial questions were determined, a jury reviewed them to ascertain their validity around the topic. The jury was selected by asking both teachers and administrators in this specific school district to review the questions. These people all have knowledge of the counseling service but would not be a

part of this study. Both the administrators who were chosen and the teachers all have first-hand knowledge of the counseling program and its overall function as it relates to the district and the High School. I discussed with each of the jury members research question for the qualitative portion of the study in order for them to be familiar with the overall question. The jury reviewed each question as it pertained to the overall research that was being conducted. After the jury validated the questions, these questions were utilized in the semi-structured interviews. Their expertise was founded in their knowledge of both the High School as well as the counseling program. With this combined knowledge they were able to establish the validity of the question that the research asked.

Each interview that was done was recorded with the full consent of the participants. Once the meeting was concluded, the researcher transcribed each interview. The transcripts were member checked, which allows the interviewee to review the transcript to determine if it was correctly recorded, and their meaning was captured. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) stated that member checking ensures the reality, meaning, and truth-value of the collected data.

Ethical Considerations

During this research, it was vital to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, the High School, and the counseling program. When consent was given by the board of education to conduct this research, it was clear that the High School would remain confidential. The students were not interviewed or contacted by the researcher to ensure that this study did not interfere with the counseling they were receiving. The interviewees provided their signed consent to participate in face-to-face interviews.

Personal Background/Role of the Researcher

The researcher has always valued the importance of mental health for students. My undergraduate degree is in special education, my master's degree, which I received from the University of London Institute of Education, is in social justice and education. Both of these previous studies have continually highlighted the need for equitable mental health services regardless of socioeconomic status. As a current principal of an elementary school, the need for counseling is frequently apparent. Even at this young age, students need a safe space in which they can express their feelings and learn coping skills and strategies to help them be successful.

As a researcher, I had two different roles while conducting this research. The first was gathering the necessary data to do the quantitative portion of the study. The second was conducting the face-to-face interviews with the administrative personnel as well as the teachers. I remained objective during the interviews to combat any bias that could interfere with the answers given during the interviews.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Introduction

The research that was conducted is a convergent mixed-methods study that was used to explore what influence, if any, a specific mental health program in a Northeast high school had on absenteeism and tardiness for students serviced by the counseling program. The research also explored the overall impact that teachers and administrators felt the program had at the school. This convergent mixed-methods study used descriptive statistics to examine the data gathered regarding absenteeism and tardiness. The qualitative data were used to determine the overall impact that the program has had on the high school, which may provide further insight into the whole counseling program.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on attendance rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 2: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on tardy rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 3: What is the perception of administration and teachers regarding the impact, if any, of the counseling program at the High School?

Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: It was not possible to determine central tendencies between the counseling program and attendance rates for students who receive counseling services in the High School.

Null Hypothesis 2: It was not possible to determine central tendencies between the counseling program and tardy rates for students who received counseling services in the High School.

Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

This study included 19 students from the High School in New Jersey. To be included in the study, the students had to be in Grades 9 through 12 currently. The students had to be enrolled in the school since February 2018 to obtain their attendance records for 2 consecutive years. Any student who fit the criteria was included in the study. All students had to currently be enrolled in individual or group counseling through the specific counseling program at the high school. This research did not consider if a student has an Individualized Education Plan, a 504 plan, or is currently enrolled in English language learner classes. The study included both male and female students in the study but did not distinguish between the two.

Variables

The independent variable was the students who have received individual or group counseling with a certified, licensed psychotherapist. One dependent variable was the attendance rates and tardiness of the students who have received individual or group counseling through this specific mental health service in the High School.

The determination was made to use descriptive statistics for two reasons. The first was the limited number of students who received services at the High School; only 19 students received counseling services, whether they were individual or group counseling. Other students at lower grades and elementary schools received counseling, but the focus of this study was explicitly high school. The second was that descriptive statistics provide the ability to determine the mean, median, and standard deviation of the data, which would provide the researcher with an overview of the absenteeism and tardy rates for the year prior to the counseling services being put in place and the year that the students received the services (Witte & Witte, 2010).

Procedures

The data needed to complete the study were obtained from the student database system that the school currently uses. The researcher counted the number of absences and tardiness from February 2018 to February 2019 and then counted the number of absences and tardiness from February 2019 to February 2020. This specific counseling program began in February 2019. The data were then inputted into an Excel spreadsheet. The students were not identified on the spreadsheet. The information was organized by each year and was separated into absences and tardiness. The researcher was able to determine the mean, median, and standard deviation of each year from these data on the Excel spreadsheet of the absences and tardy rates.

The qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with administrators, teachers, and the counselor who have been instrumental in the implementation and running of the program. All six participants were asked the same questions during the interviews. The interviews were then transcribed and member

checked. The transcripts were coded to determine different themes from each of the questions.

Presentation of Quantitative Findings

Research Question 1: Analysis and Results

Research Question 1: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on attendance rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

All students who fit the criteria were included in the study. Table 1 shows the student and their absences for the year before receiving counseling through the specific program.

Table 1

Students and Their Attendance Rates Prior to Counseling February 2018-2019

Student number	Absences prior to counseling February 2018-2019
1	2
2	16
3	10
4	15
5	2
6	35
7	15
8	10
9	6
10	40
11	0
12	35
13	7
14	6
15	9
16	15
17	25
18	10
19	16

Table 1 shows the number of absences that the students accrued before beginning the counseling program. Results were as follows: 15.7% of students accrued 0–5 absences, 36.8% of students accumulated 6–10 absences, 15.7% of students accrued 11–15 absences, 10.5% of students accrued 16–20 absences, and 21% of students accrued more than 20 absences from February 2018 to February 2019. The majority of the students, 36.8%, had between 6 and 10 absences during this period. The mean for the attendance rate was 14.42, the median was 10, and the standard deviation was 11.59.

Table 2

Students and Their Attendance Rates While Receiving Counseling February 2019-2020

Student number	Absences while receiving counseling February 2019-2020
1	0
2	16
3	13
4	23
5	2
6	42
7	16
8	7
9	12
10	27
11	2
12	26
13	12
14	11
15	7
16	19
17	19
18	19
19	12

Table 2 shows the number of absences that students accrued while in counseling. There were 15.7% of students who accrued 0–5 absences, 10.5% of students accumulated 6–10 absences, 26.3% of students accrued 11–15 absences, 26.3% of students accrued 16–20 absences, and 21% of students accumulated more than 20 absences. The majority of the

students, 26.3%, fell within two categories: 11–15 absences and 16–20 absences. The

mean attendance rate was 15, the median was 13, and the standard deviation was 10.12.

 The researcher retains the null hypothesis based on the interpretation and analysis of the

data in this section. The descriptive statistics indicate that the counseling program did not

impact the attendance rates for students who are enrolled in the program.

Research Question 2: Analysis and Results

Research Question 2: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on tardy

rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High

School?

 All students who fit the criteria were included in the study. Table 3 shows the student

and their tardiness for the year before receiving counseling through the specific program.

Table 3

Students and their Tardy Rates Prior to Counseling February 2018-2019

Student number	Tardiness prior to counseling February 2018-2019
1	0
2	19
3	35
4	1
5	2
6	16
7	18
8	1
9	9
10	0
11	0
12	1
13	0
14	15
15	1
16	0
17	0
18	2
19	0

Table 3 shows the tardiness for students prior to receiving counseling. There were 68.4% of students who were tardy 0–5 times, 5.2% of students were tardy 6–10 times, 5.2% were tardy 11–15 times, 15.7% were tardy 16–20 times, and 5.2% of students were tardy greater than 20 times. The majority of students, 68.4%, were tardy between 0 and 5 times during the year. The mean tardy rate was 6.3, the median was 1, and the standard deviation was 9.7.

Table 4

Students and Their Tardy Rates While Receiving Counseling February 2019-2020

Student number	Tardiness while receiving counseling February 2019-2020
1	0
2	16
3	30
4	1
5	4
6	14
7	17
8	2
9	9
10	0
11	0
12	2
13	0
14	6
15	0
16	1
17	0
18	1
19	0

Table 4 shows the tardiness for the student the year that they received counseling. There 68.4% of students who were tardy 0–5 times, 10.5% of students were tardy 6–10 times, 5.2% of students were tardy 11–15 times, 10.5% of students were tardy 16–20 times, and 5.2% of students were tardy greater than 20 times. The majority of students, 68.4%, were

tardy between 0 and 5 times during the year that they received the counseling services. The mean tardy rate was 5.4, the median was 1, and the standard deviation was 8.2. The researcher retains the null hypothesis based on the interpretation and analysis of the data in this section. The descriptive statistics indicate that the counseling program did not have an impact on the tardy rates for students who are enrolled in the program.

Presentation of Qualitative Findings

Research Question 3: Analysis and Results

Research Question 3: What is the perception of administration and teachers regarding the impact, if any, of the counseling program at the High School?

The presentation of the qualitative findings examined themes in each question that was asked of the administrative team as well as teachers. Each interview question examined the perspective of administration as well as the perspective of the teachers. It is essential to look at each through a separate lens and compare the differences and similarities at the end of each question. The conclusion of the section will discuss overall themes that emerged from the data.

Interview Question 1. What have been the biggest changes you have seen since the program's inception?

All three administrators who were interviewed discussed that the most significant change they have seen is the undivided time the highest risk students can receive. The three administrators addressed the fact that the highest risk students were taking up most of the day for the guidance counselors; however, during counseling sessions, they were often interrupted. The counseling program has allowed the highest risk students to

receive a dedicated counseling time beyond school-based therapy. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate this finding:

>Some of the students that were most high risk and needed frequent contact with guidance counselors or child study team members, they have more attention at a set time undivided attention from the therapist because every week they are going to meet at that time. There are no interruptions during that time, whereas guidance counselors do get interrupted. I think it is more goal-directed when they do counseling than with guidance or case managers because, again, it is focused on whatever their treatment goals are, it is more than school-based counseling. It is more in-depth then school-based counseling.

Through this more in-depth counseling, the students who are the highest risk have an opportunity to feel more supported than they had in the past. The program has allowed the students to receive a higher level of mental health services than had been previously offered.

As a result of these services for the highest risk students, it has allowed the guidance department to help other students in the building who have mental health concerns but are not considered high-risk students. The guidance department has been able to expand the number of students they are servicing. One administrator remarked:

>When you took those five heavy hitters and put them downstairs [referring to the counseling program] to someone whose only job it is to help them, that allowed guidance to help the other 95 people who still needed guidance but just in life.

This allowed students who had not been previously seen the opportunity to speak with a guidance counselor regarding issues they may have.

The teachers had a similar perspective to the administration for this question. The teachers' perceptions were that mental health services provide a safe space for students to express their issues. It is another place where students can go to be supported and know that there is an adult who is there to help them succeed and grow. The following participant quotes provide examples of their perspectives: "I think the [program] allows them to know that I can speak about my emotions and express myself freely and feel safe and trusted and comfortable;" and "[The program] has also alleviated the high-risk students so that they have somewhere they know that they can go."

One teacher remarked that as a result of the increased help, the students who had previously been failing in her class began to achieve academically, which has been an overall positive impact as a result of the program.

The overall changes that occurred allowed the high-risk students to receive a high level of treatment beyond what has been traditionally offered in schools. As a result of the highest risk students being regularly seen in counseling, it has allowed the guidance counselors to see and help more students. The latter otherwise might not have been afforded the opportunity to speak with a guidance counselor. The program has allowed students another safe space where they can express their emotions in a productive and healthy environment. Although the teachers did not speak about the ability to go beyond traditional school counseling, they acknowledged the importance of having another place to express their emotions.

Interview Question 2. What have been the greatest obstacles of implementing and running the program?

The common theme that emerged from all three interviews with the administration is that parental involvement and parents' understanding of mental health issues has been the greatest obstacle to implementing and running the program. Parents' resistances to having students enter into counseling and then not following through with various referrals and treatment plans has been an ongoing challenge for the program. The administrators spoke about the parents' refusal to follow through or even allow their child to enter the program.

Parents are not always on board or receptive, the counselor will say they need more outside of this, but the parents don't always do it. That I know for the therapist has been a big challenge for the therapist when she knows they are so high risk but can't do anymore.

One of the biggest challenges is parents don't believe or understand that mental health is something that needs to be treated, it is more something like you should just try the best and hard and you will get over it. So anxiety is one thing that the parents don't acknowledge along with depression, we have some students who have significant challenges functioning in the school. They miss a lot of school days we make accommodations for outside treatment and parents don't really enroll them in services, or even medication.

A challenge is parents, it's switching the culture that counseling means you are crazy. If someone at home is telling their kids not to go, we have kids who are really high risk, but the parents are like our business is our business, so it changing the culture of mental health.

The teachers had a different perception of the biggest obstacles regarding the implementation and running of the program. The teacher strongly felt that the students missing class time to receive the service were the most significant challenge. Although the teachers acknowledged that it is based on a rotating schedule, sometimes the program changes, and there is no communication, which becomes another challenge. The teachers are concerned that students who are potentially already struggling in a class have to miss additional class time to receive mental health services as revealed in the following quotes:

> The biggest thing I think in terms of the high school and the functionality of it is the timing and everything. Most of the time it takes one entire class period, they will just be gone.

> Unfortunately it is in the school day, so the biggest obstacle and I don't blame anyone for this, you are taking time away from school, and sometimes that means going into an academic class, and it might be an academic class they are struggling in, and then they just missed more of it.

> Even if it was something basic letting a teacher know that so and so was leaving. I think that's really important for teachers to know when they are leaving, so there is a flow of communication, so it done through different classes and not just the same class.

All three administrators remarked that it is crucial to change the culture that exists around the stigma of mental health services, to allow students to receive the services that they need to help them function in a school setting. The resistance that parents express and then transfer to their child has been the greatest obstacle to the program's success. The students who are the highest risk and need continuing care outside of school are, in many cases, unable to receive the follow-up services as a result of parental resistance to the idea of mental health issues.

All three teachers remarked on the challenges of students missing class time. They were concerned that it is difficult to make up the work that had been missed. The teachers felt that since the students are typically gone for the entire class period that they usually treat that student as if they had been absent for the day. It was challenging to catch them back up on the work and valuable instructional time that they had missed. Teachers also wanted there to be an increase in communication between teachers and the counseling program. Although they acknowledge the importance of confidentiality, sometimes the counseling schedule is changed or delivered late, which means teachers have to make unanticipated last-minute adjustments.

Interview Question 3. Have you seen an improvement with regards to attendance or tardiness?

The administrative interviewees saw an improvement of attendance or tardiness more as a case-by-case basis rather than seeing growth as a whole group of students. The interviewees remarked that attendance and tardiness are not necessarily reasons students would be referred. Therefore, it is not a predominant theme during their counseling sessions. On an individual basis, students who might have been referred to the counseling

program for anxiety now feel they have that additional support. Therefore, they know if they come to school, there is a place for them to discuss their anxiety.

> I think there are some students who have improved, I haven't looked at the data, but I know there are some that have been brought up in the past that I haven't heard about. And when they are involved with the therapist, it's more like let's just get you into school, and we will deal with it.

> Since [a student] has learned some skills to manage her anxiety and depression, she has been really doing really well academically and with attendance, but that is not the same for every student, it depends on how engaged the student is.

The interviewed teachers felt a positive correlation between the counseling service and better attendance and tardy rates than they had seen in the past. The teachers also spoke more about individual students that they felt had made substantial improvement since receiving the counseling. These two quotes highlight this point:

> Yes, I think the attendance and tardiness has been better with this program. Maybe not for every student, but I specifically can think of a student I had who was absent so frequently and when the student was there didn't want to be there in class. I don't have the student anymore, but I have seen the student a lot more in the school and the classes, and engaged.

"I think in February last year when the program started, and since then, I think there has been an improvement in terms of attendance and tardiness."

 The success seen around the students with regards to attendance and tardiness is seen on an individualized basis. It is specific to one or two students rather than as improvement as a whole group. Consensus for both the administrators and the teachers is that there has

been a positive change to attendance and tardy rates; however, they are isolated cases and cannot necessarily be generalized to the entire population of students receiving mental health services.

Interview Question 4. How do you identify students for counseling services?

The administrators remarked that the most at-risk students are identified for counseling. The majority of the students who have been referred for counseling had suicidal thoughts in the past and a history of depression and anxiety. The students are typically referred to a guidance counselor who will determine if their symptoms are severe enough to be referred to the specific counseling program. As there is only one counselor who is available full-time to run the counseling program, there are a limited number of students who can be seen on a daily and weekly basis. Those who are also referred are the students who need mental health services, but their parents will not follow through with a treatment plan that subsists outside of the school day. In some cases, students were referring themselves for mental health services; however, they did not want their parents to know, and because of age restrictions could not receive the mental health services.

> This year we continued the services of the students who did not graduate from last
> year, and so those students continued services, and primarily this year it has been
> from guidance counselors and a few from the students themselves, self-referred.
> That was a little bit challenging because the students who were self-referring were
> not 16, and I can only provide services to students who are 16 and over without
> parental consent. So I need parental consent for any student who is younger than
> 16, so I had a few students who self-referred, but they were not 16, and they didn't

want their parents to know they were getting services so that I couldn't service them.

Guidance counselors or case managers are really the ones who identify, or principal are saying this kid is the one most at risk. If they aren't coming to school, if they are failing everything, they are a smart kid if they are expressing being depressed or anxious. We need parents to be on board before we make a referral, but if we are kind of all in agreement they need support they are not getting it, or we are concerned that they will not get the help, or will the parent take them those are the kids that go on the top of the list to get services.

When discussing how they are referred to the mental health program, the teachers did not speak about students who had suicidal ideation or were high-risk students. They talked more about grades or behavioral issues that they saw in the classroom. Teachers would not be privy to a great deal of the confidential information that the administration would be aware of; however, they are still able to identify students who need mental health services. Participants stated, "So for the teachers, I would look at their grades, if their grades put them at risk if their attendance puts them at risk, and classroom observations;" and "That is one thing I thought was really great; we spent as a team in collaboration when we met, we all sat down brainstormed who we thought would benefit."

The administrator referred the majority of the students based on having displayed the high-risk behaviors. Parental involvement and possible care the student can receive outside of school are also taken into account when placing students in the counseling program. The teachers would refer students, mostly based on grades, attendance, and classroom observation of the student.

Interview Question 5. Do you feel there has been a positive or negative impact on teacher–student relationships?

The overarching theme to this question for the administration was that it depends on the teacher and their perception of the importance of mental health services. The teachers are emailed ahead of time to send students down to the counseling program. However, some in the past have refused to send them if there is a test or announce it in front of the class, which violates the student's privacy. In some cases, the students who were the most disruptive during class time are no longer as disruptive, which the teachers have seen as a positive. However, some teachers are still resistant to the idea of students missing class time for counseling, which has had an impact on the overall teacher-student relationship. The counselor is available to speak with the teachers; however, many times, a student will not consent to have the counselor speak with the teacher, which then hurts the teacher–student relationships.

I think it depends on the teacher. Some of the kids do not want their teachers knowing anything, they don't want the therapist talking to the teacher so the therapist can be an advocate for them, but they don't trust maybe the teachers.

I would say this is a very tricky question. I think our program is really young in the school, and we have not had the opportunity to sit down with the teachers to speak about mental health and provide some education about the impact. It depends on the teacher, and it depends on the kids, I think that is one area we need to work on growing. In terms of providing professional development to the staff about mental health and trying to give the student confidentiality.

Definitely a positive impact. We have seen so much improvement. I will tell you,
though, teachers have been one of our biggest issues. The teachers who are like
the parents and almost don't believe it is necessary or should come above
schoolwork.

It is the minority of teachers, but we pushed out this huge wellness
initiative, but I don't think our teachers fully got it. I think that some wellness
training for teachers would help.

The teachers who were interviewed all felt that it had a resoundingly positive impact on
teacher–student relationships. The teachers felt that because they knew a student might
struggle emotionally, it made them more compassionate towards them. They also thought
that it allowed the student to have an unspoken pact with the teacher, which
acknowledged some more profound challenges that the student was facing, other than just
potentially academic issues.

I think it has been positive because the teachers are the ones who are facilitating
the in between the students going. They are in your classroom, so you know
where they are going, so they feel that they don't actually have to tell you, but you
know that I am going there for reasons.

For me, it just makes me more sensitive, I'm pretty sensitive anyway, but I think
that it makes it more sensitive anyway.

It is kind of an unspoken pact, they kind of feel they can trust you too because
they know that I maybe they have some things going on, so if they are struggling

with homework, I know they are dealing with something. It allows them to feel a
little more comfortable.

The administration felt although in some cases, the impact on teacher–student
relationships has been positive, it is essential to provide teachers with the opportunity to
learn about mental health issues. The administrative interviewees all expressed that an
increase in understanding mental health and providing professional development around
the importance of mental health would help the program to flourish on a grander scale.
Even though there has been a positive impact for many teachers, some remain skeptical
about prioritizing mental health; thus, this has the potential to impede the overall success
of the counseling program.

The three teachers who were interviewed all resoundingly felt that the program
had had a positive impact on teacher–student relationships. It had given them a better
understanding of which students might be struggling and allowed them to be more
sensitive. The teachers felt that students didn't need to express that they were dealing with
more significant issues because just the fact that they were receiving these services
allowed them to know that something meaningful was happening in the student's life.

Interview Question 6. What impact, if any, has this program had on the overall
High School?

The overall impact that the program has been seen to have by the administrative
interviewees is that it services the highest risk students, which has had two positive
outcomes. The first is that the high-risk students are receiving the help they need to better
function in the school environment and outside of school. The second is that since the
counselor is dedicated explicitly to these higher risk students, more of the general

education population can talk with a guidance counselor. They are no longer spending hours with only one student. The impact has been a positive one, which has allowed the high school to function as a more cohesive place, which can help more students succeed. The counseling service has also helped students who would not be able financially or for other reasons access to mental health services the opportunity to receive treatment. Participant perspectives follow:

> I think that definitely, our highest risk students have a safe place that is consistent and undivided time given to them. And I think some of them have been really able to work through their issues and be more focused on school because they know they have that time and place to dump it all out and in an emergency situation she is there as well.

> I think that for the most part allowing some students who were not able to function because of mental health problems are doing better. A lot of students who did not have the ability to go for outpatient services because their parents wouldn't drive them there or they don't have health insurance, so even if the parents wanted them to get services they can't always afford for them to get services, so when the district pays for them, it helps because they are not going to be a burden in their family is being important in terms of engaging them.

> I think the biggest impact has been to our general education. It's our general education who gets left behind in every situation. By taking the high-risk students out, it allowed more attention to the general education kids.

 The interviewed teachers felt that the program had had a positive impact on the school because it brought mental health to the forefront of the conversation and showed that it is

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a priority at the high school. By having this program in the schools, teachers feel that they can educate the whole student, rather than just focus on the academics. Knowing that the school is prioritizing the students' social and emotional health has given teachers the understanding that they are at liberty to address the students' emotional well-being in their classrooms when appropriate. Perceptions of two participants were, "Talking about social-emotional health is necessary now; it has to be apart of the curriculum it has to happen;" and "Now, students can go talk to someone about and work through it and try to get through it because you can't get through any of the academics until their mind is clear of what they are going through." A third participant stated:

> It shows that they care about people who have issues, who have mental health issues, and it just shows that there are people out there who care."
>
> "It is something that is very positive and nurturing, and it is an opportunity to take advantage if students need it.

According to the administration, the program was designed to help the high-risk students receive counseling services that they otherwise would not have been unable to get. The program has succeeded in this respect by allowing a dedicated space that only focuses on mental health. However, another positive outcome has been that the general education population, which might have had to go without seeing a guidance counselor, is now able to receive more guidance services because the higher risk students have a space dedicated to meeting their needs.

Teachers felt that the program and administrative emphasis on the importance of mental health had given more of an ability to educate the whole students instead of focusing solely on academics. They felt that the program has brought up more

conversations around the importance of educating the whole student, which has had a positive impact on the overall high school. Each teacher felt that the program has had a resounding positive change to the high school and has impacted the students significantly.

The overall impact on the High School has been a positive change. The administration's perception has been that the high-risk students now have a dedicated space for them to receive the mental health services they need. There have been some obstacles that have prevented the program from truly flourishing. There needs to be more community awareness around mental health to dispel the stigma around counseling for parents; this would allow more students to receive the services they need. However, the program has helped the higher risk students, which has allowed the broader school community to benefit from guidance counselors and programs that otherwise would not have been available. The counseling program has also allowed the high-risk students to receive counseling that goes beyond the traditional school-based counseling to address mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. This has had a resounding positive effect on their ability to function within the school environment.

The teachers, too, have felt that the program has had an overall positive impact on the school's daily functions. The teachers expressed the program's positive result that there has been an increase in the number of conversations around the importance of mental health for the students. The teachers feel the most significant challenge is that the students are taken out of class time to receive these services because it impacts their academics. Teachers also understand that there are confidentiality issues that prevent the counselor from speaking with them, however they feel there needs to be better

communication between the counseling program and the teachers. Despite these issues for the teachers, they seem encouraged that the program has helped many students who otherwise would not be able to receive these services. The teachers feel that since the school has prioritized the students' social and emotional well-being, it has allowed them to address these issues within the classroom and not just focus solely on academics if they feel something needs to be addressed.

Both the teachers and the administrators felt that the counseling program brought another service into the school that has allowed students a safe, productive, and positive environment to express their needs. Although there are a few challenges that the program faces, both teachers and administrators feel the school has been better off since the counseling program has been in effect.

Chapter V
Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this convergent mixed-methods study was to explore what influence, if any, a specific mental health program in a Northeast high school had on absenteeism and tardiness for students serviced by the school. It is essential to continually evaluate programs that are brought into schools because of their expense and ensure their effectiveness for students and faculty. This study interviewed both administrators and teachers to determine their perceptions of the program. The study also used attendance data that were collected on the students who received these services, to determine if the counseling program had any impact on attendance and tardy rates.

The qualitative portion of the study consisted of the researcher conducting interviews with three teachers and three administrators. These semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees to express their opinions and offer insight into the workings of the counseling program. These interviews were then transcribed and coded to determine various themes that emerged from the data.

The quantitative portion of the study consisted of the researcher collecting data from the school's database system. The absences and tardy rates were collected for two consecutive years. The first year was based on students not receiving counseling, and the second year was when the students had received either group or individual counseling. As a result of the limited sample size, descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean, median, and mode of each set of data. The convergent mixed-method approach was appropriate to use because it gave an overarching view of the program. Three research questions were explored in this study.

Research Question 1: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on attendance rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 2: What impact, if any, has the counseling program had on tardy rates across grade levels for the students who receive counseling services in the High School?

Research Question 3: What is the perception of administration and teachers regarding the impact, if any, of the counseling program at the High School?

Summary Research Question 1

The first question looked at the impact that the counseling program has had on attendance rates for students. This research found that there was no impact on attendance rates for students from one year to the next. There might have been no impact because attendance was not necessarily the primary focus of these counseling services. The students who had been referred to the program were considered the highest risk of the population. These students suffered from depression, anxiety and had had potentially suicidal thoughts. Therefore, the sessions focused more on mental health issues than their attendance. When looking at the data, the students mostly remained consistent in their attendance records, meaning that students who had previously been absent regularly were again habitually absent. Those students who had regularly attended school continued to do so.

London et al. (2016) and Kearney and Bensaheb (2006) discussed that mental health plays a vital role in school attendance. Students who are depressed and anxious have the potential to attend school less regularly than students who do not suffer from

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these conditions. Although the school and the counseling program focused on mental health issues, the chronically absent students continued this trend. The students who were severely depressed or anxious may have needed medication to help them overcome these factors, but they may not have access.

The therapy also may have focused on their anxiety and depression as it related to family issues, but not explicitly to school. Rossen and Cowan (2014) stated mental health interventions need to be a collaborative effort between the families and the school. One of the biggest obstacles that the school identified was working collaboratively with families. If the emphasis on school attendance was not necessarily a priority for the family, it could impact overall attendance for the student (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Summary Research Question 2

The second question examined the effect that the counseling program had had on tardy rates for students. The research found that there was no impact on the tardy rates for students. The program's focus was on more severe mental health issues, and the counselor did not necessarily address tardiness with students during the counseling sessions. The majority of the students were tardy between 0 and 5 times during both years. The students who were rarely late continued that trend, while the habitually tardy students continued that behavior. Therefore, the counseling program had no significant impact on tardy rates for students.

As with attendance, a myriad of different factors contributed to a student's attendance and tardy rates. (Tyre et al., (2011) talked about the need for a comprehensive approach to combatting chronically tardy students. This approach may be necessary if systemic change is to be made.

The students in this program had less of an issue with tardiness than they did with absenteeism. The majority of the students were only tardy between 0 and 5 times during the school year. The students were more prone to being absent than they were to being tardy. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) discussed that tardiness can lead to chronic absenteeism. It may be the earlier years of these students' academic careers, and they tended towards tardiness; however, the data did not show that in this study. Caldarella et al. (2011) discussed that tardiness can be linked to lower academic achievement. This study did not look at academic achievement; however, if you look at the academics of the students who trended towards tardiness, their academic success could have been diminished. When looking at both the charts for attendance and tardiness, there does not seem to be a link to chronic absenteeism and chronic tardiness.

Summary Research Question 3

The main impact that the program has been found to have after interviewing both teachers and administrators is the program helped to meet the needs of those students who had significant mental health issues. As a result of these students receiving a dedicated counseling time and therapy that goes beyond traditional school-based therapy, they could be taken off the guidance counselors' caseload. The guidance counselors were then able to use their time to help the general population of students who needed assistance. Although the counseling program services only a select number of students, there was a far-reaching impact on the general population of the High School. The general population of students had increased access to guidance counselors, which allowed them to receive the counseling services that are appropriate for their needs. This increased time with guidance counselors could potentially help other students forge

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stronger teacher–student relationships, which would positively impact their academics (Muller, 2001).

The teachers and the administration felt that the program had an overall positive impact on the lives of the students and the culture of the school. The teachers thought it was necessary to continually address the students' mental health concerns to help them achieve academically. It inadvertently let teachers know that a student might be struggling with mental health or more significant needs beyond the classroom, without knowing the specific issues. The teachers had to send them to the counseling service; thus, they knew the students who needed the extra focus on mental health. The teachers who were interviewed spoke about how this garnered feelings of empathy for what the student might be experiencing in their personal life. This had a resounding positive effect on the teacher–student relationship. Roorda et al. (2011) discussed the importance of having a positive teacher–student relationship on the student's academic and social-emotional well-being. Barile et al. (2012) stated that the school's overall experience is more positive when teachers and students have a secure connection. This counseling program allowed teachers to know the students who were struggling, and this helped teachers to forge an empathic bond with the student. The interviewees built a more reliable connection and understanding between the student and the teacher. This improvement in relationships helps the student have an overall more positive high school experience, according to Klem and Connell (2004).

This program also allowed students access to mental health services that they otherwise might not have been able to afford. The students did not have to pay anything for the service, which was positive since some families do not have health insurance or

the financial means to cover the cost of counseling. For the younger students who cannot drive or take mass transportation, they did not have to travel anywhere to receive the counseling. All the necessary services were provided at the school, thereby affording students who would not have access to mental health services the opportunity to receive treatment, according to Rossen and Cowan (2014). The administrators spoke about some frustration regarding the lack of follow-up by the parents regarding additional outside services that were recommended. This lack of follow-up by many families indicates that even minimal mental health services would not have been provided to their child if this program did not exist.

The major roadblock that continued to come up during the interviews with the administrators was that the parents thwarted the progress in many cases because they did not believe in or understand the importance of mental health. Swick and Powers (2018) discussed the stigma attached to mental health issues, such as embarrassment or shame, around the need to receive mental health services. This could be a contributing factor to the resistance that the administration has faced with parents. The administrators found this to be a source of great frustration because the school, even with this service, could only offer so much. There was no psychiatrist on staff who could prescribe possible medications; the onus to access psychiatric providers fell to the parents. The parents, on some occasions, would not allow their child to participate in the counseling program. Students who were too young to consent legally could not receive counseling services. However, the school did allow students to receive counseling without parental consent once they reached the legal age of consent.

However, the teachers felt the most significant obstacle was the scheduling that took away from class time. The students who received these services in many cases were already struggling with academics, and to lose class time created a more significant hindrance to their academic progress. Parke and Kanyongo (2012) cited the value of instructional time and the need for consistency for all students. Therefore, the students who miss that specific class feel the impact of the loss of instructional time, and it has the potential to affect the rest of the students as well (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012). However, even with these challenges, the teachers still felt the program overall was a positive addition to the school.

Findings Related to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is centered on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory discusses the various stages of requirements that have to be met before a person can move onto the next stage. The first phase is centered around basic physical needs; the second phase discusses the need for a person to feel safe; the third phase talks about the need to feel loved; the fourth phase is centered around self-esteem, and the fifth phase is self-actualization (Burleson & Thoron, 2014).

This school counseling program helps students achieve various phases based on their mental health needs. If a student is having suicidal thoughts, therapy can help a student feel safe. Or for a student suffering from an eating disorder, therapy can help them feel loved because they know there is a person that they can turn to with regards to their mental health issues. If a student does not feel safe either because of themselves or circumstances around them, they will not be able to achieve or even necessarily function in a school setting. This more in-depth therapy helps the students work through the

significant mental health issues so that they can perform not only in the school setting but also in the future. This counseling program goes beyond traditional school-based counseling and allows students space to meet their mental health needs.

Recommendations for Practice

The greatest obstacles the program has faced are resistance from the parents and some of the teachers. Although, according to the administration, they did have a parent night to explain the program and a dedicated faculty meeting to discuss this with the staff. They still met pushback from these two groups, which hindered the program's possible potential. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has put forth a plan that outlines how to implement a school-wide counseling program. Number 5 is "Develop a public relations plan," and Number 6 is " Garner community support by engaging all stakeholders" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2015).

Although the school did try to do this by having the parent night and the faculty meeting, it fell short in this regard because of the resistance they continued to meet. It is sometimes difficult to get parents to come out to events at night; therefore, a suggestion could have been to have multiple fliers and emails go out to parents to discuss the importance of mental health and how it impacts schools. It would also be necessary to address the negative stigma that sometimes exists around mental health issues. The outreach to parents should be ongoing and not just isolated to a one-night event. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, n.d.) recommends that an advisory board that is made up of key stakeholders take place before implementing the program. This should include parents and talk about the outreach that can be done at different community events so that parents can better understand what the counseling services

involve. This outreach can happen at various school-related events, such as Parent/Teacher Organization meetings, sporting events, or any extracurricular activity that can be used to promote this organization and make it part of the parents' vernacular.

The other group that met the program with resistance was some teachers who did not understand the importance of mental health. Although a faculty meeting was used to explain the program, more in-depth professional development was needed to garner the faculty's necessary support. Professional development should focus on how mental health impacts all aspects of a student's life. Without proper mental health, it is difficult for a student to function and complete the daily tasks that are demanded of them. Kourkoutas and Giovazolias (2015) wrote, "At risk students who can benefit from supportive and non-conflicting or rejecting relationships with teachers seem to better recover academically and reengage with peers and learning processes than those without these positive relationships" (p. 139). Teachers need to be allowed to understand that having a positive relationship with a student helps them academically. Having the counseling service in the school helps to promote this positive "non-conflicting" relationship, which is the foundation of academic success.

During the interviews, the teachers spoke about how, at the beginning of the counseling program, they were asked to recommend students for the service. However, at the beginning of the following year, their input was not taken into consideration. It is essential to have a faculty representative on the referring team to involve them in the program's ongoing conversation and implementation.

During the interviews, the teachers also discussed that one of the greatest challenges they faced with the program was scheduling. It was difficult for students to

miss an entire class period when they were potentially already behind in their academics. One suggestion that a teacher presented was to have the students miss the end of one period and the beginning of another so that they would only miss half the class instead of the whole time. Although they acknowledged it could disrupt the class, they felt it might have a better outcome so that each teacher would see that student at least for a limited time. Although the program happens in the school, this does not necessarily mean they have to follow the traditional school day. The counselor could provide services to students before or after school. Although this would not be feasible for all students, it would allow others to remain in class and have a dedicated counseling time while academic courses are not in session.

Although this program was found to be effective in helping to alleviate the time of guidance counselors and helping the more severe students receive the necessary mental health services, it was not effective in reducing the absenteeism or tardiness for students. If students' attendance rates continue to be an obstacle for the school, another means of changing this pattern would be necessary to address the issue. The counseling program in isolation did not have a positive impact on attendance or tardy rates. Hinz et al. (2003) stated that to help increase attendance, parents have to play an integral role in this process to change the pattern. Nauer (2016) found that a personal approach with each student helped increase attendance rates; when personal calls were made to the home, students were more likely to attend a school or be on time. In conjunction with one more of these methods, the counseling program could have made an impact, but the counseling program on its own did not affect attendance or tardy rates.

Recommendations for Future Study

This research had its limitations due to the small sample size and was limited to this one specific high school. Future studies should look at other schools that are also using this particular outside counseling program. By looking at other schools, it would be interesting to see if they faced the same challenges and successes demonstrated by this particular high school. By speaking with other school districts, it could be determined whether the obstacles and successes are specific or systemic to the overall implementation and running of the counseling program.

Although the researcher found no significant difference between attendance and tardy rates for the students involved in the counseling program, there was only one year's worth of data that was available due to the limited time the program had been in place at the High School. By following the attendance/tardy records for more than one year, it could be better determined if, over time, the counseling program impacted student attendance.

Future research could also focus on the reasons for the absences, which this study did not consider. Where the days that the students were absent, was it an excused absence or unexcused absence? Understanding the types of absences that the students have accrued would better allow the school and the counseling service to address the issue for chronically absent students.

Additional research should also be done to understand why the program was met with such resistance by parents. This was the most significant obstacle that the program faced; if it was better understood why parents did not want their child participating, these concerns could be addressed and potentially have allowed more students in need to

receive the necessary services. Parents are a major stakeholder in the program; it is crucial to understand their overall thoughts. Future research could also interview the parents of the students who received the counseling services to ascertain if they felt there had been an impact on their child's life.

Summary

The research found that there was no impact on the attendance and tardy rates for students. However, when interviewing both teachers and administrators, they felt the program was overwhelmingly successful in helping the most vulnerable students. The program also had an unforeseen positive effect on students' general population, since the guidance counselors could use more of their time for those students. As the program continues to grow at the High School, it will be necessary to educate all major stakeholders on the importance of mental health in the overall well-being of a student.

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July 13, 2020

Dayle Collins
Seton Hall University

Re: Study ID# 2020-094

Dear Ms. Collins,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled, "Effectiveness of a School Based Counseling Program" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. If your study included an informed consent form, letter of solicitation or flyer, a stamped copy is included for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mara Podvey

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board