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The Evaluation of Positive Intervention Strategies on Chronic Absenteeism at the High School Level

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THE EVALUATION OF POSITIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES ON CHRONIC
ABSENTEEISM AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

By

Marla Clayton Johnson

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By

Marla Clayton Johnson

THE EVALUATION OF POSITIVE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

Abstract

By Marla Clayton Johnson

University of the Pacific
2020

There is an abundance of research on chronic absenteeism as well as the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach, specifically the element of positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS), at the elementary school level. A clear understanding of MTSS and PBIS at the high school level and how those approaches may impact chronic absenteeism of high school students is lacking in the recent research. The literature review provided the reader with an overview on PBIS and chronic absenteeism through the theoretical lens of Cooper's (1982) Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) theory and explained the influence that PBIS has on chronic absenteeism at the elementary school level. The argument supporting utilizing successful policies already in place to address chronic absenteeism at the high school level is presented. This study identifies PBIS within the current research, as a means to understand how these promising practices may support improved attendance for the chronically absent high school student. The research suggests that positive behavior intervention strategies have tangentially decreased chronic absenteeism by reducing suspension rates at the elementary school level.

This study sought to understand how effective, evidence-based positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS), which have addressed and improved challenging student behavior schoolwide, can be repurposed to combat the causes associated with chronic absenteeism at the high school level. The causes associated with chronic absenteeism at the high school level fall

into four categories termed school, family, environmental and personal. The objective of this quantitative program evaluation study was to evaluate the PBIS interventions that a local, small public high school used for targeted chronically absent high school students to see if their chronically absenteeism rate decreases. This study hypothesizes that the PBIS approach to behavior intervention can successfully transfer to decrease chronic absenteeism at the high school level. Additionally, this study discusses the extent to which results may be generalized to high school students across school districts.

The results of this research study affirm the research questions that PBIS strategies can be repurposed to address chronic absenteeism at the high school level and having an effective attendance intervention program can improve attendance rates between and within attendance tiers in high schools, resulting in reduced chronic absenteeism. The most effective tier in improving attendance rates and reducing chronic absenteeism was both Tier 3 and Tier 4, with each tier resulting in 50% of participants increasing their attendance rates and reducing chronic absenteeism.

Keywords: multi-tiered system of support, chronic absenteeism, positive behavior intervention strategies, student attendance, intervention, school connectedness and school climate.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It was mid-October and 9th grader John Doe had already missed nine days of school. When meeting with him and his family about why he is chronically absent, the MTSS intervention team learned about familial and transportation struggles that impede John from coming to school. And because he missed so much in the first few months since school began, he did not have a network of friends that he connected with and didn't know his teachers too well to motivate him to attend school on a regular basis.

School connectedness is having a psychological sense of belonging and care within the school community (Chapman, Buckley, Sheehan, & Shochet, 2013). School connectedness can be defined many ways and includes many different factors. Engaged in learning, school climate, and a student having built strong relationships with staff and peers at school are just to name a few of the ways that school connectedness can be interpreted. Cultivating connections are crucial to keeping students engaged in the educational process and when students are engaged in their own learning, the negative influences and challenging behaviors along with absences from school tend to be minimal. Students that perceive themselves to be connected to school in a positive way exhibit higher grades, improved attendance rates, and less aggression, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2009). Increased attendance for these connected students is important because the high school dropout rate is highly related to chronically absent students (Erbstein, 2014).

Chronic absenteeism was defined as “missing 10% or more school days,” which equates to approximately two absent days a month during a single school year (Gottfried, 2019, p. 3). Schoeneberger (2012) stated that poor school attendance is often a result of (a) student's lack of

interest in school; (b) student responsibilities and interests that compete with school; or (c) lack of family resources. Fundamentally, students who are not at school often under-perform in school and “experience anxiety stemming from their perceived lack of ability,” which in turn can result in dropping out of school (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997, p. 88). Finding out why students do not feel connected to school and why students are chronically absent is imperative in order to educate students and lower the high school dropout rate.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to present an overview of the study. The chapter opens with a background summary of the study topics of school climate, positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS), and chronic absenteeism in the high school setting. The background is followed by the problem statement, purpose of study, and research questions. The chapter continues with sections on the significance of the study, the conceptual framework used to guide this study, the definition of key terms. A summary section concludes the chapter.

Background

School Characteristics

School characteristics are defined as “school size, class size, whether the school is public or private, and whether the school is urban, suburban, or rural” (McNeeley, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002, p. 138). The school site in this study, pseudonym Urban High School (UHS), is located in Sacramento, California within the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). SCUSD educates a little over 43,000 students, within the city of Sacramento and the surrounding region. The student population of Urban High School is 37.1 percent Hispanic or Latino; 17.4 percent Asian; 17.7 percent African American; and 18.8 percent white. About 5.3 percent of students are of mixed ethnicity (SCUSD, 2019).

UHS is a small, urban, Title I, innovative public high school within SCUSD serving a 250-student population that mirrors the diversity within the Sacramento region (SCUSD, 2019). UHS school administrators have been successfully implementing positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS) for the past four years and have seen their referral rates and suspension rates dramatically decrease by positively intervening with challenging behaviors. Students are taught appropriate behaviors, re-directed when inappropriate behaviors occur, and then rewarded for meeting the appropriate behavior expectations set schoolwide. UHS attributed their success to following the tenants of PBIS and using the MTSS approach to address students who exhibit challenging behavior. If the PBIS approach is successful with reducing challenging behaviors, then when applied to students who are chronically absent, the reduction results should be similar (SCUSD, 2019).

Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies

When students presented challenging behaviors in the classroom, such as off-task behavior and disruptive talking, UHS educators put interventions into place to address these behaviors and educators created plans to decrease these negative behaviors. These interventions were three-tiered and include (a) universal supports for all students, (b) targeted interventions for some students, and (c) individual supports for a few students. The identified Tier 1 universal supports were in place for all students, like teaching schoolwide behavioral expectations, phone calls home when behavior issues arise, and home visits for all 9th graders. The designated Tier 2 targeted interventions were implemented with the percentage of students that are not internalizing the Tier 1 support, including Student Study Team (SST) meetings with families, goal setting activities, and mentoring programs. And the intensive Tier 3 and 4 interventions were individualized for each of the select few students that were not responding positively to the

Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports designed to improve their behavior. Tier 3 and 4 interventions may include behavior contracts, online courses in a smaller learning environment and possibly modifying a student's schedule. This is the structure of PBIS and the specific interventions within each tier were school site specific.

In this study, the positive behavior intervention strategies that could be repurposed to support a chronically absent student were mostly Tier 2, Tier 3, and Tier 4 strategies, with a single Tier 1 strategy of calling home being utilized. The goal setting and student study team meetings with families brought to light an issue that impacted all stakeholders in the student's education and by the school partnering with the families to resolve the chronically absent issue, these PBIS interventions proved successful.

Research has demonstrated that for high schools to adapt the implementation process to these contextual influences, they must focus on key foundational systems (data, leadership, and communication (McCurdy, Empson, Knoster, Fluke, & Grant, 2019). It is through these systems that high school administrators and staff can successfully implement the core PBIS features of teaching appropriate behaviors, intervening when those expectations are not met and rewarding students when the expectations are met, to achieve desired student outcomes (Flannery, Frank, & Kato, 2012; Kittelman, McIntosh, & Hoselton, 2019). The desired outcome for this study was to decrease the chronic absenteeism rates of high school students at Urban High School using a single segment of MTSS, namely PBIS, to intervene with families and students to improve their attendance rate at school.

Chronic Absenteeism

Attendance Works (2019) defined chronically absent as missing two or more days of school each month, for any reason except school-related, excused or unexcused. This is nearly

10% of the entire school year which is 180 days of instruction for students. Chronic absenteeism in the primary grades, K-3, was used to predict lower test scores, low fundamental reading and math skills, and high school dropout rates in later grades (Bruner, Discher, & Chang, 2011). Chronic absence is the number one predictor of dropping out of school (Ginsberg, Jordan & Chang, 2014). It is apparent that chronic absenteeism can be detrimental to students in the educational system at any grade level, starting in Kindergarten, and moving through each grade as they approach graduation. Educators can intervene and engage families in improving their student's attendance rates when there is an early identification system and students are flagged when they are at-risk of becoming defined as chronically absent (McCurdy et al., 2019). When educators have a positive culture and climate and create meaningful relationships with their families, there is effective communication between school to family and students feel more connected to school and might attend more frequently (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

School Culture and Climate

A student that does not feel physically or mentally safe at school will most likely not attend school. According to Wilson (2004), students who attend "schools with negative climates" and low community connectedness are "significantly more likely to demonstrate high levels of aggression" (p. 293). Students who feel cared for by the staff and faculty at a school site tend to perceive the school environment as positive and welcoming - a place they can learn without feeling intimidated or scared. If educators increase the feeling of connectedness students have to school, the levels of aggression and bullying will naturally decrease, along with chronic absenteeism. And when students feel safe, they are more likely to attend school and engage in their own education (Wilson, 2004).

Problem Statement

There is limited research on how PBIS is implemented at the high school level (Freeman et al., 2016). UHS has successfully implemented the PBIS program to address challenging student behaviors as one of very few high schools to do so in the United States. Even though high school PBIS programs have not been thoroughly researched, they do exist and have been successful, which is why UHS used the PBIS approach to address chronic absenteeism.

There is minimal research on how PBIS can be repurposed to address chronic absenteeism at any educational level, but specifically at the high school level. There is plenty of research on PBIS and elementary school implementation, so this study explored what PBIS looks like at the high school level and if those interventions had any impact on high school students who were chronically absent.

It is important to study the causes associated with chronic absenteeism and how students' lack of connectedness to school impacts their attendance. And if students at schools do not feel connected and choose to be absent from school, it is important to find out the best way to change that. Research demonstrated that “nearly one half of all high school students feel disconnected from school and feel disenchanting with their school experiences” (Blum, 2005). This study sought to understand how a research-based component of a MTSS, like PBIS, can be repurposed to address students who have been identified as at risk and chronically absent.

Purpose of Study

This study pursued the understanding of how effective, evidence based PBIS (PBIS) that have addressed and improved challenging student behavior schoolwide through multi-tiered systems of support, can be repurposed to address the causes associated with chronic absenteeism at the high school level. The goals of this study were to identify the PBIS intervention strategies

successful in improving student behavior and then use those strategies on targeted at-risk and chronically absent students to see if their attendance improves. An additional aim of this study was to identify PBIS within the current research, as a means to understand how these promising practices may support improved attendance for the at-risk and chronically absent high school student.

Knowing that students who are chronically absent are at high-risk for dropping out of high school, the purpose of this study was to examine whether or not previously determined successful PBIS intervention strategies can be repurposed to decrease chronic absenteeism with UHS students.

Research Questions/Hypothesis

The objective of this study was to quantitatively evaluate the PBIS interventions that a local, small public high school used on at risk and chronically absent high school students to see if their chronically absenteeism rate decreases. This study answered the following research questions:

Research Question 1.

Can PBIS intervention strategies be repurposed as an approach to decrease chronic absenteeism at the high school level?

Research Question 2.

How effective is each PBIS intervention tier in reducing chronic absenteeism at the high school level?

Hypothesis.

If PBIS intervention strategies can decrease challenging student behaviors at the high school level, then those strategies can be used to decrease chronic absenteeism in high school students.

Significance of the Study

An awareness of factors that influence chronic absenteeism at the high school level could help secondary educators create positive learning conditions for their students. There is limited

research on chronic absenteeism at the high school level and even less research on PBIS at the high school level. This study was accomplished so high school educators can recognize if they use effective PBIS intervention strategies to decrease challenging student behavior, those strategies could also be used to reduce chronic absenteeism and influence students to come to school and actively participate in their own education. This could ultimately result in earning more credits and graduating from high school rather than dropping out. Improved student attendance rates could reap benefits in all facets of an educational institution, especially in the aspects of increased academic achievement, decreased dropout rates, and increased success in college and career pursuits.

Theoretical Framework

Cooper's (1982) *applied behavior analysis (ABA)* theory underpinned the work of this study in that the elements associated with this theory spoke to the way students learn in a certain environment. ABA theory was tightly connected to this study in that applied behavioral research is "concerned with the manipulation of environmental stimuli to help individuals efficiently and effectively emit specific responses" (Cooper, 1982, p. 114). ABA is experimental and when utilized in education, it "decreases the need for each generation of teachers to rediscover the principles through trial and error learning" (Cooper, 2007, 34) and can be used as an instructional technique to systematically change behavior in school classrooms.

A MTSS is one example of an educational framework that aligns with ABA, especially in terms of providing environmental stimuli, such as interventions, to yield specific improved behaviors in students. In relation to this study, ABA was implemented in the form of the PBIS intervention program addressing chronic absenteeism, resulting in a reduction of high school student chronic absenteeism rates.

Definitions of Key Terms

The key terms associated with this study were not an exhaustive list but only touched on some of the considerations found in the research like MTSS, chronic absenteeism, PBIS, school climate, and school connectedness.

Multi-Tiered System of Support

MTSS is a systemic, continuous improvement framework in which data-based problem-solving and decision making is practiced across all levels of the educational system for supporting students (Sailor, McCart, & Choi, 2018).

Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism is typically defined as “missing 10% or more” school days, which is equivalent to 18 days a year or two days every month (Gottfried, 2019, p. 3).

Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies

PBIS provide a behavioral framework that emphasizes the integrated use of classroom management and school-wide discipline *strategies* coupled with effective academic instruction to create a *positive* and safe school climate for all students (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

School Climate

School climate refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions (Wilson, 2004).

School Connectedness

School connectedness is a belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals (Wilson, 2004).

Chapter Summary

By secondary school, a considerable percentage of students feel disconnected from the school community, “which can lead to a broad range of behavioral, emotional and academic problems” (Monahan, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2010, p. 3). Educators need to be aware of their students’ perceptions of school connectedness or the lack thereof. Research has proven that when schools have a positive school climate and students perceive a high rate of connection to school, they are more likely to attend, less likely to drop out, and more likely to be successful after high school (Alexander, et al, 1997; Joyce, 2015; Law, Cuskelly, & Carroll, 2013; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Wilson, 2004). Multi-tiered systems of support components like PBIS contribute to a positive school climate where students want to come to school and learn (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). In this study, the applied behavioral analysis theory in the form of a model like PBIS is applied to the student population who struggles to connect to school. Participation in PBIS could result in improved academic, behavior, and attendance outcomes for high school students.

This concludes Chapter 1, which provided a comprehensive summary of the study. The following chapter is Chapter 2, which presents the empirical literature relevant to this study. The literature review is the first step in understanding the various causes of chronic absenteeism. It also provides information as to whether the MTSS model element of PBIS interventions used at the elementary level can be repurposed to reduce chronic absenteeism at the high school level.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Schoeneberger (2012) stated that poor school is suggestive of numerous things: a lack of interest and little sense of belonging in the school community on the part of the student, or competing interests outside of the school environment, or lack of family resources that promote school attendance (p. 28). Fundamentally, students who do not attend school consistently “are destined” to underperform in school and “experience anxiety stemming from their perceived lack of ability”, which in turn may influence their decision to leave school early (Alexander et al., 1997, p. 88). Finding out the reasons why high school students are chronically absent and what kind of effective interventions work to decrease chronic absenteeism at the high school level is important to prevent students from dropping out of high school.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the evidence-based PBIS, which has addressed and improved challenging student behavior schoolwide through multi-tiered systems of support, can be repurposed to address the causes associated with chronic absenteeism at the high school level.

Many studies have concluded that PBIS successfully modifies elementary student behaviors through a reinforcement model and explicitly taught expectations along with personal interventions around conflict resolution (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010; OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions et al., 2000). In addition to studying the effects of PBIS on behavior at the elementary level, there has been an equivalent amount of research studies accomplished on chronic absenteeism at the elementary level. These studies have concluded that there is a close correlation between chronic absenteeism by the 6th grade and dropping out of school by the 10th grade (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Gottfried, 2019; Sugai & Horner, 2002;

Tanner-Smith & Wilson, 2013). Linking the successful implementation of schoolwide multi-tiered systems of support component, like PBIS, at the primary school level to understanding the causes of elementary school chronic absenteeism, could inform how secondary educational institutions could develop schoolwide, multi-tiered systems of support to decrease chronic absenteeism at the high school level.

There is limited research on PBIS outcomes and chronic absenteeism at the high school level separately and minimal research on how PBIS effects chronic absenteeism directly. There is an abundance of research on chronic absenteeism and the MTSS approach at the elementary school level, but there lacks a clear understanding of how MTSS implementation may impact chronic absenteeism at the high school level.

Knowing that students at any age level missing 10% of school are at high-risk for dropping out of high school (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Keegan & Gable, 2016; Tobin & Sprague, 1999), the purpose of this study was to see how a component of a MTSS model like PBIS can be repurposed to address chronic absenteeism at the high school level. This study employed Cooper's (1982) ABA theory in the form of PBIS to impact chronic absenteeism at the high school level. Understanding the relationship between PBIS, as one component of an MTSS approach, and chronic absenteeism, through applied behavioral analysis, could possibly help support high school students, families, teachers, and school leaders in decreasing chronic absenteeism in secondary educational institutions (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

The intent of this literature review was to provide an overview on multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) elements like PBIS; explain chronic absenteeism through the theoretical lens of Cooper's (1982) ABA theory, and support the argument for repurposing successful MTSS policies already in place to address chronic absenteeism at the high school level. The goal of this

literature review was to identify successful PBIS interventions within the current research as a means to understand how these promising practices may support decreased chronic attendance rates for at-risk and chronically absent high school students. Another goal was to identify the causes of chronic absenteeism at the high school level and how schools can implement intervention strategies to support the students who meet this criterion. School climate was discussed as a way to connect how students feel about coming to and being at school as way to understand why they may be consistently absent.

The essential elements discussed in this literature review were not an exhaustive list but touched on some of the considerations found in the current research like factors related to school climate and school connectedness, multi-tiered systems of support like the PBIS model and causes of student chronic absenteeism. The figure below demonstrates a synopsis of what the reader found in the literature review.



Figure 1. Literature review synopsis

School Climate

School climate refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions and interacts with its stakeholders. Lewis and Sugai (2008) claim that when PBIS is implemented schoolwide with a strong sense of reliability and fidelity, school climate is improved. Students feel more connected to the adults on campus, participate in the curriculum at higher levels of engagement, and attend school more regularly, resulting in a lower percentage of students who are designated as chronically absent.

School Characteristics and Psychosocial Climate

When families decide where to attend high school, school characteristics come in to play in deciding what will be the best fit for the student. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the “psychosocial climate at school is influenced by such factors as policies related to discipline, opportunities for meaningful student participation, and teachers’ classroom management practices” (CDCP, 2009). When there is a negative psychosocial climate at a school site, students might feel less connected to school because of the unfair discipline practices or the lack of meaningful opportunities for students. When the school climate is positive, there is a higher chance of school connectedness with students and the students feel safer, which could result in students attending school more consistently.

School Safety

The perceptions of school safety are paramount when discussing school climate. A student who does not feel physically or mentally safe at school is more likely to not attend school. Wilson (2004) found that students at schools with negative climates and low levels of student connectedness “were significantly more likely to demonstrate high levels of aggression” (p. 295). Students who feel cared for by school staff and teachers tend to perceive the school environment as positive and welcoming - a place they can learn without feeling intimidated or scared. If we increase the feeling of safety students have at school, the levels of aggression and bullying will naturally decrease, along with chronic absenteeism. And when students feel safe, they are more likely to attend school and engage in their own education (Joyce, 2015; Wilson, 2004).

Staff-to-Student Relationships

School connectedness can be associated with a student's perception of how adults on campus treat them and care for them while at school (Wilson, 2004). Positive relationship building is important to set the tone for the learning environment a teacher creates in their classroom. Joyce (2015) found that students who feel that their teachers care about them are more engaged in school. Engagement could be used synonymously with school connectedness and a sense of belonging. Teachers, administrators, social workers, support staff and counselors all have a pivotal role to play in the lives of the students they interact with every day (Joyce, 2015).

Individualized counseling assistance for students who are struggling to connect to adults or peers can make the difference in a successful graduate versus a high school dropout. A lot of young adults do not “counseling services and interventions” that focus on strengthening students' connectedness to school resulted in “improved their postsecondary educational outcomes” (Lapan, Wells, Petersen, & McCann, 2014, p. 305). The role of the social worker and counselor providing those necessary interventions and guidance is imperative for students to remain in school and be successful (Joyce, 2015).

Peer and Family Relationships

Family and peer influences are determining factors in how students perceive their connectedness to school. Law, Cuskelly, and Carroll (2013) designed a study to measure peer influence and school connectedness. They found that students who reported strong connections to family also had strong connections with their school (Law et al., 2013). The amount of time that students spend at school and with their teachers and peers is significantly more time than they may spend at home. If both home and school environments are positive and foster a sense

of connectedness, they should contribute to more positive outcomes for students in terms of attendance, class passing rates, and minimal aggression. Studies have shown that one of the reasons why students come to school is to see their friends and interact with their social network or peers. If a student has a solid peer group, they are more likely to attend school on a more consistent basis (Durborow, 2017).

Multi-Tiered System of Support

When schools have a positive school climate and meaningful relationships with their stakeholders like students and families, they provide support to those stakeholders when concerns surface. McIntosh and Goodman (2016) discussed how blending the MTSS model of response to intervention (RTI) and the PBIS model is needed for educators to provide the amount of support necessary for the ongoing challenges that students are facing. Johnson, Smith and Harris (2009) detailed how RTI works as a part of a MTSS model in secondary schools, coordinating PBIS, attendance and academic support. MTSS is an evidence-based educational model that utilizes proactive “problem-solving techniques” that “integrate academic and behavioral” instructional practices and interventions (Gamm et al., 2019, p. 4). To this end, educators use different MTSS models to address different issues that arise with their students. One successful component of a MTSS in addressing challenging student behavior is PBIS (Gamm et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2009).

Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies

Definition of PBIS

PBIS refers to a MTSS directly related to ABA that was developed by Sugai and Horner (2002). It is an applied behavioral systematic approach to changing challenging behavior through positive interventions rather than punitive consequences. This model includes

establishing schoolwide expectations, explicitly teaching those expectations, correcting the behavioral errors, and then positively reinforcing those expectations when they are met (Sugai & Horner, 2002). When students present challenging behaviors, educators develop plans and interventions are put into place to improve these behaviors (Flannery, Frank, & Kato, 2012).

PBIS interventions are three-tiered; universal supports for all students, targeted interventions for some students, and individual supports for a few students (Flannery et al., 2012). The identified Tier 1 supports are in place for all students and these universal supports are successful with about 85% of the student population. The designated Tier 2 supports are implemented with the 10% of targeted students that are not internalizing the Tier 1 universal support. While the intentional Tier 3 and Tier 4 supports are individualized for the 5% of the student population that are not responding positively to the Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports designed to improve their behavior. Research has demonstrated that for high school educators to adapt the implementation process to these contextual influences, they must focus on key foundational systems (data, leadership, and communication), and that it is through these systems that high school educators can successfully implement the core PBIS features to achieve desired student outcomes (Flannery et al., 2012). Please refer to Figure 2 for a visual of the interventions that are associated with each tiered level.

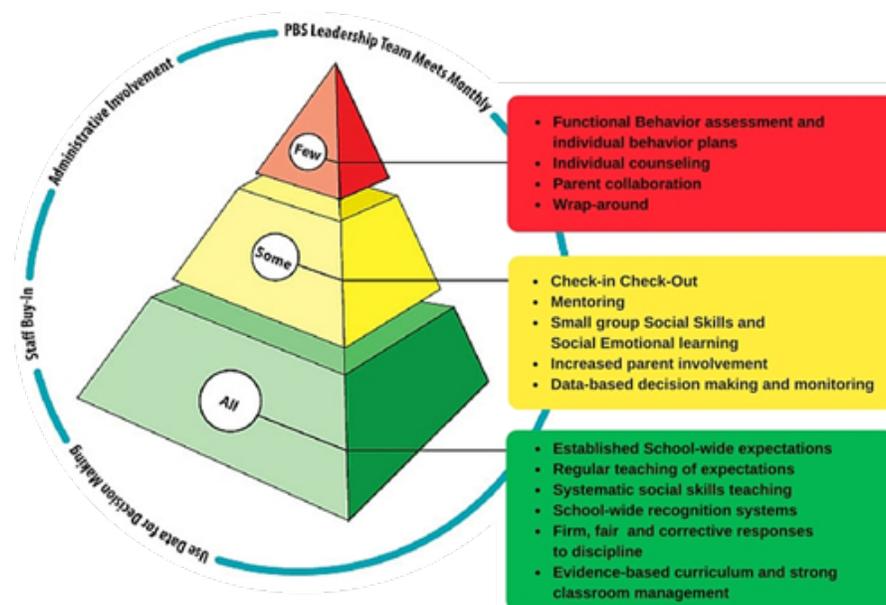


Figure 2. PBIS three-tiered framework

PBIS in the Classroom

The PBIS program is a proactive approach that allows educators to adopt and implement a system of evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated educational continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students (Kittelman, McIntosh, & Hoselton, 2019). This framework was selected for implementation at school sites as a solution to reduce referral and suspension rates and improve positive interactions between staff and students. The PBIS program is a schoolwide expectation of how students and staff should interact and behave while on campus, in class, and in the community. This program goes beyond conventional school rules such as the zero tolerance policies towards behavior that are detrimental to school culture and to certain targeted populations of students, including African American and Latino students, who are being suspended at much higher rates than their peers (Townsend, 2000).

The PBIS strategies implemented by staff include developing lesson plans that explicitly teach the schoolwide behavior expectations to students during the first several days of school, reiterating those expectations daily by embedding the schoolwide expectations into their curriculum, redirecting challenging behavior that doesn't meet the schoolwide expectations and replacing that behavior with an appropriate behavior, and celebrating student success in reaching and exceeding the behavior expectations by handing out rewards earned and developing a recognition system. The PBIS program calls out specific and intentional actions and recognizes student success in a formal way (Kittelman et al, 2019).

Chronic Absenteeism

Definition of Chronic Absenteeism

The average daily attendance (ADA) is defined as the total number of days that student has attended school divided by the total number of days of student instruction (Attendance Works, 2019). This formula is solely for funding purposes to determine how much money goes to the districts for ADA. When a student is absent from school, ADA is not claimed for that student for that absence.

Truancy is defined as a student missing school for more than 30 minutes with any good reason or excuse (Attendance Works, 2019). Basically, the student is missing school without permission from their parent or guardian and the school and family may be unaware of their whereabouts. Truant students may be subject to legal action, along with their legal guardians, for missing school without permission. In calculating truancy, only unexcused absences are counted rather than all absences. A student who is truant frequently can be considered chronically absent (Attendance Works, 2019).

Chronic absenteeism is defined as school absences that equal or exceed 10%, which equates to approximately two absent days a month during a single school year (Gottfried, 2019). When calculating chronic absenteeism rates for students, all excused and unexcused absences, including in and out of school suspensions, are included (Gottfried, 2019).

Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

Causes of chronic absenteeism throughout the literature revolve around four common factors; in-school, environmental, personal and family. These factors influence one way or another why students have trouble coming to school consistently. The framework below evolved from Dexter's (1981) investigative dissertation trying to understand why inner-city high school students are chronically absent. The graphic below shows the four causes of chronic absenteeism according to Dexter (1981).

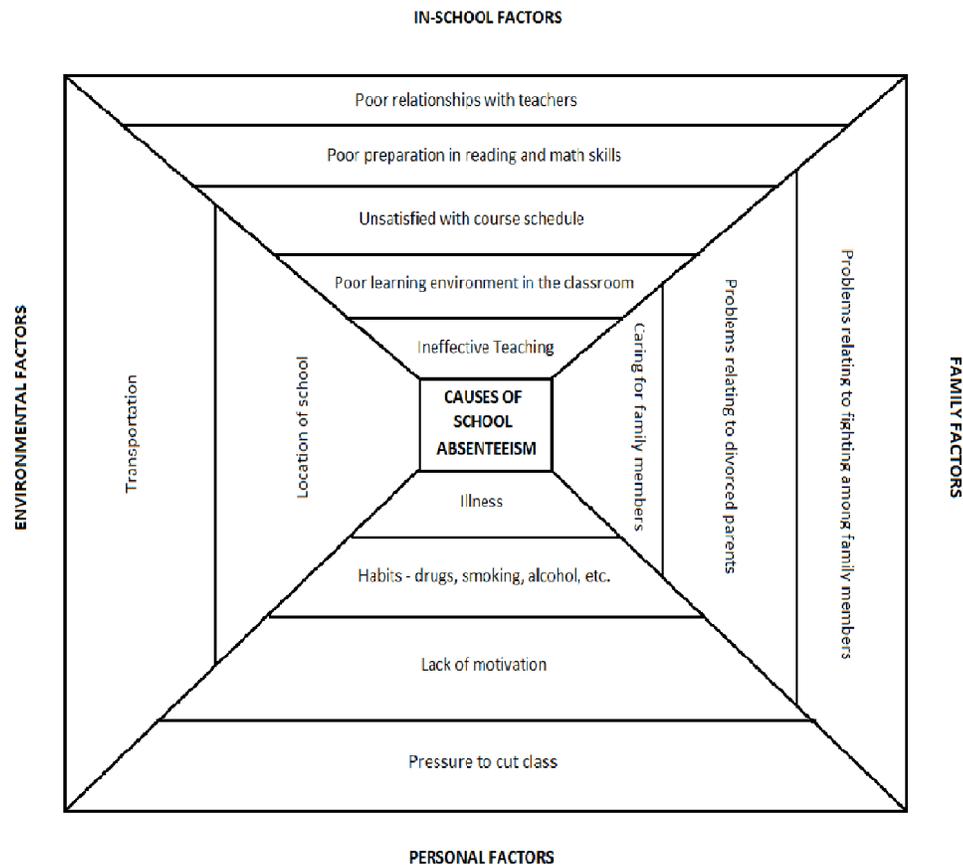


Figure 3. Dexter's (1981) causes of chronic absenteeism framework

According to the research, in-school factors include negative relationships with staff as well as curriculum and class assignments are not meaningful to the student (Dexter, 1981; Kittelman et al., 2019). Other in-school factors include ineffective teaching and a poor learning environment (Dexter, 1981; Kittelman et al., 2019). Family factors range from adverse relationships within the family, problems related to divorced parents, and the student being responsible for caring for a family member. Illness, risky behaviors with drugs or alcohol, lack of motivation and apathy and social pressures fall within the personal factor's domain.

Transportation and location are environmental factors that may contribute to students being chronically absent (Attendance Works, 2018; Dexter, 1981).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of action that provided a framework for this study of the impact of multi-tiered systems of support on chronic absenteeism at the high school level was Cooper's (1982) ABA theory.

Cooper's (1982) Applied Behavior Analysis Theory

Cooper's (1982) ABA theory is distinct when understanding how a MTSS component like PBIS works in an educational setting. Most frequently used with special education and autistic students, ABA is a form of therapy used to manage and improve challenging social, behavior, and life skills (Cooper, 1982). In the educational setting, interventions using the ABA approach focus on controlling negative behaviors by replacing punitive consequences with positive reinforcements for the behavior teachers want to see from their students. Students learn the correct behavior to display by seeing it modeled and rewarded (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007). Figure 4 provides a visual that shows how ABA might look in a classroom setting. When a teacher wants to encourage the behavior, they see in the student they use positive reinforcement to change the behavior rather than negative consequences or punishments. ABA is about encouraging the positive behavior which in turn discourages the negative behavior.

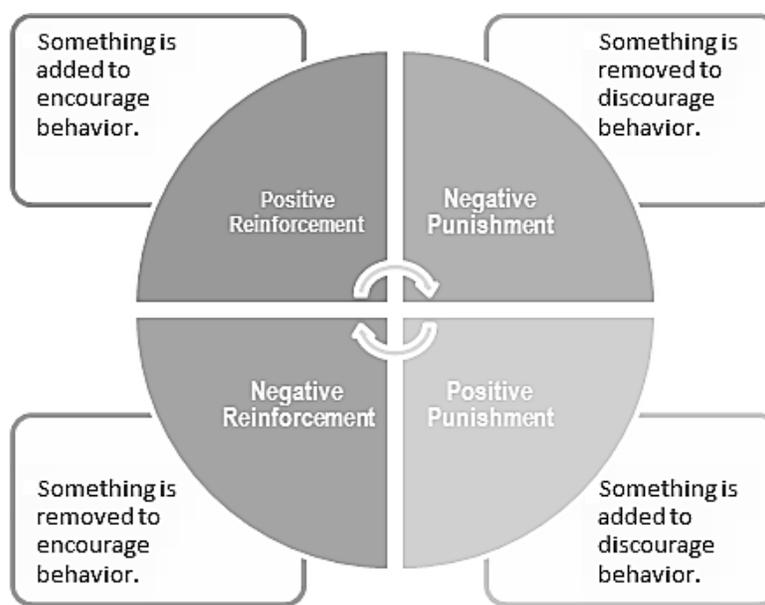


Figure 4. Cooper's (1982) applied behavior analysis (ABA) theory

Theoretical Connection to PBIS

Cooper's (1982) ABA theory underpinned the work of this study in that the elements associated with this theory speak to the way students learn in different environments. A student, as an innate person, is placed into several different learning environments throughout the day with their six-period high school course schedule. In each of those learning environments, there can be different expectations from each teacher in each classroom. In those different learning environments, behavior can be modeled in various ways. The PBIS approach brings a systematic method to how students learn to change their behavior through positive modeling and rewarding desired behavior (Cooper et al., 2007).

Cooper's (1982) ABA theory was tightly connected to this study. ABA concerns "the manipulation of environmental stimuli" to elicit a certain response or behavior (Cooper, 1982, p. 114). When a desired behavior is rewarded, it is more likely that same behavior will continue. ABA is experimental, and when utilized in education, it eliminates "trial and error learning"

(Cooper, 2007, p. 34). It can be used as an instructional technique to systematically change behavior in their classrooms (Cooper, 1982). PBIS uses the concepts of ABA in that it is a systematic instructional strategy that can improve challenging behavior in the classroom when following the tenants associated with the MTSS approach.

Chapter Summary

The findings from the literature review suggested that PBIS is a promising system and set of interventions for improving the attendance of students who are at-risk for becoming chronically absent and for those students who are already defined as chronically absent students. The methodology discussed in the next chapter described how this study used a quantitative approach to evaluate the repurposed implementation of the PBIS intervention program to impact the attendance rates of at-risk and chronically absent students at the high school level.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research has demonstrated that almost 50% of students in high school have low levels of school connectedness and “feel disenchanting with their school experiences” (Blum, 2005, p. 16). It is important to study the factors associated with school connectedness and how students’ lack of connectedness to school impacts their attendance. And if students at schools do not feel connected and choose to be absent from school, it is important to find out the best way to change that. The purpose of this study was to assess if effective PBIS can be a transferrable intervention for students who have been identified as at-risk and chronically absent. This study examined if evidence-based PBIS can be used to decrease chronic absenteeism with targeted students. This study wanted to demonstrate how effective, evidence-based PBIS interventions that have addressed and improved challenging student behavior schoolwide, can be transferred to combat the factors associated with chronic absenteeism. The goals of this study were to identify the most effective PBIS intervention strategies successful in improving student behavior and use those strategies on targeted chronically absent students to see if their chronic absenteeism attendance rates decreased.

The study methodology is the topic for Chapter 3. This methodology chapter is organized by first discussing which research questions are to be answered and the hypothesis associated with each question. Then the design of the study and the explanation of the variables along with the method of research that was used is discussed. Participant selection and procedures within the study and how the data will be collected and analyzed is detailed as well. This chapter concludes with ethical considerations and limitations of the study along with a summary of the chapter.

Research Questions/Hypothesis

The objective of this research study was to determine whether PBIS intervention strategies can be used to promote different outcomes with chronically absent students. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1.

Can PBIS intervention strategies be used as an approach to decrease chronic absenteeism at the high school level?

Research Question 2.

How effective is each PBIS intervention tier in reducing chronic absenteeism at the high school level?

Hypothesis.

If PBIS intervention strategies can improve student behaviors at the high school level, then those strategies can be applied to decrease chronic absenteeism in high school students.

Research Design

This study took on a program evaluation quantitative design approach, which could be considered influence or outcome objective research. Influence objective research refers to “the application of previous research to control various aspects of the world” (Johnson & Christianson, 2008, p. 124). The previously implemented intervention program that uses the PBIS model of intervention strategies was applied towards attendance rates for chronically absent high school students.

The methodology chosen for this research study was the best methodology because there was a tiered intervention program that was to be evaluated to see if improvement outcomes are attained for at-risk and chronically absent high school students. The goals of this study existed to identify the PBIS intervention strategies that have been successful in improving challenging student behavior and repurpose those interventions with the population of at-risk and chronically absent students to see if their chronic absenteeism attendance rates decrease.

Program Site

Pseudonym UHS (UHS) is an innovative health care-themed small high school in the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). The school is open to any student in the Sacramento area. UHS administrators work with local health care providers to give students experience and exposure to a variety of health care professions while still in high school. UHS is a certified *Linked Learning* and *Nation Academy Foundation* school. The mission of UHS is to provide students with an outstanding education, rich with relevant academic, application and leadership experiences – using healthcare as a theme (SCUSD, 2019). UHS serves approximately 250 students, employs sixteen educators, one special education social worker, two counselors, nine support staff, and one principal. The population of students mirrors the Sacramento region in terms of ethnic and racial diversity with 46% Latino, 26% African American, 16% Asian and the other 12% either Caucasian or identified as two or more races or other students (Erbstein, 2014).

The results of this research study can be generalized to other school sites and other student populations. The PBIS tiered intervention program that was repurposed by UHS administrators to utilize as an intervention to improve chronically absent students' attendance rates can be generalized to any school site with chronically absent students. The research study site stood to benefit from this intervention program because the target population of chronically absent students' attendance rates and credits earned towards graduation are likely to improve with improved school attendance for each student. Student retention, grade point average, school connectedness and school average daily attendance (ADA) can also be improved when students attend school more regularly (Freeman, et al., 2016).

Researcher Role

According to Herr and Anderson (2005), there are several possible research positionalities, one being the position of “outsider in collaboration with insiders” (p. 38). This research study was potentially about organizational transformation in regard to school culture and decreasing student chronic absenteeism dramatically, especially if the traditions of community empowerment and radical change from the continuum are considered.

The principal investigator assumed this position because they were an outsider looking in. Because of the educational experience and the knowledge base of the principal investigator; they were also able to see the study from an insider’s perspective. There is also the insider in collaboration with other insider’s viewpoint that could be taken although that might mean the principal investigator is a little too close to the research study.

If the outside/insider approach was taken, it was easy to “go native” and slip into co-participation or immersion within the study. As the outsider, more of the “limited participation” degree of involvement was sought (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 40). If the insider research role is chosen, then possible immersion or co-participation might be more appropriate as to the degree of the lead researcher’s involvement (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

In the spirit of transparency, the principal investigator made her research presence known (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) about her position and purpose in the study. In that sense, portrayal was overt and participating was considered full. That approach was justified because being fully invested and transparent was necessary to gain the trust of the participants. With the principal of the research study site being the principal investigator, they were firmly rooted as an insider participant and needed to address the issue of bias due to their positionality. Personal

relationships the school principal has were leveraged to mitigate any unintentional influences on the research study.

Methods

Data Collection Tools

The tools used for quantitative data collection to evaluate whether or not the repurposed PBIS intervention program is successful in decreasing student chronic absenteeism rates were baseline student attendance data and post-intervention student attendance pulled from UHS student information system called Infinite Campus. Archival student attendance data was collected to gather a baseline of all students' attendance rates prior to specific students qualifying by identified criteria for the study, resulting in the student participating in the attendance intervention program at UHS. Once amassed and analyzed, the quantitative data were assessed to evaluate whether or not the repurposed, PBIS intervention strategies were effective with the selected population of at-risk and chronically absent high school students in decreasing their chronic absenteeism attendance rates.

Participants and Sampling

UHS has a PBIS Team that consists of the high school principal, intervention teacher and attendance technician. This PBIS Team was responsible for using the PBIS strategies and developing the attendance intervention strategies to be used with the students who were identified as chronically absent. Only the principal investigator knew which students were involved in the research study but the PBIS team knew which students were involved in the entire intervention program.

A MTSS early identification system, researched from Chang and Romero (2008), was developed to see which students were on target for becoming at-risk and chronically absent.

Students in the PBIS intervention program were those students who met the criteria of at-risk and chronically absent students in the Tier 2 (targeted) and Tier 3 and 4 (intensive) levels, as defined by the California Department of Education. The identified Tier 1 universal supports were in place for all students schoolwide and worked with about 85% of the student population. The designated Tier 2 supports were implemented with the percentage of targeted students who were at risk of becoming chronically absent, which is about 10% of the student population, as they were not internalizing the Tier 1 support. And the intensive Tier 3 and Tier 4 supports were individualized for each of the select few students, about 5% of the student population, that were not responding positively to the Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports designed to improve their attendance rate. The defined chronically absent student went through all tiers of interventions so to study those students would control for which tier was most effective.

All students schoolwide were in the initial population for Tier 1. Students that weren't responding positively to the universal Tier 1 interventions were selected by structural sampling to receive targeted Tier 2 interventions, which placed them at-risk of becoming chronically absent. Students that didn't respond positively to the targeted Tier 2 interventions were selected to receive Tier 3 and 4 intensive interventions, meeting the definition of a chronically absent student.

UHS students whose baseline attendance rates landed in the Tier 2 – 4 levels were selected to be in the research study, even though all students were in the schoolwide intervention program. Students' archival attendance data, pre and post intervention program, was collected. The rationale for choosing structural sampling versus random sampling was based on the fact that students who remained in Tier 1 universal supports did not fit the definition of an at-risk or chronically absent student and the attendance intervention program criteria put participants into

the tiered intervention levels. The students chosen for this research study were purposely selected based on their attendance rate percentage and whether or not that fell within the range of an at-risk and chronically absent student.

The student criteria for placement in intervention tiers coincided with the students' attendance rates. Tier 1 students had an attendance rate 91-100% while Tier 2 students had an attendance rate between 81-90.99%, putting them at risk for becoming chronically absent. Students whose attendance rates fell within 71-80.99 % were placed into Tier 3 and any student who had a baseline attendance rate of 70.99% or below was placed into the Tier 4 attendance level. Students in Tiers 2, 3 and 4 qualified as chronically absent by definition. Random sampling would not be appropriate because not all students engage in chronic absenteeism or have attendance issues.

Variables and Level of Measurement

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether or not an implemented chronic absenteeism intervention program modeled after a PBIS intervention program reduces chronic absenteeism in high school students at an urban high school within Sacramento, California. The independent variable was the chronic absenteeism intervention program that was modeled after the PBIS intervention program, repurposing the prior successful PBIS program that addressed challenging behaviors in students to address chronic absenteeism.

The dependent variable was the chronic absenteeism rate, inversely related to student attendance rates. As a student's chronic absenteeism percentage declines, the student's average daily attendance rate improves. Chronic absenteeism data was continuous and numeric on an interval scale in percentages of days missed. The chronic absenteeism intervention program was

categorical. Pre and post intervention program student absenteeism rates were disaggregated by Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 and Tier 4 qualifying levels.

Data Collection

Pre- and post-intervention attendance program data was obtained at UHS through archival student attendance data per individual student. This archival data was housed in Infinite Campus, which is the student information system used by UHS. During the study, real time measurement was taken by way of weekly reports through Infinite Campus to determine tier movement for participants. Participants' attendance rates were tracked weekly for 10 weeks to see how effective each tier of intervention had been. Students moved fluidly between intervention tiers during the 10-week research study, but only the baseline and post-intervention program attendance data collected was analyzed for improvement.

Data Analysis

Once the archival data was collected from the pre and post-intervention program student attendance rates, the data was tabled and analyzed. Tables were developed designating which level of attendance rate tiers students qualified for, the percentage of participant movement between said attendance rate tiers, and the percentage of participants who improved their attendance rates within attendance rate tiers. Descriptive statistics explained the movement between and within tiers and illuminated outliers within the data that contradicted the trend line.

Validity and Reliability

There were threats to internal validity and external validity. An internal threat to validity in this study was related to the participants, such as mortality (student drop out). With the implementation of the tiered interventions addressing chronic absenteeism in the targeted population of students, those that responded positively to the intervention program as a whole

would be dismissed from the targeted tiered intervention program as it was not necessary anymore once their attendance rates improved. The threat of diffusion of treatments was also a threat to internal validity because the students in the intervention tiers could speak and learn from each other during the study. The external validity threats were the interaction of setting and treatment, meaning this study would not be able to generalize the outcome to any other school because it was specific to UHS students. There was also a systemic bias of students that attend UHS because 86% of the student population comes from poverty. Students who come from poverty typically have higher school absenteeism rates than students who do not qualify for free and reduced lunch programs (Balkis, Arslan, & Duru, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

The research conducted in this study was used to inform best attendance intervention practices at UHS. The students at UHS are a protected group of high school students including a vulnerable population. Participants' rights were protected by following the IRB process because human subjects are being used. No harm came to any participant and consent forms were obtained from each participant before starting the study. Confidentiality within the research study and to the public was paramount, as the ethics of student privacy rights in an educational setting cannot be violated. Only students selected in the target population of chronically absent students and their parents knew they were involved in this research study. Students outside as well as inside of the research study did not have knowledge of what intervention tier students were associated with. Confidentiality was maintained during, after and in reporting the results by using coded identification numbers for each student.

The UHS PBIS Team had knowledge of the intervention tiers and which students were selected to be in each tier, but the PBIS Team did not have the ability to move a student from one

tier to the next, prohibiting influence over mortality. The principal investigator was the only one who had access to the student information system data for the targeted student population during the research study. Educators have access to the school population attendance data, but the principal investigator was the only one who knew which students were included in the research study. All digital data were maintained confidentially on the principal investigator's password protected computer and will remain there for one year after the research study concludes. All hard copy attendance data, including consent forms, were placed in a locked home filing cabinet and will remain for one year after the completion of the research study and then shredded and recycled.

There was minimal psychological and sociological risk to the participants in this research study because archival data was used for each participant. In order to mitigate the risk of a participant being embarrassed about needing attendance intervention due to their chronic absenteeism rate, a social worker was on site to meet with students and families feeling emotional about their attendance status. The PBIS team and the principal investigator's professional training and experience working with high school students helped mitigate the risk during the research study. The student population involved in this research study may or may not benefit but potential benefits to each student with attendance issues were that the interventions they received might have worked and the student improved their attendance rate. Being in school more often, the student may see an increase in their grades which may result in passing more classes and earning credits towards graduating from high school.

Limitations

Limitations of this study were students checking in and out of school that were initially part of the study since SCUSD is considered a transient district. Students in SCUSD are able to

enroll at any school within the district and can attend school outside of the school district, resulting in variable enrollment at school sites and students moving in and out of schools by choice (SCUSD, 2019). The mitigating factor for the research study site was that the historical turnover rate is very low. Chronically absent students tend to remain at the same school because there is not a benefit to changing schools, unless location and transportation are the reasons for the absences. If environmental factors are the main reason a student is chronically absent and they withdraw from school, which could be a considerable limitation to the research study.

The lack of parental consent was also a limitation as that constrained the target student population within the research study if students did not return a signed consent form. School climate being positive and strong relationships between school and families was an important mitigating factor because trust between students, families and the PBIS team was solid and consent to participate was forthcoming because those things existed at the research study site.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the context the study was conducted in, the methodology and design employed to answer the inquiry questions, the defined variables, and described briefly the participants selected, the tools of instrumentation used and how the data was collected and analyzed. The issues of validity and ethical considerations were addressed as well as different limitations that occurred within the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study sought to understand how effective, evidence based PBIS that have addressed and improved challenging student behavior schoolwide, can be transferred to combat the factors associated with chronic absenteeism. The goals of this study were to identify the most effective PBIS intervention strategies successful in improving student behavior and use those strategies on targeted chronically absent students to see if their attendance improves. The objective of this research study was to determine whether PBIS intervention strategies can be used to promote different outcomes with chronically absent students.

Research Questions/Hypothesis

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1.

Can PBIS intervention strategies be repurposed as an approach to decrease chronic absenteeism at the high school level?

Research Question 2. How effective is each PBIS intervention tier in reducing chronic absenteeism at the high school level?

Hypothesis. If PBIS intervention strategies can decrease challenging student behaviors at the high school level, then those strategies can be used to decrease chronic absenteeism in high school students.

Data Collection

Archival attendance data was collected from the student information system at UHS for 201 students. Those students were placed in Tiers 1 through 4 based on their attendance rates. Students' whose attendance fell within the range of 91-100% were placed in Tier 1 with the least amount of interventions applied. Another group of students were placed in Tier 2 because their attendance rate was between 81- 90.99%. Students' with attendance rates of 71-80.99% and

71% and below were placed into Tiers 3 and 4, respectively. Attendance tiers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Attendance Tiers

<i>Tier</i>			
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
91-100%	81-90.99%	71-80.99%	70.99% and below

Students were placed in attendance tiers based on their pre-intervention program attendance rate; the 10-week intervention program started. The expected findings were that attendance rates would improve, either within the same tier, or between tiers, for participants in the 10-week intervention program.

Data Overview

The data was collected, and students were sorted into attendance tiers based on their pre-intervention program data. Out of 201 students, the pre-intervention data showed that 150 participants had attendance rates that fell within the Tier 1 range, while 45 students were placed in Tier 2. Four students qualified for Tier 3, and only two students have attendance rates so low as to require placement in Tier 4. After students were placed in their respective tiers, the attendance intervention program began. Participants were given weekly repurposed PBIS interventions based on their tier for the next 10 weeks. Each week, attendance rates were updated and recorded, and participants were then moved into tiers based on their attendance rate. The intervention program was fluid and students could move within tiers and between tiers based

on their attendance rates updated each week. See Table 2 below for a comparison between the PBIS interventions and the repurposed PBIS attendance interventions used in this study.

Table 2
Comparison of PBIS and UHS Attendance Interventions

<i>Tier Level</i>	<i>PBIS Interventions</i>	<i>UHS Attendance Interventions</i>
Tier 1	Universal supports are in place for all students, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching behavioral expectations, • phone calls home and, • home visits for all 9th graders 	Universal supports are in place for all students, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone calls home when students miss one or more periods per school day
Tier 2	Targeted interventions with the students not internalizing the Tier I support, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Study Team (SST) meetings with families, • goal setting activities, and • mentoring programs 	Targeted interventions with the participants not internalizing Tier 1 support, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an SST meeting with the participant, teachers, counselor, administrator and parents/guardians to determine why absent more than 10% of the time, • participant sets attendance goals considering the external factors that hinder daily school attendance
Tier 3	Intensive interventions for the students not responding positively to Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • behavior contracts, • online courses in a smaller learning environment, and • possibly modifying a student's schedule 	Intensive interventions for participants with attendance rates from 71 – 80.99%: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student attendance review team meeting with the participant, teachers, counselor, administrator and parents/guardians to discuss their chronic absenteeism issue and sign a legally binding SART contract
Tier 4	Not applicable	Intensive interventions for participants with attendance rates from 70.99% and below who went through the SART process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) meeting involving the student, the parent or guardian, school district officials and the district attorney

During the 10-week intervention program, the Tier 1 intervention consisted of an automatic phone call home to any student that missed one period of school or more for that day, which is the schoolwide policy-based intervention that all students receive regardless of being a participant in an intervention program. Interventions that occurred in Tier 2 were a Student Study Team (SST) meeting with each participant, their teachers, a counselor, administrator and their parent or guardian where a conversation took place around why they were missing school more than 10% of the time and a goal setting session where the participant set attendance goals with guidance from the researcher considering the external factors that hinder daily school attendance for the participant.

Tiers 3 and 4 included similar interventions, the latter more severe than the former. An intervention called a Student Attendance Review Team (SART) meeting was held for participants in Tier 3, at which participants met with their teachers, a counselor, administration and their parents to discuss their chronic absenteeism issue and sign a SART contract. The SART contract is a legally binding agreement that the student will attend school on a daily basis, and if they are absent, a medical or emergency reason and documentation must be provided. Tier 4 participants already went through the SART process before the research study began, so their intervention consisted of the next step, the Student Attendance Review Board (SARB). The SARB process involved the student, the parent or guardian, school district officials and the district attorney. It is rare, but there is always a chance, due to compulsory attendance laws, the parent or guardian can serve jail time for not following the law and ensuring the child in their care attends school (Rafa, 2017).

When the 10-week intervention program ended, Tier 1 had 146 participants and Tier 2 had 49 participants. Tier 3 and 4 combined had six participants post-intervention program. The

number of participants in each tier accounts for the movement between tiers, meaning whether or not a participant improved their attendance rate in 10 weeks and moved up a tier, or decreased their attendance rate in 10 weeks and moved down a tier. There was also the possibility that participants would remain in the same tier but improve or decline in their attendance rate. Movement within tiers resulted in a different set of data collected.

Data Analysis

The intention of this study is to see if repurposed PBIS intervention strategies can be used as an approach to address chronic absenteeism by improving attendance rates in students in high school. The outcome of the data is to see if participants improved their attendance rates at the end of the 10-week intervention program. Improvement in attendance can be shown not only by movement between tiers but movement within tiers. Table 3 below shows the participants who moved between tiers.

Table 3
Number of Students Who Moved Between Tiers

	<i>Tier</i>				
	<i>1 (91-100% Attendance)</i>	<i>2 (81-90.99% Attendance)</i>	<i>3 (71-80.99% Attendance)</i>	<i>4 (70.99% & below Attendance)</i>	
<i>Pre- Intervention Tier Totals</i>	<i>Post- intervention Tier</i>	<i>Post- intervention Tier</i>	<i>Post- intervention Tier</i>	<i>Post- intervention Tier</i>	<i>Post- intervention Tier Totals</i>
1 (150)	Stayed (139)	Dropped (11)	Dropped (0)	Dropped (0)	1 (146)
2 (45)	Moved up (7)	Stayed (36)	Dropped (2)	Dropped (0)	2 (49)
3 and 4 (6)	Moved up (0)	Moved up (3)	Stayed (3)	Dropped (0)	3 and 4 (6)

In the pre-intervention tier column is the tier in which participants started, and in the post-intervention tier column is the intervention tier in which participants finished after engaging in the 10-week intervention program. There were 150 participants who started in Tier 1 with an attendance rate of 91-100%, which did not qualify them for the attendance intervention program in this study because they did not fit the study criteria for the attendance intervention program. Regardless of their qualification status in this study, Tier 1 participants still received the schoolwide universal intervention of an automated phone call when they were absent. Of the 150 students that started with an attendance rate of 91% or higher in Tier 1, 7% dropped into Tier 2 intervention range while the other 139 students remained in Tier 1. This is the most significant drop of all four tiers and could be attributed to the lack of effective attendance

intervention offered to those students because they were not in the study's attendance intervention program.

The Tier 2 pre-intervention program started with 45 participants and maintained the majority of participants, 80%, while moving 15% of the participants to Tier 1 based on their improved attendance. This positive change in attendance could be attributed to the consistent attendance interventions they received. However, two participants dropped from Tier 2 to Tier 3 based on their decreased attendance. One of those students was an emotionally disturbed student in the Special Day Class who was going through severe mental health issues during the time the intervention program was implemented (April to June) and missed a tremendous amount of school for doctor's appointments and therapy sessions. The other student missed the Tier 2 cut-off by .01%, placing her in Tier 3.

Tier 3 began with four participants showing serious attendance concerns and needing numerous interventions. After participating in the intervention program, 50% of these tiered participants improved their attendance and moved into Tier 3 while the other 50% of participants stayed in Tier 3. Tier 4 had identical results as Tier 3, with 50% of participants moving to the tier above and improving their attendance while the other 50% remained in Tier 4.

Movement within tiers may be a more significant change than movement between tiers. The table below shows the movement of participant's attendance rates within each tier, resulting in improvements in participant attendance even though they didn't move up in intervention tiers.

Table 4
Student Movement Within Tiers

	<i>Tier</i>			
	<i>1</i> <i>(91-100%</i> <i>Attendance)</i>	<i>2</i> <i>(81-90.99%</i> <i>Attendance)</i>	<i>3</i> <i>(71-80.99%</i> <i>Attendance)</i>	<i>4</i> <i>(70.99% &</i> <i>below</i> <i>Attendance)</i>
% of Students who Improved	36%	42%	50%	50%

The results of this study could be generalized to similar educational institutions with comparable student demographics and populations. And if schools and school districts have parallel rates of poverty as Urban High School, this study could result in similar outcomes. For those schools and school districts with lower-poverty rates and differing demographics and populations, the implication that this study might be successful with any high school student across school districts could be confirmed with additional research studies.

Results Linked to Research Questions

The above analysis of the data lends itself to answering the study's two research questions.

Research Question 1

The first question this research study sought to answer is whether or not PBIS intervention strategies be used as an approach to decrease chronic absenteeism. According to the archival attendance data collected and the results of the 10-week intervention program results, it was determined that PBIS intervention strategies can be used as an approach to decrease chronic absenteeism in high school students.

The PBIS intervention strategies can be repurposed to address chronic absenteeism in high school students by following the design of the MTSSs structure; using universal interventions for the majority of the students, more intense interventions for the 10% or so that don't respond to the universal interventions, and the most intense interventions for the top 5% of students that don't respond to Tier 1 or Tier 2 interventions (McIntosh and Goodman, 2016). This study's approach used attendance interventions rather than behavioral interventions to decrease chronic absenteeism at the high school level.

Research Question 2

The second question this research study sought to answer is how effective each tier is in reducing absenteeism. The intervention program results showed that Tiers 3 and 4 were the most effective tiers with 50% of their participants improving their attendance. Tier 2 was a close runner-up, boasting a 42% increase in attendance rates for that level's participants, and Tier 1 was showed a 7% decrease in attendance rates while 36% of participants improved their attendance and 93% of participants remained in Tier 1.

Threats to Validity

The internal threat of mortality was addressed in the data analysis by showing the movement between tiers, resulting in an overall 65% improvement in attendance between intervention tiers. The other internal threat of validity, threat of diffusion of treatments, where students could speak and learn from each other in treatment, was not controlled for in this study.

The external validity threat regarding systemic bias could not be controlled for in this study because Urban High School's student population falls is set within the high-poverty range of 86% Title I students. Balkis, et. al., (2016), assert that students who come from poverty typically have higher school absenteeism rates than students who do not qualify for free and

reduced lunch programs. The other external threat of interaction of setting and treatment was discussed in the Chapter 4 analysis.

Chapter Summary

The results of this research study affirm the research questions that PBIS strategies can be repurposed to address chronic absenteeism at the high school level and having an effective attendance intervention program can improve attendance rates between and within attendance tiers in high school students, resulting in reduced chronic absenteeism. The most effective tier in improving attendance rates and reducing chronic absenteeism was both Tier 3 and Tier 4, with each tier resulting in 50% of participants increasing their attendance rates and reducing chronic absenteeism. Dexter (1981) identified the various causes of chronic absenteeism, which included factors associated with family, personal, environmental and in-school influences. The cause of in-school influence factors is where PBIS, MTSS and attendance intervention programs can have a significant impact on students and their attendance rates.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to understand how evidence based PBIS, which successfully addressed and improved challenging student behavior schoolwide through multi-tiered systems of support, could be restructured to address the reasons students were chronically at UHS and lower chronic absenteeism attendance rates. The goals of this study were to identify the prior PBIS intervention strategies successful in improving student behavior and using those strategies on targeted at-risk and chronically absent students to see if their attendance improves. Knowing that students who are chronically absent are at high-risk for dropping out of high school, the purpose of this study was to examine whether or not previously determined successful PBIS intervention strategies could be repurposed to decrease chronic absenteeism with UHS students.

The results of this research study addressed the research questions. Previously successful PBIS strategies used to address challenging behavior in high school students can be repurposed to address improvement of attendance rates in chronically absent high school students. In addition, having an effective attendance intervention program can improve attendance rates between and within attendance tiers in high school students, resulting in reduced chronic absenteeism. The most effective tiers in improving attendance rates and reducing chronic absenteeism were both Tier 3 and Tier 4, with each tier resulting in 50% of participants increasing their attendance rates and reducing students' chronic absenteeism.

When looking at tier effectiveness, the results demonstrate the attendance intervention participants improved their attendance both within attendance tier levels and between attendance tier levels. An average of 45% of attendance intervention program participants whose baseline attendance rates before the 10-week intervention program started in a specific tier were able to

improve their attendance rates within the same tier, meaning they stayed in the same tier they started in, but still improved their attendance rate. Additionally, 65% of attendance intervention participants improved their attendance significantly, moving them up into an improved attendance tier by the end of the 10-week attendance intervention program.

Discussion

During the study, there were unanticipated, personal events of participants that impacted the results of the study. In analyzing the data, it became apparent that there were a few outliers that contradicted the overall data trend and decreased their attendance rates significantly, regardless of how many interventions they received. In addition to the students mentioned in the data overview in Chapter 4, there were a few outlier situations that needed to be narratively explained because of their unique effect on attendance rate declines.

One student whose baseline attendance rate placed him into Tier 2 did not receive the interventions offered during the attendance intervention program because of one of Dexter's (1981) external factors which was out of his control. This student was unable to attend the student study team meetings (SST) and set attendance goals because his mother had to attend a court-order in-patient drug program for 60 days and he had to go live with his grandmother outside of the SCUSD district lines, causing a major limitation in transportation. His starting attendance rate was a solid 89.14% but declined rapidly in the 10-week intervention program to a post-intervention attendance rate of 79.11%, dropping him into Tier 3 based on a 10% decline in attendance rate. Even though UHS is an open enrollment school, meaning students who live outside of the school district are still able to attend schools within the school district. However, the student missed a tremendous amount of school during the 10-week intervention program due to transportation issues.

Another student started in Tier 1 with a 96.60% baseline attendance rate, which is exceptionally high for a Title I school such as UHS. During the fourth quarter - when the attendance intervention program began - this student fell into Tier 2 with a post-intervention attendance rate of 90.52%. The reason for this nearly 6% drop in attendance rate was because this particular student started to cut school to smoke marijuana with his neighbor after his mother went to work. He didn't want to come to school under the influence because he knew that the consequences would be in-school suspension and that his mother would find out if he was caught. His choice was to tell his mother he was "sick" and stayed home on the days he smoked with his neighbor, so his attendance started to quickly decrease. The student admitted to this during the SST meeting during the Tier 2 intervention he received. A social worker was present and continued working with the family afterwards to get the student's attendance back on track.

Students who had attendance rates improve dramatically - well outside of the trend line - were mostly 12th grade students whose baseline attendance rates placed them in Tier 2 during the fourth quarter. These 28 students were required to sign a *senior contract*, which resulted in significant improvements in their post-intervention attendance results, finishing in Tier 1. The senior contract is a letter of agreement signed by 12th grade students, who promise, among other things, to have an attendance rate of 90% or better by the last week before graduation (SCUSD, 2019). Students who fail to meet this contractual obligation cannot participate in the graduation ceremony. They still receive their diploma, but participation in the ceremony is a privilege rather than a student's right. That contract alone, historically, motivates UHS seniors to come to school so their attendance rate is above 90% when it comes time to walk across the stage (SCUSD, 2019).

The elements that impact student attendance beyond the reach of the attendance intervention program should be considered when designing a school-wide attendance intervention program. Dexter (1981) categorized factors that influenced student attendance into four categories: (a) environmental, (b) personal, (c) family and (d) in-school influences. According to his research, educators need to consider these factors when discussing attendance interventions for students that struggle coming to school (Dexter, 1981). These considerations have clear implications for improving attendance intervention strategies.

Implications and Recommendations for Attendance Intervention Strategies

School-based attendance intervention programs should involve all stakeholders when being designed and should consider external factors out of the school's control as well as causes of chronic absenteeism that the school intervention team can mitigate (Sheldon and Epstein, 2004). This study employed certain strategies to combat chronic absenteeism based on a tiered-intervention process but there are ways it could be strengthened through future research on best-evidence strategies for improving student attendance. Following are some of the factors that should be considered in research and development of evidence-based attendance intervention strategies.

The successful interventions that were involved in Tier 3 and 4 of the 10-week intervention program, specifically the student attendance review team and student attendance review board contracts, made a huge impact on the participants in those tiers. One suggestion is that those interventions happen in earlier tiers, so students don't even reach the higher levels of chronic absenteeism in Tier 3 and Tier 4, where improvement is difficult.

Another suggestion for improving the attendance intervention program is to reduce the range within the attendance tiers, which may be too broad. A smaller attendance percentage

range could allow the school to fine tune their site-specific targeted interventions and drill down on precise successful actions for each participant within the smaller tiered range. This could also show more movement between tiers because the attendance intervention program is fluid by design.

Further consideration should be given to strengthening the universal, or Tier 1, interventions that all students receive according to their schoolwide attendance policy. For this study, only an automated phone call home was scheduled if a student missed one period or more of school day. In Table 2 of Chapter 4, PBIS interventions for Tier 1 include teaching of schoolwide behaviors and home visits for all 9th grade students. This study did not include the teaching of good attendance practices and what that means and looks like in classrooms. It did not include discussion with students in a classroom setting about what chronic absenteeism is and how that will impact their futures in terms of dropout rates, lower grades and lower chances of graduation from high school.

PBIS intervention strategies align with Cooper's (1982) ABA through showing and teaching what good behaviors, like attending school regularly, look like to improve the behavior of students. By explicitly teaching good attendance behaviors to students struggling with their attendance and visiting homes of students with declining attendance rates, perhaps Tier 1 in this study would have not seen a 7% drop in student attendance rates. Changing the school policy to include these interventions for Tier 1 students could have major implications for decreasing chronic absenteeism rates at the high school level.

There are also state attendance policy issues to consider when addressing chronic absenteeism, both at the primary and secondary school levels. Longnecker and Blanco (2003), believe it will "take some time before policy catches up." Currently in California, average daily

attendance (ADA) determines funding for school sites. ADA is calculated by taking the total number of days of attendance for all enrolled students divided by the total number of days in the regular school year. A student attending every day would equal one ADA (Sheldon, 2007). Because base funding is determined by ADA, it is imperative that students attend school as many days as possible during the school year. When students don't come to school, the ADA drops and subsequently funding for the school is decreased. This in turn leads to less funding for, or even closure, of programs such as art and sports, as well as loss of funds for instructional materials and technology at school sites. This particularly affects Title I schools with high poverty rates, where chronic absenteeism is more likely to be an issue. If funding were based on enrollment, the number of students enrolled in the school, rather than ADA, funding for schools would not be impacted as much by attendance rates (Pehlivan, 2011).

Implications for Future Research

This study focused on PBIS being repurposed to address chronic absenteeism in Title I high school students. The findings support the need for a greater effort on the part of secondary educational experts to engage in follow-up studies geared towards decreasing chronic absenteeism and understanding the reasons for chronic absenteeism at the high school level. As a result of this study, further research could be conducted concerning the impact of chronic absenteeism tied directly to each of Dexter's (1981) external factors.

The outliers discussed impacted the data sets and the correlations don't necessarily capture the narrative behind the outliers. These specific student stories point to factors beyond the school's control. One of Dexter's (1981) external factors stated is environmental, specifically transportation. A research study could be conducted relating environmental issues

that high school students face to their attendance rates and how educators can address those issues, like buying bus passes or modifying student schedules.

Another study could be conducted tying high school student attendance issues to personal factors including drug use. The study connecting drug use to chronic absenteeism could include suggestions for what school leaders could do when attendance issues arise due to the personal choices of students participating in drug use. Community resources could be provided by counselors based on the results of the study and what impact it could make on decreasing chronic absenteeism of high school students.

Connecting family influences to attendance rates is another further research implication in that some of this study's attendance intervention program participants were required to attend medical appointments and serve as interpreters for family members that did not know English and had trouble communicating in their communities. Perhaps a longitudinal study could be conducted researching the long-term impacts of cultural influences and traditions on high school student attendance rates.

The fourth of Dexter's (1981) causes of chronic absenteeism is an element that the school can have some influence over. In-school factors associated with why students in high school are chronically absent include relationships with teachers and peers as well as external motivation. The Senior Contract was a great example of that in this study. Future research studies could demonstrate how incentive programs influence chronic absenteeism including studying the impact on different grade levels, different genders, different subgroups and general attendance rates overall in high school students.

An additional recommendation for potential research would be to develop a study through a qualitative lens, diving into the values and opinions of the educational stakeholders

about the important of attendance at the high school level, beyond just the quantitative data attendance rates produce. This study could also be replicated by using a larger sample size of high school students and could be conducted in a school with a different demographic of students who may not have as many challenges as Title I schools to see if the results of this study could be generalized to other secondary institutions.

Conclusion

There has been extensive research on chronic absenteeism focusing on MTSS approaches, specifically the component of PBIS, with elementary-school children (Gamm et al., 2019; McCurdy et al., 2019). A well-defined understanding of MTSS and PBIS at the high school level and how those approaches may affect chronic absenteeism of secondary students is deficient in the recent research. This study resulted in the significant, but limited, impact of the PBIS-based attendance intervention program at UHS, generating improvements in attendance rates within and between attendance tiers in a 10-week intervention program.

Several outside factors aligned to Dexter's (1981) framework play a major role in the fluctuation of attendance rates at the high school level based on the results of this study. Even though the 10-week attendance intervention program was minimally successful, the external factors outside of the school's control caused less significant change than hypothesized. One reason the researcher supposes change was not as significant was because there weren't enough schoolwide interventions offered at the Tier 1 level to avoid the 7% decline in student attendance rates. Involving interventions within the classroom, following the structure of PBIS, could have produced more significant results and should be considered for future research.

Practitioners in education could find value in the findings of this research study by using these baseline results to understand reasons why high school students are chronically absent and then develop attendance policies and evidence-based, effective intervention programs to support students attending school on a regular basis.

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