THE EFFECT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, BEHAVIOR, AND ATTENDANCE HAVE ON THE SUCCESS OF AT-RISK COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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THE EFFECT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, BEHAVIOR, AND ATTENDANCE HAVE ON THE SUCCESS OF AT-RISK COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Thesis

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Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Abstract

of

THE EFFECT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, BEHAVIOR, AND ATTENDANCE HAVE ON THE SUCCESS OF AT-RISK COMMUNITY DAY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Scott Allen Maddock

Brief Literature Review

Parental involvement in schools, whether initiated by the parents or the schools, has a profound effect on academic, social, and emotional development of adolescents. All too often, by the time students reach the secondary level, parents back away from their involvement (Beghetto, 2001). As there are many barriers perceived by both parties, families and schools, that inhibit parental involvement, there are actionable steps school leaders can take to support, encourage, and develop parental involvement in education (Milliken, 2007). In addition, regular school attendance is pivotal to shaping a positive and proactive perspective on learning. Students need to feel they have a place in their school, best accomplished by regular attendance and engagement in everyday school activities and curriculum (Burg, 2007). Lastly, children identified as at-risk are more susceptible to being retained or eventually dropping out. By circumstance, often it is these at-risk individuals who experience greater truancy and little support from home, when in fact, they are likely the population in most need of such intervention and support.
Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to analyze factors that promote academic success and sustainability for students enrolled in a middle school community day school environment.

Methodology

Data was collected using several implements. A survey of parents was taken, behavioral records from a community day school that show indications of parental contact made during poor behavior and attendance records for 15 randomly selected anonymous students were used. The study took place in a small county-run community day school in a small town to rural setting.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that if schools are proactively developing family and community relationships and implement positive enforceable truancy programs to encourage attendance, they will find behavior of students improves making them more likely to be successful in a traditional academic setting. In a community day school, students arrive with varied social, emotional, and academic needs. It is plausible that these needs can be met by using parental involvement and attendance to facilitate a
paradigm shift in the perception of school, leading to a successful placement in a general 
education environment.

__________________________________________, Committee Chair
Virginia L. Dixon, Ed.D.

__________________________________________
Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Success in school can be defined in many different ways. Success can be measured by letter grades, assessments, social popularity, end results, awards, or even just survival. Most students in the general education environment find success to a degree throughout their academic careers. Most students have teachers who impact them greatly, have community members or programs that help them through tough times, or have parents who follow up on their homework and volunteer at school functions. Most students make friends, learn skills, get introduced to a new hobby, perfect or at least improve a skill set, and ultimately are awarded with a diploma. This is the case for most students. Unfortunately, it is not the case for all students.

There is a place in education often ignored by the general education school teacher. It is an area not closely monitored by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It is a place often referred to by professional educators as “that place.” And it houses a type of student many refer to as “those kids.” That place, and those kids, are sometimes on the same campus as the general population student, but most often, they are on some remote piece of land that hardly resembles a school campus. The place is any alternative education site and the kids are alternative education kids; the kids the educational system has failed.
Alternative education can mean many different things and carry many diverse connotations. Home school, independent study, charter schools, community schools, continuation schools, private schools, and adult education are alternative choices to the typical, state-run education environment. For the purpose of this study, alternative education refers to community day schools (CDSs) attended by middle school students who have for one reason or another been dismissed from their general education classroom. It is these CDSs that often leave administrators putting out figurative fires, teachers looking for different opportunities, and students in a holding place until they get motivated and get out, move onto the ninth grade version of the same school, or in many cases drop out. The education system is failing its communities, its employees, and most importantly, its children. But is it the sole responsibility for schools to provide for students who lack the motivation, support, or capacity to survive public schools? Perhaps not, but it certainly is a pervasive issue in schools throughout this country.

Community day schools are district-appointed schools for children identified as at-risk. The written purpose for any CDS is to teach the skills and attitudes necessary to be successful in a regular school environment. The sad reality of CDSs at the secondary level is that many students do not make it back to the regular school environment. Instead, they go to the high school CDS, become credit deficient, enter a continuation high school and either earn a general equivalency diploma (GED) or dropout. The purpose of this study is not to paint a bleak picture of how many districts lose children to alternative education. This study looks at different contributing factors that lead middle
school students out of the alternative education model and into a successful regular program.

Families, community involvement, and school culture are all influential aspects in defining success in education. Success for an at-risk student is simply defying the term that has been put upon them by factors in their life making successful completion of school a bigger challenge than most kids will face. Though the school’s purpose is to get any child in a CDS to develop necessary academic skills in order to be successful in a regular education environment, a student of a CDS may define success as minimally as finishing the day, as short-term as finishing the year, or as broad as trying to not drop out. This researcher examined tendencies of at-risk students, parental involvement at the middle school, CDS level, and finally attendance habits of CDS attendees.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to analyze factors that promote academic success and sustainability for students enrolled in a middle school CDS environment. In addition, the study examined the factors that contribute to the success achieved and how they relate to one another. First of all, the varied levels of parental involvement and their effect on a child’s academic success were analyzed. Next, the study looked at truancy and attendance to examine the effects they have on establishing academic success. Furthermore, the study examined student behaviors, the root of such behaviors, and the effect poor behavior has on determining a child’s view of school. These questions was
looked at with the hypothesis being that greater parental involvement and sustained attendance habits have a profound affect on student behavior and the paradigm shift necessary for at-risk students to experience to make them more likely to be successful in school. The concept of parental involvement cannot rest fully on the parent nor can it rest completely on the school. It is a careful craft to develop a meaningful relationship between school and family, but for the success of at-risk youth, a very necessary one. Relationships must be started at the beginning of the school year in a positive way; thus, if conversations of a negative course must be had, there is positive rapport established. Schools must take the initiative in developing a “trust fund” with the parents. Making regular deposits, or positive connections, makes for easier, more meaningful withdrawals, or connections that might have negative implications regarding their child. Establishing positive contacts with families communicates to all parties that the school is most interested in the care and well-being of the child.

This researcher has had many years of experience in CDS settings as a teacher and administrator. In Nevada County, there is a unique CDS at the middle school level. The problem is that at-risk students are identified and enrolled in the school, but there has been no follow-up to check for sustained success. Oftentimes, students have shown a measure of success in the CDS, but when placed in the high school without a safety net for failure, the students flounder. Students leaving a CDS environment need a structured program complete with scaffolds of support. The research presented in this paper begs the question: What is present at the CDS that is lacking at the high school, thus
accounting for a disparity in at-risk student success in school programs. For the purposes of this project, the CDS in Nevada County was used for analysis. Success, as used in the statement of the problem and hypothesis, is defined as completing the requirements set by the CDS. Additionally, within the study, parental involvement is defined as the functioning relationship between the school and the families of the students. It is a symbiotic relationship dependent upon both initiating contact at various points.

Definition of Terms

Academic Development Institute

Also referred to as ADI. The ADI is an agency that works with parents and schools to develop the image of the school so parents, students, and school staff all have a shared value system.

Academic Placement

Used throughout this paper in reference to the program in which a student placed after he/she has successfully fulfilled the requirements of the CDS placement. It refers to the least restrictive environment for that student.

Alternative Education

Though alternative education could be defined as any education out of the norm of the traditional school setting, for the purposes of this paper it refers to CDSs.
At-risk Students or At-risk Children

This statement is used to characterize a student who is at risk of failing or at risk of dropping out of school.

Community Day School

A CDS is a district-appointed school for students identified as at-risk or expelled students.

Middle School

For the purposes of this research, the term middle school is used to characterize those students in sixth through eighth grade.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

Also referred to as NCPIE. NCPIE is an organization whose focus is to empower parents in their child’s education and to improve school life for students.

National Education Goals Panel

Also referred to as NEGP. The NEGP is a federal branch that assists in monitoring national and state progress towards national educational goals.

Parental Involvement

Used throughout this paper as a general statement for the continually developing relationship between schools and parents of students. Parental Involvement is defined, but not limited to, volunteering at school, making regular contact with school, checking in with teachers, involvement in a child’s education, expressing
an active interest in the academic, social, and motor development of a child, and using the school as a means to communicate that interest.

Parent Teacher Association

Commonly known as PTA. The PTA is an organization dedicated to promoting children, raising the standard of children’s home lives, and strengthening the relationship between home and school.

Parent Teacher Organization

Commonly known as PTO. An organization whose mission statement declares that more parental involvement in schools will yield higher test scores, improved attendance, and better grades.

School Attendance Review Board

Also known as SARB. SARB intends to develop ways to coordinate school, community, and home efforts to help improve attendance and behavior problems.

Truancy Programs

Programs used to promote healthy attendance in school. Truancy programs can be facilitated at the site or district level and are sometimes performed by juvenile probation departments. Typically, truancy programs are reactive for students who have already been identified as chronically truant.
Limitations of Study

There are several limitations apparent in the study. The study examined a single CDS program in Nevada County. Although the students arrive at the school from a possibility of Nevada County’s nine elementary school districts, they all enter into a single school district when advancing to high school. Furthermore, the students referred to the subject school are referred for a variety of reasons. Some students are referred for grades, some for behavior, others are the subjects of expulsion hearings.

Additionally, the tool used to measure parental involvement was a survey. A survey is always suspect to skewing, as its return is voluntary and only samples a specific audience. Hence, it is possible that those parents returning surveys automatically measure a higher level of parental participation.

For the attendance data no individual student names, identities, or records were used as data; instead, a randomly selected sample of students over a trimester’s time was used. A limitation present in the attendance data is that because some students are referred to the CDS for truancy, some students in the sample may have been under a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) contract and were, thus, more compelled to have regular attendance.

Significance of the Study

There is a great deal of literature detailing the positive outcomes of increased parental involvement. Likewise, there is a vast library of evidence supporting the idea that students with better attendance will be more likely to be successful in school.
Additionally, there is a plethora of literature that states the tendencies of at-risk kids. Too often, CDSs are focused on what is wrong with the students attending them instead of what can be done to make them successful. Too often, administrators and teachers of CDSs spend the majority of their time dealing with conduct issues with students, and not enough time addressing true needs.

It is the opinion of this researcher that if CDSs put their resources into establishing positive parental relationships and attendance incentive programs, students of CDSs would find more success in school. The study examined avenues the schools can take to increase parental involvement and resources parents can tap into to become more involved. In addition, the study examined positive reinforcement for attending school regularly. Finally, if a link is made between focusing on establishing parental involvement and positive attendance records then CDSs can end their perpetual reactive behavior of putting out figurative fires and proactively establish a focus for improving student success rates.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze factors that promote academic success and sustainability for students enrolled in a middle school CDS environment. This review of literature investigates global ideas, principles, and facts regarding influences and determinants on middle school students in the CDS setting. The term alternative education can describe many different deviations from the general education classroom. Whereas independent study, home school, and a myriad of charter schools can offer an alternate choice to educating young people, many students at risk of failing or dropping out get segued away from the general population of successful students and placed into CDSs on a path that often leads to an academic lifetime of alternative education.

Through investigating different aspects of influence, this study examined the likelihood or unlikelihood of a middle school student returning to the general education classroom after successfully completing an alternative educational placement in a county-run CDS at the junior high grade level.

The placement of a child into a CDS can happen because of many different reasons. The most common are truancy, failing grades, or poor behavior. As young people struggle through middle school making decisions that can have monumental influences on their high school career and ultimately their success rate to earn a diploma,
there are factors schools and the student’s supportive network can impact to encourage success. Throughout this review of relevant literature, parental involvement, school attendance, and tendencies of at-risk students are analyzed.

Parental Involvement

For generations, the popularized, “What did you do at school today?” question made for conversation during after-school pick-ups and created chatter at dinner tables across America. Though authentic in the early years of education, the all too familiar question becomes sometimes generic and often cliché when students approach the middle grades.

Children in early elementary tend to have more parental involvement, or at least parental support. All children benefit from a healthy parent-child relationship. This relationship is an important building block to paving the way for a successful academic experience. It is essential for a beginning elementary student to have a supportive family in the backdrop to scaffold the frameworks necessary to be successful in school. While students move on through their academic careers, the relationship between home and school becomes increasingly more important. The foundations for a positive school experience are put into place in the early educational years, and the effect parents can have on academic success becomes more compounded each year. As students become more independent and seemingly rely less upon their parents, or rather appear to not want their parents as involved in their life outside the home, parents tend to back away from
the education arena. As parental involvement may have been present at the elementary level, it significantly declines heading into the middle school level (Beghetto, 2001).

Knowledge of school happenings is evident among parents of early education children; however, when kids need arguably even more parental attention as they approach the early stages of puberty and enter into young adulthood, parental influence in regard to education seems to decline. Parental absence from daily school happenings and routines is ill-timed as middle school students are not only going through significant physical changes, but also encounter many new challenges as homework becomes more frequent and more difficult. Typically, middle school is where students have more than one teacher, have health and wellness classes that investigate their changing bodies, and have a significant increase in homework and general workload. It is not essential that parents sit in on classes; however, it is important they encourage positive study habits, appropriate routines, and healthy practices. The most effective way parents can encourage student achievement is to engage them in learning activities at home.

This issue of declining parental involvement does not only rest in the arms of the families; the schools are equally responsible. Possibly the only innocent victims in this scenario are the children. When parents present learning opportunities at home, the importance of an education is communicated to children. That support translates directly to reinforcing a healthy atmosphere and outlook on school, which in turn promotes children to become lifelong learners. As parents instilling good learning habits
communicate an importance that encourages children’s successful achievement at school, it is also imperative parents maintain high expectations for the children.

In addition to maintaining high academic expectations, parents must back them up with continual support. Reinforcement of high expectations by parents can prove to be one of the most consistent predictors of student academic success. As important as it is for parents to encourage a safe and supportive learning environment at home, it is equally important for schools to empower parents to become involved in educating children. There are many ways schools can involve parents in the learning process.

Most schools have organizations to promote parental involvement in education. The problem resides in getting parents to join such organizations and maintain them. Robert D. Putnam (2000) reported for the last quarter of the 20th century, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) memberships dropped 1.2% across America. That averages 270,000 families dropping out of the PTA each year from 1975 to 2000. It is essential that schools take advantage of using parents as a resource. Best Practices (2004) found that schools involving parents boost student performance in struggling areas. Additionally, sites that implement parental involvement and create a culture of it outperform similar schools that do not make the practice a norm. If schools can successfully construct positive parental partnerships, student achievement increases, test scores improve, homework is consistently turned in, attendance is more consistent, and negative behaviors, as well as drug use, go on the decline (Best Practices, 2004).
As it is established that schools must do their part in involving parents, there are perceptions and practices that must change in order to make this happen. Staff and administrative ideas, beliefs, and perceptions of the parents they serve must reflect the desire to have those same parents active in educating children. In addition to a paradigm shift in viewing parents as partners, there are logistical changes that must take place. Parents need to see the school as not only as a resource for their children, but also a resource for them. Also, communications between school and home must improve. Many parents do not involve themselves too closely to the school because of miscommunication. Often, they feel the only reason the school wants to interact with them is to communicate a negative behavior their child has exhibited in the classroom (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). More frequent communication can build rapport and trust among parents and school staff. Lastly, after schools have established a network of parent volunteers, to cement the partnership, schools must create even more long-term buy-in from parents by including them in the decision making process (Best Practices, 2002).

Schools usually inform rather than include. They set meetings on school grounds rather than at community locations. Meeting outside of school campuses might level the playing field and take away some of the administrative mystique that proves to be a barrier between schools and communities. In addition, by the time parents are involved in a meeting, the agenda is usually set. Instead of including parents and community members in the planning stage, schools typically bring parents in when decisions are
made and information must be passed along (Shmekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Trust must be established so school officials can trust parents to provide valuable input and parents can trust that school officials will consider their input seriously. Parents are already invested in their kids, and with these processes in place, parents are also invested in the school and the academic learning process.

Bill Milliken (2007) wrote, “We have an adult problem, not a youth problem and it’s up to us to see differently, think differently and then act differently” (p. 101). Milliken (2007) went on to state that making this difference could prove influential for not only students throughout our country, but also the families and communities they come from. It is a process that has to be built with schools and community members working side by side. Schools are rarely better off than the communities in which they are immersed (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005). Likewise, communities do not typically have an advantage over the schools in their neighborhood; the two exist on a level playing field and, therefore, must strengthen one another. Just as a student who engages in a sport takes more notice, pride, and interest in improving when a parent shows a vested interest, a similar occurrence exists when a parent shows special attention to academic happenings (California School Boards Association [CSBA], 2006). Furthermore, when parents take a more meaningful approach to supporting their children in school, the role of the parent as a family member is strengthened (Machen et al., 2005).

Even as some adults have neglected the fact that children need academic home support, policymakers have not. Inclusion of parental and home support remains an
important piece of nearly every improvement plan formed to try and improve the performance of schools in our nation (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP; 1995) added to their list of goals a parental involvement component that demands each state encourage partnerships that will increase and maximize parental involvement to foster student development. The idea must then be addressed that if schools are required by law to develop and implement plans, strategies, and policies to encourage parental involvement, why is it that parents are not getting involved? Schools that receive federal funds must develop or adopt a parent involvement policy. Parents are required to support the learning atmosphere of their children. Additionally, the Family-School Partnership Act allows parents to take up to 40 hours each year off from work to participate in school activities to support their child (CSBA, 2006). Seemingly, schools are designing parental involvement plans, yet on a wide spectrum, parents are not getting involved.

Throughout this review of relevant literature pertaining to communications between the school and home, several factors are observed. State and national laws clearly state positions on developing policies to include parents. Perceptions of school officials and parents will be considered as potential barriers to participation. A variety of possibilities for communication and involvement is explored. The effects of parental involvement on academic achievement and school behavior are analyzed. Finally, resources for parents and school staff that support and encourage home to school communication are examined.
Communication and Involvement

Parental communication and involvement go hand in hand. Once the child’s home has been communicated with in regard to school activities, parents are involved. In the same respect, the school is involved with the family. Because of this symbiotic relationship, it is essential the communication be made accurately, effectively, and regularly. Within the education system, there is an entire vocabulary that has taken on a language of its own. Teachers who can communicate as effectively with those inside the education world using education terms, lingo, and acronyms as they can with those outside that world could practically be considered bilingual. It is important that educators remember this disconnect when conversing with the outside world. If connecting parents is the key, they should not be isolated by being inundated with education speak. The same way a doctor will try to speak plainly to a patient relying on bedside manner rather than an extensive knowledge of pharmaceutical science, an educator must speak to families and community members relying on common grounds not creative institutional jargon. One of the most effective ways teachers and administrators can do this is by finding that common ground by exploring the pulse of the community. In some areas, schools routinely do home visits as this helps to level the playing field. Bringing teachers, administrators, and parents together in the family’s home aids in removing some of the barriers and positions both parties as supporters of the children (Posnick-Goodwin, 2007).
Just as it is important for a school to learn the unwritten code of the communities it serves, it is equally important for the school to teach the community how it operates. It is beneficial for schools to communicate with parents to bring them on board to accomplish tasks and goals. In addition, it is equally important to unify parents for the benefit of the school and, ultimately, the children. If a school can bring parents together for the greater good of the educational agenda, networks of accountability can be developed, strengthening a safe and positive school culture (Long, 2007). Hence, professional development seminars need to be established to educate teachers on culturally diverse issues pertinent to their schools, and workshops for parents should be made available to assist them in understanding the practices and expectations of the school (Carter, 2004).

Parent and School Staff Perceptions

In some cases, parents are not getting involved because there is a lack of ownership in the parental piece that schools employ. Getting parents involved requires a give and take connection in which both parties, the schools and the families, must agree on what the participation looks like. All too often, the place of the parent is misunderstood which can easily lend to misconceptions of the reasons nonparticipation is elected. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) stated that where schools sometimes believe parents are lazy and disinterested in their child’s education, schools are not reaching out to parents correctly. Parent perception of their place in schools often resides in how they have been treated by the school. If, for instance, a parent is only contacted when a child
is doing poorly, either failing or misbehaving, the parent sees disciplinarian as their most profound role in their child’s education. As the role of disciplinarian can be an important and influential tool, it should only measure a fraction of what parents can offer and provide in modeling behaviors that lead to academic success.

In addition to discipline calls, schools tend to involve parents in formalized, well-planned meetings and ceremonies that involve agendas usually put together by school officials. In these cases, parents are invited to attend but often take on the role of casual observer. It is believed that if school doors were more open to parent participation on a less formalized level that included parent-generated agendas that parents would see a valuable place for their participation in their child’s academic growth (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001).

Parents have seen their role in the past as being one of chaperone to the dance, fundraiser supporter, participant at a ceremony, or disciplinarian to instill proper school conduct. In actuality, there are many arenas in which a parent can have a meaningful role in a child’s educations. Parents can provide a place to do homework or study, and keep bedtimes consistent. Parents can model and set time limits for out of school activities. They can model discipline, work ethic, and the value of being a life-long learner. Parents can heighten, but keep realistic, their expectations for their children and support and encourage their academic efforts at school. In addition, parents can encourage reading, writing, and family discussions where ideas are shared, discussed, and questioned (Michigan Department of Education, 2002).
Academic Impact

Many factors can affect, both positively and negatively, a child’s educational development and, therefore, success. Among the impacting attributes are culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, broken, and/or joined families, and rural verses urban residence. Though factoring greatly in the development and success of a child’s educational career, data shows that none are more impacting than positive rapport and communication between parents and school (Blankstein, 2004). When aspects regarding classroom curriculum and policy are clearly communicated to parents, parental expectations emerge. In his study of parental involvement and student achievement, William Jeynes (2005) found that parental expectations was one of the leading factors in affecting student achievement. Healthy and consistent communication among school staff, parents, and children can foster a nurturing sense of accountability, safety, and school readiness. Student achievement heightens when parents are positively involved in school activities. Blankstein (2004) stated, “greater parental involvement leads to greater student achievement” (p. 168).

Indeed, to maximize student achievement, parents and teachers need to work closely together. Appropriate communication and teamwork are what is best for the child’s educational success. This concept seems pertinent and achievable; however, other factors tend to weigh heavily and awkwardly upon the shoulders of the ever-so-fragile relationship between school and home. All too often, schools place the blame of the child not trying hard enough on the families and the families place the blame of their
child’s seemingly inadequate education on the schools. Lying in the balance is the child who tries to survive both in the school environment and in the home (Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, Hall, & Gollnick, 2002).

*Parental Influence on Student Behavior*

Ongoing knowledge of school and school activities can assist students with appropriate school behavior while at the same time strengthening academic success. The general education school has a climate and culture of its own. It is essential that, whether consistent with the home culture or not, students abandon inappropriate-for-school behaviors and habits. “Although school has a central role in developing students’ character, the most profound impact on students’ development comes from their families” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, p. 65). With an awareness of a culture conducive to school activities and operations, parents can influence their child’s behavior, thus influencing their ability to be a successful citizen in school. As much of a role model a parent can be in demonstrating proper behaviors, they can also demonstrate proper attitudes that lead toward appropriate behaviors.

Perception of the academic institution can weigh heavily on effort, choices, and behaviors exhibited at the institution. If a parent views, discusses, and accuses the school of not doing, portraying, or implementing meaningful curriculum and practices, chances are a negative attitude will transcend down to the children. On the contrary, a parent who chooses to exemplify the school relating its usefulness and meaningfulness gives a positive behavioral example for the child to bestow. The relationship between parental
behavior toward education and student behavior are directly related (Cotton & Wikeland, 2001).

As parents play a key role in communicating positive behavior, so do teachers. Teachers who routinely and effectively contact parents to discuss how their child is progressing in classes see the benefits. When teachers make the call, student behavior rises to the occasion. Even though many teachers realize that communicating with the parent can resolve issues effectively, many are reluctant to call. This is often the case because teachers either do not know what to say, or are afraid they will say the wrong thing, in effect, worsening the situation. To be equipped with the tact, know-how, and effectiveness of communicating with parents, administrators need to provide professional development on communicating with parents correctly. At first glance, this may not seem like the best use of valuable professional development time; however, an effective ongoing dialogue with parents can be a proactive solution to unwanted behaviors (Whitaker, 2003).

**Parent Resources**

As many administrators find recruiting and maintaining parental involvement and communication a daunting task, there are many organizations, groups, clubs, and events that support the ongoing communication between school and home. Whereas some of these are high-financed organizations with political agendas, many are locally run, groups of intrigued parents who understand the importance of maintaining a dialogue with the school their children attend.
• Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
  o An organization that declares more parent involvement in schools will help kids earn better grades, achieve higher test scores, attend school on a regular basis, improve behavior and social skills, and have a more positive attitude toward school (Parent Teacher Organization [PTO], n.d.).

• Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
  o The PTA is an organization whose set values are collaboration, commitment, accountability, respect, inclusivity, and integrity. Their purpose is to promote children, raise the standard of the child’s home life, strengthen the relationship between home and school, and remain active legal advocates for children by securing adequate laws (Parent Teacher Association [PTA], 2000)

• National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)
  o An organization focused on students improving their school life, parents becoming empowered in education, improving teacher morale, schools getting better, and strengthening surrounding communities (National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education [NCPIE], n.d.)

• Academic Development Institute
  o An organization whose mission is to work with families and schools to help children become self-directed, life-long learners. They are committed to the image of the school as a community where students,
parents, teachers, and staff associate with one another and share common values and a common culture (Academic Development Institute [ADI], 2008)

- National Educational Goals Panel
  - An executive branch agency of the federal government that monitors national and state progress toward the national educational goals (National Education Goals Panel [NEGP], n.d.)

Obviously, the list could continue as there are a plethora of local, state, and national organizations that focus on developing and maintaining school to home communication. The literature overwhelmingly states there is a strong connection between parental involvement and success attained in the education system. Part of that connection is tangible where teachers and parents can work together for the good of the students; however, there is a part that is unseen. The unseen obstacle is the prejudices schools might have against certain family groups and that families might have against schools. The intangible, shadow barrier that prevents partnerships from being made between home and school can only be remedied by the solution that seems most distant and impossible; more face-to-face communication among school administrators, teaching staff, and parental figures will go a long way in correcting misunderstandings among families, communities, and school officials.
Attendance

Attendance is mandated by law, through California Education Code 48200, that children between the ages of 6 and 18 attend school. As the law is directed toward children, parents are mandated to compel their child to attend school punctually every school day. As minors can face consequences of juvenile probation, entrance into the juvenile court system, or referral to the district or county School Attendance Review Board (SARB) for refusing to regularly attend schools, parents of minors who do not attend school can face criminal prosecution, penalties, and fines. For younger students in the early elementary stages of school, chronic tardies and absences are typically an adult problem. Accordingly, fines, court appearances, and possible jail time serve as consequences appropriately aimed at the parents. For secondary students, students in middle and high school, frequent tardies and absences are a student problem.

By secondary school, adolescents can sometimes be out of the control of their parent and refuse to attend school on time or even on a regular basis. In such cases, fines, court appearances, and possible jail time for parents is still used as a consequence. However, they are not as successful if the negative consequence does not trickle down to the adolescent being defiant. For the adolescent, often other modes are used to convince them of the importance of regular school attendance. As absences are naturally going to occur, it is essential that the parent/guardian provide an explanation for the absence to the school. If the absence is not excused for reasons described in the California Education
Code and/or is not verified by the principal or principal designee of the school the absence is in violation of the compulsory attendance law and may be referred to SARB.

Initially, the goal of SARB is to examine cases of students with poor attendance and develop a contractual plan with the family to correct further instances of truancy. If the contract is not followed, fines may be issued and then the board may move to criminal prosecution to enforce mandatory school laws. As clearly as laws are stated and consequences are drawn, truancy and absenteeism remain perpetual obstacles for at-risk students. Missing out on a quality education is not the only hazard a habitually truant student faces. Not only might prospective employers wish to see attendance records in lieu of a resumé to check for employee consistency, but often students who are truant fall into criminal behavior. Ken Reid (2002) reported that 23% of adolescents sentenced in the court system have struggled with truancy. Reid further argued that a tighter partnership between school officials and law enforcement could not only aid in solving the truancy problem, but could also reduce criminal activity among school-age children.

Often proactive steps must be taken to counteract truancy. In a study authored by Burg (2007), it was suggested that even calling attention to students with truancy issues may help in getting those students to school more regularly. Whereas pointing out the dangers of successive absences may prove to be the cure to the occasionally absent student, it is far from the solution to the habitually truant adolescent.

Possibly the greatest danger in habitual truancy is the discovered normalcy in being absent from school. Guare and Cooper (2003) discussed varied tactical studies of
truancy. Rate of truancy was the first tactic explored. Next, a dominant reason or cause of the repeated behavior was given. Three reasons for truancy Guare and Cooper (2003) explored were character issues, negative peer influence, and a weighed choice or option to go to school or not.

It is believed that a possible reason for truancy is conduct disorder or other behavior issues. This could reflect the upbringing or general attitude toward school of the family, or could be the result of a learning hardship the child faces while in school. It can be easy for school officials to gravitate toward the upbringing failure suggesting that the child is a product of a home culture that does not respect school attendance. This can be especially apparent in habitual truancy cases. In fact, the family and culture of how the family views school may be contributing factors; however, the school is responsible for creating an environment that welcomes and reinforces school as a priority. The successes and failures of school attendance are two-way streets between the home and the school.

Peer pressure is also held as a major contributing cause to truancy. Truancy caused by peer pressure can be students negatively influencing others in their social circle to not attend school, choosing instead to partake in a non-school activity or, it can take the form of bullying. In some cases, students may feel pressured at school because of the bully behavior that makes them afraid to be at school. Bullying accelerates in middle school settings. With demands put on academic achievement as defined by state testing, many character education programs have been eliminated from schools. Ironically, it is
these same programs that build social skills and student confidence making students feel safe at schools, possibly increasing their attentiveness, attendance, and test scores. Lastly, some children are weighing their options, consequences, and desires and exercising their right to free choice by choosing to not go to school.

Rather than punish students and parents for missing school, administrators and teachers must find ways to engage students while they are present at school. *Truancy Revisited* (Guare & Cooper, 2003) suggested several recommendations to implement in schools to help reduce the truancy problem. One of the easiest and possibly most effective methods was listening to students and gaining an understanding of their interest, obstacles, and dreams. In understanding a student’s point of view, the classroom and learning experience can become much more personal and meaningful (Guare & Cooper, 2003).

Students who are present and engaged at school have a greater chance of succeeding in their educational ventures. In a study surveying over 200 secondary school-aged children, Guare and Cooper (2003) found a significant relationship between students’ feelings toward their school and their likelihood toward truancy. A far greater number of students who would not recommend their school were more willing to cut school than those who would positively recommend their school to another. By getting students invested in their school and curricular activities, truancy can be greatly reduced. Success in education relies heavily on a student being invested in the academic explorations of the classroom. To be fully vested, students must attend on a consistent
basis. The incongruous relationship between attendance and academic investment becomes a slippery slope of truancy and disengagement. The more school a child misses, the more likely they are to be disengaged in learning and invested in their school. The more disengaged students become, the more likely they are to be truant from school. Schools must find a way to identify students at risk of being truant and develop more effective ways of engaging such students.

One of the problems schools face in increasing and maintaining attendance is that most schools have interventions in place to identify a student who is truant and address the truancy. This in itself is not a problem; however, whereas many resources are devoted to intervening in the truant student, few resources are employed in identifying the student who is at risk of being truant. Intervention programs have their merit and are instrumental in addressing the problem, but few schools have a proactive plan for preventing habitual absences. Neild, Balfranz, and Herzog (2007) suggested that the moment a student sends a signal of being at-risk early in their school career, he/she becomes more at-risk of dropping out of school. The said risks can manifest themselves in many different ways. In a study performed in Philadelphia, Neild et al. (2007) found that if a middle school student received a final grade of F in mathematics or English they were 75% more likely to drop out of high school than a student who received no F letter grade. Additionally, the same study found students who had less than 80% attendance for the academic year had a similar chance of dropping out. So, as the adage states, an ounce
of prevention is worth a pound of cure, many districts are kept busy exploring the cure, few have found the prevention.

SARB and truancy outreach programs are doing a great deal to hold accountable the families and students who have been identified as at-risk of being truant; more needs to be done to prevent the risk from initiating in the first place. When attempting to circumvent a problem, it becomes necessary to analyze some of the underlying causes of the problem. To encourage school attendance, it is equally important to examine what keeps students out of school, strategies that can be implemented to keep students attending school, and possible intervention strategies to catch students before truancy becomes habitual.

In a study determining factors that play a role in keeping students out of school Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, and Delicandro (1998) identified six variables affecting truancy in secondary students. Students’ school perceptions, perceptions of parental discipline, parents’ control, students’ academic self-concept, perceived family conflict, and social competence in class all play significant roles in whether a student will be a successful school attendee.

A school’s climate and culture can play a vital role in welcoming a student who feels intimidated by the classroom experience. An environment that will tolerate low standards will receive them; likewise, a school that demands high expectations will challenge students to rise to the top. Students need teachers who require high expectations and give them the support required for achievement (Railsback 2004). The
message a teacher, a classroom, and an entire staff convey to a student feed into their perceptions of school. When students’ perceptions of school are poor, they are less likely to attend.

Students’ perceptions of parental discipline weigh heavily in their view of structure and authority. Kilgore, Snyder, and Lentz (2000) found that poor parental monitoring and discipline has a direct connection to child conduct problems in school. When students cannot identify social structures as presented in a day-to-day classroom situation, it becomes increasingly more difficult for that child to identify the school and school staff as authority figures. Classroom culture, attentive school staff, and effective communication all play a vital role in conveying the importance of regular school attendance. Positive attendance behaviors should not only be discussed, they can be communicated even more powerfully if they are celebrated. Students who miss school should be held accountable for their absence, students present should be praised.

Additionally, positive attendance habits need to be infused into daily curriculum. This can be done in a variety of different ways. There are district-adopted programs such as Second Step that not only encourage attendance but also include social and character curriculum. In many states, at the county or district level, there are truancy outreach programs that have incentives for consecutive school days attended. These programs can also focus on students who have had truancy issues in the past. Not all truancy programs have to be tackled at the county, district, or even site level. Classrooms can implement programs to counteract truancy as well. There are many community and sporting events
that provide perks for students who regularly attend school or maintain perfect attendance. If schools adopt these programs and promote them within the classroom, it not only motivates students, it encourages community activities at school.

Community Day School Populations

A CDS can be comprised of many different types of students. There are different learner types, different languages spoken, different interests, different struggles, a varying home life, and, for most, definitively a different circumstance all together that put that individual student in a CDS. Just as it can be said there is no such thing as a typical student, there is most certainly no such thing as a child that could be categorized as a typical CDS kid. In many cases the reasons, tendencies, and dreams of a given CDS student are anything but typical. A CDS should be viewed as a place for second chances, a least restrictive environment for that particular student’s success. Additionally, it should be a place that can focus on an individual learner’s challenges and help him/her overcome those challenges. All too often, a CDS is used as a warehouse for the thought to be unteachable, incorrigible, and apathetic. Children who attend CDSs in elementary and middle school often believe they go where the bad kids go. They believe they are there because it is deserved, and can fall into the rut of believing they are hopeless and are losers.

A community day school is formed out of necessity by a school, district, or county office of education. Just as there is no such thing as a typical child assigned to a
CDS, there is not a typical community day school in existence. Community day schools are often a function of reaction rather than prevention.

*Who Goes to a Community Day School?*

There are a variety of reasons a child in middle school will be enrolled in a community day school. Though a school cannot control what type of emotional baggage an individual brings to school, it is necessary for that school to be careful and effective in unpacking that baggage. Waterman and Walker (2009) discussed characteristics of at-risk kids as they selected students identified as at-risk for a study. A wide variety of needs and situations were identified in the at-risk students targeted. Students were found to have relatively quick downward fluctuations in grades, had been exposed to violence or violent acts, had apathetic feelings of school and life in general, depression, anxiety, and outbursts of anger. Kids who arrive at the door of a CDS are not there because they lack the brain power to compete and succeed in a general education classroom. In fact, many kids at a CDS have social and emotional needs that have contributed to their academic and behavioral failures (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).

Whether it is conduct disorder, self-sabotage, chemical imbalance, or chemical dependencies, at-risk kids who enter the CDS environment are still kids who, like other kids, want to learn. Many of them feel as if they have been given up on, so they, in turn, give up. Oftentimes, they have just forgotten how to act and respond like a typical functioning student, so they respond in the way that comes easy and natural. Herrenkohl et. al (2000) found that ways children are socialized within the family unit have a direct
outcome to positive and negative development. Furthermore, their study showed that children less engaged in school at a younger age have an increased rate of failing school and dropping out by the time they enter middle school.

To a large extent, CDS populations are groups of children society has failed. Perhaps the term at-risk kids should be rethought and changed to in-need kids. They are kids who deserve a chance but do not always get the ones they need. To be fair, the CDS typically does have the tools needed to assist this needy population. McEvoy and Welker (2000) found a connection between antisocial behavior and academic failure. They argued that early condition in the home assist in predicting later antisocial behavior. This antisocial behavior perpetuates itself in school. Because of the learned behavior, students are given fewer opportunities for positive reinforcement. The lack of positive reinforcement in an academic setting creates an aversion to school for these individuals. Once an aversion is created and students have a negative perception of school, it is nearly impossible for them to find success. Within this, educators often spend the majority of their time trying to find out what is wrong with the child rather than what is going right. In many cases, by the time the student arrives at the doorstep of the CDS, they have given up all together on education. Landsman, Moore, and Simmons (2008) suggested it is a teacher problem, not a student problem. They argued that by creating a shift in thinking about what is going right for a student and discovering what can be done rather than what is wrong with a learner, or what cannot be done, the student will be more likely to experience their own paradigm shift about learning in schools.
Summary

In summary, it is not to suggest that all CDS children have antisocial behaviors, or even a propensity for violence. The truth is that a CDS population is not an accurate cross section of youth in American schools. It is a select group that has challenges in meeting the rigorous demands of the general education classroom. Kids finding themselves in the CDS environment are needy. They have specific emotional and social needs that must be met through a very individualized education. In addition to providing the individualized education, schools need training and resources in school-based counseling and other outside services to aid in the development and growth of this unique student body (McEvoy & Welker, 2000).
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

Setting of the Project

The Token Community Day School provides an alternative school placement with the goal of improving academic and social skills, providing support for rehabilitation, and enabling students to be successfully reinstated in mainstream education. (Nevada County Superintendent of Schools [NCSS], n.d., p. 1)

Background. Token Community Day School is an alternative education site run by the Nevada County Office of Education. The name Token derives from the school’s concept to improve student behavior and practice in order to prepare them for success at their original general education site. The name refers to the following: Rehabilitate, Renew, and Reinstate. The school began 12 years ago when it was realized there was a population of middle school students in need of a small alternative site to provide for unique situations. Token CDS does not fit into the genre of a typical general education school. It does not contain the children from a specific neighborhood and is not maintained by a large well-resourced staff. The school is not part of a specific community nor is it a satellite school specific to a single district. Token is a community day school, which services sixth- through eighth-grade students.
**Students.** Token is a school designed to serve at-risk middle school students. The students who attend Token CDS have been expelled or otherwise excused from their general education assignments and have been referred to attend for a contracted amount of time. Most students are referred via district, while others in more extreme cases are referred to attend by the Student Attendance and Review Board (S.A.R.B.). Therefore, most of the students attending Token are not from the same neighborhood. Realizing that instead of being part of one community and bringing that community to school, Token CDS must establish its own community, creating its own personality and culture.

**Staff.** Table 1 shows the gender breakdown of Token CDS staff and administration.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 illustrates the females outnumber the males four to three; however, onsite, on a regular basis, there are two males and two females. The three administrative staff are offsite most of the time.

Token CDS has three full-time teachers and one full-time office staff. One of the teachers is a White male, and two of the teachers are White females. All three teachers are between 30 and 50 years of age. The office staffperson is a White female. Of the three teachers, one has a single-subject credential in English language arts and the other
two have single-subject credentials in social science. All three hold Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certificates. In addition, all three teachers are considered highly qualified as defined by No Child Left Behind.

Currently, Token CDS has a site administrator contracted for six hours a week. There are two county-level administrators who conduct administrative duties for Token CDS. Stanton Miller, Associate Superintendent, is the curriculum coordinator for the site. Mr. Miller is also currently mentoring the site administrator and serves as a consultant to administrative decisions. On record, the principal for the school is the County Superintendent of Schools, Holly Hermanson.

*Ethnicity of community and students.* In Nevada County, the linguistic and cultural backgrounds weigh heavily to the White (not of Hispanic origin) influence. Because Token CDS is a county-run program and does not draw children from a specific neighborhood or community, the school instead enrolls students from throughout the surrounding communities. Though there is some diversity at Token CDS, the school community typically mirrors the trends of the Nevada County communities represented at the school: Grass Valley, Nevada City, Penn Valley, Alta Sierra, and Lake of the Pines.
Figure 1 shows the ethnicity percentages in a pie chart for the city of Grass Valley.

Figure 1  Ethnicity of Grass Valley

(City-Data.com, 2008c)

The data shows that just over 88% of residents of Grass Valley are White. Hispanics make up the next majority at just over 6%.
Figure 2 shows the ethnicity percentages in a pie chart for Nevada City.

Figure 2   Ethnicity of Nevada City

(City-Data.com, 2008d)

The data displayed in Figure 2 states similar data to that shown in Figure 1. Nevada City is over 90% White and just over 3% Hispanic.
Figure 3 shows the ethnicity breakdown for Penn Valley.

The data displayed in Figure 3 is much like the surrounding communities in that it shows that Penn Valley is over 90% White with about 5% being Hispanic.
Figure 4 displays the ethnicity breakdown of Alta Sierra, a surrounding community of Token Community Day School.

Figure 4  Ethnicity of Alta Sierra

Alta Sierra shows a 92% White population, 4% Hispanic population, with varied ethnicities making up the remaining 4%.
The surrounding community of Lake of the Pines is represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5   Ethnicity of Lake of the Pines

(City-Data.com, 2008b)

The Lake of the Pines community is comprised of over 90% White and about 3% Hispanic.
The ethnicity of Token CDS mirrors the ethnicity of its surrounding communities.

Figure 6 Ethnicity of Token Community Day School

Staying consistent with the communities throughout Nevada County, Token CDS has a 90% White population, 5% African American, and 5% Hispanic. In addition, the population is cumulatively 85% male and 15% female.

Goal. Token CDS aims to Rehabilitate, Renew, and Reinstate students back into their general education assignment. The main goal of Token CDS is to provide structure, guidance, and opportunities for the students to be better prepared and experience success as they advance into their educational futures.
Behavior management. Each student is held to a behavior contract manifested through the school’s tier system. At Token CDS, students earn one of three tiers: first tier, second tier, or third tier. Students may change tiers on a weekly basis. The tiers are differentiated by levels of privileges. First tier students may leave at 3:15 PM and participate in community service projects, among other privileges. Second and third tier students are given an extra study hall time and are dismissed at 3:50 PM. Students earn and lose points daily based on conduct, participation, and homework. Points are averaged at the end of the week to determine the tier for the following week. The placement of tiers is not relative to what tier the student was on the previous week making it possible for a student to go from third tier to first in a week’s time. The tier system illustrates a system of consequences to the students while at the same time allowing them to have a new start week after week.

Special programs/organizations. There are many programs and organizations in which Token CDS gets involved that benefit the students. On a weekly basis, students spend two hours at the Mud Hut, a hands-on clay studio, where they learn different clay techniques, build their own masterpieces, and take them home to share with their families. In addition, Token CDS eighth-grade students participate in a weekly two-hour woodshop class where they learn the basics of woodworking, measuring, and cutting. Many Token CDS students participate in community service projects each week. The staff from Token CDS work closely with Lee Blakemore, the founder of Youth Can Do, a non-profit organization that supports youth by providing opportunities for involvement in
the community. Lee Blakemore has been influential in working with Token CDS to plan projects to benefit the surrounding communities. Blakemore has initiated many different projects with Token students. Students have done everything from cleaning up local cemeteries to beautifying many of Nevada County’s parks. Also, the school works with Vern Taylor, head of Nevada City Public Works, and Trent Finch, Park Ranger for the city of Grass Valley, to plant bulbs, make playgrounds safer, and paint park benches.

Challenges. There are many challenges faced when working with at-risk students. Challenges abound in the classroom, on the playground, and in home to school communications. It is true that many students are referred to Token CDS due to poor behavioral choices; however, challenges in the classroom are not all conduct-related.

Classroom challenges manifest themselves in a plethora of ways. The vast disparity within small class groupings continues to be a challenge Token CDS teachers must rise to meet. Whereas many students might be basic to far below basic in reading and math, others may excel in those areas and need to work on a social skill set to achieve success. In addition, it has been found that many students have a high capacity for learning and enjoy it very much; however, they may have sensed themselves struggling at an early age and developed a coping mechanism, for example poor classroom conduct, to compensate. The balance is some students are drastically underachieving leaving teachers grasping at straws while others who have the ability to achieve proficiently seemingly sabotage their own education.
In addition to finding challenges with student types and ability levels, it is the opinion of this researcher that at times there is a disconnection between students and staff. Many of the students at Token CDS come from broken homes where they balance their time between the homes of their mom with boyfriend or step-dad and dad with girlfriend or step-mom. With this shifting of residences comes an uneasiness of spirit and organization teachers often struggle to relate to. Instead of identifying an unwanted behavior as a coping mechanism for a situation that happened earlier that morning at home, staff often misinterpret it as belligerent defiance that is unacceptable for school. It is this researcher’s experienced opinion that many behavioral issues could be remedied by a little understanding and allowance of space by the school staff.

Parental involvement. Parental involvement is highlighted on page three of the Token Parent and Student Handbook (NCSS, n.d.). It explicitly states, “A student’s successful experience in the Token Community Day School depends largely upon parental responsibility and cooperation with Token school personnel” (NCSS, n.d., p. 3). The handbook goes on to outline parental responsibilities as those relating to the caring and transportation of their child to and from school. The handbook does not involve responsibilities directly relating parental involvement to the student’s education.

For the most part, there is little, if any, parental involvement at Token CDS. There is minimal communication with parents on school activities, and parents are not generally encouraged to participate in school functions, fieldtrips, or activities. It has been an observation of the long-standing office staff that parents are often a distraction
and are not always appropriate in interactions with the student body. Seemingly, most students enrolled in Token CDS do not come from a background that innately supports success in academics. As parental involvement is at a minimum, it also seems parental support, shown by home study habits, meetings, and phone calls, is not a strength for many Token CDS students. It is this researcher’s opinion that these two are not separate from one another.

Design of the Study

Instrumentation

The first source used was a survey sent out to parents of all students on the roster at Token CDS at the time of the study. In total, 33 surveys were sent home. Of the 33 sent home, 20 were completed and returned representing a sample of about 61%.

The second source used was behavior charts on students over a period of five weeks. Students who had been enrolled for at least six weeks were analyzed. Of the 20 students enrolled at the time of the study, 13 had been enrolled for at least six weeks. Behavior charts on all students who had been enrolled for at least six weeks were used; therefore, of the student population, 65% are represented in the sample.

The third source of data used was attendance totals during the final trimester of the academic year. Attendance is listed for 15 anonymous students. The data shows how many days each of the 15 students attended out of the 60 school days in the trimester.
Data Collection

The surveys for the parents were sent home with students and returned to school by students (see Appendix A). The parents were asked to read and sign a consent form describing the study, the confidentiality, and anonymity (see Appendix B). All completed surveys were handed in to office staff and immediately placed in a file folder at the school. One hundred percent of the surveys collected were used as data and analyzed. The data was organized by using the original survey as a recording sheet. The data pertinent to the information for the second source was retrieved from the student behavior chart school records. The behavior charts are daily sheets that record total student points earned with notations indicating reasons for point deductions. Attendance was provided by the attendance clerk on 15 randomly chosen students during the third trimester.

Data Analysis Procedures

The parent survey was developed with the intent of finding out if the parents felt there was a need for a program or process to improve communications between home and school and if the parents believed that improving the program or process would help make their children more successful students. The parent survey was developed with 10 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The second source used was student behavior charts recorded daily by school staff and administrators. Student behavior charts over a five-week period were analyzed. The student behavior charts were utilized to analyze home to school contacts and to determine if there were significant
changes in student conduct after contact was made. Attendance records were used to show the overall attendance habits of students at the selected community day school.

The purpose of the instruments used and data collected was to show three separate factors that inhibit students identified as at-risk. Daily success rates and behavior as defined by community day school staff, a questionnaire designed to show parental involvement and concern levels from parents of enrolled students, and attendance trends over the last 60 days of the academic year all gave a suggested measure of success students were able to experience. These three factors alone are measurable and might suggest a student’s propensity for experienced success. This researcher offers the hypothesis that if school leadership is active in cultivating home to school communication, implementing enforceable truancy prevention programs, and developing a school-wide character program, students labeled as at-risk of dropping out or being retained will experience a more successful academic career and will be more likely to have a successful transition to a general education environment.
Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Presentation of the Data

Data Analysis/Parent Survey

Question 1 asked parents how long their child had attended Token Community Day School.

Table 2

Question 1 Results

1. How long has your child attended Token Community Day School?

1-3 months 70% (14)

3-6 months 20% (4)

6-9 months 5% (1)

More than 9 months 5% (1)

Seventy percent of the students had been enrolled from one to three months. Twenty percent of the students had been enrolled between three and six months while a combined 10% had been enrolled six months or more.
Question 2 asked parents if they felt there was a need for parents and school administrators or teachers to communicate on a regular basis.

Figure 7  Question 2 Results

Forty percent of parents felt there is always a need for parents and school teachers or administrators to communicate on a regular basis. Thirty-five percent felt it is important to communicate on a regular basis, while 25% felt it was only necessary sometimes. Zero percent felt there is never a need to communicate.
Question 3 asked parents if they were satisfied with the current level of communication that currently existed between themselves and teachers or administrators at Token CDS.

Figure 8 Question 3 Results

Fifty-five percent of parents responded that they were satisfied with the amount of communication between themselves and Token CDS staff. Ten percent stated they were satisfied most of the time while 30% declared they were satisfied only sometimes. Five percent of parents responded they were never satisfied with the amount of communication between themselves and teachers or administrators from Token CDS.
Question 4 asked parents if they felt welcome to contact the school to find out more information on homework, class work, or scheduling.

Figure 9  Question 4 Results

Seventy-five percent of parents stated they felt welcome all the time to contact the school to inquire about homework, class work, or scheduling. Ten percent of parents felt welcome most of the time and 15% felt welcome sometimes. None of the parents expressed that they never felt welcome.
Question 5 asked parents what they felt their child’s greatest need was while attending Token CDS.

Figure 10  Question 5 Results

Thirty percent of parents responded they believed their child’s greatest need was to receive assistance in math, language arts, and/or history. Representing the majority, at 40%, organization was a top priority for many parents. Assistance in homework was only a concern for 5% of the parents surveyed while 25% believed that behavior was the primary need for their child.
Question 6 asked parents if they felt that more communication between school and home would benefit their child.

Figure 11  Question 6 Results

Thirty-five percent of parents felt that more communication would help their child all of the time. Twenty-five percent felt that more communication between home and school would assist their child most of the time. While 35% felt that more communication would sometimes be helpful, only 5% felt that more communication would never be helpful.
Question 7 asked parents if they would like to know more about their child’s daily, weekly, or monthly schedule.

**Figure 12  Question 7 Results**

Sixty percent of parents replied that they would like to know more about their child’s daily, weekly, or monthly schedule all of the time. Five percent responded they would like to know more about schedules most of the time while 20% would like to know more sometimes. Fifteen percent of parents surveyed declared they already knew enough about their child’s schedule at Token CDS.
Question 8 asked parents how often they would like to hear from a teacher or administrator regarding their child.

Figure 13  Question 8 Results

Forty-five percent of parents reported they would like to hear from a teacher or administrator on a weekly basis regarding their child. Thirty-five percent of parents surveyed would like to hear from a school representative every two weeks. Five percent would like to hear from a teacher or administrator on a monthly basis and 15% would prefer to contact the school as needed.
Question 9 asked parents how they would like to receive information from the school.

Figure 14  Question 9 Results

Thirty-five percent of parents surveyed desired to receive a phone call from the school to receive information on their child. Fifteen-percent responded that the internet would be the most convenient way to hear from the school. Thirty-five percent of parents stated they preferred to receive a bi-weekly or monthly newsletter. Fifteen percent of
parents reported that a student-carried student planner would be the best way for them to receive information from the school.

Question 10 asked parents how often they would like to meet with their child’s teacher to discuss progress and improvements.

Figure 15  Question 10 Results

Fifty percent of parents surveyed responded that they would like meetings once a month with their child’s teacher. Twenty percent reported that they would like meetings every six weeks, which would coincide with progress report distribution. While no
parents cared to meet at the end of a trimester, 30% preferred to only meet as needed and not have a set time.

Question 11 asked parents if they had any additional comments or suggestions regarding school to home communication.

- “I think it should start weekly, then as your child improves bi-weekly”
- “Email is wonderful exchange of information that parents and teachers can share the child’s progress.”
- “It would be great if the teachers would write a note in the student’s planner once a week to give an update on performance—doing good, not getting work done, etc…”
- “So far there has been no contact.”

*Findings*

There were many trends easily identified in the data. Although many parents reported being happy with their communication experience, all presented feedback, suggesting improvements to the process would aid in student development and success. Evident from the data, there is a clear need for regular, meaningful communication between school and home. The following findings were realized over the course of the study:

- The majority of parents surveyed believed that parents and school administrators or teachers need to communicate on a regular basis at least most of the time.
• Ninety-five percent of parents surveyed believed more communication would help their child succeed.

• Sixty percent of parents wanted to know more about their child’s daily, weekly, or monthly schedule.

• Eighty percent of parents wanted to hear from a teacher or administrator regarding their child weekly or biweekly.

Data Analysis/Behavior Charts

Each line represents a student’s points for the day, each chart displaying a week. As discussed in the behavior section of the school narrative, each student receives 100 points per day and, depending on behavior, homework, and conduct, will keep or lose points throughout the day. Figures 16-20 illustrate the points of 15 students over five weeks of school indicating when contact with parents was initiated by the school.
Daily points during the week of March 31, 2008 are presented in Figure 16. The “Contact” callout represents a parent contact.

Figure 16  Week of March 31

Most students held their points above 70. Two students dropped below 70 during the week. One parent/guardian contact was made regarding student points.
Daily points during the week of April 7, 2008 are presented in Figure 17. The “Contact” callout represents a parent contact.

Several students dropped below 70 points on various days during the week. Two contacts were made regarding point loss.
Daily points during the week of April 14, 2008 are presented in Figure 18. The “Contact” callout represents a parent contact.

Four students dropped below 70 points at some point throughout the week. One contact was made regarding a student’s point loss.
Daily points during the week of April 21, 2008 are presented in Figure 19. The “Contact” callout represents a parent contact.

Figure 19  Week of April 21

Three students dropped below 70 points on various days during the week. No contacts were made regarding point loss.
Daily points during the week of April 28, 2008 are presented in Figure 20. The “Contact” callout represents a parent contact.

Figure 20  Week of April 28

Five students dropped below 70 points at some point throughout the week. Two contacts we made regarding point loss.
Findings

As evident from the data, the number of students dropping below the acceptable daily point level compared to the number of home contacts initiated by the school pales in comparison. In a five-week analysis of student behavioral points, only six contacts were made to parents/guardians. In addition, contacts were only made after a student made a significant drop in daily points. In could be concluded from the data that:

- More contacts should be made to homes regarding student behavior points
- Contacts have not been made to express students experiencing success.
- No follow-up contacts were made to discuss student behavioral reaction regarding school to home connection.

Interpretation

After examining both sources of data, it becomes very clear there is a need for an improved communication process at Token CDS for parents and teaching staff. Though many parents surveyed reported they were satisfied with the communication, the data analyzed from other survey questions supports the notion that parents want to know about their child more often. In addition, as observed in the five-week analysis of behavior charts, the data conveys that the current communication is reactive to a child’s behavior rather than proactive in supporting positive conduct. Perhaps if students, parents, and teachers openly discussed expectations, guidelines, and behaviors, students would have a clearer picture of the positive effects of good decision-making. Also, regular communication for parents aids them in developing routines supportive of the school
culture. To the contrary, continuous negative contact to parents succeeds in only nurturing negative relationships with parents. When a school only calls when there is a problem, the school becomes likened to the problem rather than the solution.

Data Analysis/Attendance Report

Fifteen randomly chosen students attending the community day school are represented in the following attendance chart, Figure 21. Student attendance was taken during the third academic trimester of the 2007/2008 academic school year and reported by the attendance clerk. Figure 21 illustrates the attendance for the 15 randomly selected students.
Attendance totals of the 15 randomly selected students for the third trimester during the 2007/2008 academic year are presented in Figure 21.

Figure 21  Attendance Totals

Figure 21 shows that no students attended all 60 days of the third trimester. Four of the fifteen students attended at least 50 days. Eight students attended between 40 and 49 days of the final 60. Two students attended between 30 and 39 days, leaving one student attending less than 20 days of the third trimester.
Findings

As evident from the data, students enrolled in the community day school are missing out on school, therein, missing out on an educational opportunity. There were 60 days of school in the third trimester. When added together, 246 days were missed collectively by the 15 students. This means that on any given day with a class of 15 kids, approximately four would be absent. Therefore, it is possible that on every day of the third trimester 27% of the students were absent.

- A total of 246 days of school were missed.
- The fewest number of days missed by any one student was three.
- The greatest number of days missed by a student was 43.
- With the fewest and greatest numbers discarded, the remaining students averaged 15 absences each over a period of 60 days.

Interpretation

A careful look at the attendance records shows there is a need for a truancy program to be implemented at the school. If the trend over the course of the academic year were consistent with the third trimester, on average, students would miss greater than 25% of their school year. Developing positive attendance habits helps build congruency within a school year. It helps to increase knowledge base, relate new information to prior knowledge, and develop ownership and buy-in to the school’s climate, culture, and academic purpose. In addition, regular attendance instills a value that school is important and a regular part of adolescent life. In conclusion, if a normalcy
of school attendance is established, this gives way to student buy-in, and increased knowledge base and school performance. With increased knowledge base, improved academic performance, and student buy-in, students are less likely to incur as many behavior problems. Though consistent attendance may not be the answer to every obstacle an at-risk student faces, poor attendance certainly can be the catalyst and antecedent related to several factors damaging the chance at a quality education.
Chapter 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the final chapter of this thesis, the researcher summarizes the findings associated with attendance, behavior, and parental involvement in community day school programs and makes conclusions and recommendations on the improvement of such factors. In summarizing the conclusions of this study, it is important to revisit the hypothesis. The hypothesis is that greater parental involvement and sustained attendance habits will have a profound affect on student behavior and the paradigm shift necessary for at-risk students to experience in order to make them more likely to be successful in school.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to analyze factors that promote academic success and sustainability for students enrolled in a middle school community day school environment. The research strongly suggested that steady, consistent parental involvement can have a profound effect on a student’s success in school. At-risk children, typically, do not have the luxury of consistent home to school communication and involvement. The research also indicated that at-risk students need a scaffold of support systems to aid them in a successful academic experience. In addition, research has shown that increased school attendance is not only pivotal in increasing student participation in academic affairs, it affects the way students perceive school importance.
This researcher analyzed the effects of parental involvement and questioned why parents do not get involved. In addition, this researcher examined the effects of poor school attendance, and looked into the implementation of truancy programs at schools. Also, it became important to analyze characteristics of students referred to community day school programs. It became apparent to this researcher there were connections within these three factors that, if positively affected and changed, could result in a more successful academic experience for students identified as at-risk and assigned to a community day school program.

Conclusions

The result of this study has several applicable outcomes. Conclusions can be drawn with regard to the effect of parental involvement and its application, the consistency that regular attendance builds within a student, and how regular attendance and proactive parental involvement can play key roles in improving the behavior and conduct of students identified as at-risk and enrolled in a community day school.

First of all, the research shows that a student’s home life plays a significant role in establishing healthy attendance practices and behavior at school. The perception a family has of the educational institution is often transferred to the child. With this noted, it becomes important to encourage a paradigm shift in the way the family views the school. School administration and leadership must take the first step in this initial positive contact. The research outlined barriers present for parents and those present for school officials. The data collected in the survey paired with the results from the behavioral
sheets indicate that parents desire to communicate with schools regularly; however, that communication is unwanted if initial talks are of the negative nature regarding their child. This conclusion leads this researcher to believe that if proactive steps were taken upon enrollment to involve parents in a positive way, parents would be more likely to become involved in school activities and less likely to be turned away by their perception of how the school views them and their child. It is up to school staff and officials to impact parental perception by creating positive contact.

Secondly, conclusions can be drawn that support the fact that establishing regular school attendance will result in better school performance. The research shows that when school students are in school and are engaged in school activities, they are less likely to be involved in troublesome activities. In addition, the research supports that regular school attendance creates greater buy-in for students. Greater buy-in by students makes for better academic performance, a sense of belonging at school, and more positive outlook for participating regularly in academic activities. Furthermore, the research pointed at evidence supporting that children engaged in school are more likely to stay in school and students that stay in school are more likely to be engaged in school. Engagement and attendance make a healthy rotation of positive school attendance and positive school experience. It is up to school officials and administration to develop and implement effective truancy programs to support healthy attendance habits.

Lastly, as most kids referred to community day schools are done so because of behavior, student behavior becomes one of the most pivotal determinants of a successful
academic experience. Behavior becomes the linchpin between parental involvement and attendance. The research suggests that students who experience behavior complications at school do so because they are less engaged, have a negative perception of school, and are additionally frequently truant. The research indicates that students who are habitually truant are more likely to have problems at school. Likewise, students who have truancy problems and behavioral issues, tend to have parents who are less involved in their daily educational experience.

The conclusion of this thesis supports that due to the outcomes discovered through the review of relevant literature and data collected, the researcher holds the hypothesis as being supported. The hypothesis being that greater parental involvement and sustained attendance habits will have a profound affect on student behavior and the paradigm shift necessary for at-risk students to experience in order to make them more likely to be successful in school. The research and data collected assert that establishing regular positive communications with parents is desired and will have a positive affect on student achievement. With positive interaction established, rapport is developed. When rapport is developed, parents are more likely to be involved in regular school functions and happenings. With parents involved, kids are less likely to be truant from school. With knowledgeable families and regular attendance by kids, students are more likely to be engaged in their education. If at-risk students have parents equipped with tools to help them succeed through school involvement and students are engaged at school, a
successful academic experience is plausible and will result in a successful placement back into a general education environment.

Recommendations

Further research of this study could include a few things. First, it would be beneficial to analyze the data from multiple community day school programs to identify common trends. Secondly, desegregating student data based on reasons a student was referred to the community day school could show and attempt to explain differences in other data collected. Finally, a longitudinal study collecting data on a community day school that had implemented positive parental involvement, truancy programs to encourage attendance, and support systems to ensure positive school behavior might give an indication as to the success rates after general education placement occurred.

Future studies of positive factors affecting community day school success rates could further the development of this study. Certainly, this study can be replicated. As county offices of education and school districts look to develop community day schools that promote student achievement and successful placement back into the general education environment, they could perform like studies and get similar and increasingly more developed results. The more wide-spread the study, the closer educational leaders will get to establishing successful exits of the community day school environment.

Closely examining and desegregating students based on referrals to a community day school may show different success rates in general education placement. For instance, this researcher would question that in a broader study, do students referred
because of truancy fair better than those referred because of behavior? Desegregated referral data might also show that with the necessary tools in place by school leadership that referral origination has no effect.

To finalize the recommendations, the researcher is left with yet another thought. The connection between successful academic experience and parental involvement, behavior, and attendance can be one of a conundrum. The researcher questions whether parental involvement can be created and, hence, create a trickle down effect of positive school experience or if a positive school experience leads to a parent wanting to become more involved?
APPENDIX A

Instrument of the Study: Parental Involvement Survey

Parent Survey
Connecting School and Home
Token Community Day School

Directions: Please check one answer for each question on numbers 1 – 10. For question 11 you may write in an answer.

1. How long has your child attended Token Community Day School?
   ____ 1-3 months
   ____ 3-6 months
   ____ 6-9 months
   ____ more than 9 months

2. Do you feel there is a need for parents and school teachers or administrators to communicate on a regular basis?
   ____ all of the time
   ____ most of the time
   ____ sometimes
   ____ never

3. Are you satisfied with the amount of communication there is between you and teachers or administrators from Token?
   ____ Yes!
   ____ most of the time
   ____ sometimes
   ____ never

4. Do you feel welcome to contact the school to ask about homework, class work, or scheduling?
   ____ all of the time
   ____ most of the time
   ____ sometimes
   ____ never
5. What do you feel is your child’s greatest need at Token Community Day School?
   ____ help with math, language arts, and/or history
   ____ organization
   ____ homework
   ____ behavior

6. Do you feel that more communication between school and home would help your child?
   ____ all of the time
   ____ most of the time
   ____ sometimes
   ____ never

7. Would you like to know more about your child’s daily, weekly, or monthly schedule?
   ____ all of the time
   ____ most of the time
   ____ sometimes
   ____ I already know enough about this

8. How often would you like to hear from a teacher or administrator regarding your child?
   ____ weekly
   ____ bi-weekly (once every two weeks)
   ____ monthly
   ____ I prefer to contact as needed rather than a set time

9. Regarding daily homework, schedule, announcements, and subject matter, how would you like to receive information from the school?
   ____ phone
   ____ internet
   ____ bi-weekly or monthly newsletter
   ____ student planner (carried to and from school by student)

10. How often would you like to meet with your child’s teacher(s) to discuss progress and improvements?
    ____ monthly
    ____ every six weeks (when progress reports come out)
    ____ at the end of each trimester
    ____ I prefer to meet as needed rather than a set time
11. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding school to home communication?

Thank you so much for your time and participating in the survey!
Consent to Participate in Research

Consent to Participate in Research At Token Community Day School

You are being asked to participate in research, which will be conducted by Scott Maddock, teacher and graduate student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University, Sacramento. The Department of Education supports the practice of informed consent and protection for subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you would like to participate in the present study.

The purpose of this study is to develop, for implementation, a school wide program to strengthen home to school communication for Token students and families.

You will be asked to fill out the attached survey of questions about home to school communication at Token Community Day School.

The information gathered from this survey is important since it will represent a sampling of parent opinions on current home to school communication and help the researcher develop a process to improve home to school communication to assist students in becoming more successful.

Your participation is solicited, but strictly voluntary. The researcher assures you that all surveys will remain anonymous.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Scott Maddock at: (530) 274-1322 or by email at smaddock@nevco.k12.ca.us

Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your support and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Scott Maddock
Teacher/ Graduate Student
APPENDIX C

Instrument of the Study: Sample Student Behavior Sheet

We, the adults, give you, the students, instructions. You, the students, follow the instructions *immediately, without comment.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Room/Reading</td>
<td>Science/Elective</td>
<td>P.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared for School/Other*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Point total may change after staff review at the end of the day.
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