

## **Literature Review**

Attendance of elementary school aged children is a well researched topic. In general, students that come to school on a regular basis not only outperform students with chronic absences, but move on to more productive and fulfilling lives as well. A pattern in attendance can emerge in kindergarten, where chronic absenteeism begins to take its toll, especially among economically disadvantaged children. A display of this attribute as early as kindergarten can be an accurate prediction of attaining at the lowest educational achievement levels by the end of the fifth grade year (Chang, 2008).

Chronic absenteeism is defined by the literature in a number ways and differs from truancy. Chang and Romero define chronic absenteeism as missing ten percent of the school year and importantly includes all absences in this count, excused and unexcused. Including all absences is important for very young students in elementary school because it is extremely unlikely that a parent does not know about their child's absence. As children age and move into the secondary school level, truancy is generally defined in terms of unexcused absences and comes with the possibility that parents are unaware of their child's absences (Chang, 2010).

Numerous reasons for chronic absenteeism exist, including a number of family risk factors, health reasons, lack of resources, domestic violence, lack of interest or ability on the part of the student and the student's perception of the school, classroom and teacher (Maynard, 2012). One study suggests a number of family risk factors that are an adequate early predictor of student absenteeism: low level of parental education, being born to a teenage mother, living below the poverty index, living in a family with 4 or more children, receiving welfare, having unemployed parents, having a parent with poor health or having food insecurity. Students in early elementary school possessing three or more of these risks were proven to have more

absences during the school year than their peers who did not possess three or more risk factors (Romero, 2008).

The effects of chronic absenteeism in elementary school have been linked to future academic struggles and failure. Students who exhibit this problem during their early academic career are more likely to not achieve to their full potential, score poorly on academic achievement testing, drop out of school, and have problems with alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs (Sheldon, 2004). The documented effects that chronic absenteeism has on students' lives make intervention for these students imperative in our schools.

“While parents are responsible for getting their children to school every day, schools and communities need to recognize and address the barriers and challenges that may inhibit them from doing so, especially when they are living in poverty” (Chang, 2008). Schools are the first line of action when it comes to helping students who display chronic absenteeism. They need to track absenteeism data so that they can employ as early as interventions as possible, preferably beginning in kindergarten. Giving parent's knowledge can be the first line of defense. In elementary school, parents are generally aware that their student is missing school, but may not realize how much school their child has actually missed. One early intervention can be to inform families when their child has reached an unacceptable level of absences. Parent workshops, which teach about the importance of being in school on a regular basis, can be held at the school because not all parents understand the importance of regular attendance in elementary school. Other interventions can include such things as, before and after school programs for children to motivate them to attend and involving parents in award ceremonies in which students are rewarded for good attendance (Bickelhaupt, 2012). These interventions will not solve a school's chronic absenteeism problem alone. The community should be utilized to help as well.

Community volunteers can act as mentors for students with chronic absenteeism (Sheldon, 2004). Organizations, such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters can be reached to provide mentors to young students who may need it. Mentoring can also happen within the school. “Students with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in school report more positive academic attitudes and values, and more satisfaction with school. These students are also more engaged academically” (Klem, 2004). Schoolteachers, administrators, aides, custodians, bus drivers, and office personnel can all be positive influences in a student’s life. When these interventions fail to produce satisfactory results for students, a more drastic approach may be necessary to help them. Schools can make referrals for counseling and court officers may need to become involved in the most serious cases.

The literature reviewed in this study portrayed three overall themes related to elementary attendance. First, there is an array of reasons why students become chronically absent. Second, clearly researched effects of chronic absenteeism show negative outcomes for students. Third, interventions need to be in place to address students and families who start to display a pattern of chronic absenteeism.

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