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Examining Truancy Board Effectiveness in Countering Student Absenteeism in Grades  
K - 5 in Three Title I Schools in Northeast Tennessee

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Jennifer Grace Clark

May 2008

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Dr. Louise MacKay, Chair

Dr. James Lampley

Dr. Eric Glover

Dr. Cecil Blankenship

Keywords: Truancy Board, Absenteeism, Truancy, Discipline Problems,

Compulsory Education

## ABSTRACT

Examining Truancy Board Effectiveness in Countering Student Absenteeism in Grades  
K - 5 in Three Title I Schools in Northeast Tennessee

by

Jennifer Phillips Clark

The purpose of this study was to determine the association between the use of a truancy board and the number of student absences in K - 5 students in 3 Title I schools in northeast Tennessee. Absences were compiled on students who attended the same elementary school over the 4 years of the study, 2003-2004 through 2006-2007. Two years of absences were combined for the 2 years prior to the implementation of the truancy board, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. The data were then compared to the combined number of days for the 2 years following implementation, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. A paired samples *t* test, an ANOVA, and an independent samples *t* test were used to analyze data regarding the affect of the truancy board on student attendance in K - 5 students.

The results of the study indicated there was no significant difference in the number of days absent for the students in the 3 schools in the 2 years following the implementation of a truancy board as compared to the 2 years prior to implementation.

The results of the study also indicated there was no significance with student gender. Male and female students were absent at about the same rate after the truancy board implementation as before. Socioeconomic status for each student was also examined. Students who qualified for the free and reduced lunch program were considered to have a low socioeconomic status and students not qualifying were considered to have a high socioeconomic status. Both groups of students were absent about the same number of days after the truancy board implementation as before.

## DEDICATION

My husband, Danny, and my children, Cloe and Clare. Thank you for your patience and sacrifice.

To my parents, Doug and Barbara Phillips, and to my grandparents, the late Charles Mascott and Grace Mascott and the late Paul and Bertha Phillips. Thank you for my first experiences with learning and demonstrating the importance of education.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of thousands of students are absent from school each day in America; many are absent without an excuse. Principals state that student absenteeism is one of the top discipline problems they face in their schools. Unexcused absences, or truancy, usually lead to negative, long-term outcomes (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001).

Compulsory education began in America in 1600 when the Puritans settled Massachusetts. The belief was that educated children could read and study the Bible in order to save their souls. Later, labor laws began to influence compulsory education. In some cases, families needed their children's incomes to survive. When this need was common in a particular community, laws were passed with little regulation of school attendance. However, in some communities, low child labor wages kept adults from earning what was needed to support families and compulsory education laws were passed that required children to attend school regularly. Getting children into school and out of the work force allowed adults to work for higher wages and support their families (Kotin & Aikman, 1980).

Currently, all states have compulsory education laws and strict standards of attendance. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) has made student attendance an important component of school success. This Federal law requires schools to have an additional indicator when measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In Tennessee's elementary and middle schools, the additional indicator is student attendance. Schools must show AYP in attendance each year. Additionally, Tennessee requires schools to show a 93% attendance rate or higher on individual school report cards and system report

cards. The *Tennessee Attendance Manual* outlines specific attendance issues such as the number of days in the school year, the ages required for students to attend, and attendance reporting procedures. The Tennessee manual echoes Tennessee state law as outlined in the Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) and NCLB. (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2006*).

There is some discrepancy in the actual meaning of truancy. While it is widely accepted that truancy is a status offense, the nature of the absence is often in question. The broadest definition, which is widely accepted, is that truancy is simply an unexcused absence. However, some states define truancy as an unexcused absence without the knowledge of the parent or guardian. Many states define truancy according to the number of days missed by students. For example, in Pennsylvania, three or more absences label a child as truant. In Louisiana, the fifth unexcused absence is considered truancy; while in Colorado and California, the limit is four absences. There is no national standard for truancy and because states use different tracking systems, national data are unavailable. Data can often be difficult to track within a single state. In Tennessee, for example, there is no requirement for the computer programs used to track attendance making it difficult to collect statewide attendance data (Christie, 2006).

There are many legitimate factors that cause a student to miss school and many times the reasons are legitimate. For example, students miss many days each year due to personal illness. However, when a student becomes truant, there are several factors that may influence the absences. Family factors may include lack of supervision and negative role models. School factors may include inconsistent enforcement of the attendance policy or boredom with the curriculum. Family mobility and parents with multiple jobs

are economic factors. Student factors may include a lack of interest in school or ignorance of school attendance rules (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007).

Just as the causes for student truancy vary, the consequences vary as well. At the elementary level, student truancy is an early warning sign for later delinquent activity, dropping out of high school, and educational failure. As children grow older, the effects of truancy become even more serious. Truancy in middle and high school becomes the most powerful predictor of delinquency. Such delinquency may then lead to the predictability of male criminality and incarcerations are increased while their earning potential as adults is decreased (Capps, 2003).

Student achievement is also affected when a child becomes truant. Many school districts with high truancy rates also have the lowest achievement rates (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007). In primary grades, principals report truancy as an added challenge to the daily burdens they face as administrators. Primary grade teachers express frustration in planning and reteaching practices resulting from truant students (Reid, 1999).

Many states, communities, and individual schools have become proactive in the battle against student truancy. A collaborative approach involving stakeholders such as school personnel, the juvenile courts, parents, and community agencies is commonly used. Computer systems are in place to track student absences and the data are reviewed regularly. Some school systems have implemented a coordinator who works with parents to help keep children in school. Others have started mentoring programs for students to help them want to stay in school. Many states have enacted policies that withhold driving privileges from truant students (Baker et al., 2001).

The available research examines truancy prevention strategies that are multifaceted. Schools or school systems in which very little was being done to combat truancy have started the implementation of approaches using multiple strategies such as student rewards, parent workshops, use of truancy officers, and social service agencies. There is little research available concerning the sole implementation of the use of truancy boards or attendance boards at the elementary level. A truancy board generally consists of members of the school administrations and other community stakeholders. The purpose of this board is to assist parents in the improvement of student attendance. The researcher feels this area needs to be further examined.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of a truancy board on elementary grade level students and the demographic variables associated with students at the primary level. The attendance of students in Kindergarten through grade 5 in the Title I schools in the study will be examined over a 2-year period prior to the use of a truancy board and a 2-year period after implementation.

#### *Research Questions*

The research questions that will guide this study are:

1. Are there differences in K-5 students' attendance rates for the same students in the three target schools between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period?

2. Are there differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period among School A, School B, and School C?
3. Are there differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on gender for the target schools?
4. Are there differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on socioeconomic status for the target schools?

#### *Significance of the Study*

Research is conducted, committees are formed for planning, and initiatives are implemented, evaluated, and sustained. The implementation of a truancy board is not an exception. The effects of truancy board implementation independent of other truancy prevention strategies may benefit schools in similar situations with similar demographics. The challenges of NCLB, state requirements, and the lack of academic achievement in truant students all create a concern for school administrators.

Existing literature addresses very little regarding the independent use of a truancy board. While there is significant literature to review regarding truancy and attendance at the higher education and secondary levels, there are few pieces of literature regarding truancy or attendance issues at the elementary level.

### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of the study, the following terms are defined:

Compulsory Education: Laws that make certain children regularly attend school (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007).

Adequate Yearly Progress: A measure of a school's or school system's ability to meet required federal benchmarks with specific performance standards from year to year (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

State Report Card: Tennessee's reporting method for state achievement test results (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

Attendance Rate: The average number of days students attend school as compared to the average number of days the students are enrolled (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

Tennessee Code Annotated: State laws in Tennessee (*LexisNexis*, 2007)

Status Offense: A type of crime that is not based upon prohibited action or inaction but rests on the fact that the offender has a certain personal condition or is of a specified character (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007).

Economically Disadvantaged: A student who qualifies for free or reduced lunch (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 2005).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 2005).

Graduation Equivalency Diploma: The test measures whether a person has the academic skills and knowledge expected of high school graduates in the United States thus allowing adults who lack a high school diploma to certify that they possess the

equivalent of a traditional high school education (American Council on Education, 2007).

Homeschool: To teach school subjects to one's children at home (Merriam-Webster, 2007).

Families First Program: The program provides temporary cash benefits to families in Tennessee who have children and are experiencing financial difficulties. It emphasizes work, training, and personal responsibility (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

School Improvement Plan: A document outlining effective use of data to determine student performance goals and to use research to identify strategies and interventions to achieve these goals (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

ANOVA: An acronym for a statistical procedure entitled analysis of variance. An overall test of the null hypothesis for more than two population means (Witte & Witte, 2004).

t test: Used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the average values of the same measurement made under two different conditions (Easton & McColl, 2007).

SPSS: Statistical Program for the Social Sciences. Statistical software used for editing data and statistical analyses (Green & Salkind, 2005).

### *Delimitations and Limitations*

Delimitations of this study include:

1. The population is delimited to three Title I schools in a northeast Tennessee school system.
2. The population is delimited to students in Kindergarten through grade 5 who attended the same school during the study, from the 2003-2004 school year through the 2006-2007 school year.
3. The population is delimited to three schools in a rural school system.

Limitations of this study include:

1. Schools A, B, and C have different incentive programs in place for students in Kindergarten through grade 5.
2. While only Kindergarten through grade 5 student attendance was examined, Schools A and B are pre-K through grade 8 and School C is pre-K through grade 5.
3. There may be mistakes in attendance recording and tracking that cannot be explained.
4. Schools A and B maintained the same administrator for all 4 years of the study while School C had an administrative change beginning the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the study.

### Overview

The study is divided into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to compulsory education laws, truancy contributors, and strategies to decrease the number of truant students. The statement of the problem, the research questions, the significance of the study, the definition of terms, and the delimitations and limitations of the study are

also included. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to various issues concerning student attendance including truancy data, the legal aspects of attendance and truancy, causes and consequences of truancy, and truancy prevention strategies. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 presents the results. Chapter 5 contains the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research resulting from the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The history of compulsory schooling began as early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century in America. The Puritans settling in Massachusetts brought an understanding of education and foresight as to what the lack of education could bring. Laws were soon established that mandated some form of schooling for children. As time passed and children came to be seen as assets in the labor force and compulsory schooling laws became less stringent. The attitudes towards children and their education changed once again when labor unions saw children as a threat to adult workers' wages. Laws were updated yet again to force parents to take their children out of factories and place them into school (Ensign, 1969).

Even today, laws regarding student attendance are being reviewed and updated regularly. Because there are no national laws regarding student attendance, states are responsible for determining appropriate ages when students should attend school, the number of days per year they attend, and the length of the school day. States, along with local Boards of Education, are also responsible for establishing consequences regarding student truancy (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

The signing of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2001, created a challenge for elementary schools regarding student attendance. Student attendance in Kindergarten through grade 8 is tracked as an additional indicator to measure a school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). NCLB has consequences and requires each state to have consequences for schools and school systems if AYP for this additional indicator is not met each year (NCLB).

Tracking student truancy on the state and national levels is a challenge. There is no standard process used for reporting student absences nationally or even within the same state. Individual school districts have the flexibility to choose any computer system they consider appropriate to track the absence of its students (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001).

There are many reasons why a student may miss school. Often there is a legitimate reason, such as a personal illness. States define the difference between a legitimate illness or an excused absence differently from an absence without an excuse, or an unexcused absence. States also vary considerably when defining an unexcused absence and at which point to take action against the student and parent or guardian. In Tennessee, for example, an unexcused absence is simply defined as a missed school day without an adequate excuse. Virginia considers an unexcused absence to be a day of school missed in which the student's parent or guardian is not aware of nor supports. Unexcused absences in North Carolina are days missed that cannot be justified under local attendance policies (Code of Virginia, 2007; General Assembly of North Carolina, 2005; Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

States also vary in the number of days in which the school system justifies contacting parents or guardians. After 5 unexcused days in Tennessee, written notice is given to the parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian does not comply within 3 days, a report is filed with legal authorities. In Virginia, parents or guardians are also contacted after 5 unexcused days are missed. However, after the 6<sup>th</sup> unexcused day is missed, a conference is scheduled with an attendance officer. After the 7<sup>th</sup> unexcused absence, a complaint is filed against the parent or guardian with legal authorities. North Carolina

notifies parents or guardians after only 3 unexcused absences. By the 6<sup>th</sup> unexcused absence, the parents or guardians are contacted by mail and an attendance counselor works with the student and the family to improve attendance. After 10 unexcused absences, the school administration meets with the parents or guardians to determine if a good faith effort has been made to improve attendance. If not, the principal contacts legal authorities and a complaint may be filed with juvenile court (Code of Virginia, 2007; General Assembly of North Carolina, 2005; Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

The consequences for students who become truant vary from light to severe. School districts have a variety of short-term consequences for students who have no excuse for missing school. A truant student may face after-school detention, extra work assignments, or in-school suspension. Long-term consequences for the students may result in juvenile delinquency, earning low wages as adults, and becoming welfare recipients. Student attendance is vital to the academic success of a child. Children not attending school regularly have a much higher risk of dropping out, have lower literacy rates, and put themselves at risk for adult criminality (Baker et al., 2001).

Some schools and school districts have become proactive in combating student truancy across America. Typical preventive practices include home visits, counselor intervention programs, and parent assistance programs (Capps, 2003).

The review of literature will identify research relevant to this study. The first part will examine the history of compulsory schooling and the past and present laws related to student attendance. The second section discusses the problems with tracking truancy, the third is an explanation of truancy causes and consequences, fourth is a study regarding

the relationship between truancy and student achievement, and lastly, truancy prevention strategies found in the literature will be presented.

### *History of Compulsory Education in the United States*

Puritans settling in Massachusetts in the mid-1600s brought many traditions, beliefs, and practices with them from England. One of these was their belief that education was important to all classes of people. England had established Poor Laws in the mid-1500s to ensure all children were taught a trade. After acquiring and using this new skill, it was thought these children would not become idle and troublesome to the community. It was also widely accepted that if children could learn to read, they could read and study the Bible. Not only would these children not become idle and troublesome, they would be saved from Satan's wrath. It was a national system that lasted 7 years for England's citizens between ages 12 and 60 who were not already employed (Encarta, 2007; Thattai, 2001).

The Massachusetts Puritans took this concept and expanded the laws to adapt to their new way of life in America. There were three major principles adopted from the Poor Laws in England. First, they believed mandatory schooling bred individual economic independence. Secondly, the Poor Laws allowed the citizens to be taxed for the purpose of education and training of the poor. Thirdly, the Puritans established the state as the final arbitrator as to the type of learning conveyed to children. One major point had changed. The revised laws written by the Massachusetts Puritans required in mandatory education for all children, not just for the poor as they did in England (Kotin & Aikman, 1980).

Ensign (1969) stated the first compulsory schooling law was established in 1642 in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. It required parents and guardians to teach children a trade and to learn to read. The law made provisions for local males, called selectmen, to act as overseers of the education of the children in their specific communities. These selectmen were to determine whether the children were being taught appropriately to understand religious principles and to understand the laws of the country. There were no provisions for schools or teachers; all responsibility was placed on the parents or the guardians according to Ensign. Massachusetts's law contained penalties for parents or guardians who failed to meet the educational standards. Negligence could result in court proceedings, fines, or having the child taken away. The selectmen could be fined if they failed to enforce the law (Ensign).

A few years later, the law was amended to be more specific. It was understood that children should read "perfectly." Apprenticeships were clarified so that boys received training until age 21 and girls until age 18. Also, the master or teacher began earning payments from the town treasury (Kotin & Aikman, 1980).

It soon became evident that parents alone could not meet the educational requirements. Towns became more involved in children's instruction as the educational burden on parents and guardians began to increase. Towns with 50 or more households appointed a teacher who was paid by parents. Towns with a 100 or more also appointed a schoolmaster to give instruction in Latin grammar to boys (Ensign, 1969).

By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, public attitudes towards compulsory public education began to change. These second and third generation Americans did not demonstrate the strong religious beliefs as had the original Puritans and the need for

commerce and growth began to emerge and become popular. The general population began to question the need for long years of schooling as this model interfered with the workforce. According to Kotin and Aikman (1980), poor families needed the children to work and many children began leaving school to enter factories. Often, the child's income was needed for survival of the family. In many new factories, women and children made up half of the employment. Often, it was suggested, that because most poor children had few educational opportunities ahead of them, they were better off working. Thattai (2001) stated when trade with England ended in 1812, factories sprung up throughout New England. Children between the ages 7 to 12 were the most sought after workers. Many of these children worked 7 days a week for 12 hours per day (Kotin & Aikman; Nosotro, n.d.; Thattai).

There were opponents to child labor. Some parents, guardians, and members of certain communities saw the harm to the child's health with long hours and poor working conditions. The opponents believed the early years in a child's life should be focused on education rather than work and that education was necessary for the effective functioning of democracy. Because of their concern, some factories did establish what were called factory schools. However, in most situations educational opportunities were only allowed on Sundays after 8:30 PM (Ensign, 1969; Thattai, 2001).

After the Civil War, there were even more children working and the need for legislation regarding child labor began to grow. By 1899, most states had enacted some form of child labor restrictions. In many of these restrictions, children were limited to working only in manufacturing. The minimum age for employment was 12 with a maximum of 10 work hours per day. However, loose requirements and infrequent

monitoring for schooling and literacy meant many children were still being abused (Kotin & Aikman, 1980).

According to Ensign (1969), part of the influence that began limiting child labor came from labor unions. They perceived children were taking jobs from adults. As a result, in April 1904, the National Child Labor Committee was formed. The committee attempted to keep children under 14 from working in any industry or commerce. Additionally, children between the ages of 14 and 16 were protected from excessive hours and night work. Within 5 years, 43 states had enacted similar, significant legislation regulating child labor. Federal courts became involved with the enactment of the Keating-Owen Bill in 1917. This regulated commerce by prohibiting articles made using child labor (Ensign).

Another influence on the factory was the result of the 1870 and 1910 Federal Census Reports. The results showed significant decreases in illiteracy percentages in most states (Ensign, 1969). In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed. The act established an 8-hour workday with a 40-hour week maximum limit. The minimum age for working children was 16 and it allowed inspections of factories to monitor employees and the use of child labor. This move limiting the ages of children and number of hours worked naturally led to changes in compulsory schooling. With children not at work, the laws forced them back into school (Kotin & Aikman, 1980).

### *Compulsory Schooling in Tennessee*

Tennessee, along with many other states, followed Massachusetts' lead when establishing compulsory schooling laws. The first laws for compulsory schooling in

Tennessee were passed on April 12, 1905. (Morgan, 2004) At that time, this law in Tennessee was Public Law Chapter 483. Over time, Tennessee's laws evolved into the Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA). Attendance laws in Tennessee now can be found in TCA Title 49, Section 6, Chapters 3001 – 3005 (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

Tennessee Code Annotated specifically outlines all requirements for children residing in Tennessee regarding school attendance. As with all states, public education in Tennessee is free to any children who will be age 5 on or before September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year. Tennessee places the responsibility of school attendance on parents and guardians of all children between ages 6 and 17. Parents are to provide an education to their child or children either through a public school or non-public school. The only exceptions are students under age 17 who have already earned a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate or are currently enrolled in a GED program. The other exception is a child enrolled in a home school. The specificity of the law in Tennessee clearly outlines who should be receiving an education either in a public school, private school, or home school. Individual districts have policies and procedures in place to monitor the type of education students receive in their districts (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

In addition to TCA, Tennessee also publishes an attendance manual that defines attendance expectations even further. All guidelines in the manual are pursuant of laws outlined in TCA. The *Tennessee Attendance Manual* specifies all school systems must conduct school for at least 180 days each school year. All students should have the opportunity to attend and the school system is responsible for any consequences to those who fail to comply. Teachers are to take attendance daily and the teacher's records must

be checked against the school's computer program used for tracking attendance. Each school system is responsible for adopting a procedure for tracking student attendance (*Tennessee Attendance Manual, 2007*).

In addition to establishing guidelines for accounting student attendance, the *Tennessee Attendance Manual* also lists criteria for notifying parents or guardians of student absences. The manual states parents or guardians must be notified by written notice each time the child has five unexcused absences. The manual continues to outline guidelines for school systems regarding issues such as what constitutes a full school day, early dismissals, late arrivals, and student absences resulting from school-approved activities (*Tennessee Attendance Manual, 2007*).

Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-3007 specifically outlines guidelines for school systems to use when enforcing compulsory attendance. Names, ages, and residences of students attending any school in the district including public, private, home, or other type of school are to be reported to the school system director. The attendance of students and any who may transfer in are tracked through daily attendance reports. According to TCA, any student who misses 5 days without an excuse is to be immediately reported to the school system director. Any additional accumulation of five unexcused absences are also reported. The parents or guardians are notified of the absences in writing. If the parents or guardians fail to comply by legitimizing the absences within 3 days of the written notice, they are reported to the local law agency. A local judge may deal with each case on an individual basis consistent with TCA. Options include fines parents must pay or a requirement of community service (*Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007*).

Tennessee Code Annotated allows local school districts the opportunity to join local law enforcement to enforce compulsory attendance. Advisory boards may be created using representatives of school staff, parents, administrators, and other community members. These boards are also referred to as truancy boards or attendance boards. Tennessee law allows input from local neighborhood groups and provisions for training for school officials and law enforcement personnel (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

Tennessee law also contains additional, more specific consequences for parents of truant children. Pursuant to TCA 71-3-154, some activities for families participating in the Families First Program are addressed. Those families enrolled in the program are responsible for their child or children's school attendance. If parents fail to comply with the school system's attendance policy of the child's school system, a redirection of benefits may occur for as much as 20%. Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-3017 regulates the eligibility of a driver's license for students under age 18. Any child under age 18 with 10 consecutive or 15 cumulative unexcused absences during a semester cannot possess a driving permit or license. License holders may have their driving privileges revoked if unexcused absences become a problem (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

#### *No Child Left Behind and Student Attendance*

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This act has changed the way educators and the public view the educational system in America. The challenge of this new legislation was to hold individual school systems accountable for failing students. The previous system used to report student progress

failed to reveal certain students and groups of students failing to meet academic standards. The solution chosen by the NCLB act has been to set specific goals with clear timelines of success, disseminate information to parents in a clear manner regarding student achievement, and give parents choices if schools fail to show improvement (Nosotro, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

A significant feature of NCLB that is different than any other legislation before it is the withholding of funding for schools that are failing. Previously, legislation allowed failing schools access to funding equal to schools showing success. Since 1965, more than \$321 billion of federal funding has been spent to help the educationally disadvantaged students. NCLB specifies that taxpayer funds will only be allocated for programs that work (Thomas, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Academic expectations are established at the state level in core subjects and progress is measured through standardized tests aligned to state standards. Any school or school system failing to meet the standards is targeted for improvement. Data are disaggregated by economic background, race and ethnicity, English proficiency, and disability. Schools are accountable for each subgroup as well as the school's scores as a whole (NCLB, 2001).

Accountability is the foundation of NCLB. The federal government has given individual states the responsibility of establishing an accountability system. This statewide accountability system applies to all local education agencies, public elementary schools, and public secondary schools within each state. Schools must show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by individual states. The AYP formula for each state should be statistically valid and reliable, should result in substantial academic

improvement, and should measure the progress of schools. Adequate Yearly Progress must be shown in all subgroups including students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, all racial and ethnic groups, and students with limited English proficiency (NCLB, 2001).

In addition to meeting high standards in academic areas, schools must meet goals in other areas as well. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* requires secondary schools to show achievement in graduation rates as an additional indicator. Each state must also determine an additional indicator for the public elementary schools. States have a choice as to which category public elementary schools are required to show improvement. Public elementary schools must show progress and meet this specific state-determined goal as an additional indicator. States may choose from achievement on additional “state and locally administered assessments, decreases in grade-to-grade retention rates, attendance rates, and changes in the percentages of students completing gifted and talented advanced placement and college preparatory courses” (NCLB, 2001, p.2).

Tennessee has chosen student attendance as the additional indicator for elementary schools. All public elementary schools and school systems are required to carefully track student attendance rates. The Tennessee State Board of Education defines attendance as the actual student attendance rate. This is calculated by the average number of days a student attended school compared to the average number of days that the student was enrolled. Tennessee’s current target attendance rate for all public elementary schools is 93% (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

The Tennessee Education Act of 1992 previously established standards of accountability for all public schools. Tennessee state law, specifically TCA 49-1-601,

has been amended to coincide with NCLB regulations for meeting federal benchmarks. The Tennessee State Board of Education has amended performance standards and requirements to meet these standards in order to meet the criteria mandated by NCLB (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

As required by NCLB, Tennessee publishes a state, system, and individual school report card each year. All NCLB information can be found on the report card including student achievement at each proficiency level disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, economically disadvantaged, the percentage of students not tested, most recent 2-year trends in student achievement, graduation rates for secondary schools, proficiency qualifications of teachers, and aggregate information on any other indicators used by the state to determine AYP (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

With so much emphasis placed on AYP and student attendance for public elementary schools, Tennessee has clearly defined what is required of schools serving students in Kindergarten through grade 8 to meet federal benchmarks. According to the Tennessee State Department of Education, there must be a 95% participation rate on all state assessments, required proficiency in math, reading, and language arts, and a 93% attendance rate for the school year or improvement from the previous year. If schools in Tennessee do not meet these benchmarks, TCA and NCLB have determined consequences for the schools. After the 1<sup>st</sup> year of not making AYP in any area including attendance, the school is listed as a Target school. There are no actions taken at this point. Schools are simply notified they did not make AYP and have 1 year to show improvement (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of not making AYP, TCA requires schools to be notified they are at risk of being placed on notice. NCLB requires the public be notified, parents be given the opportunity to move their child to a school making AYP, schools must revise their School Improvement Plans (SIP), and schools must receive technical assistance from an outside expert (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

After the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of not making AYP, the new actions taken as required by TCA are a joint study between the department of education and the school system to report findings on how the school and or school system can meet adequate yearly progress for performance standards. There will also be an approval of discretionary grants. NCLB does not add any new actions (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

After the 4<sup>th</sup> year of not making AYP, TCA requires numerous new actions be taken. The state must approve funds allocated to the school, a local review committee is appointed to monitor the SIP, principals are given a performance contract, and remediation and supplemental services are put in place. NCLB requires at least one corrective action be put into place. Schools may replace staff, adopt a new curriculum, decrease the authority of the management at the school, appoint an outside expert, or reorganize the internal organization of the school (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

After the 5<sup>th</sup> year, only one new action is required by both TCA and NCLB; a plan must be prepared and presented with options regarding alternative governance. In addition, all previous actions must continue through this 5<sup>th</sup> year (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

After the 6<sup>th</sup> year, TCA gives the Commissioner of Education the authority to assume powers of governance in the system, recommend the director be replaced, and recommend all or some of the local school board be replaced. NCLB requires prompt notification of all parents and teachers involved. Additionally, alternative governance could be implemented through reopening the school as a charter school, replacement of all or some of the school staff members, contact a private management agency, state takeover, or other major restructuring (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

After the 7<sup>th</sup> year, TCA requires no further action. NCLB requires no new action. The previous options from the 6<sup>th</sup> year are still in place (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2007).

A tremendous amount of pressure is placed on schools and school systems to meet attendance requirements each year. The consequences can have an impact on all members of a school system. Student attendance has become an important issue at the local, state, and national levels.

### Defining Truancy

Webster's dictionary defines a truant as "one who shirks duty; *especially*: one who stays out of school without permission" (Merriam - Webster, 2007, p.1). However, the definition of the term truancy varies nationally. While the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) has added an increased attention to attendance, there is an array of issues regarding truancy and the definition.

Most researchers would agree that truancy is defined as “an absence from school for no legitimate reason” (Edward, 2006, p.1). However, there are several factors that influence a student’s absence and specific reasons the student may not be in school.

The meaning of the term absence may vary. Some students may miss an entire school day while others miss only one or two specific classes. With regards to truancy, a student could be considered truant for missing a morning class for a health-related appointment or for a long-term absence of a “teenage mother, a child kept home to care for siblings, or a child taken out of school for an out-of-season family holiday” (Edward, 2006, p. 1). There are many other variations. Determining what constitutes a legitimate reason is a challenge for all states and school systems.

It is also challenging to determine whether or not an absence is excused or unexcused. Most school systems have guidelines for school administrators to follow, but often the administrator has flexibility in granting an excuse to students based on individual situations. Also, most states look at an excused and unexcused absence equally. If a student becomes seriously ill and misses a significant number of days, although the absences would be excused by the school, state accountability formulas only consider the number of days missed, not the reason (National Center for School Engagement (NCSE), 2006).

The United States Department of Education gives little guidance on truancy or a truancy definition for schools to follow as a national guideline. However, the National Center for School Engagement defines truancy as “If a student is absent without an excuse by the parent or guardian or if the student leaves school or a class without

permission of the teacher or administrator in charge, it will be considered to be an unexcused absence and the student shall be considered truant” (Seeley, 2006, p. 2).

Seeley (2006) gives an example and suggestions for districts that may be constructing their own truancy definition. First an organization should determine what constitutes an excuse and the process of getting the excuse to the appropriate personnel. The organization should examine methods of communication between parents or guardians and the school; such as written, oral, and email. Secondly, there should be a predetermined number of unexcused absences before the school considers consequences and regards the student as truant. This number should be provided in handbooks and parents and guardians should be informed of the consequences. Third, there should be a strategy in place for notifying parents of a student’s absence. Documentation of this notification is also important (Seeley).

Historically, states have collected attendance data, not truancy data. As noted earlier, attendance data do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Recently, NCLB has changed this practice and now requires states to have a truancy definition and data that are collected on a school-by-school basis (NCSE, 2006). Beginning with the 2005-2006 school year, states were to begin reporting these truancy data to the United States Department of Education. While still in the beginning stages, this national data should provide a more standardized national view of truancy (NCLB, 2001).

With the addition of NCLB reporting procedures, states will ideally become more uniform in defining student truancy. At this time, however, there are significant variations among states. In California, students absent without an excuse for 3 full days

or tardy or absent for more than any 30-minute period during 1 school day on three occasions is considered truant. For a student to be considered truant in Connecticut, the student has missed 4 unexcused absences in 1 month or 10 in 1 school year. In Illinois, truancy is defined as a student who is absent from school 10% of the 180 consecutive day school year. Louisiana considers a student truant if there are 5 missed days in 1 semester or 10 days in school not operating on semesters. Students are referred to juvenile and domestic relations court in Virginia after 7 absences in a school year (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007). Arizona defines truancy as 5 absences from school during a school year. In Colorado, 4 unexcused absences in 1 month or 10 unexcused absences in 1 school year make a student truant. New Hampshire defines truancy as 20 half-days of unexcused absences (Christie, 2006). In Tennessee, Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) outlines details regarding student truancy. While there is no specific definition given, TCA lists guidelines for parents and school officials. Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-3001 (c)(1) states that parents or guardians with children residing within the state between ages 6 and 17 “shall cause such child or children to attend public or non-public schools and in event of failure to do so, shall be subject to penalties” (TCA, 2007, p. 1). Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-3007 lists the duties of teachers, principals, and directors of schools regarding the reporting of student absences and how to address students with excessive absences. Tennessee Code Annotated requires principals or teachers to report to the director of schools all children who have been “absent 5 days without adequate excuse” (TCA, 2007, p. 1). The director of schools gives written notice to the parent or guardian of the children who are “unlawfully absent from school” (TCA, 2007, p. 1). If parents fail to comply, TCA gives directors guidance to “report the facts of

such unlawful attendance to the sheriff, constable, city police officer, district attorney general, or the foreman of the grand jury” (TCA, 2007, p. 1). The director is also required to report any child “who is habitually and unlawfully absent from school to the appropriate judge” (TCA, 2007, p.2). The judge may fine parents or guardians \$50 or require 5 hours of community service.

While there are variations in the number of days or class periods, all states do have limits for student absenteeism, processes for reporting, and consequences for parents or guardians. However, to effectively combat truancy at the national level, states and school systems should have more uniformity when defining truancy.

### *Causes of Truancy*

Much research has been conducted regarding the causes of students who become truant. For many students, there may be only one contributing factor while for others there are several causes that bring about their absence from school.

The National Center for School Engagement (2006) identifies three primary categories in which causes of truancy are divided: (a) home and family factors, (b) school factors, and (c) student factors. Home and family factors are characteristics that affect the home environment of the student. Often, the truant student comes from a home in which there is economic deprivation and the student is forced to work. There may also be domestic problems and family conflicts occurring in the home. Abuse and neglect may be occurring in the home as well as violence in or around the home. A student’s parent or guardian will have significant influence over a child’s attendance. If the parent or guardian abuses drugs and alcohol, the child is more likely to become truant. If a

student comes from a single parent home or one in which parents or guardians work multiple jobs, the student is less likely to attend school regularly. Parents or guardians can become negative role models, especially when they do not value education themselves. They may even condone student absences and show a lack of guidance and supervision. A high mobility rate in the family may also contribute to poor attendance (NCSE; Reid, 2005).

School related factors also influence a student's decision to attend school. The school environment affects the student's willingness to attend. If the atmosphere is unwelcoming and unsafe or if bullying is tolerated, students are more likely to be absent from school. Teachers also have influence over student attendance. Students are absent more often if teachers show a lack of respect for students, neglect diverse student needs, or have a lack of classroom control. The content and delivery of the curriculum also influence students' decisions concerning attendance. Inadequate identification of students with special education needs cause some students to feel "overwhelmed, frustrated, and with an inability to succeed" (NCSE, 2006, p.1) causing these students to be absent from school to the point of becoming truant. School accountability procedures regarding truancy and attendance also affect students' attitudes regarding school attendance. Walls (2000) links inconsistent attendance policies, lack of meaningful consequences, and poor record keeping practices as negative influences on students. Any time parents or guardians are not regularly notified regarding a student's attendance, the student's attendance is negatively affected. When the school's discipline policy consists of punishment through suspension for a student's truancy, students are less likely to have good attendance (NCSE; Walls).

While outside influences such as parents or guardians and teachers have an impact on student attendance, the students themselves may have personal issues that negatively influence their decisions to attend school. Research has not found a gender factor for children referred to court due to attendance issues. However, the “majority of petitioned truancy cases involve 15-year-olds” (Baker et al., 2001). Students labeled as truant are less likely to perceive school as favorable and have no positive relationship with teachers or other students. These students often feel academically inferior or view their classes as boring. They may also feel socially incompetent in class. Some students feel they cannot keep up with the material while others feel the material is not challenging enough. Truant students often do not feel safe at school. The students may also face frequent suspensions for a variety of offenses (Clearinghouse on Educational Policy and Management, 2004).

Students may become truant due to personal abuse of drugs and alcohol or poor physical or emotional health. Students may lack affordable transportation or have child care issues that keep them from attending school regularly. A student’s lack of English proficiency is sometimes a factor influencing school attendance. The negative influence of friends and peers also effects a student’s decision to attend school regularly. In many instances, truant students lack self-esteem, social skills, confidence, concentration, incentive, and self-management skills. In other situations, students are simply unaware of the school’s attendance laws (Walls, 2003).

### Consequences of Truancy

A student's lack of commitment to education has several short-term as well as long-term consequences. Truancy is a risk factor for student substance abuse and teen pregnancy. These students are also more susceptible to feelings of social isolation, low self-esteem, and overall weaker social skills than their peers who attend school regularly. There are greater feelings of rejection and criticism from parents. Short-term consequences can lead to a lifetime of problems if not quickly reversed (Baker et al., 2001).

Truant students are at risk for several delinquency issues. Daytime burglary and vandalism occur more often by truant students. Students missing school are more likely to participate in gang behavior, auto theft, and graffiti use (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007).

Students, whether in elementary school or high school, are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school if attendance problems occur. The truant student's achievement will also suffer as a result of not attending school regularly. Schools with the highest truancy rates typically have the lowest academic achievement rates (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007). Students who exhibit problems in elementary school will most likely have attendance problems in high school. Seventy-five percent of these same students will fail to graduate from high school (Edward & Malcolm, 2002).

If student truancy is allowed to continue throughout a short-term period, several long-term problems tend to occur. As with the immediate results of school absences, students who become truant are at a greater risk of drug abuse and associate with drug-using peers as adults. Because these students have a high rate of dropping out, as adults

they have lower earned wages, are often the recipients of welfare, have fewer job prospects, and are unemployed more often (Baker et al., 2001; Morgan, 2004). The cycle of poverty is often perpetuated. Other long-term consequences of students who are truant show that as adults they exhibit more violence and tend to have marital problems. They often fall into adult criminality and are incarcerated more often. The financial impact on the community resulting from a less educated workforce also brings about an increase in the need for social services (Baker et al.). On a larger scale, these adults generally feel political apathy and negatively affect the local tax revenue (*Encyclopedia of Everyday Law*, 2007).

Between 1978 and 1986, 85 juveniles were convicted of murder in the state of New York. There was only one common factor among them. Of the 85, 57.6% had a record of student truancy. Only 7.1% had not had an attendance problem while in school. No records were available for the remaining 35% (National Center for School Engagement, n.d.).

The state of Tennessee has laws in place to deter students from being habitually absent from school. According to Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA), Tennessee's state law number TCA 49-6-3017, students can now have their driver's licenses suspended. In 2002, 6,488 licenses were suspended in Tennessee (Morgan, 2004). Many schools have consequences for truant students. During the 2001-2002 school year, 30,000 students were suspended from Tennessee schools for attendance issues. Students and parents can also be referred to the local court system for habitual absences according to TCA 49-6-3007. The local judge may fine parents \$50 per day or sentence them to 5 hours of community service if a child is absent more than 5 days in a school year. The Families

First Program benefits may be reduced by 20% for families with truant children according to TCA 71-3-154 (Tennessee Code Annotated, 2007).

The habitually absent student will experience many negative consequences. Not only will the child suffer on a short-term level throughout the years of education, but also as an adult. The truant student will often become a financial burden to the community as well as a threat to community safety.

### *Truancy and Student Achievement*

As discussed previously, truancy has several negative consequences for students; not only while still in school, but as adults as well. Missing school negatively affects a student's level of academic achievement. Not only does common sense tell us that if a student is not in school, the student cannot learn the academic material, but research supports this concept as well. Researchers found several instances in which high absenteeism rates negatively affected a student's performance with regards to the student's grade point average, classroom grades, and standardized achievement test scores. One report found "A student's absence is negatively correlated to a student's standardized test score and warns policymakers that habitually absent students need special attention" (Dunn, 2003, p. 8).

Heberling and Shaffer (1995) found school attendance has a significant effect on a student's grade point average. The research examined both regular education students and learning-disabled students to find both groups displayed evidence that as the rate of absenteeism increased, the students' grade point average decreased. It was also found

that absenteeism directly affects the amount of learning at the elementary level (Heberling & Shaffer).

Strickland conducted a study of high school juniors in the Chicago area in 1998 to determine if there was a moderate correlation between attendance and grade point average. He found chronic absenteeism to be a major indicator of poor academic achievement. He also determined that when attendance improved, student grades tended to improve as well (Strickland, 1998).

Several other researchers have come to conclusions regarding truancy and achievement. Anderson, Mitchell, and Butler state “poor performance, truancy...can affect academic achievement” (1993, p. 1). “Absenteeism is detrimental to students’ achievement,” and “students who miss school fall behind their peers” (DeKalb, 1999, p. 1). Baker et al. (2001) found the students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates. The National Center for School Engagement (2006) reported truancy is correlated with poor performance on standardized tests. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) addresses student absences as an indicator for low-performing schools. “Students who do not attend school are more likely to score poorly on tests of achievement” (American Federation of Teachers, 2007, p. 2). These findings each support the idea that students will gain a greater amount of academic knowledge if they are in school regularly.

Other researchers have found more specific results. Myers conducted an analysis of student reading and math scores on the Basic Skills Test for a group of Minnesota students. He found that attendance effects were larger on math scores as compared to reading scores. Myers reported a “1% increase in attendance can affect up to 7% increase

in math scores among high achieving Latino students” (Myers, 2001, p. 1). He also found that students in the upper quintile were affected more by an increase in attendance (Myers).

Johnston (2000) reports students who attend class 95% of the time are twice as likely to pass state language-arts tests as students with only 85% attendance. In Rochester, New York, students who scored between 85 and 100 on state English tests had at least a 93% attendance rate. Also, students who scored below the 54<sup>th</sup> percentile only had an 85% attendance rate (Johnston).

The literature indicates students must attend school regularly in order to achieve high academic standards whether measured by grade point average, classroom grades, or on standardized achievement tests.

### Truancy Prevention Strategies

Assisting individual students with attendance and increasing overall school attendance rates are obstacles faced by individual schools, districts, and states. While each level must determine strategies that will be most effective for each individual situation, there have been several strategies suggested by researchers and national organizations interested in school attendance that have been proven to be effective in increasing student attendance.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program (OJJDP) gives suggestions for effective practices regarding student attendance. First and foremost, there should be parent involvement. Meaningful student consequences and incentives are enforced in schools that are successful. There should be involvement of community

resources such as local law enforcement officials. Ongoing school-based truancy reduction programs should be in place. These programs should be “comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering” (Baker et al., 2001, p. 7). They need to view the student as part of a family and deal with the family as part of the community. School-based programs should have long-term objectives that evolve over time. Trained and supported staff must be in place to manage the program. Collaborative partnerships must be established with community agencies, organizations, and concerned individuals (Baker et al.).

Educational Digest (2002) listed several additional practices that will positively influence overall attendance. Attendance patterns should be analyzed regularly to allow school personnel to know who is absent and when they are absent. Attendance policies should be reviewed regularly with stakeholder input. Consistent enforcement of the policy guidelines will also improve student attendance. Parents should be communicated with regularly and efforts must be made to reach out to them. The use of automated telephone calling systems has been shown to be effective. Educational Digest suggested schools hold special activities on Mondays and Fridays because most student absences occur on these 2 days and the special activities could prove to be incentives to encourage student attendance. Student attendance should be reviewed from the previous year before school starts to target at-risk students early. Allowing at-risk students to participate in special responsibilities such as raising the flag or leading the school in the pledge could help increase individual attendance by allowing them to demonstrate responsibility. Providing counseling and modeling behavior are also positive influences on school attendance (Educational Digest).

Specific research has been conducted regarding certain practices. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found three broad strategies have been found to positively influence student attendance. First, schools that take a comprehensive approach involving the student, the family, and the community have shown success. Secondly, schools that use more positive reinforcement rather than negative punishment activities have proven to be effective. Finally, schools must remain focused on the improvement of student attendance over a long period of time to show positive results. The Epstein and Sheldon research on partnership practices found assigning a truant officer to students and families with attendance problems had positive effects. Rewarding students with good attendance and referring habitually absent students to counselors also helps. Family contact is also important. Making parents and guardians aware of a school contact person, effective communication, and workshops for families on school attendance have each shown to have a positive influence on student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon).

Additional research suggests using a collaborative approach but adds other suggestions. Early prevention strategies such as conferences with parents for elementary school students will lower absenteeism. Schools should use a computer system to track student absences and notify parents or guardians of student absences immediately (Walls, 2000). The National Center for School Engagement echoes this research. However, it is suggested schools and school districts set up Attendance Review Boards whose responsibilities would be to assist students and parents or guardians solve school attendance problems through the utilization of school and community resources (California Department of Education, 2007; NCSE, 2006).

Another researcher has interviewed truant students who reported their friends also skipped school. He suggests that if these students were exposed to other peer groups and had other positive interactions, their attendance might improve. After-school athletic activities or other programs can give truant students the opportunity to make new friends in a positive atmosphere while feeling a sense of accomplishment (DeKalb, 1999).

There are several additional strategies that have shown success as well. The school should provide emotional, social, and behavioral support for students. Alternative learning environments and curricula may raise student attendance. Projects to improve attendance should be designed for “younger students who have not yet become disaffected are likely to be much more effective and cost-efficient than spending on special provisions to support long-term non-attenders to return to school” (Edward & Malcolm, 2002, p. 3).

There have also been suggestions regarding teacher behavior and student attendance. Teachers should arrive on time to class each day. In the classroom, frequent praise for students and interaction with the entire class must be evident. Teachers should minimize verbal reprimands and other punishment. Competition in the classroom should also be deemphasized. Working with high school students to develop a career plan will also help improve attendance (Edward & Malcolm, 2002).

### *Truancy Board Practices*

Truancy boards are used in school districts across the country. In most instances, the local districts have developed policies to guide administrators through the truancy board process. The purpose of these boards is to determine the cause of a student's

attendance problems and create a plan to assist the student in improved school attendance behavior. These boards are comprised of members of the school community as well as the general community. There may be school administrators, law enforcement officials, and members of the local Child Welfare department on the board. The board is created as a final step before students and parents or guardians are referred to the local court system. The ultimate goal of this board is to keep students in school (California Department of Education, 2007).

In order to establish an effective truancy board, several factors must occur. First, there should be a commitment from the school system. Volunteers are needed to serve on the board and should be well trained to make decisions regarding student attendance. Schools and the board must also establish a process to refer a student to the truancy board. Smooth operation of this process will be dependant on the coordination of all involved parties and the needed documentation (Dimock, 2004).

California has adopted a statewide policy regarding truancy boards. It is called the Student Attendance Review Board or SARB. In one study, it was concluded “SARB is an effective strategy to improve student attendance for those students referred to SARB” (Thompson, 1998, p. 142). Of the students referred to SARB in one school district, there was a 76% improvement in attendance after meeting with SARB. In San Diego, attendance increased from 68% to 81% after the implementation of SARB and truancy rates fell from 32% to 19% (Thompson).

In Ohio, the Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program is used to prevent excessive absences for students in elementary and middle school. Once students reach a certain number of absences, the parents or guardians are invited to participate in a

mediation session. School representatives are also in attendance along with a truancy officer and a social worker. Causes of the child's truancy are discussed and an agreement is reached. This program has seen a decrease in the number of absences by students participating in the program. Participating kindergarten students' absentee averages fell from 15 to 4 and first grade students fell from 13 to 2 (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

Broward County, Florida has established a similar program called the Broward County Intervention Program that consists of parents, social workers, and school representatives. Parents are informed of the consequences of truancy and are often referred to school or community services. If the attendance problems continue, charges may be brought against the parents. There have only been 160 court filings despite the thousands of cases seen by the truancy board over the past 3 years (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

Ramsey County, Minnesota began the Truancy Intervention Program to address truancy in middle school students. Students with three or more absences, along with their parent or guardian, are required to attend a large group informational meeting. If absences continue, they are referred to the School Attendance Review Team. The hearing includes school representatives, the assistant county attorney, parents, and the student. Their purpose is to create an attendance contract. The number of truant students referred to juvenile court has decreased by 47% since the program beginning in 1994 (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

The Truancy Intervention Program in Fremont, California added increased counseling to its truancy board. When a student is brought into the clinic for truancy issues, a counselor discusses problems the student may be having that could be causing

the attendance problems. Parents are invited and informed of attendance regulations and additional causes of the truancy problem are discussed. A verbal contract is outlined to improve student attendance (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

Phoenix, Arizona offers the Court Unified Truancy Suppression Program. Once a student accumulates three unexcused absences a meeting with parents or guardians is established to discuss factors related to the absences. With this program, the student is assigned consequences for absences such as extra tutoring, work hours, essays, or additional class attendance. Seventy-four percent of students in 2000 completed their consequences and improved attendance. Ninety-seven percent of students began attending regularly during their enrollment in the program (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

Adams County, Colorado uses a Truancy Reduction Project to increase attendance. Interviews with the child and family are conducted and input from community service agencies and school personnel are collected. A treatment plan involving the entire family is created to reduce truant occurrences. Eighty-five percent of students and their families have been successful with this program (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

In the summer of 2003, the elementary principals in an East Tennessee school system were called to a meeting concerning student attendance. The meeting was held in order to discuss options to address the improvement of student attendance rates. After some discussion, an explanation and description of a truancy board was given. It was explained that a committee would be established at the school level with the principal, the counselor, and two other faculty members acting as the committee members.

Student attendance would be closely monitored. When a student reached five unexcused absences, the parent or guardian would be notified and called to meet with the school-level truancy board. This initial meeting with the parent or guardian was to be an opportunity to clarify the absences, offer assistance, and make plans for any future action if necessary. If student attendance improved, no additional meeting would be called in the future. However, if the student continued to be absent from school with no valid excuse, an additional meeting was to be called. The initial meeting was to be documented and signatures from all present parties were to be obtained. Once the student had 10 unexcused absences, the student's name was referred to the system truancy board along with copies of documentation from the school-level meeting.

The system level truancy board was to consist of representatives from the district office and representatives from the community including personnel from the local Department of Children's Services and the juvenile court system. The system-level truancy board may invite other relevant community members as needed. Once a parent or guardian was called to one of the monthly system-level meetings, a central office staff member would contact the school to request the most recent attendance report for the referred student. During this meeting, parents were to be given clear, concise instructions concerning their child's school attendance. Timelines were to be established and clear consequences were to be outlined for parents or guardians if they failed to meet attendance standards. A representative from the central office would then request weekly reports regarding the student's attendance. If the student's attendance failed to improve, the parents' or guardians' names and documentation regarding the child's attendance were to be given to the local juvenile judge. The juvenile judge has several options at

this point. The judge could warn or fine parents or guardians, issue community service requirements, or other options, as he or she deems appropriate.

While compulsory school attendance had its beginnings in colonial America, the importance of regular attendance remains vital for today's student. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* has increased accountability for student attendance. States as well as local school boards have focused efforts to increase attendance. While there is variation in state definitions of truancy, much is being done to improve student attendance. With the knowledge that regular school attendance has a positive effect on student attendance, many communities have created truancy boards to work with families to improve attendance. While details and procedures in these truancy boards have some variation, there are also similarities. Each is in place to serve as a safety net before students and their families are petitioned to court.

Chapter 2 presented a review of current research and practice regarding truancy in public schools. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedure to be used in this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Introduction

The methodology and procedures used in this study to determine the effect of the implementation of a truancy board on students in Kindergarten through grade 5 are described in this chapter. The following sections are included: research design, population, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, listing of hypotheses, and a summary.

#### Research Design

This study was designed to investigate the effects of truancy board implementation on three Title I schools in an East Tennessee school system. Specifically, the study examined trends in attendance for students in Kindergarten through grade 5 during the 2 years prior to the truancy board implementation and the 2 years after its implementation.

The research questions used to guide this study are as follows:

1. Are there differences in K-5 students' attendance rates for the same students in the three target schools between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period?
2. Are there differences in K-5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period among School A, School B, and School C?

3. Are there differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on gender in the target schools?
4. Are there differences in K-5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on socioeconomic status for the target schools?

This study was conducted using demographic data from three elementary schools and the district office. The 2007 Tennessee State Report Card provided some data on the demographics of each school. The Horizon computer program and the STAR computer program were used to compile, track, and analyze attendance data.

The independent variable for this study was the implementation of a truancy board. The dependent variables were student attendance for the 2005–2006 school year and the 2006–2007 school year. Gender, socioeconomic status, and student grade levels were used to examine interaction.

### Population

This study was conducted in a school system in East Tennessee. The students involved attended the same elementary school for the time span examined in this study. Each of the three schools received instruction and guidance equally during the implementation phase of the truancy board. There were 255 students in the population examined for this study. There were 62 students attending School A, 132 attending School B, and 61 attending School C.

Schools A, B, and C were all Title I schools based on the percentage of students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. The truancy board at each school was funded as a school-wide program. Each of the three schools received Safe School status on the Tennessee State Report Card (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007).

The student populations of all three schools remained relatively cohesive for each of the 4 years of the study. The difference in student population did not change more than 19 students in any given year.

The percentage of economically disadvantaged students remained consistent within each school. The largest fluctuation within any one school was 7.2 percentage points.

The student populations based on gender remained consistent throughout the 4 years of this study. Female students maintained slightly higher enrollment numbers over male students.

The Tennessee State Department of Education requires schools to show at least a 93% attendance rate each year as an Additional Indicator to meet Adequate Yearly Progress for NCLB (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 2001). For the 2006-2007 school year, School A maintained a 94.3% attendance rate, School B had a 93.9% attendance rate, and School C had a 94.1% attendance rate. School A, School B, and School C each met the 93% requirement for each of the 4 years of this study (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007).

School A and School B retained the same principal for each of the 4 years of this study. School C retained the same principal for the first 3 years, but a new principal was named for the final year of the study.

In order for a student's attendance to be included in this study, the student must have attended the same school, either School A, School B, or School C consistently during the 4 years in this study. All students who met these criteria were included.

### Instrumentation

Data were collected regarding student attendance from the attendance supervisor in the school system. The school system in this study used the Horizon computer system for tracking student attendance for the 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 school years. The school system began using the STAR attendance program for the 2006-2007 school year. Both the Horizon system and the STAR system are capable of accurately storing and tracking student information regarding attendance. Data can be obtained on individual students during specific time periods or for an entire school year. Several years of attendance can be accessed from previous school years. These systems also provide additional services other than attendance data. Schools and school systems may use it to schedule student classes, store personal student information such as addresses, student status in the Free or Reduced Lunch Program, race and ethnicity, and parent information.

### Data Collection

Data were collected after receiving approval from East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board. The Director of Schools in the school system in this study granted permission for the study to take place.

Demographic data were primarily obtained through the Tennessee State Report Cards for the school system and each of the individual schools in this study. Student attendance for all students in Kindergarten through grade 5 from the school years 2003-2004 through 2006-2007 was collected. The grade level groups were divided by gender for each of the three schools examined in the study. Socioeconomic status of the students was analyzed for each of the three schools by reviewing each student's free and reduced lunch status.

### Data Analysis

The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The following strategies were used to address each research question:

Research Question 1: Are there differences in K-5 students' attendance rates for the same students in the three target schools between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period?

Ho:1<sub>1</sub>: There are no differences in K-5 students' attendance rates for the same students in the three target schools between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period.

A paired samples *t* test was used to test this hypothesis.

Research Question 2: Are there differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period among School A, School B, and School C?

Ho:2<sub>1</sub>: There are no differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period among School A, School B, and School C.

An ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis.

Research Question 3: Are there differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on gender in the target schools?

Ho:3<sub>1</sub>: There are no differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board and the 2-year pre-truancy board period between boys and girls in the target schools.

Research Question 4: Are there differences in K–5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on socioeconomic status for the target schools?

Ho:4<sub>1</sub>: There are no differences in K-5 students’ attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on socioeconomic status in the target schools.

An independent *t* test was used to test these hypotheses.

### Summary

Chapter 3 described information on the research design, the student population, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and a list of null hypotheses that were used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of a truancy board had a positive relationship to student attendance. Student attendance data were collected from three Title I elementary schools. Attendance data for students in Kindergarten through grade 5 who had attended the same school 2 years prior to the truancy board implementation and also the 2 years following implementation were included in this study. The attendance data were collected from three separate schools from the same school system in East Tennessee. This study was guided by four research questions and the corresponding hypotheses.

#### *Analysis of Research Questions*

Data were collected spanning a 4-year period, beginning with the 2003-2004 school year and ending with the 2006-2007 school year. Data from the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years were collected as the 2-year period prior to the implementation of the truancy board. For each student, the 2 years of data were added together to create a sum of days absent. The 2 years following the implementation of the truancy board, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 were added to create a second sum of missed days. The sum of the pre-truancy board years was subtracted from the sum of the post truancy board years.

There were 255 students who had been consecutively enrolled in one of the three schools included in the study during the 4 years of data collection. Table 1 shows student

population, gender, and free and reduced lunch status for students at each of the three target schools.

Table 1

*Student Population and Demographic Information for Participating Schools*

School	Population	Gender		Free or
	N	M	F	Reduced Lunch
School A	62	29	33	38%
School B	132	69	63	36%
School C	61	35	26	67%

*Research Question #1*

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates for the same students in the three target schools between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period?

The analysis of this research question included all students involved in the study.

The null hypothesis was:

H<sub>01</sub>: There are no differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates for the same students in the three target schools between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period.

A paired samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate if the truancy board implementation influenced student attendance. The results indicated that the mean student attendance during the 2-year post truancy board period (M = 16.60, SD = 10.84)

was not significantly less than the mean student attendance during the 2-year pre-truancy board period ( $M = 17.18$ ,  $SD = 10.35$ ),  $t(254) = .94$ ,  $p = .35$ . The  $\eta^2$  index was .003, which indicates a small effect size. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.64 to 1.8. Figure 1 shows the distribution for the two groups.

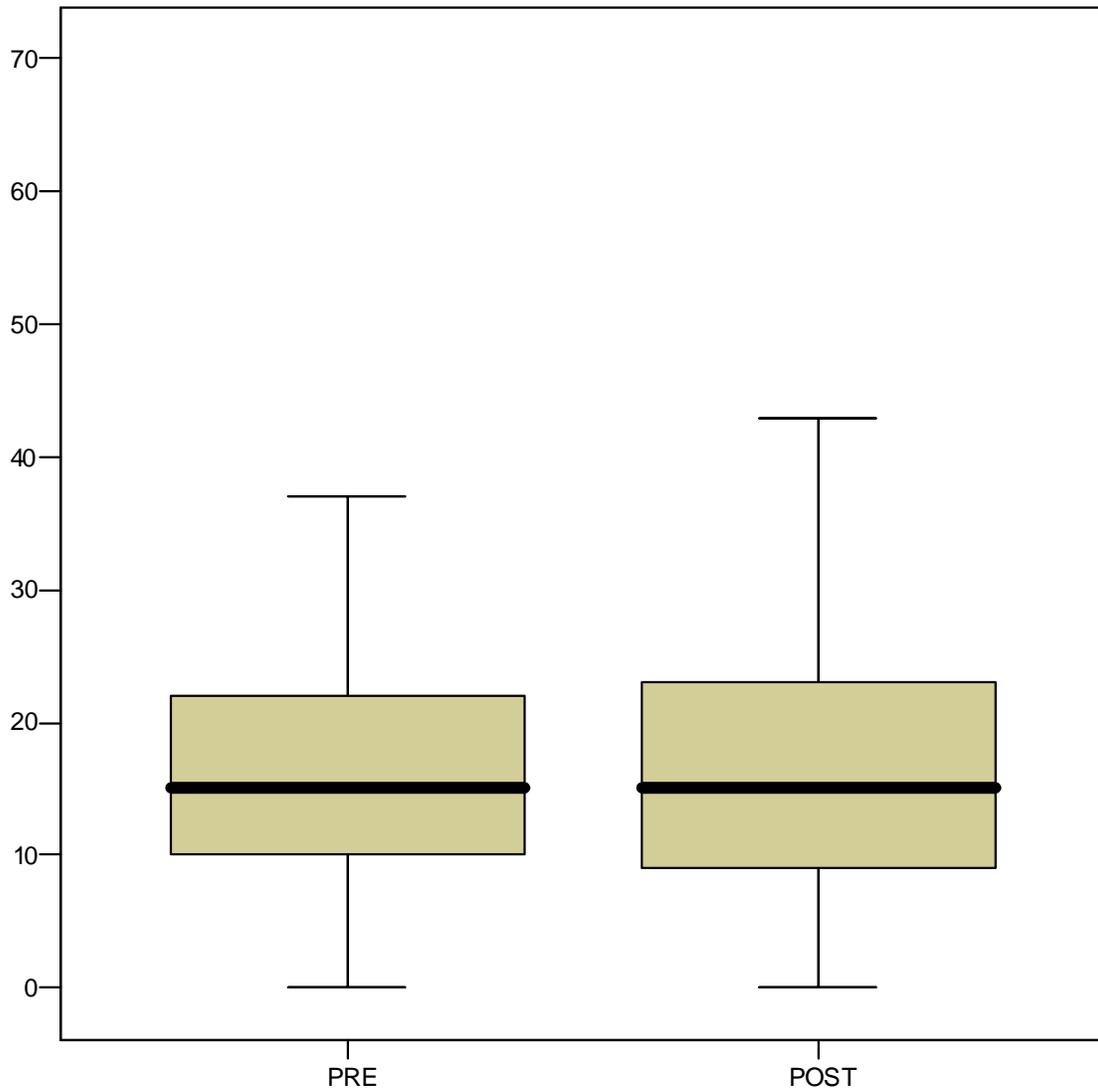


Figure 1. Attendance for Pre-Truancy Board and Post-Truancy Board Implementation

There was very little difference in student attendance after the implementation of the truancy board.

Research Question #2

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period among School A, School B, and School C? The null hypothesis was:

H<sub>0</sub>2<sub>1</sub>: There are no differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period among School A, School B, and School C.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the implementation of a truancy board and the change in the number of student absences from the 2 years prior to implementation to the 2 years following implementation. The factor variable, schools, included three schools: School A, School B, and School C. The dependent variable was the change in the number of days absent from the 2 years prior to implementation to the 2 years following implementation. The ANOVA was not significant,  $F(2, 252) = .70, p = .50$ . Therefore, H<sub>0</sub>:2 was retained. The strength of the relationship between truancy board implementation and the number of days students were absent from school, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.006). The results indicated that the number of days absent was not significantly affected by the implementation of a truancy board. The means and standard deviations for student absences in the three schools are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Student Absences in the Three Target Schools*

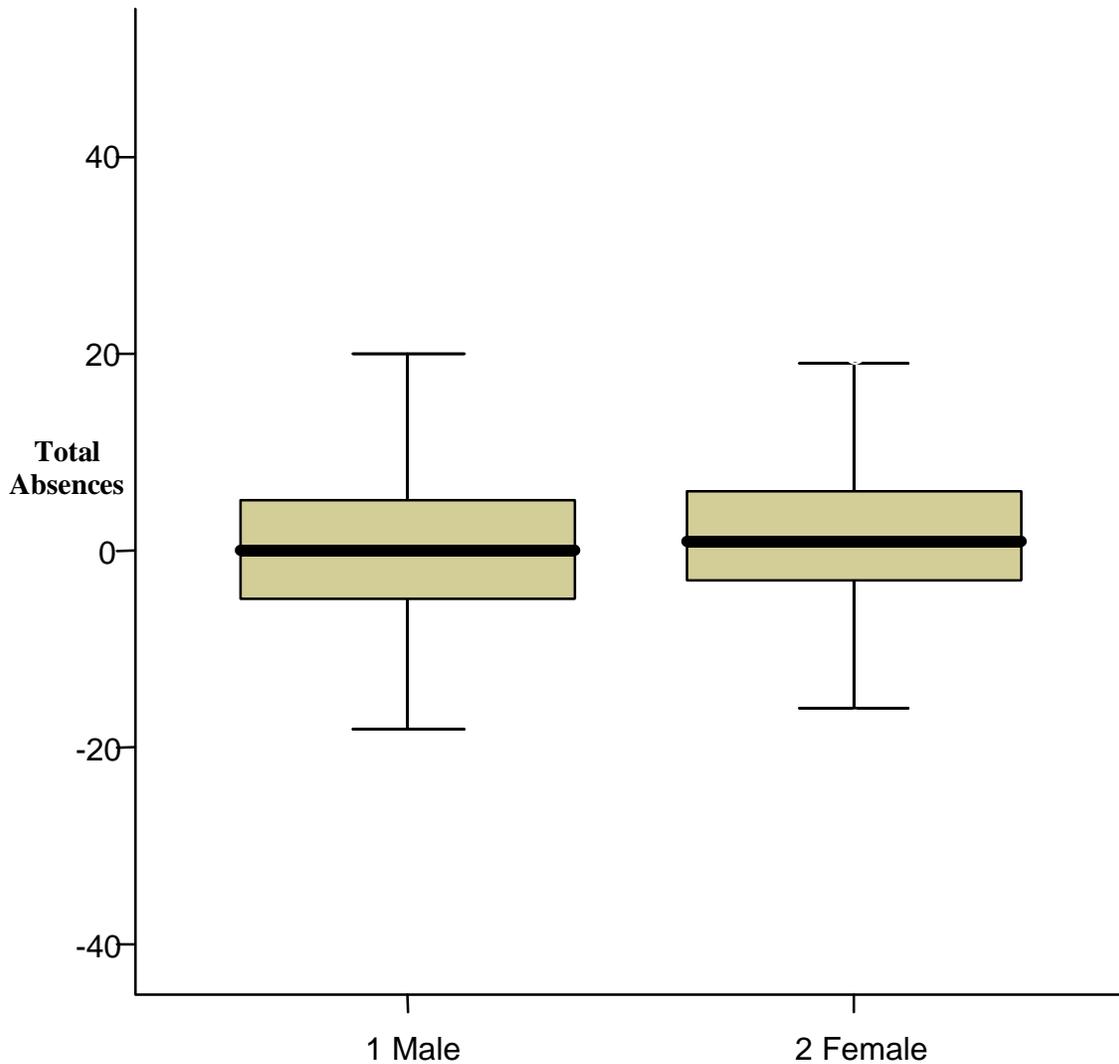
School	N	M	SD
School A	62	1.31	12.02
School B	132	.82	9.24
School C	61	+.67	8.71

Research Question #3

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on gender for the target schools? The null hypothesis was:

H<sub>031</sub>: There are no differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on gender for the target schools.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the number of student absences differ based on gender. The number of absences was the test variable and the grouping variable was gender. The test was not significant,  $t(253) = -.76, p = .45$ . Therefore H<sub>031</sub> was retained. The  $\eta^2$  index was .002, which indicated a small effect size. Male students (M = .01, SD = 7.55) tended to be absent from school about the same as female students (M = .96, SD = 11.14). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -3.44 to 1.53. Figure 2 shows the distribution for the two groups.



*Figure 2. Male and Female Attendance*

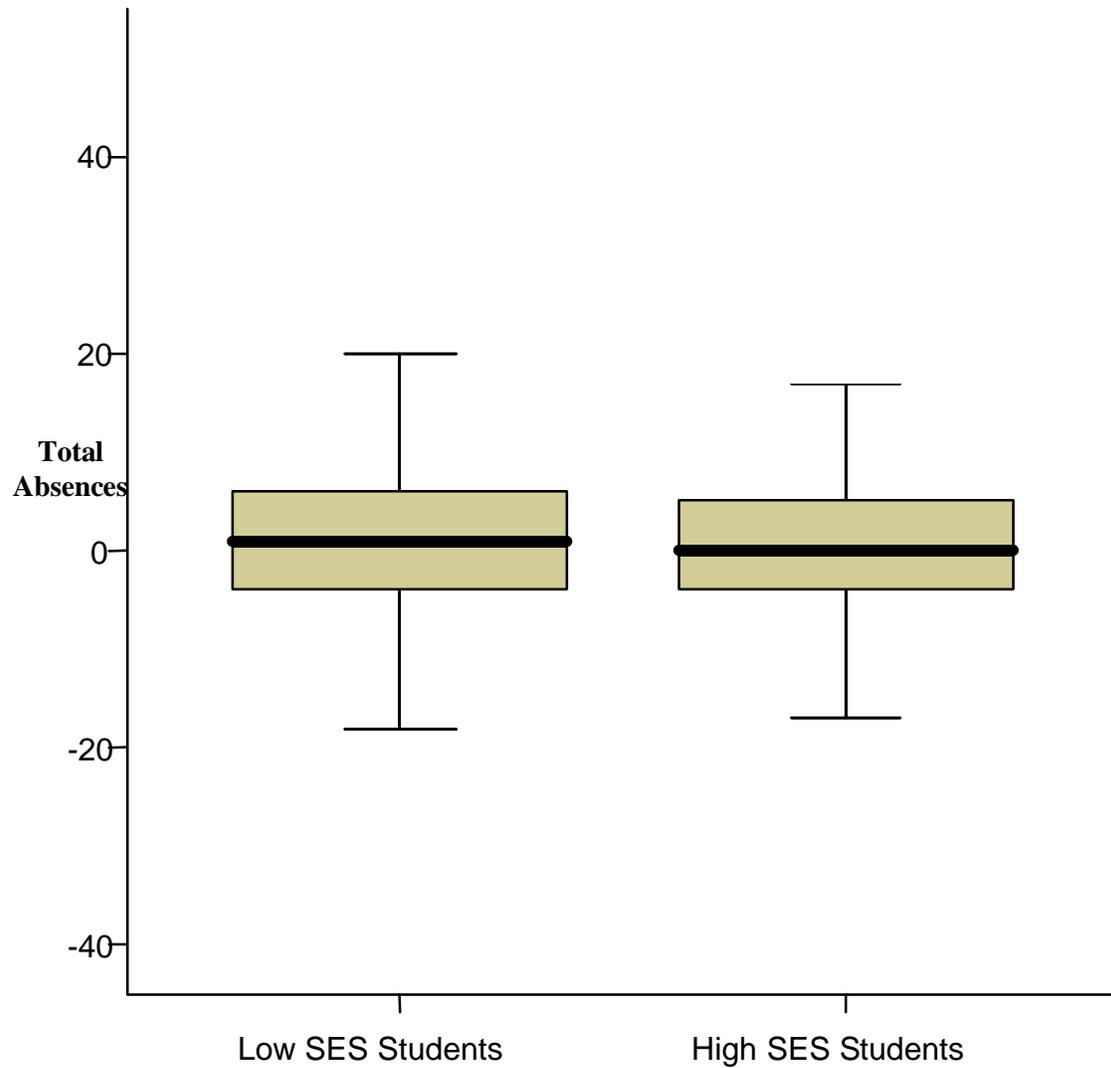
Research Question #4

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on the socioeconomic status for the target schools? The null hypothesis was:

$H_{04_1}$ : There are no differences in K - 5 students' attendance between the 2-year

post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on the socioeconomic status for the target schools.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the amount of student absences differ based on the socioeconomic (SES) status of the student. The number of absences was the test variable and the grouping variable was students with a high SES status or students with a low SES status based on the students' participation in the free and reduced lunch program. The test was not significant,  $t(253) = .62, p = .54$ . Therefore,  $H_0:4$  was retained. The  $\eta^2$  index was .001, which indicated a small effect size. Students with a high SES status, those that did not qualify for a free and reduced lunch program, ( $M = .24, SD = 9.31$ ) tended to miss about the same number of days from school as those with a low SES status ( $M = 1.01, SD = 10.53$ ). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -1.68 to 3.22. Figure 3 shows the distributions for the two groups.



*Figure 3. High SES and Low SES Student Attendance*

Summary

The results of the data collected and the analyses are presented in Chapter 4. A paired samples t test was conducted to determine if the implementation of a truancy board had a relationship with student attendance. The test showed there was no significance.

An ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a difference in student absenteeism rates in each of the three schools in the study. The test showed there was no significant difference in the pre-truancy board period and the post-truancy board period.

Independent-samples t tests were conducted to determine if there were differences in student absenteeism rates based on gender and student SES status. The tests showed there was no significant difference based on gender or student SES status. Attendance rates did not improve significantly after the implementation of the truancy board.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the implementation of a truancy board and the number of student absences. Data were collected from three schools for 4 years. The 2 years of attendance prior to the truancy board were added for each student and the 2 years following the implementation of the truancy board were also added. In order for a student's absences to be included in this study, the student must have attended the same school for the entire 4-year period from the 2003-2004 school year through the 2006-2007 school year. The three schools were chosen from a rural school system in East Tennessee.

The analysis focused on four research questions and the four corresponding null hypotheses. The sample included 255 students attending Kindergarten through grade 5 during the 4 years of the data collection. Each student attended the same elementary school for the 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and the 2006-2007 school years. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

#### Summary of Findings

Although this study found no significant findings, the importance of school attendance is critical to student success in school. Heberling and Shaffer (1995) determined the number of days a student is absent has a negative effect on student learning in K - 5 grade levels. Dunn (2003) found a negative correlation between standardized test scores and student absences. Strickland's (1998) research showed that when students' attendance improved, students' grades also improved.

In addition to school-related consequences to absenteeism, there are several additional factors that are affected negatively when students are chronically absent from school. Baker et al. (2001) found several short-term and long-term consequences. Students with high absenteeism rates become at risk for substance abuse, teen pregnancy, social isolation, and low self-esteem. These students also often earn lower wages as adults, receive welfare assistance, and are often unemployed. As adults, truant students are more likely to be violent and have marital problems. (Baker et al.)

With such a strong need to reduce student absenteeism, several researchers have recommended strategies to combat student truancy. The use of a truancy board is among the recommendations. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Program (OJJDP) reveals the most important component of reducing student absenteeism is to involve parents. Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) recommend a collaborative partnership comprised of community agencies, organizations, and additional concerned individuals. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that schools involving the student, family, and community through a comprehensive approach may positively influence student attendance. The National Center for School Engagement (2006) specifically recommends the use of truancy boards as a strategy to solve school attendance problems.

The study presented here did not show the same success as other truancy boards perhaps because of the lack of additional components used in other programs. California's Student Attendance Review Board was found to improve student attendance (Thompson, 1998). This use of a truancy board differs from the truancy board in this study in that it is a statewide initiative as opposed to a local strategy. Ramsey County, Minnesota has also seen success with the use of a truancy board with middle school

students. A difference with their program is the use of a mandatory large group informational meeting for all parents with students having three or more absences. The use of a truancy board in Phoenix, Arizona has also shown success. A different component with their program is the use of student consequences. Referred students are assigned extra tutoring, work hours, essays, or additional class attendance (Mogulescue & Segal, 2002).

### Research Question #1

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates for the same students in the three target schools between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period?

A paired samples *t* test was used to evaluate the differences between the 2-year period prior to the truancy board implementation, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, and the 2-year period following the implementation, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. The findings showed there were no significant differences between the 2-year post implementation mean and the 2-year pre-implementation mean. There was only a .58 difference between the 2-year pre-implementation period ( $M = 17.18$ ) and the 2-year post-implementation period ( $M = 16.60$ ).

### Research Question #2

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period among School A, School B, and School C?

An ANOVA was conducted to analyze the difference in mean student absences from each of the three target schools. The 2-year pre-truancy board period of absences from 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 were added to create a total number of absences prior to truancy board implementation for each student. The 2 years following the truancy board implementation were also added to create a total number of absences for each student for the 2 years following implementation, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. The two sums were then added to create a new value for each student representing either an increase or a decrease in the number of absences after the truancy board was implemented. The ANOVA compared the means of the new value by school. There was no significance found. School A ( $M = 1.31$ ) and School B ( $M = .82$ ) showed an improvement in the mean days absent after the implementation of the truancy board. School C ( $M = -.67$ ), however, did not.

### Research Question #3

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on gender for the target schools?

An independent samples  $t$  test was used to analyze any difference in mean days absent over the 4-year period based on gender. The findings showed there was no significance based on the students' gender. Female ( $M = .96$ ) students did have a slightly higher mean attendance rate than male ( $M = .01$ ) students. The difference, however, was not significant.

#### Research Question #4

Are there differences in K - 5 students' attendance rates between the 2-year post-truancy board period and the 2-year pre-truancy board period based on the socioeconomic status for the target schools?

An independent samples *t* test was used to analyze any differences in mean days absent over the 4-year period based on the students' socioeconomic status. The students' socioeconomic status was determined based on the students' qualifications of free and reduced lunch services. If the student did not qualify for free and reduced services, that student was considered to have a high socioeconomic status. If the student did qualify, the student was considered to have a low socioeconomic status. The test was not significant. The students with a low socioeconomic status ( $M = 1.01$ ) did show a slightly higher mean than students who had a high socioeconomic status ( $M = .24$ ).

#### Conclusions

##### Conclusion #1

The implementation of a truancy board does not appear to statistically reduce the number of student absences at the K - 5 level. There was no significance regarding the mean days absent in the 2 years following the implementation of a truancy board.

##### Conclusion #2

Based on the findings of the study, it appears the implementation of a truancy board has similar affects on different student populations. Students with a high socioeconomic status were not affected more positively than students with a low socioeconomic status after the implementation of a truancy board.

Conclusion #3

As with the socioeconomic level, it appears truancy board implementation does not affect absences based on the students' gender. Male and female students continued to be absent from school at about the same rate even after the truancy board was implemented.

Conclusion #4

Although statistically not significant, the mean differences in absences for different student populations did show attendance improvement for 3 of the 4 groups involved in the study. Male students were the only group to show an increase in days absent with a slight increase of .01. See Table 3.

Table 3

*Comparison of Means Prior To and Following Truancy Board Implementation*

Student Group	Pre-Implementation	Post-Implementation	Difference
High SES status	18.27	17.26	-1.01
Low SES status	16.32	16.08	-.24
Male students	16.68	16.67	+ .01
Female students	17.52	16.56	-.96

Conclusion #5

The Tennessee State Department of Education requires all schools to maintain a 93% attendance rate. Table 4 displays attendance rates for School A, School B, and School C for each of the 4 years of this study.

Table 4

*Attendance Rates for the Three Target Schools*

School	2003-2004	2004-2005	2-Yr Mean	2005-2006	2006-2007	2-Yr Mean
School A	94.5	94	94.25	94.2	94.3	94.25
School B	93.1	93.1	93.1	93.2	93.9	93.55
School C	92.6	93.8	93.2	93.3	94.1	93.7

Each of the three schools met or exceeded the state requirement of 93% each year. School C received a 92.6 for the 2003-2004 school year and met the state requirement through rounding. The highest attendance rate was achieved by School A both before and after the truancy board implementation. However, School B showed a slight improvement for the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. School C showed a slight decline in 2005-2006, but an increase for 2006-2007. All of the three target schools either maintained the attendance rate or showed an increase in overall attendance rates for the 2-year averages during the period following the truancy board implementation as compared to the 2-year average during the period prior to implementation.

### Recommendations for Practice

Although this study found no statistically significant improvement in student attendance following the implementation of a truancy board, the following are recommendations for practice:

1. Due to the minimal financial investment to operate the truancy board in this study, the use of the truancy board should continue in each of the three target schools. Two-year average attendance rates showed slight increases in each school or no change. None of the three schools in this study showed a decline in the 2 years following the truancy board implementation as compared to the 2 years prior to implementation.
2. Other schools in this system should continue the use of the truancy board in expectation of maintaining or improving the attendance rates to meet the 93% requirement for the Tennessee State Department of Education. The three target schools in this study maintained or improved student attendance rates after the implementation of the truancy board.
3. A continuation of training should continue over time in order to further improve future influences of the truancy board on student attendance rates. Given more time and additional opportunities to reevaluate the truancy board practices, schools may show greater improvements in student attendance rates in the future.
4. Other school systems should consider the use of a truancy board in order to maintain state student attendance goals due to the minimal investment of time and financial resources required to operate a truancy board.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

The following recommendations are provided for future research:

1. Replication of this study using a larger population size. This study was conducted using data from 255 K - 5 students.
2. Replication of this study in another school system. This study was conducted in a northeast Tennessee school system using three Title I elementary schools.
3. Replication of this study in a middle school or high school setting with different students. As students move from the elementary grade levels, the decision to attend school begins to move from the parent to the student at the higher grade levels.
4. Continuation of the study with these same students as they enter middle school and continue on to high school.
5. Replication of this study in an urban or suburban school system. The response to a truancy board may differ in these settings as compared to the rural setting of this study.
6. Further longitudinal analysis with more than 4 years of data. As the use of the truancy board continues, parents may become more attentive to attendance requirements and the consequences resulting from non-attendance.
7. Expand to the use of qualitative research approaches to examine the perceptions of the truancy board implementation from students, parents, teachers, and administrators.
8. Expand to investigate the change in the number of referrals to the local juvenile court system.

9. Expand by disaggregating subgroups to identify trends in student attendance.

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