

ENCOURAGING ENGAGEMENT:
MENTORING STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

By

Debora Kinsland Foerst
and
Wendy House Hannah

Director: Dr. Jessica Weiler
Assistant Professor
Program Director for Educational Leadership Program

Committee Members:
Dr. Brandi-Hinnant Crawford, Human Services
Dr. Phyllis Robertson, Human Services
Dr. Beverly Payne, Assistant Superintendent
Mrs. Susanne Swanger, Assistant Superintendent

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Wendy Hannah

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thank you for your understanding and support along this journey and for your friendship and laughter always.

DEDICATIONS

Wendy Hannah

This journey would have never been possible without the support of my family. I dedicate this disquisition to each and every one of you. Without your love and support, this disquisition would never have come to fruition.

Travis, you are my best friend. I love you more with each passing day. You are my soulmate, my rock, and my point of rationality. You love me even when I feel I don't deserve it. Thank you for not only being a wonderful husband but for also being an amazing daddy to Gavin and Cael and for being their mama when I haven't been able.

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For my parents—Ray & Jerri Kinsland, not only did you give me life, you have offered and are still providing life lessons that are invaluable and support that is second to none . . .

For my person—Shawn, in the midst of EVERYthing, you encourage, you protect, you love . . .

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Proverbs 16:3

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ABSTRACT

ENCOURAGING ENGAGEMENT:

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Debora Kinsland Foerst, EdD

Wendy House Hannah, EdD

Western Carolina University (March 2018)

Director: Dr. Jessica Weiler

For students across the United States, chronic absenteeism is a significant problem that can lead to poor academic performance, dropping out of school, and lack of success in college and/or the workplace. Although schools implement a wide range of interventions to promote school attendance, some students continue to be absent from school. This paper examines the national problem of chronic absenteeism and the problem at two schools (one middle and one secondary) in the western region of North Carolina. We recommend the implementation of evidence-based mentoring practices adapted from the mentoring program Check & Connect™, including personalized academic interventions and relationship-building between students and adults to increase student engagement. Analyses suggest that the applied mentoring program may, indeed, improve attendance for students considered chronically absent and, in addition, may improve their academic performance and reduce discipline referrals.

THE DISQUISITION AT WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Our disquisition process began in 2015 as students in Western Carolina University's doctoral program for educational leadership. Western Carolina University had recently remodeled their EdD program after The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), which prompted, among other changes, a shift from a dissertation to a *disquisition* (Carpenter, 2016). The disquisition differs from a dissertation in that it does not follow the typical traditional chapter format or the traditional research framework. The disquisition process and final manuscript focus on identifying and solving problems faced by educational leaders. Lomotey (2018) defines the disquisition as “a formal, problem-based discourse or treatise in which a problem of practice is identified, described, analyzed and addressed in depth, including methods and strategies used to bring about change and to assess whether the change is an improvement” (p. 3). The unique creation of the disquisition matches the unique approach of using improvement science to address problems of practice within our own local context. Using improvement science to improve education will, according to Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2015), “direct greater attention to how better to design and fit together the many elements that shape the way schools work” (p. 8).

Carpenter (2016) emphasizes that “the purpose of the disquisition is to share the process for studying and intervening in the professional space where [a] problem [is] identified. Its purpose is also a pedagogical tool to model and practice the process of improvement science on authentic problems and is a self-evident form of accountability encompassing most, if not all, of the knowledge and skills learned in the EdD program” (p. 6).

Bryk et al. (2015) present “very different organizational arrangements” when using improvement science to address a problem of practice in educational settings (p. 7). A “networked improvement community” (NIC) is a collaborative partnership between two or more entities “organized to solve a shared problem” (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 7).

This paper serves “to document the scholarly development of [our] leadership expertise in organization improvement” (Lomotey, 2018, p. 3). It is the result of two distinctly different schools who formed a NIC to address a common problem of practice and decided to “make a commitment to pursue specific measurable aims, set targets to guide continuous improvement, develop a common language, and adopt common measures of success” (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 150). It is ordered to reflect the disquisition process which includes: (1) the history and current state of the problem and within local contexts, (2) the explanation of an improvement initiative including a theory of improvement, (3) an evaluation of the improvement initiative process and the outcomes, and (4) resulting implications and recommendations for educational leaders.

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

“Chronic absenteeism is a national problem... Frequent absences from school can be devastating to a child’s education. Missing school leads to low academic achievement and triggers drop outs. Millions of young people are missing opportunities in postsecondary education, good careers and a chance to experience the American dream.”

John B. King Jr., US Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education, 2016

As the quote highlights, student attendance in school is crucial to student success.

Students who exhibit chronic absenteeism often fall behind in their coursework or they may drop out of school altogether. Regardless of the reason for missing school, absenteeism may contribute to significant and considerable consequences, with many studies linking absenteeism to students dropping out of school (Kearney & Graczyk, 2013; Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Erbstein, 2014). Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore & de La Torre (2014) contend that middle grades attendance is one of the best predictors of how students will perform in high school classes. Johnson, Simon, & Munn (2014) suggest that students with attendance problems are more likely to drop out of school during, or shortly after, their freshman year of high school, as a result of course failure which is more likely in ninth grade than any other grade in high school.

Students who do not attend school regularly often demonstrate below average academic performance, and they tend to score lower on standardized tests, ultimately increasing achievement gaps between students who demonstrate chronic absenteeism and students who do not (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014; Erbstein, 2014). Chronic absenteeism affects not only middle school and high school credit attainment; it can also

affect college completion (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014), employment, or both (Erbstein, 2014).

HISTORY AND CURRENT STATE OF PROBLEM

Student absenteeism is a national challenge. Approximately ten per of students are absent from school daily (McConnell & Kubina, 2014). Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) define chronic absenteeism as absences (excused or unexcused) that equate to missing at least 10% of any given school year. Figure 1 further illustrates the concept of chronic absenteeism. Distinguishably, chronic absenteeism differs from truancy; chronic absenteeism accounts for all absences, while truancy only accounts for unexcused absences. Chronic absenteeism can be easily masked if attendance monitoring only considers consecutive student absences; for example, in a school calendar of 180 days, a student can miss as few as two days per month and still be classified as chronically absent (Chang, 2017).

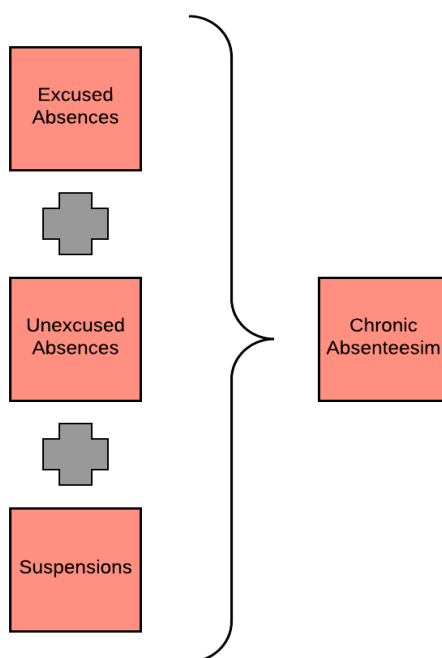


Figure 1. Chronic absenteeism defined. Adapted from "Ensuring an Equal Opportunity to Learn by Reducing Chronic Absence" Attendance Works. Check and Connect Student Engagement Conference. Minneapolis, Minnesota (Chang, 2017, p. 3).

Balfanz and Byrnes propose that schools have not, historically, collected the most appropriate attendance data because the federal government has not required “states or school districts to report chronic absenteeism” (2013, p. 8). Reporting average daily attendance has not always revealed individual students who were chronically absent. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), in “The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation’s Public Schools,” found only six states that reported chronic absenteeism: Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, and West Virginia.

North Carolina (the state in which the two schools examined within this disquisition are situated) acknowledges the gravity of achieving educational opportunities for all students. North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) members “encourag[e] continued research and discussion around... chronic absenteeism, [and] school climate. The [North Carolina Department of Public Instruction] NCDPI [plans to] review how other states are including, or planning to include, similar indicators and will see what can be learned from them” (The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* [ESSA] Consolidated State Plan - North Carolina, 2018, p. 50). These acknowledgements heighten much needed attention toward chronic absenteeism and promote educational equity for all students.

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR), housed within the United States Department of Education (USDE), defines chronic absenteeism as missing fifteen days of school. Further, ESSA requires chronic absenteeism as a reporting accountability metric and an optional measure for school improvement (Chang, 2017). Data on chronic absenteeism were disclosed by the Office of Civil Rights for the first time in 2016 (Attendance Works, 2016; The United States Department of Education, 2016); data support literature findings

from Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), Ginsburg, Jordan, and Chang (2014), and Erbstein, Olagundoye, and Hartzog (2015), identifying absenteeism as a matter of social justice to be addressed by equitable practices. Students identified as being in one or more of the following subgroups report higher rates of chronic absenteeism: (a) American Indian, (b) African American, (c) students of low socioeconomic status (SES), and (d) special education identification. Chronic absenteeism is, for students who already encounter social injustices and disenfranchisement, another roadblock to learning and equal opportunity. Chang and Jordan (2017) applaud the emerging spotlight on chronic absenteeism and they emphasize that this enlightenment progress provides “a clear opportunity to tackle some of the challenges that are keeping students from attending school regularly” (p. 24). This opportunity is particularly notable for those students who are traditionally marginalized.

Why Does this Problem Exist?

Most students who are chronically absent struggle with numerous barriers and hardships that make regular school attendance challenging (Erbstein, 2014). We engaged in causal analysis to determine the causes of the identified problem. Causal analysis, according to Bryk et al. (2015), provide for “a common understanding of the specific problem” by “identifying the specific problem to be addressed” and “asking the ‘why’ questions” to further explore the problem (pp. 66-67). One example of a causal analysis approach is the application of Ishikawa’s fishbone diagram (1986). The fishbone is described as a diagram in which:

Each major bone represents a key factor thought to contribute to... unsatisfactory outcomes. The smaller bones capture the details that emerge from conversations about the factors. Typically, five or six primary factors – “major bones” – may be identified, with multiple contributing factors under each (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 68).

Application of a fishbone diagram (Figure 2) helped us identify fundamental causes of the given problem. School climate, lack of student connectedness, student health concerns, negative student behavior, academic issues, and family challenges are all identified as contributing factors of chronic absenteeism (Christenson, Stout & Pohl, 2012).

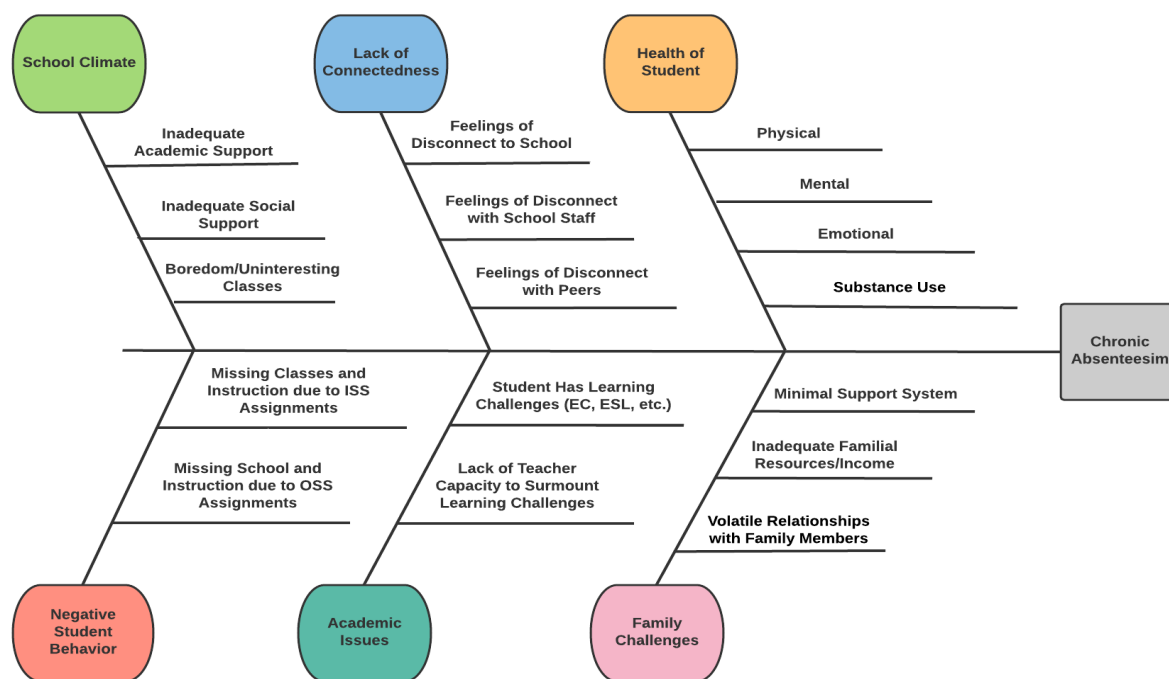


Figure 2. Fishbone Diagram Illustrating Causes of Chronic Absenteeism.

Maxwell, Reynolds, Lee, Subasic, & Bromhead (2017) recognize school climate as a leading factor in student achievement. They characterize school climate as the embodiment of unwritten rules, norms, and expectations of the total school environment (as cited by Brookover et al., 1978; Haynes et al., 1997; Petrie, 2014), and they contend (as cited by Cohen et al., 2009) that school climate is the “quality and character of school life” (p. 2). Further, school climate can be described as (a) an overall dedication to maintaining high standards (academically and behaviorally), (b) delivering curriculum to

students that is both relevant and engaging, (c) creating opportunities for students to participate in decision making about their learning, and (d) personalizing instruction to support all students. Exemplification of such dispositions increase students' feelings of belonging and connectedness to school (Klem & McConnell, 2004). Wilkins (2008) maintains that "establishing a positive school climate and promoting respectful, supportive relationships within the school can be sufficient [enough] to motivate students to attend" (p. 15).

Conversely, schools that provide limited or inadequate academic and social supports for students or have minimalistic expectations (or have high expectations that are not maintained for all students), are likely to demonstrate increased student disengagement and higher rates of absenteeism. Likewise, Duffy and Elwood (2013), as cited by Pomeroy (1999), assert that students are more susceptible to decreased motivation and increased negative behaviors when teachers engage in practices that include "antagonism, shouting, [and] sarcasm, which... communicat[es] a message that students [are] not valued or liked as individuals" (p. 117). Moreover, school connectedness is severed or reduced by school climates that are punitive and maintain inflexible attendance policies and practices. Policies that support suspension for student truancy, for example, contradict the rationale for having attendance policies. These types of policies are counterintuitive and do nothing but push students further away from school.

Student absenteeism is also linked to health issues, including physical, mental, and emotional distress (Erbstein, 2014). Erbstein, Olagundoye, and Hartzog (2015) recognize both physical and mental health in their list of barriers affecting attendance.

These factors can include: (a) phobias of people that may be the result of bullying, intimidation, or discrimination, (b) loud noises, and (c) speaking in class – all of which may discourage students from attending school (McConnell & Kubina, 2014). Engberg and Morral (2006) propose that “Strong correlations exist between drug use and measures of school performance, including attendance, grades, and graduation” (p. 1741). Gase, Collier, Guerrero, and Wong (2014) and Dahl (2016) concur, citing substance use (drugs and alcohol) as negatively impacting student attendance.

Negative student behaviors and the resulting consequences contribute to student absenteeism (Erbstein et al., 2015; Gase et al., 2014). Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2015) in “Sent Home and Put Off Track,” also connect student absenteeism to in-school and out-of-school suspensions: “Excluding students from school for disciplinary reasons is directly related to lower attendance rates...” (p. 17). Regardless of whether a student receives in-school or out-of-school suspension, the result is the same; suspended students are excluded from valuable instruction within the classroom.

Academic issues are a barrier to attendance; more specifically, the educational style of the school, a student’s learning challenges or disabilities, and a student’s academic performance directly impact attendance (Dahl, 2016; Erbstein et al., 2015; Gase et al., 2014). Kearney and Graczyk (2013) suggest schools are not providing proper supports for individual academic challenges and needs.

Erbstein (2014) suggests that beyond learning challenges, family challenges are major factors that contribute to student absenteeism. These challenges include minimalized support systems, inadequate family resources or income, and volatile relationships with family members. Dahl (2016) finds lack of parental engagement,

student employment, responsibilities of caring for siblings at home, and physical and emotional abuse may cause students to exhibit higher rates of absenteeism. Lack of support from the home environment and parent or caregiver discretion contribute to student absenteeism as well (Erbstein et al., 2015; Gase et al., 2014).

Problem of Practice within the Local Context

Each author of this disquisition serves as a school administrator within two separate schools in Western North Carolina. Wendy Hannah is an assistant principal at Sun Valley Middle School, and Debora Foerst is a principal at Riverview High School. This section provides an examination of the local context in which the problem occurs, beginning with a brief of Western North Carolina, followed by a description of each of the respective schools/school systems in which the identified problem of practice manifests.

Western North Carolina. Western North Carolina (WNC) is home to the Appalachian Mountains (inclusive of both the Great Smoky Mountains and the Blue Ridge Mountains). Mount Mitchell is also located in the WNC mountains of Yancey County and sits at an elevation of 6,684 feet, making it the highest point east of the Mississippi River. Western North Carolina, as shown by the County Map of North Carolina (2017), borders Eastern Tennessee, Northeast Georgia, Southeast Virginia, and the Upstate of South Carolina. Asheville is the largest city in WNC and is the county seat of Buncombe County (Figure 3).

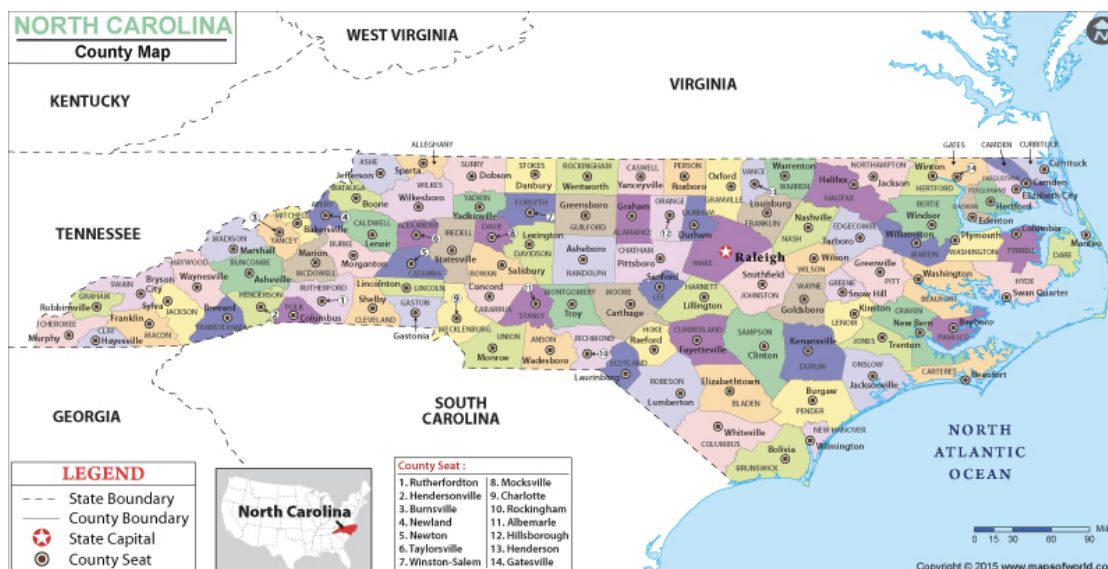


Figure 3. County map of North Carolina with county seats and bordering states. Retrieved February 23, 2018, from <https://www.mapsofworld.com/usa/states/north-carolina/north-carolina->

The Western North Carolina Vitality Index (n.d., Retrieved from <http://www.wncvitalityindex.org>) is a resource from the Mountain Resources Commission (MRC) that utilizes United States Census Bureau publications. Both schools, in which the improvement initiative occurred, are part of twenty-seven counties reported on by the MRC. In 2010, more than 14% of North Carolina's population resided within the MRC, with the largest number of residents located in Buncombe County (Figure 4).

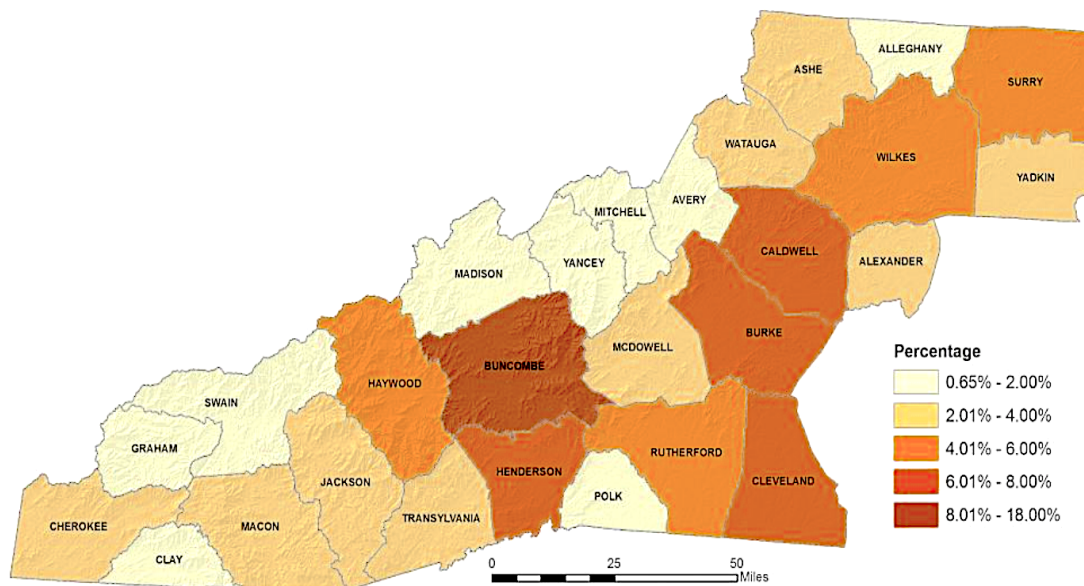


Figure 4. 2010 Population percentages of counties within the MRC. Reprinted with permission from the Western North Carolina Vitality Index, Retrieved January 23, 2018, from <http://www.wncvitalityindex.org/population/current-population>.

Ethnic data vary widely within the MRC. Data from 2010 reflect a population that is 12% African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or Other. The remaining 88% of the population identifies as White. Ethnic variations within the MRC are largely attributed to the demographics of Jackson and Swain counties. Jackson County has an American Indian population of 9%, and more than 25% of Swain County's population is comprised of American Indian/Alaskan Native residents.

Sun Valley Middle School¹. Sun Valley Middle School (SVMS) is comprised of approximately 590 students. It is one of seven middle schools within the Mountain Sky School District² (MSSD), located in Western North Carolina. Further, it is one of only four middle schools within the MSSD that serves only seventh and eighth grades. Upon completion of eighth grade, the majority of students transition to Sun Valley High

¹ Sun Valley Middle School is a pseudonym for a middle school located within Western North Carolina.

² Mountain Sky School District is a pseudonym for the district in which Sun Valley Middle School resides.

School³. The 2015-16 four-year cohort graduation rate for MSSD was 85.7%, and the four-year cohort graduation rate for Sun Valley High School (SVHS) was 92.8%. The 2016-17 four-year cohort graduation rate for Mountain Sky was 88.3%, while the rate for Sun Valley High School was 89.6%.

The student population at SVMS is relatively diverse with approximately 47% of all students identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (SES). Beyond socioeconomic diversity, the student population is also ethnically diverse. The circle graph in Figure 5 illustrates the ethnic diversity of students who attend the Sun Valley Middle School where the improvement initiative occurred.

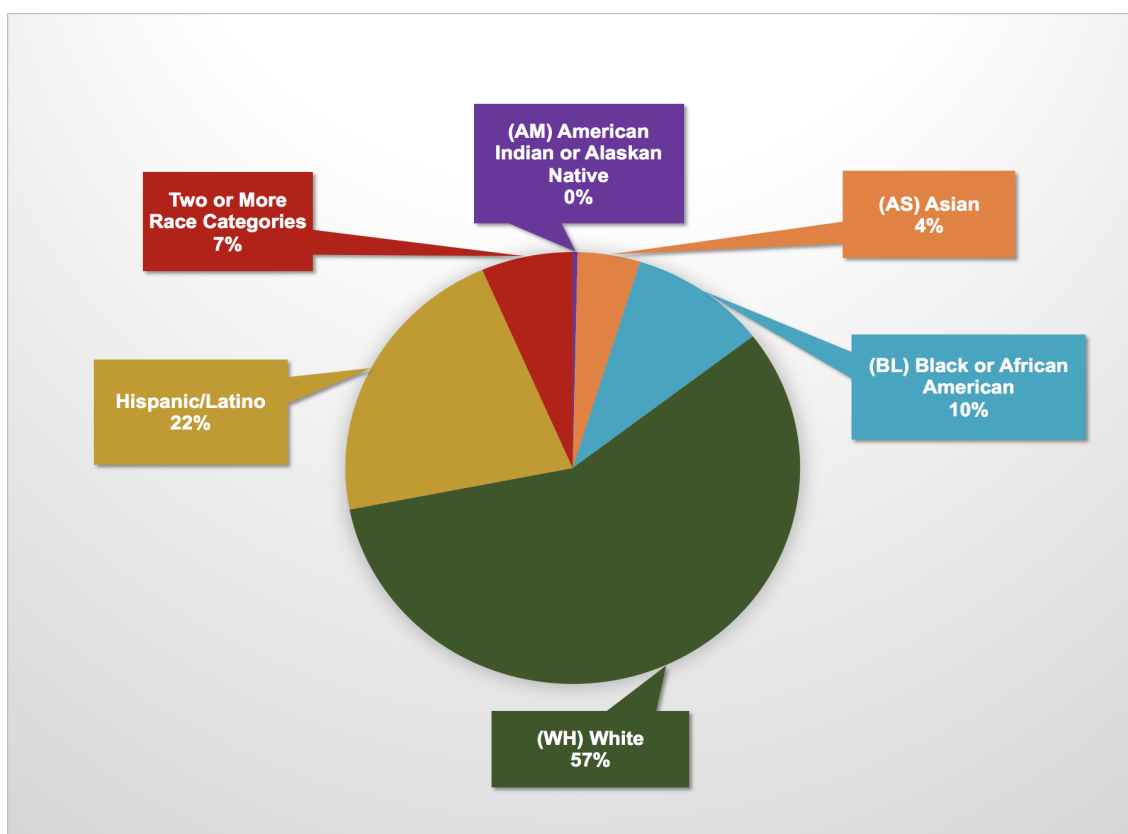


Figure 5. Ethnic data for middle school students at Sun Valley Middle School, SY 2017-18.

³ Sun Valley High School is a pseudonym that represents the receiving school for students at Sun Valley Middle School.

Sun Valley Middle School operates on a seven-hour instructional day with core academic classes lasting approximately sixty minutes. Beyond core academic classes, all students take PE and one unified arts class per nine weeks. Additionally, all students participate in a daily thirty-minute period that is dedicated to common, novel read-alouds by grade level, enrichment, remediation, and homework support.

Students in grades six through eight, in accordance with Mountain Sky School District Board Policy 4400 (2014), may miss no more than fourteen days of school (Appendix A). Additionally, students must be in school for at least one half of the school day to be counted present. When considering promotion standards and graduation requirements, attendance is a driving force that can either support or prevent student promotion, credit attainment, and graduation from high school. MSSD Board Policy 4400 defines truancy as when a student accumulates ten or more unexcused absences. In such instances, truancy charges may be filed against the student, the parent, or both, and students may also be suspended out of school for up to two days. When a student reaches ten unexcused absences, schools must hold a conference with the school attendance team to develop an attendance improvement plan. MSSD Board Policy 4400 states that attendance committees must include representation by the school social worker, a school administrator, at least one school counselor, and teacher representation is recommended. Additional attendance committee members may include but are not limited to: (a) the school nurse, (b) district Graduation Initiative personnel, (c) school-based therapist(s), and (d) Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) caseworkers. Middle school attendance committees are overseen by the school social worker – a half-time position that is allocated to Sun Valley Middle School. School attendance teams may: (1) review

individual attendance data, (2) consider the reasons for student absences, (3) encourage the student's teacher to follow up with parents about the negative impact excessive absences may have on academic progress, (4) require mandatory physician documentation, and (5) require appointment verification (MSSD Board Policy 4400-R, Appendix B). Attendance intervention plans should be developed by the school attendance committee in cooperation with the parent, guardian, or legal custodian. Schools, however, are given discretion as to when or how a plan is developed based upon individual needs demonstrated by students and families. These conferences are not synonymous with those that might be held with a student, mentor, parents, and/or members of the Attendance Improvement Initiative Team that serves as a strategy for this disquisition.

Attendance data for the Sun Valley Middle School support an intervention designed to increase attendance as students enter eighth grade and prepare to move onward to high school. Both eighth grade and total school attendance rates have steadily decreased since SY 2014-15, following increases from SY 2013-14 (Figure 6).

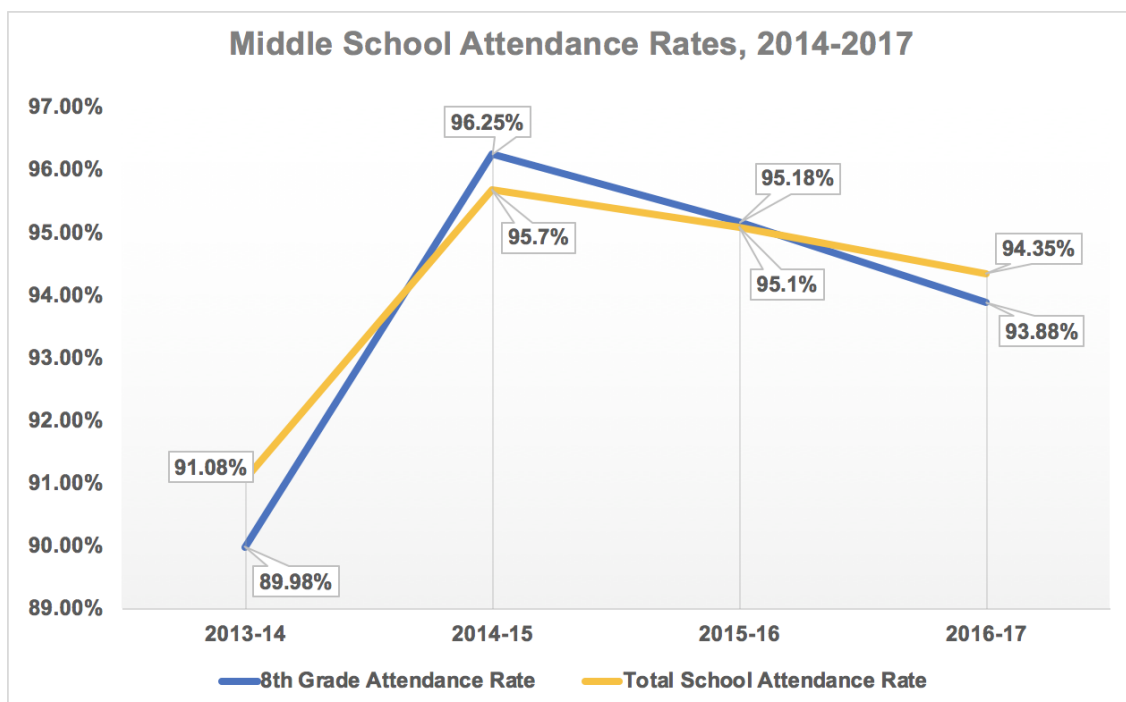


Figure 6. Sun Valley Middle School attendance rates for SY 2013-14 through SY 2016-17.

For the purposes of this disquisition, a focus will be placed on the 2017-18 eighth grade student population. Data collected in January 2017 indicate that thirty seventh grade students, 11% of the student population, met the threshold for being classified as chronically absent (Appendix C). Data collected in August 2017 indicate that fifteen eighth grade students met the criteria for chronic absenteeism. Of the fifteen students identified in August, twelve students had already missed at least 12.5% enrolled school days by the end of September 2017.

Riverview High School⁴. Riverview High School (RHS) is one of three high schools located within a condensed area of Western North Carolina. Each of the three high schools is situated within an approximate twenty-mile radius of one another. RHS is

⁴ Riverview High School is a pseudonym for a high school located within Western North Carolina.

part of the Smoky Ridge School District ⁵(SRSD) that is inclusive of one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. SRSD is a PK12 system comprised of approximately 1,200 students. Of all students within the system, 72% qualify for free or reduced lunch. Riverview High serves students in grades nine through twelve, with an enrollment of 320 students. Ninety-two percent of all RHS students are enrolled members of a federally recognized American Indian tribe.

Riverview operates primarily on a four-block schedule and follows the North Carolina grading scale. At the conclusion of each semester, students who receive 60 points or more in courses earn credits toward graduation for each course. Students must earn 28 credits to graduate from Riverview High School, but they only need four credits (out of eight courses) to earn sophomore status. This policy is receiving scrutiny because it is allowing for failure during the transitional ninth grade year when success is crucial to future achievement.

Students at RHS are allowed eight absences with a maximum of four unexcused days per course. Attendance letters are generated and mailed to parents on the fourth, sixth, and eighth absence. After the eighth absence, parents may be in violation of the local compulsory school attendance law (Riverview High School Attendance Policy, Appendix D).

During SY 2015-16, the attendance rate for the ninth grade class dropped from 93.25% in the first quarter to 89.26% in the final quarter of the year, compared to the total school attendance rate, which dropped from 89.88% to 88.15% (Figure 7). More significantly, 35% of the ninth grade class were chronically absent, and of those students,

⁵ Smoky Ridge School District is a pseudonym for the school system for which Riverview High School is located.

44% were also chronically absent as eighth grade students (Appendix E). Of this same class, students deemed chronically absent earned a mean grade point average (GPA) of 2.65 in ninth grade while those whose attendance rate was greater than 90% earned a mean GPA of 2.95.

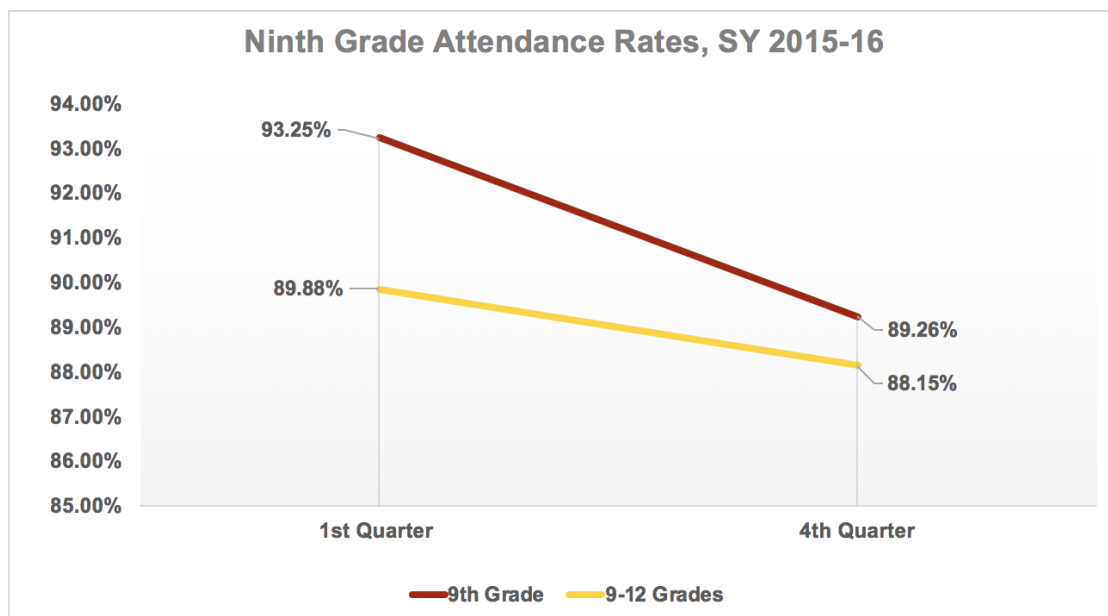


Figure 7. Riverview High School ninth grade and whole school attendance rates for SY 2015-16.

Ninth grade students attending RHS during SY 2017-18, who are also the target cohort for this disquisition, posted an overall attendance rate of 90.90% as eighth graders during SY 2016-17. These rates, however, fell below those for sixth grade students (93.65%), seventh grade students (92.12%), and ninth grade students (92.11%) during the same school year (Figure 8). While the attendance rate for the ninth grade is above the threshold for chronic absenteeism, it is impossible to discern which students are chronically absent without delving deeper into individual student data. Of the 81 students enrolled, 27 students were chronically absent (33%) as eighth graders during SY 16-17. From the group of 27 students, 11 were chronically absent as seventh grade students.

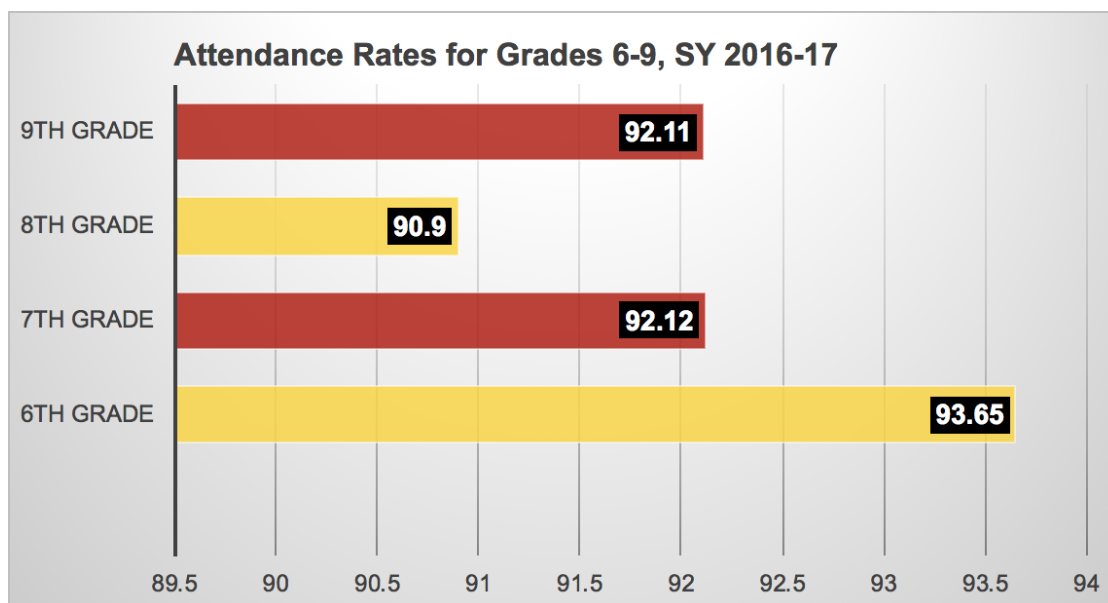


Figure 8. Attendance rates for grades 6-9 within the Smoky Ridge School District for SY 2016-17.

Local law established 18 as the legal age for students attending Riverview High School to drop out of school, whereas the legal age to drop out of school in the state of North Carolina is 16. Community leaders felt that raising the legal age to 18 would keep students in school longer, increasing the likelihood of graduation and promoting the success of students after high school. Dropout and graduation rates at RHS have improved, reflected by data from SY 2015-16 and SY 2016-17; however, noticeable gaps are evident when comparing Riverview to dropout and graduation rates for North Carolina. RHS dropout rates decreased from 8.97% during SY 2015-16 to 5.44% for SY 2016-17, but these rates are still higher than the dropout rates for North Carolina at 2.29% and 2.31% respectively. Graduation rates for North Carolina were 85.90% for SY 2015-16 and 86.5% for SY 2016-17, while Riverview's graduation rates were 67.06% for SY 2015-16 and 74.63% for SY 2016-17 (Figure 9).

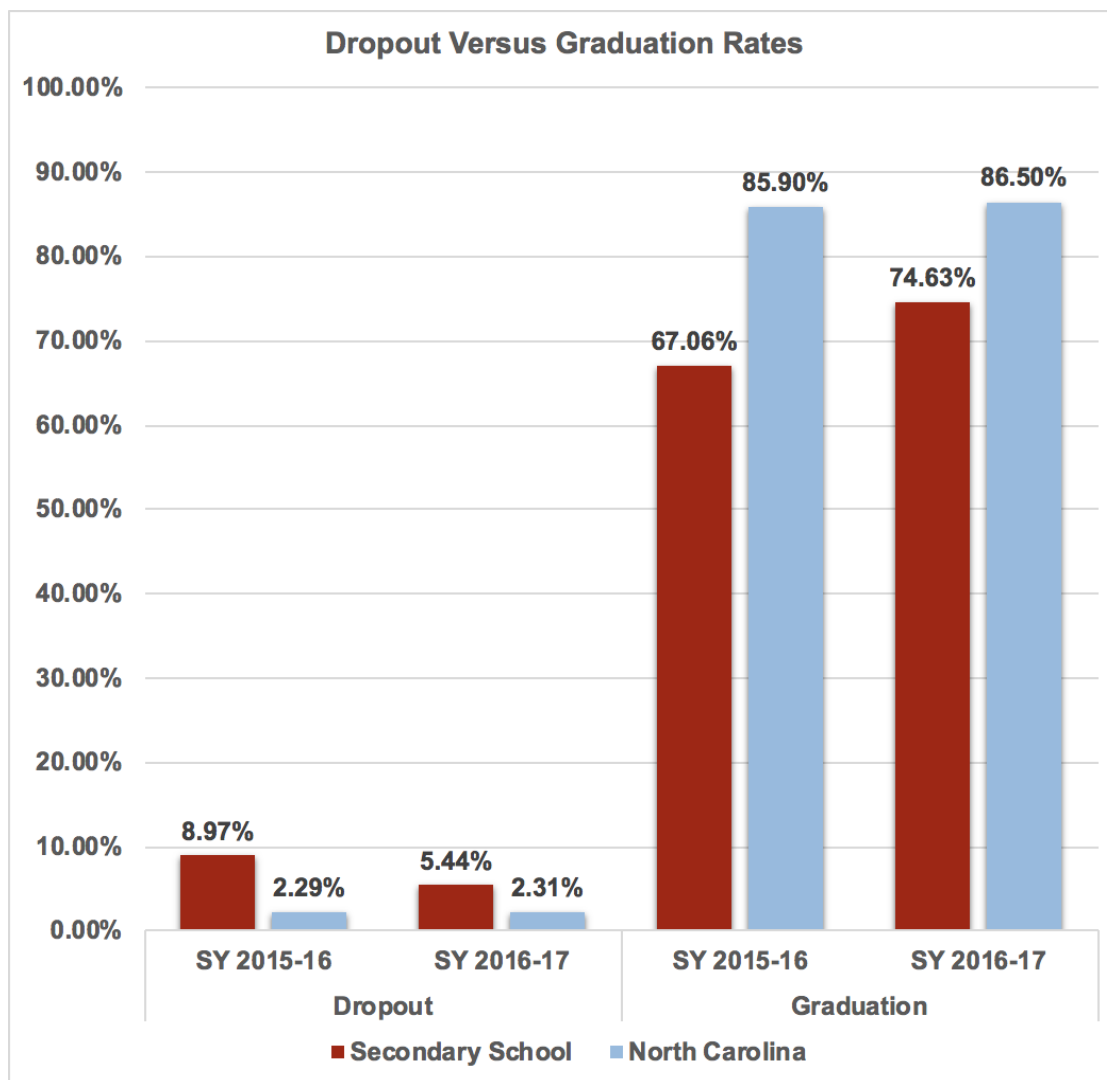


Figure 9. Comparison of dropout and graduation rates for Riverview High School and North Carolina.

An attendance committee at RHS was established to work with students who exceed the maximum number allowed absences for a semester. Riverview High School's social worker, attendance coordinator, and a cross-section of representatives from the exceptional children's program, athletic coaches, and general education teachers make up the seven-member attendance committee. Committee meetings are scheduled when parents or students request them, as opposed to being scheduled by school administrators, and they provide a forum for presenting extenuating circumstances surrounding student

absences. The committee makes decisions regarding consequences, including student make-up time or overriding absence limits. Riverview employs a full-time social worker, who manages services for at-risk students, including conducting home visits when a student has been absent for more than two to three days and the student or parent cannot be reached by phone or email.

When a student exceeds the maximum number of allowed absences, Riverview High School can file truancy charges in the local court system. Charges may be filed against the parent, the student, or both. Prior consequences have ranged from jail time for parents to community service, probation, and court-ordered attendance contracts for parents and students.

In 2013, the local prosecutor, attorney general, and juvenile services personnel appealed to Riverview's board of education, superintendent, and administration to create a system or process that would intervene early in cases of excessive student absences. Together, they formed the Truancy Intervention Council (TIC) designed to intervene prior to allowing students to reach truancy level in an effort to reduce the number of truancy cases heard in tribal court. While the middle school in this system purported some success and improved attendance with the support of this council, administration at the elementary school expressed no significant change through this process. Riverview High School struggled to benefit because TIC only met once a month, and students with attendance issues often exceeded the allowable limit prior to monthly meetings.

Problem Statement and Desired Aim

We have identified and detailed chronic absenteeism as a problem that spans the country as well as both of the identified school contexts. We have also noted historical

and current attempts to solve the problem at each of our respective schools. Past (and present) interventions have included: (a) attendance committees, (b) home visits, (c) truancy charges, (d) Saturday attendance make-up sessions, (e) summer school attendance make-up sessions, (f) familial support provided by the school social worker, (g) communication with students and families, and (h) formation of a Truancy Intervention Council. The Venn Diagram in Figure 10 displays previous and current interventions by each school to decrease student absences.

Through our disquisition, we implemented a mentoring program designed to improve school attendance rates, decrease negative school behaviors, and to promote academic achievement among eighth and ninth grade students.

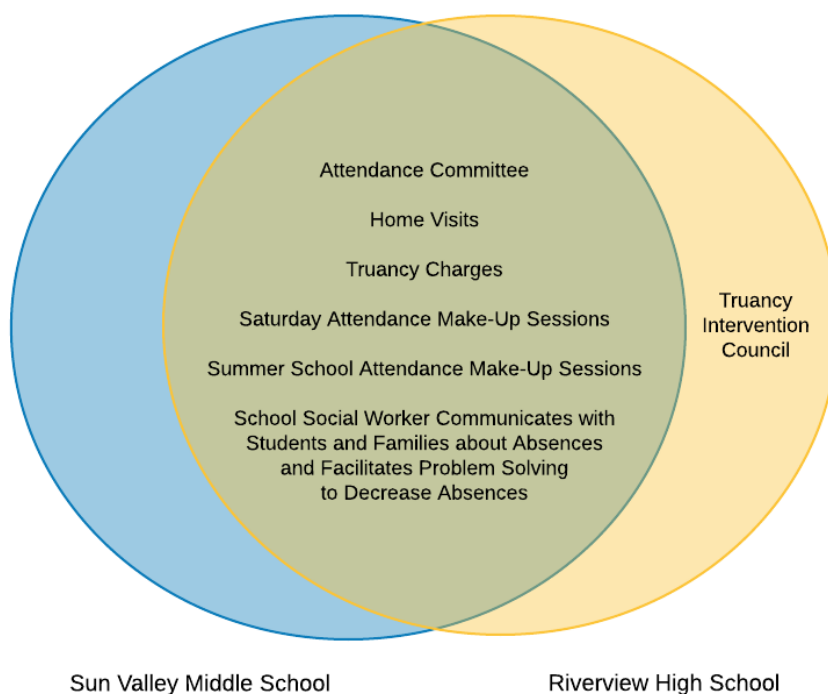


Figure 10. Historical attendance interventions at Sun Valley Middle and Riverview High School.

We conclude, based upon our present data and the absence of improvement in our schools, that prior interventions and supports have not been adequate to decrease chronic absenteeism and increase cohort graduation rates. This, coupled with baseline data, necessitates an improvement initiative aimed to reduce chronic absenteeism, with long-term goals of decreasing dropout rates and increasing on-time graduation rates.

IMPROVEMENT METHODOLOGY

This section includes: (1) our theory of improvement, including the chosen improvement initiative, (2) literature support for the improvement initiative, (3) a description of the improvement initiative and leadership teams within each context, and (4) the design of the improvement initiative, including a description of its components.

Theory of Improvement

We suggest that a school-based, adult-to-student mentoring program will reduce student absences, increase academic achievement, and ultimately increase the likelihood of cohort graduation. The conceptual framework (Figure 11), having undergone various iterations throughout this disquisition process, is a graphic organizer or mind map of our improvement theory. Framing the problem, causes, and improvement initiative, the conceptual framework provides both a visual structure and foundation for our work.

It begins with identifying the problem: students who are chronically absent are more likely to drop out of high school or not graduate with their cohort. The next stage is a cursory look at the causes of the problem: chronic absenteeism is linked to health issues, lack of school connectedness, academic difficulty, and external factors. The primary focus of the conceptual framework, though, is our improvement initiative: a site-based, adult-student mentoring program implemented at each of the schools. Components of the program--build capacity of mentors, student support structures, and student empowerment--are clarified through the supporting items below, and these items are broken down into action steps.

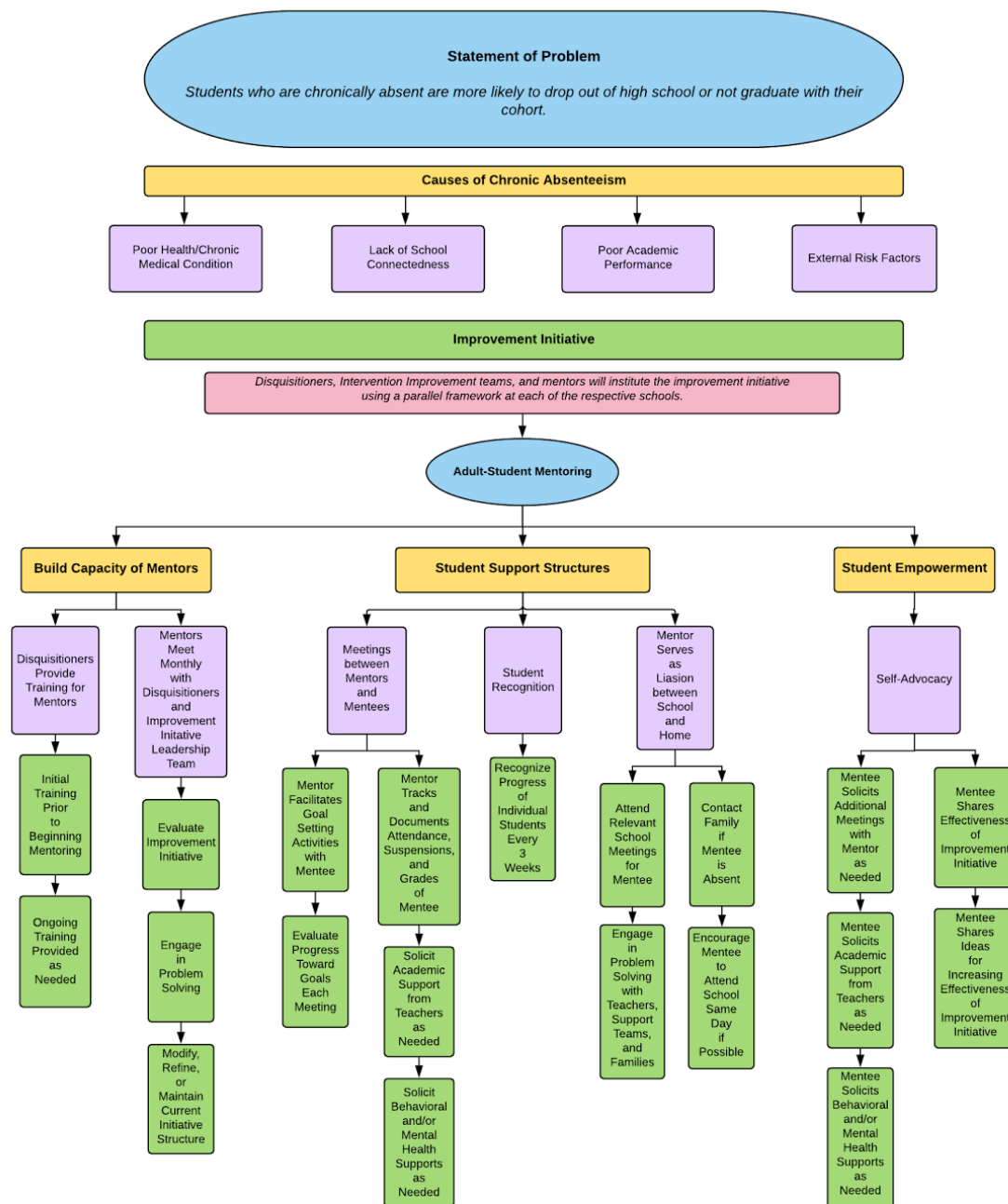


Figure 11. Conceptual framework for the improvement initiative.

A systematic approach that guides the development of an improvement initiative is a driver diagram. Once the goal (or aim) is identified, practitioners can “drive” down to the “structures . . . process . . . and norms” (Bennett & Provost, 2015, p. 39) that support the goal, while isolating the actions that will likely result in goal achievement.

Per Bennett and Provost (2015), “the driver diagram represents an overall theory... essentially [making] a broad prediction of the changes required to accomplish a given aim or outcome” (p. 39). The driver diagram in Figure 12 guides this improvement project, and while the ultimate aim is to increase graduation rates, the immediate aim focuses on improving attendance of selected students who are chronically absent.

Considering the immediate aim of improving attendance for students who demonstrate chronic absenteeism, the primary drivers – tracking and collecting student data, communicating, engaging, and supporting – are the factors that directly impact the aim. Secondary drivers break down the primary drivers by identifying who and what will be involved in the improvement initiative. Finally, “change ideas” are specific actions that are involved in achieving the aim.

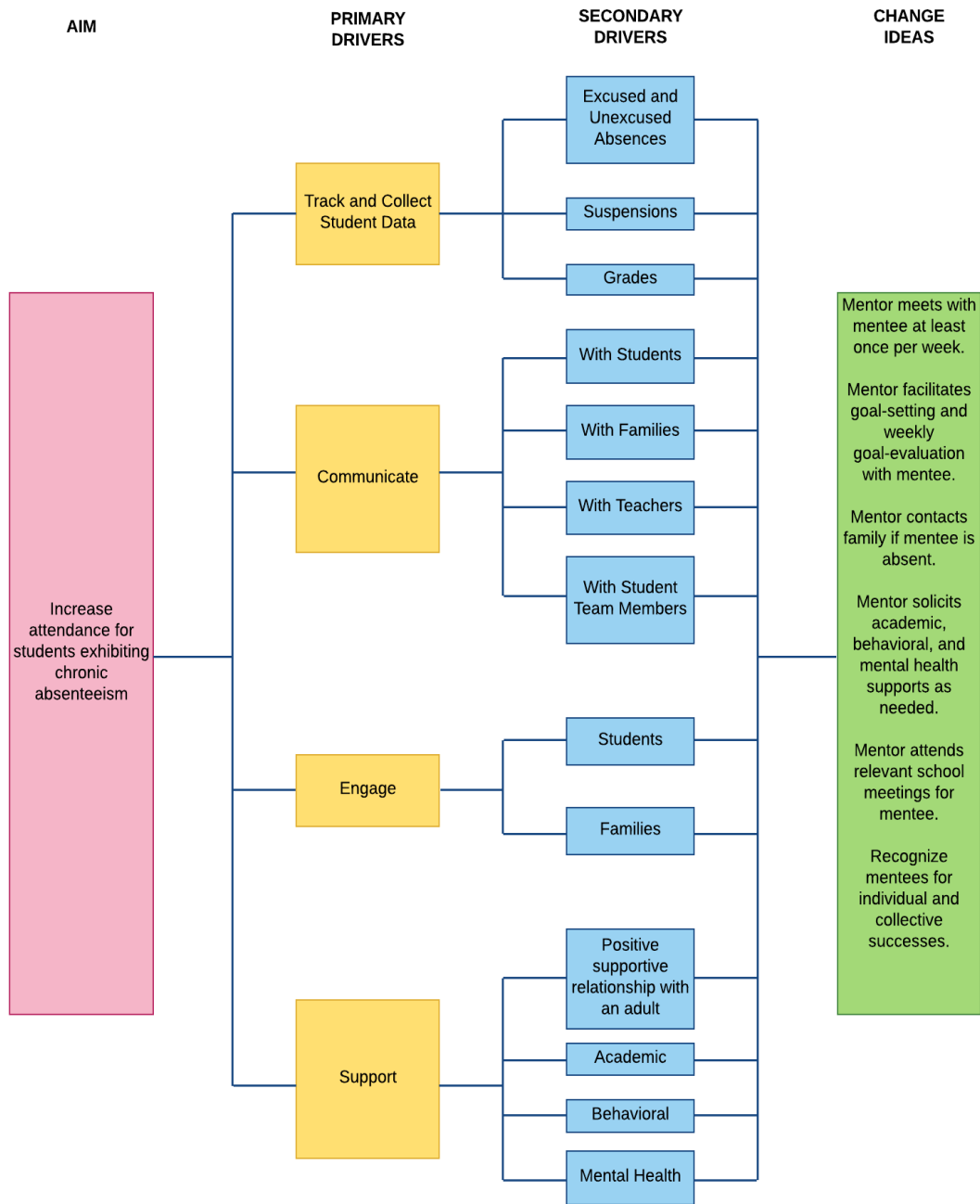


Figure 12. Driver diagram for improvement initiative.

A Review of Literature Supporting the Improvement Initiative

A relationship with a caring adult encourages students to attend school more regularly (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Railsback, 2004; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Erbstein 2014). Increased attendance leads to academic success as reflected in student grades and standardized test scores (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Studies specific to Native American students (Wilcox, 2015) and to middle grades students (Kieffer, Marinell, & Neugebauer, 2014) support the position that connecting students with an adult promotes success. When students attend school regularly, both academic and social skills are strengthened, thereby promoting college attendance (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014) and career readiness (Erbstein, 2014; Kearney & Graczyk, 2013). Kearney and Graczyk (2013) assert that students who exhibit regular attendance learn skills to appropriately interact with adults and peers, while also learning how to solve problems. Students are also likely to earn higher grades and score higher on standardized tests. As educators seek to promote student engagement to increase student learning, attendance is considered the “most basic engagement behavior” (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004, p. 103).

Check & Connect™ is an intervention that was developed in 1990 at the University of Minnesota (Attendance Works, 2013). It is designed to engage marginalized students who exhibit warning signs of school disengagement and a potential for dropping out of school. Such students may exhibit chronic absenteeism, excessive tardies to school, and/or incidents of skipping school. At the nucleus of this intervention are trusting relationships between students and mentors. Mentors are trained to engage in data-driven decision making to support and increase student resiliency and self-efficacy

through weekly student meetings and collaboration with families and relevant school staff members. Within the Check & Connect™ framework, mentors consistently monitor attendance, grades, and behavior of mentees to evaluate school engagement. Analyses serve as a platform for mentors to guide mentees with developing short and long-term goals and practices to increase and maintain school connectedness.

Mentoring increases student attendance, improves academic performance, and decreases behavior referrals through consistent monitoring of and feedback regarding student attendance, grades, and behavior data (Christenson, Stout, & Pohl, 2012). Students benefit when partnerships are formed, and this data is shared regularly with them, their families, and their teachers (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). The Check & Connect™ mentoring model, more specifically, promotes student engagement through relationships. Check & Connect™ increases student attendance through a collaborative approach with the student at the center among the mentor, school, family, and other support programs (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004; Hartwig & Maynard, 2015; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

Chang and Jordan (2017) support shifting away from negative approaches to absenteeism in favor of “community-based strategies to get more students to school every day,” which is producing positive results (p. 2). Students who are chronically absent often come from families of low socioeconomic status. Negative approaches, such as “fines, suspensions, or even jail time” (Chang & Jordan, 2017, p. 3) perpetuate the pre-existing, ever-present gap that stems directly from socioeconomic status. Issuing a fine to an already-struggling parent does not help them get a child to school; without financial means, they will likely go to jail because they cannot afford to pay the fine and will leave

their child with minimal to no supports at home. Positive strategies for addressing absenteeism include mentoring, phone calls home, and professional development for teachers. These strategies work to remove or reduce barriers for at-risk students so that attendance can improve, and more equitable opportunities are provided. Chang and Jordan (2017) conclude, “Chronic absenteeism, more than any academic indicator, is something parents, teachers, and the community can improve if they use data to target action and address barriers to getting to school” (p. 3).

The Improvement Initiative Leadership Teams

In this study, both schools implemented an adaptation of the Check & Connect™ improvement initiative that was inclusive of team members with specific areas of expertise. The teams were facilitated and managed by a facilitator, a role the researchers each assumed at our respective schools. Improvement Initiative Leadership Teams (IILT) were comprised of various staff members, including school administration, school counselors, school social workers, and student support personnel. The IILT at each of the respective sites were established to oversee the mentoring program, provide support and encouragement for mentors, and formatively assess the intervention process. They assisted with developing program structure, identifying student participants, creating professional development guidelines, determining a student recognition plan, and reviewing student monitoring forms and subsequent data. Tables 1 and 2 outline the roles and responsibilities of team members at each school.

Table 1

Sun Valley Improvement Initiative Leadership Team and Member Roles

PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	TEAM MEMBER ROLE
Assistant Principal 1	Facilitator Create Communication Plan (mentor-student-parent-teachers)
School Social Worker Eighth Grade School Counselor Assistant Principal 1	Identify Students for Intervention
Assistant Principal 1 Eighth Grade School Counselor	Coordinate Professional Development for Mentors
School Social Worker Eighth Grade Counselor Eighth Grade Teacher Assistant Principal 1	Identify Components of Student Recognition Plan
Assistant Principal 1	Student Data and Reporting

Table 2

Riverview High School Improvement Initiative Leadership Team and Member Roles

PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TEAM MEMBER ROLE
Principal	Facilitator Coordinate Professional Development for Mentors
Social Worker	Serve as Communication Facilitator (mentor-student-parent-teachers)
Attendance Coordinator Middle School Counselor	Identify Students for Intervention Identify Components of Student Recognition Plan
High School/Middle School Math Coach NASIS* Coordinator	Student Data and Reporting
*Native American Student Information System	

Improvement Initiative Design and Methodology

For this improvement initiative, we paired chronically absent students with an adult mentor in an effort to increase attendance. The conceptual framework (Figure 11) for the improvement initiative outlines the components and processes of the intervention. Our goal was to identify a maximum of twenty students to participate in the improvement initiative (up to ten eighth graders from the Sun Valley Middle School and up to ten ninth graders from Riverview High School). Students were identified as prospective participants based upon individual attendance data from SY 2016-17 that reflected chronic absenteeism, defined as ten or more excused or unexcused absences. Examining attendance data alone, and only considering those students who were enrolled in the respective schools for the 2017-18 school year, 13 students from Sun Valley Middle School and 17 students from Riverview High School were chronically absent, qualifying them for the mentoring program.

We circulated a mentor recruitment flyer (Appendix F) via staff email, in pre-service staff meetings, and in staff mailboxes. Staff members interested in serving as mentors were encouraged to ask questions, consider the additional requirements, and volunteer if they could commit to the program. SVMS had ten mentors volunteer, and nine mentors volunteered at RHS. The mentors were not very racially diverse with only one Native American. At an initial meeting, we reviewed expectations regarding professional development, weekly meetings with their mentees, data collection, and communication with teachers and parents, and mentors signed a consent form (Appendix G) to participate.

Once mentors consented to serve, we began reaching out to qualifying students and their parents to encourage participation in the program to improve student attendance. Each of us, with assistance from our school social worker, spoke to students, explained the program, the importance of good attendance, and the expectations and expected benefits from their participation. If students agreed to participate, they were given the assent and consent forms to take home to their parents to discuss. In most instances, we phoned parents to directly discuss the mentoring intervention program. While SVMS filled all ten mentee slots, RHS had seven students return their assent and consent forms to participate. The remaining students showed no interest in participating and contacting their parents did not help. Baseline data for attendance, grades, and were recorded for the 10 participants at SVMS (Table 3) and the 7 participants at RHS (Table 4).

Table 3

Participant Baseline Data for Sun Valley Middle School

Mentees	Baseline Attendance Rate (SY 2016-17)	Baseline Academic Numerical Average of Courses (SY 2016-17)	Baseline Behavioral Number of Office Referrals (SY 2016-17)
Student 1	88.70%	69.24	1
Student 2	86.44%	79.58	0
Student 3	84.75%	81.59	0
Student 4	85.88%	73.5	8
Student 5	85.88%	88.08	0
Student 6	84.40%	57.56	27
Student 7	80.60%	78.54	6
Student 8	87.35%	87.255	0
Student 9	88.90%	86.83	0
Student 10	89.40%	58.35	8
Mean for Group	86.23%	76.05	5

Table 4

Participant baseline data for Riverview High School

Mentees	Baseline Attendance Rate (SY 2016-17)	Baseline Academic Numerical Average of Core Courses (SY 2016-17)	Baseline Behavioral Number of Office Referrals (SY 2016-17)
Student 1	85.44%	67.5	5
Student 2	83.65%	80.4	2
Student 3	88.19%	74.75	0
Student 4	89.09%	84	0
Student 5	88.47%	79.25	0
Student 6	88.57%	76.75	6
Student 7	88.43%	88.25	1
Mean for Group	87.41%	78.7	2

Of the ten student participants at Sun Valley, one student participant is identified as African American, two Hispanic, one as two or more races, and six as White. Two students have 504 plans, one is identified as an EL (English Learner), and four students have IEPs. Socioeconomic data is not available for individual students; however, 45% of students at the Sun Valley qualify for free or reduced lunch. Of the seven students at Riverview participating in the mentoring program, all identify as Native American, all qualify for free and reduced lunch, and one student has an IEP.

Throughout the improvement initiative, mentors were encouraged to participate in professional development to increase their capacity to serve as mentors and to effectively engage students. The Improvement Initiative Leadership Team recommended that mentors meet at least weekly with mentees to promote trusting and supportive relationships with students and families to make progress toward the overall aim of

increasing attendance for student participants. Mentors were advised to review and document student data each week to assist mentees with establishing goals and to assist with progress monitoring of the identified goals. Mentors were also encouraged to share data with students during weekly meetings to facilitate the development of weekly responsibilities and to determine if additional academic, behavior, or mental health supports were needed. Emphasizing the inclusion of students in goal-setting, teaching them self-advocacy skills, and encouraging them to make informed decisions to increase their attendance and overall school performance were of critical importance when training mentors. Fostering the development of such skills may increase a student's ability to achieve success.

Beyond typical weekly meetings with mentees, all student mentors were also encouraged to attend relevant school meetings for mentees (e.g., IEP, Child and Family Team [CFT], Behavior Intervention Plan [BIP], Functional Behavioral Assessment [FBA]).

We managed the overall components of the initiative and offered support to mentors as they engaged with mentees. Mentor support included limiting extra duties, offering gift cards or stipends, supplying refreshments for meetings between mentors and mentees, and allowing a mentor to take time off without using leave in exchange for time in the mentoring program.

We provided professional development for all mentors prior to the start of the mentoring program at each of our respective schools. Consistent follow-up was provided throughout the improvement initiative based upon individual mentor needs and/or mentor requests along with results from self-assessments. Professional development was

designed and offered to increase the capacity of staff to serve as mentors by clarifying roles and responsibilities to clearly defining the guidelines and expectations for the mentoring program. Provisions for on-going problem solving were also addressed.

At Sun Valley, the IILT paired mentors with mentees based upon in-depth knowledge of both students and adults, including interests, strengths, and daily schedules. Mentees at Riverview selected their own mentors from short autobiographies submitted by the mentors. All mentees were paired with mentors by the end of September, so the weekly meetings began the week of October 2 and ended the week of December 18 for a total of 12 weeks. At the onset of mentor-mentee meetings, school mentors reviewed baseline data with students and assisted them with developing SMART goals. Conzemius and O'Neill (2012) acknowledge SMART goals as those that are: (1) strategic and specific, (2) measurable, (3) attainable, (4) realistic, and (4) time bound.

During meetings with students, mentors collected and documented student data using a Student Progress Monitoring Form (Appendix H). The form has three components: one piece allows the mentor to document the types of communication and interventions used with the mentee; another is used to document specific goals; and the final section is designed to record data and track gains and losses in attendance, grades, and behavioral referrals throughout the intervention. Mentors reviewed data with mentees, communicated with the families, and used data as a basis for problem solving and decision making. Mentors determined if further interventions or additional support or resources were required. For example, during a phone call between a mentor at Riverview High and the mentee's mother, she requested extra support for her son in math, so the mentor was able to arrange after school math tutoring for the student. A

student at the Sun Valley exhibited difficulty remaining organized, causing him to not turn in assignments even if he had completed them. His mentor checked in with him each day to help him determine if all completed assignments were actually turned in to his teachers. More frequent communication occurred between a mentor and a family in the event a mentee was absent. In such instances, the mentor communicated with the family each day of an absence. Making a phone call to family, offering consistent support for parents, and letting students know they are missed when not in school has been attributed to decreasing absenteeism (Balfanz, 2009; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Erbstein, 2014; Railsback, 2004). Interventions and communication with families were also documented each week.

Participants' improved attendance was acknowledged by mentors during check-in sessions with students; moreover, individual successes were rewarded at the three- and six-week marks of each quarter. Incentives included catered lunches on campus with mentors, homework passes, movie passes, vending machine snacks, and school gear (pens, water bottles, and flash drives). Recognition and concrete rewards for good (not necessarily perfect) has been found to improve attendance, it improves attendance for those who are historically chronically absent (Balfanz, 2009; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Kieffer, Marinell, & Neugebauer, 2014; Railsback, 2004).

EVALUATION OF IMPROVEMENT METHODOLOGY

Improvement science is a method by which problems of practice are solved. It is guided by founded practice, research, and learning by doing. Bryk et al. (2015) define improvement science as “the methodology that disciplines inquiries to improve practice. Undergirding it is an epistemology of what we need to know to improve practice and how we may come to know it” (p. 197). From improvement science, we chose to follow the three guiding questions from Langley et al., (2009):

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. How will we know change is an improvement?
3. What changes can we make that will result in improvement?

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching promotes improvement science “to accelerate learning and address problems of practice” and “believes that the most effective and efficient way to organize improvement efforts is through networked improvement communities (NICs)” (“Using Improvement Science,” 2018). Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) “extend human capabilities in pursuit of shared interests” (LeMahieu, 2015, para 2). LeMahieu, 2015, says NICs are:

1. Focused on a well specified aim.
2. Guided by a deep understanding of the problem, the system that produces it, and a theory of improvement relevant to it.
3. Disciplined by the rigor of improvement science.
4. Coordinated to accelerate the development, testing, and refinement of interventions and their effective integration into practice across varied education contexts (para 4-7).

Catherine Lewis (2015), in an essay on the usefulness of improvement science in education, emphasizes the focus on the three guiding questions from the model for improvement and the significance of the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) cycle in improving education. Using PDSA cycles allows educators to pilot improvement initiatives, study changes, identify the variations, and shape next steps prior to full implementation. Other integral pieces of improvement science that are useful for educational improvement include blending content knowledge with institutional awareness, drilling down to identify causes and effects of the problem of practice, piloting or prototyping an improvement initiative, studying the results, and considering the variables (Bryk et al., 2015; Carpenter, 2016; Lewis, 2015). Practitioners engage in inquiry-based methods to apply and analyze improvement methodology through consistent data collection across the improvement initiative (Bryk et al., 2015, Lewis 2015).

We applied a mixed-methods embedded design approach when evaluating the improvement methodology. The embedded design collects both “quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously or sequentially, [and has] one form of data play a supportive role to the other form of data,” according to Creswell (2012, p. 544). To evaluate the mentoring initiative, we collected the following quantitative data for students: baseline and mid-intervention attendance, grades, and behavior referrals. The mentoring program will continue until the end of SY 2017-18. For the purposes of the disquisition, the mid-intervention data serve as the post-intervention summative data. Data, however, will continue being collected throughout the remainder of the school year to continue supporting students and evaluating the program.

Quantitative data was also collected by post-intervention surveys distributed to mentees (Appendix I), mentors (Appendix J), and parents (Appendix K) beginning December 1, 2017. Qualitative data was also collected via two open-ended questions on the mentee, mentor, and parent survey. Survey responses were collected through January 11, 2018. As Creswell (2012) details, “during a quantitative experiment, the researcher may collect qualitative data to examine how participants in the treatment condition are experiencing the intervention” (p. 544). Both types of data were collected not only to determine the result but to inform next steps, which is a significant element of improvement science.

In this section, we have included: (1) formative evaluation of the improvement initiative, and (2) summative evaluation of the improvement initiative. To assess the improvement initiative, both outcome and process measures are utilized. Outcome measures indicate whether the intervention achieves its goal(s). Process measures assess the state of affairs as the intervention is being implemented and can guide mid-intervention decisions (Bryk et al., 2015).

Formative Evaluation of the Improvement Initiative

This section discusses our formative evaluation practices. Formative evaluation provides ongoing progress monitoring of an intervention or practice in order to inform and potentially improve implementation. Unlike summative evaluation processes that examine interventions following implementation, formative evaluation processes evaluate during (and throughout) implementation for the purposes of adjustment. Tables 5 and 6 identify the formative evaluation measures we used to monitor progress toward goal achievement. Table 5 identifies four formative evaluation measures used to monitor the

progress toward our desired outcome: (1) Student Progress Monitoring Form, (2) student midterm progress reports, (3) student report cards, and (4) student behavioral data. Table 6 identifies two formative evaluation measures used to monitor the progress of the improvement initiative process: Student Progress Monitoring Form and monthly improvement initiative self-assessment data.

Weekly meetings between mentor and mentee were documented over twelve weeks using the student progress monitoring form, for which attendance, academic performance, and behavioral data for each student were collected. Midterm progress reports and quarterly report cards were also used to evaluate attendance and the academic performance of student participants. Mentor, mentee, and parent survey data provided insight about each of their respective roles in participating in the improvement initiative as a way to evaluate and improve program practices. Finally, the Attendance Improvement Initiative Leadership Teams monitored processes and completed monthly self-assessments (Appendix L) to assure all components of the improvement initiative were implemented as planned or in response to data that suggested the need for adjustments.

The evaluation of improvement initiatives can be framed using Edward Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model. Donnelly and Kirk (2015) submit that the PDSA framework is a model for change encouraging leaders to study their actions and respond to their learning as they work collectively toward common goals. The PDSA process involves "...identifying, describing, and providing structure for a natural process whereby groups/teams initiate change within their system" (Donnelly and Kirk, p. 2).

The “plan” phase of a PDSA cycle, focuses on the objective or change that needs to occur, includes the who and what of the change, and introduces relevant baseline data and predictions (Langley et al., 2009; Bryk et al., 2015). Implementing the plan happens during the “do” phase, with data collection and notable difficulties recorded (Langley et al., 2009; Bryk et al., 2015). Analyzing the data, comparing results to the predictions, and identifying lessons learned occurs during the “study” phase (Langley et al., 2009; Bryk et al., 2015). Finally, “act” refers to the actions change agents take in response to what they learned during the “study” phase. Actions may include changing the course of the initiative, altering the initiative, or discontinuing the initiative altogether.

Table 5

Formative Evaluation Measures to Monitor Progress of Outcome Goals

DESIRED OUTCOMES	FORMATIVE EVALUATION MEASURES TO MONITOR PROGRESS TOWARD GOAL ACHIEVEMENT
Attendance rates for mentees (individually and collectively) during SY 2017-18 will increase from 2016-17 attendance rates	Student Progress Monitoring Form First and second quarter report cards for RHS
Academic averages for mentees (individually and collectively) during SY 2017-18 will increase from 2016-17 averages	Student Progress Monitoring Form First and second quarter midterm progress reports for SY 2017-18 First and second quarter report cards for SY 2017-18
Behavior referrals for mentees (individually and collectively) during SY 2017-18 will decrease behavioral referrals SY 2016-17	Student Progress Monitoring Form Behavioral data from school information systems

Table 6

Formative Evaluation Measures to Monitor Progress of Process Goals

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS GOALS	FORMATIVE EVALUATION MEASURES TO MONITOR PROGRESS TOWARD GOAL ACHIEVEMENT
Mentor facilitates weekly meetings with mentee during SY 2017-18	Student Progress Monitoring Form
ILLT meets monthly during mentoring program	ILLT Self-Assessment Form

We established three PDSA cycles as a framework for the formative evaluation of our improvement initiative. Cycles span August 2017 through January 2018 and detail the steps we took as disquisitioners and the Improvement Initiative Leadership Team. PDSA Cycle 1 (Figure 13) presents our pre-implementation work in recruiting mentors, identifying student participants, studying participant data, and obtaining consent and assent. PDSA Cycle 2 (Figure 14), which spans the first nine weeks of school, displays the structures for building mentor capacity, beginning the weekly mentor-mentee meetings, reviewing student progress monitoring forms, and adapting particular aspects of the program for the next cycle. PSDA Cycle 3 (Figure 15) encompasses the second nine weeks of school and highlights our process for creating, collecting, and analyzing participant surveys.

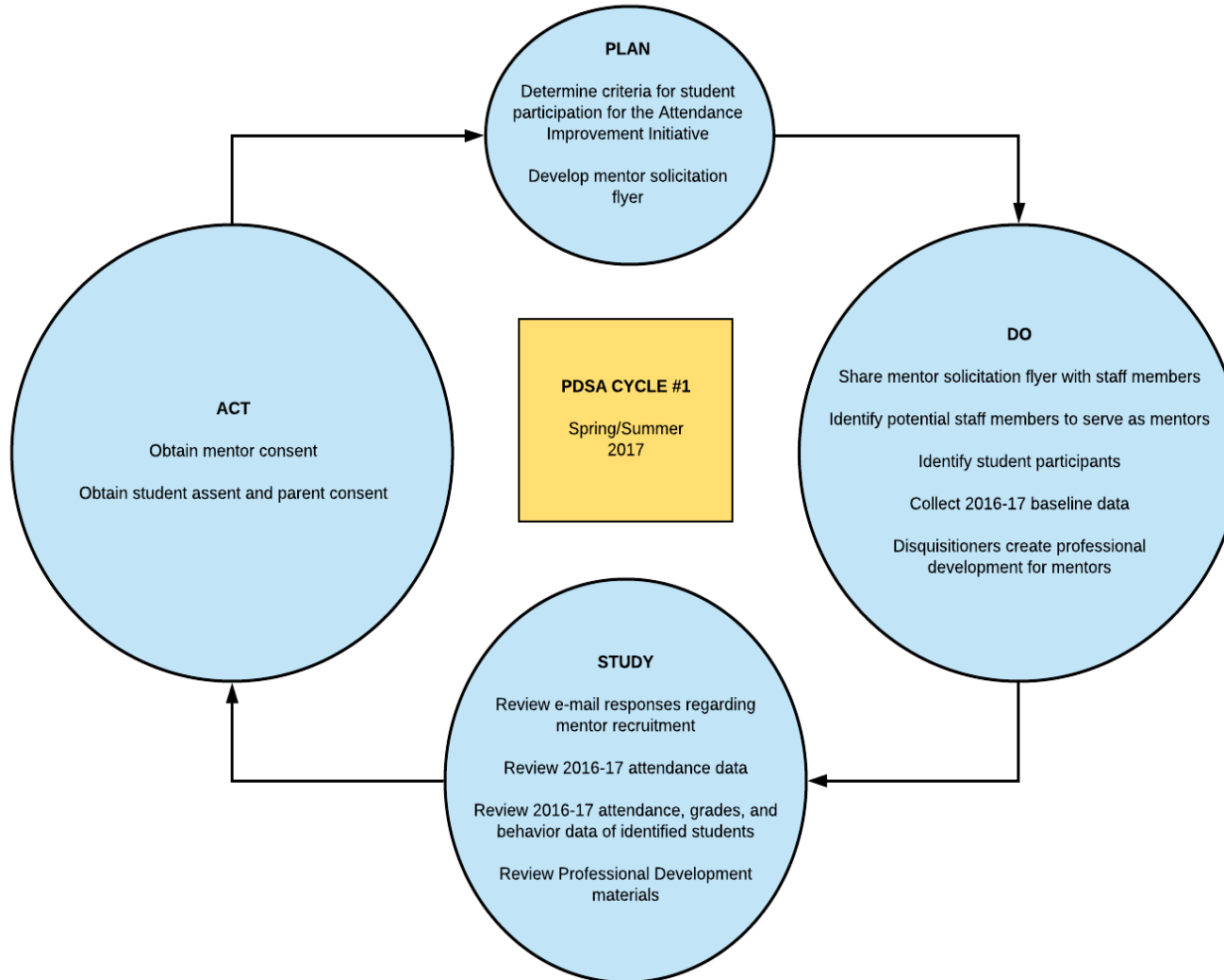


Figure 13. PDSA cycle number one.

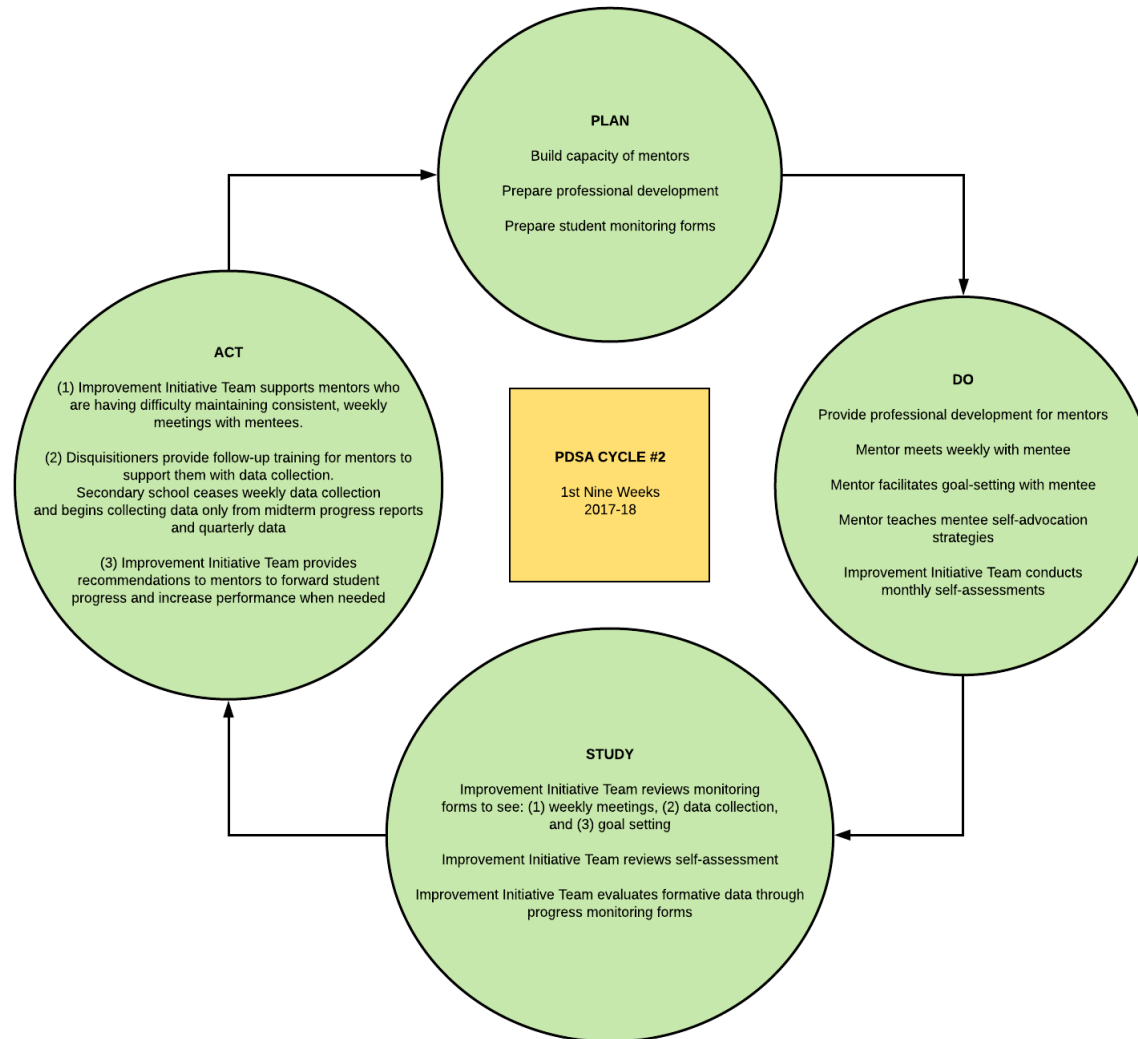


Figure 14. PDSA cycle number two.

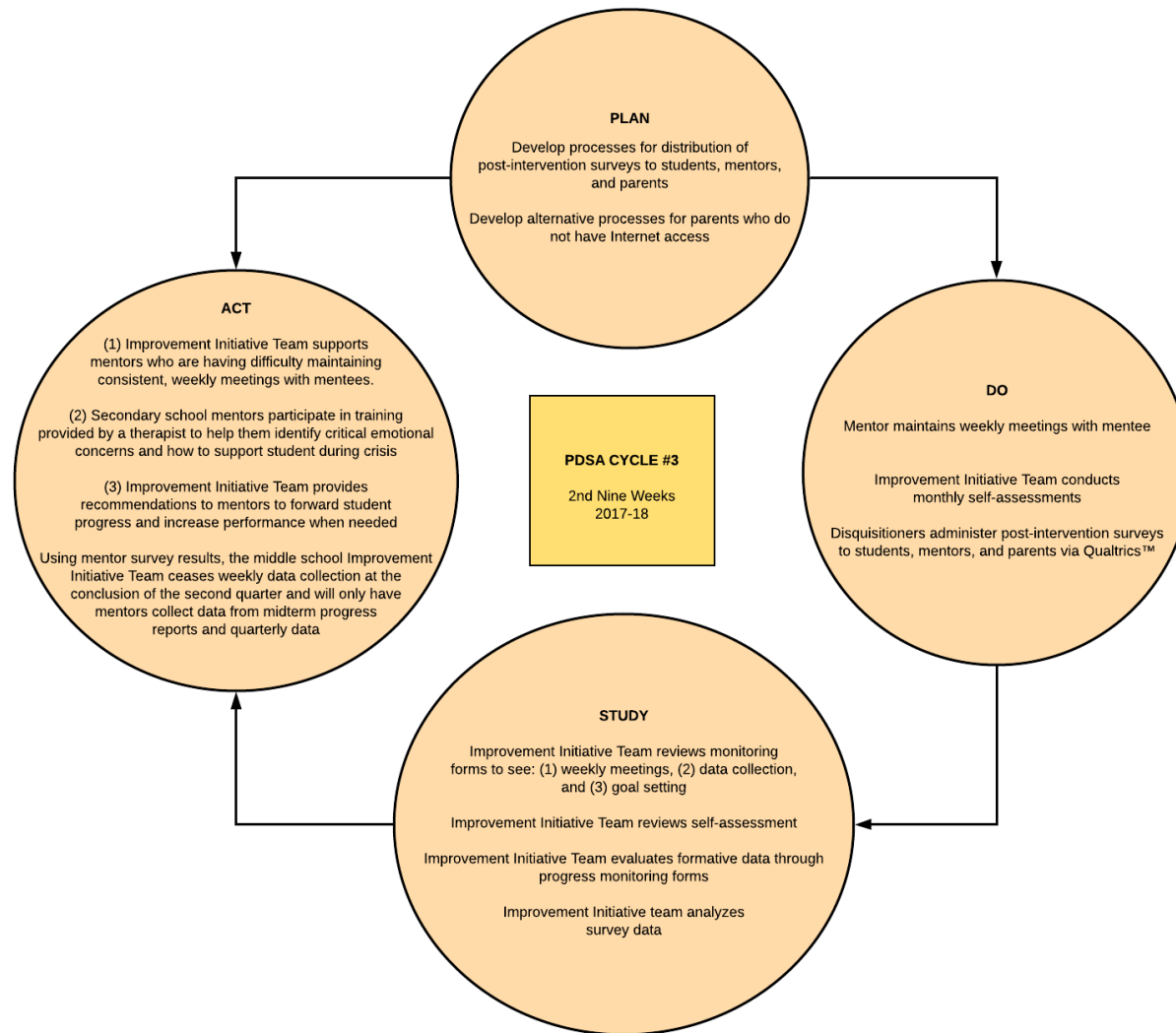


Figure 15. PDSA cycle number three.

Response to Formative Assessment Data. Formative assessment data were collected weekly by mentors as they met with mentees. Data were also collected monthly by the Improvement Initiative Leadership Teams through the completion of a self-assessment form (Appendix L). Mentors used data to help them guide mentees in establishing short- and long-term goals, plan next steps, and encourage improvement in the areas of attendance, academic performance, and behavior. This information was collected using a Student Progress Monitoring Form (Appendix H), which documented (1) student attendance, (2) student grades, (3) student behavior, (4) the type and quantity of communication with parents, (5) the type and quantity of interventions, (6) student goals, (7) weekly responsibilities of the mentor and mentee, and (8) any additional notes. Both schools provided training for mentors on data collection, reviewing each of the three forms.

The Improvement Initiative Leadership Teams met monthly to review the components of the mentoring program and utilized a team self-assessment form (Appendix L) to aid in evaluating the initiative. The form guided the team through assessing mentors, data tracking and monitoring, individualized support and intervention, and engagement with family.

Sun Valley Middle School. Progress monitoring was outlined for mentors during professional development. The Student Progress Monitoring Form (Appendix H) was shared with mentors as a recommended tool for weekly data collection. Upon recording weekly student progress, mentors were able to use data collection to engage mentees in discussions about their progress in each of the respective areas. Data collection served as a platform for weekly problem solving and goal setting sessions with students. Weekly data collection, however, proved to be a cumbersome component of the mentoring program, noted by mentors during monthly meetings with the Improvement Initiative Leadership Team and in post-intervention survey results.

Additional professional development was provided for mentors to assist them with the data collection process.

Monthly Improvement Initiative Leadership Team meetings were held to evaluate the state of the improvement initiative by reviewing students' formative data, including (1) weekly meetings between mentors, (2) data collection, and (3) goal setting. Leadership Team members provided support to mentors who demonstrated difficulty with maintaining consistent, weekly meetings with mentees, as well as with identifying and recommending additional supports mentors could use to help forward student progress and increase overall performance.

The IILT also completed monthly self-assessments (Appendix L) to determine if any changes should be made moving forward. Overall, team formative self-assessment ratings increased each month, beginning with an October rating of 2.2 and ending with a January rating of 3.6. Continued discussion surrounding data collection, combined with post-intervention survey results prompted the Leadership Team to cease weekly data collection at the conclusion of the second quarter, 16 weeks after the start of the improvement initiative, and begin collecting data only from midterm progress reports and quarterly report cards. Mentors, however, were encouraged to continue weekly data reviews with mentees.

Riverview High School. Mentors were encouraged to collect data using the Student Progress Monitoring Form and to use that data to guide mentors and students in goal setting and to document successes. The attendance, grades, and behavior checks helped mentors know which direction to take in terms of providing support for the student, advocating with other teachers on the student's behalf, or rewarding the student accordingly. One example is Student 4 failing to get doctor's notes to the attendance office to excuse recent absences because she could not keep up with the notes long enough to submit them, so her mentor worked on organizational

skills with her. Another example is Student 1, who was getting behind in some assignments, so he and his mentor developed a plan for making up the work.

Meeting monthly to complete the team self-assessment rubric (Appendix L), the Improvement Initiative Leadership Team with input from the mentors rated the mentoring program on a scale from 1 “Not Occurring” to 4 “Implementation in Place with Evidence to Support it is Occurring.” The overall rating increased from 2.35 for October to 3 in November and 3.25 in December. Out of the ten different elements, mentor commitment received the highest mark throughout the intervention, but lack of communication with family seemed to be a concern, according to the team. Information from the rubric, along with additional input from the mentors, led the Improvement Initiative Leadership Team to identify areas of need and offer extra support. Some mentors struggled more than others with the digital student progress monitoring forms, so in addition to offering an extra training session with the group, the instructional coach, who created the digital versions, provided one-on-one instruction for mentors.

Two issues were highlighted during the IILT October self-assessment, four weeks into implementation: RHS mentors encountered issues with collecting weekly grades for their students, and mentors expressed they had concerns about meeting the emotional needs of their mentees. This formative information prompted us to adjust the student grades portion of the progress monitoring form to only record grades during progress report and quarterly grading periods. Additional training was arranged to support mentors in meeting the emotional needs of their students with a therapist from a local mental health program. The therapist shared how mentors can identify critical emotional concerns and support students during crisis.

Summative Evaluation of the Improvement Initiative

This section discusses the summative evaluation practices we used and the results of those assessments. The following section presents our summative results in the following order: (1) student outcomes at the end of implementation, and (2) process outcomes at the end of implementation.

Unlike formative evaluations, summative measures are applied at the end of implementation. Analysis of the results helped us to reflect upon the process, determine whether the outcomes were achieved including the desired aim of the improvement initiative, and consider the impact of the improvement initiative on all of the relevant stakeholders, especially the students.

Table 5 highlights the three major student outcome goals: (1) increase in participant attendance, (2) decrease in participant behavior referrals, and (3) improvement in academic performance. We used data collected at the end of school year 2016-17 to establish a baseline for comparison with SY 2017-18 for students who were chronically absent. We reviewed these data in December 2017, 12 weeks after beginning the improvement initiative, to identify trends per student or by the group. Table 7 provides a summary of the data gathered.

Participants showed growth across all three outcome goals. The mean attendance rate increased from 86.71 in SY 2016-17 to 87.66 in December 2017 for participants. Numerical academic averages increased for participants from M77.14 in SY 16-17 to M81.10 post intervention. Behavior referrals decreased from the SY 16-17 mark of M3.76 to M0.82 in December 2017. Our mentees are not where we want them to be, yet, but the improvement is promising.

Table 7

Analysis of Outcome Goals

OUTCOME GOAL	ANALYSIS OF OUTCOME GOAL	RESULTS		
Increase in participant attendance	Compare attendance rates to baseline attendance rates of participants.	SVMS Attendance Baseline M=86.23, SD=2.63 Post M=86.49, SD=5.21 +0.26	RHS Attendance Baseline M=87.41, SD=2.04 Post M=89.34, SD=3.01 +1.93	NIC Attendance Baseline M=86.71, SD=2.41 Post M=87.66, SD=4.56 +0.95
Improve participant academic performance	Compare academic performance to baseline academic performance of participants.	SVMS Grades Baseline M=76.05, SD=11.27 Post M=79.08, SD=10.13 +3.03	RHS Grades Baseline M=78.70, SD=6.67 Post M=84, SD=6.09 +5.3	NIC Grades Baseline M=77.14, SD=9.49 Post M=81.10, SD=8.82 +3.96
Decrease in participant behavior referrals	Compare behavioral referrals to baseline attendance rates of participants.	SVMS Behavior Baseline M=5, SD=8.46 Post M=1.1, SD=0.99 -3.9	RHS Behavior Baseline M=2, SD=2.52 Post M=0.43, SD=1.13 -1.57	NIC Behavior Baseline M=3.76, SD=6.70 Post M=0.82, SD=1.07 -2.94

Process Outcomes: Post-Intervention Surveys

We developed post-intervention surveys for mentors, mentees, and parents by making adaptations to survey materials from the *Mentoring A-Z Training Manual* (2014, Retrieved from <http://www.ncmentoring.org/mentoring-program-evaluation-survey/>).

Surveys were administered via Qualtrics™ (a digital survey platform) for the purposes of collecting data for this disquisition. Mentee (Appendix I) and mentor (Appendix J) surveys had twelve questions, including ten multiple-choice questions and two questions eliciting open-ended responses. A sample multiple-choice question for mentees can be found in Figure 16, and Figure 17 represents open-ended questions for mentors.

Q3 Do you enjoy being a part of this program?

- Yes (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- Not much (3)
- No (4)

Figure 16. Sample mentee survey question.

Q10 Choose the best description for your mentee's grades.

- Better than last year
- The same as last year
- Worse than last year

Figure 17. Sample mentor survey question.

Parent surveys (Appendix K) had ten questions with eight multiple choice and two open-ended questions. Below is a sample parent survey question (Figure 18).

Q8 Does having a mentor help your child do better in school?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not much
- Not at all

Figure 18. Sample parent survey question.

Surveys were distributed to all stakeholders on December 1, 2017, after nine weeks of the intervention, in person, by email, or by hard copy. Survey responses were accepted through January 11, 2018. Cumulatively, 39 surveys were completed by stakeholders, 25 from Sun Valley Middle School and 14 from Riverview High School. Responses included 14 of 17 mentees, 9 from SVMS and 5 from RHS; 16 of 17 mentors, 10 from SVMS and 6 from RHS; and 8 of 17 parents/guardians, 5 from SVMS and 3 from RHS.

The results from each school are very similar with little-to-no variation, so we chose to present them together. Moreover, we have both coded responses to open-ended questions using In Vivo coding. In Vivo coding, according to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), “uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language” (p. 74) to extract meaning from participant responses. In this instance “participant” refers to the mentees, their parent(s), and the mentors. This method of coding is particularly useful in maintaining the voice of the participants. After the first cycle of coding, we identified commonalities among the responses and how they fit into overarching themes.

The following discussion summarizes the combined survey responses, both quantitative and qualitative, within three sections: mentees, mentors, and parents. Appendix M presents the multiple-choice questions and participant answers for all three surveys, and the table found in

Appendix N presents the In Vivo coding responses from the participants. The color coding of the qualitative data in Appendix N represents common themes, denoted at the bottom of the table, found throughout participant responses.

Mentee Survey Results.

Relationships. Eighty-five percent of the participants (twelve students) rated the mentoring program favorably with no students rating the mentoring program “poor”; moreover, none of the students reported that they did not enjoy being a part of the program. Two of the fourteen students responding reported liking their mentor “somewhat” while the remainder offered a resounding “yes” to the “do you like your mentor” question.

Meeting attendance. Twelve of the fourteen students indicated they met with their mentors at least once per week, and two students reported meeting less frequently.

Communication. No mentee suggested that their mentor did not communicate well with them, and in terms of sharing personal information with mentors, mentees were generally comfortable, with six responding “definitely yes,” six indicating “mostly,” and two reporting “somewhat”.

Academic performance. Only one student felt that having a mentor did not help much in terms of the student’s doing better in school, but the remaining thirteen indicated it is helping to a degree. The question about tutoring drew mixed responses with 50% marking “I have not needed tutoring”; 21.43% (3 students) said their mentors did not connect them with tutoring; and 28.57% (4 students) responded their mentors did indeed connect them with tutoring.

School attendance. Ten students reported an increase in attendance over last year; two said there has been no change; and two indicated their attendance is actually worse. In terms of grades, eight students reported no change from last year, but five stated their grades are better

than last year.

Qualitative responses. In Vivo coding of the survey responses for questions 12 – “What do you like best about the mentoring program?” – revealed two general thoughts from the fourteen student participants completing the survey, including (1) relationship with their mentor, and (2) support from their mentor. Some students offered more than one aspect of the program they liked the best: eight responses included the words “talk” or “talking”; seven answers focused on setting goals or completing work, including “set goals,” “achieve goals,” and “talk about missing work”; and five said, “help,” “helps,” and/or “helped.” Question 13 – “What do you think we should change or do differently to improve the program?” – drew little variation from most of the student responses as most responded with “nothing” to this prompt while two students suggested structural changes. One believed having a set day for mentor meetings would be helpful and the other wanted to “see mentors twice a week.”

Mentor Survey Results.

Overall perception of the mentoring program. No mentor rated the mentoring program as “excellent” or “poor”; fourteen, though, felt the program was “very good,” and two indicated it was “okay.” Of the sixteen mentors completing the survey, ten responded “yes,” five indicated “somewhat,” and one selected “not much” when asked if they enjoyed participating in this program.

Professional development. Ten mentors expressed the training session definitely helped prepare them for their mentoring experience while six suggested it helped “somewhat.” Mentors were asked to consider if they would benefit from additional training: six said “yes”; five said “maybe”; three said “probably not”; and two said “no.”

Relationships. Fifteen mentors described their relationships with their mentees as “very

good” or “good” with one selecting “fair” as a descriptor.

Program feedback. Seven mentors felt that the amount of time they spent with their mentees was sufficient, but nine felt that it was not enough time.

Academic performance. Thirteen mentors thought the program was helping their mentees become better students to varying degrees, and three felt it was not helping much. No mentor reported decreases in mentee grades from SY 2016-17, while nine indicated an increase, and seven mentors stated grades were the same as the previous school year.

Student attendance. Fourteen mentors reported increased attendance compared to SY 2016-17 for their students, and two indicated their students’ attendance was the same.

Program feedback - incentives. When asked about the reward and celebration components of the mentoring program, mentors’ responses varied: five thought it was “very beneficial,” seven said it was “somewhat beneficial,” and four felt it was “not beneficial at all.”

Qualitative responses. In Vivo coding of the survey responses for questions 12 and 13 for the mentors revealed general themes from the sixteen participants completing the survey. Several mentors responded to question 12, “What do you like best about the mentoring program?”, with more than one factor. Thirteen responses focused on the relationship between the mentor and student; specific responses include “spending time with student,” “getting to know student better,” and “one on one time with student.” Nine of the answers related to the support provided to the student by the mentor, such as “identifying issue taking steps to address it,” “paying attention to her progress,” and “positive influence in young person’s life.”

Question 13 gave mentors the opportunity to make suggestions for improving the program and mentors, again, could list multiple factors. Thirteen responses fell into the structural or design category with mentors indicating data collection as an issue. “Amount of

paperwork is not necessary to build relationships with students,” suggested on mentor. Another said, “paperwork has zero impact on performance.” Time seems to be another common concern under the structural or design theme: mentors echoed, “sufficient time,” “need to find the time,” and “time is a big concern.” Three mentors suggested more training or professional development with one mentor asking for “training with both [mentor and mentee] together [to] establish relationship.”

Parent Survey Results.

Overall perception of the mentoring program. Seven of the eight parents completing a survey rated the program “excellent” or “very good.” The other parent rated it “okay.”

Relationships: All parents reported their children enjoyed being part of the mentoring program to some degree. All but one responded “yes” to the question about the students liking their mentors, and the other one said, “somewhat”.

Communication. While seven of eight reported “once-a-week” communication was occurring with the mentor, one indicated communication is occurring less frequently. Regarding how well the mentors communicated with parents, it was a 50/50 split between “yes” and “somewhat.” No parent reported being uncomfortable sharing personal information with mentors, but comfort levels did vary. One was “definitely” comfortable; two were “mostly” comfortable; and five were “somewhat” comfortable.

Academic performance. All eight parents responding believed their children are doing better in school because they have a mentor.

Qualitative responses. Survey responses for question 9 revealed parents’ favorite attributes of the mentoring program were the positive relationship established between the mentor pairing and the support their students received from mentors. Parent answers include:

“increased motivation for attendance,” “child mention mentoring session in positive manner,” “someone is there for my child,” and “keep me in track of what’s going on.”

Question 10 solicited input regarding what should change or be done differently to improve the program, to which five respondents suggested no changes. One parent asked for “more parent involvement” while another parent said, “don’t know much about mentoring.”

Summary of Post-Intervention Survey Results

From the survey results, we can surmise the mentoring program went well as reported by all three groups of participants – students, mentors, and parents. They appreciated the extra support provided to the mentees through the relationships with the mentors. Participants see the mentoring program as helping the students accomplish attendance, academic, and behavior goals. If the mentoring program continues, we will use this stakeholder input to improve and expand the program to better support mentors and parents and better serve students.

While we are seeking to ensure participants’ ninth grade credit attainment is sufficient for advancement, this will not be included or reported in this disquisition. For the Riverview participants, this data will not be available until June 2018, and for the middle school participants, the data will not be available until June 2019. Long-term goals are to decrease dropout rates and increase cohort graduation rates, which cannot be fully realized and evaluated for participants until 2021 for Riverview High and 2022 for Sun Valley Middle School.

Sun Valley Middle School. Data collection for students in the areas of attendance, academics, and behavior reflect overall improvement when comparing pre-intervention data from SY 2016-17 to post-intervention data from January 2018 (Figure 19 and Appendix O). Students 6 and 10 are both eighth grade repeaters, with both demonstrating growth and improvement from SY 2016-17 as first-time eighth graders to SY 2017-18. Student 8 was also

an eighth grade repeater, but his progress prompted his promotion to ninth grade at the conclusion of the first semester in December 2017.

Attendance. The mean attendance rate at the middle school increased from 86.11 to 89.19. Notably, four of the ten students increased their attendance to a rate above 90.00, thereby removing their label of chronically absent.

Academics. The mean course average increased from 74.81 to 79.07. Student 5 increased from 88.08 to 94.00, and Student 6 made incredible growth, increasing from 57.56 to 87.67.

Behavior. Behavior referrals and suspension days also improved with the mean number of referrals decreasing from 5.56 to 1 and the mean number of suspension days decreasing from 7.11 to 0.77. Students 4, 6, and 10 each demonstrated significant improvement with behavior. Student 4 demonstrated a decrease in office referrals by seven, and Student 10 decreased by six. Student 6 demonstrated a tremendous decrease in office referrals, going from 27 during SY 2016-17 to 2 for the first half of SY 2017-18.

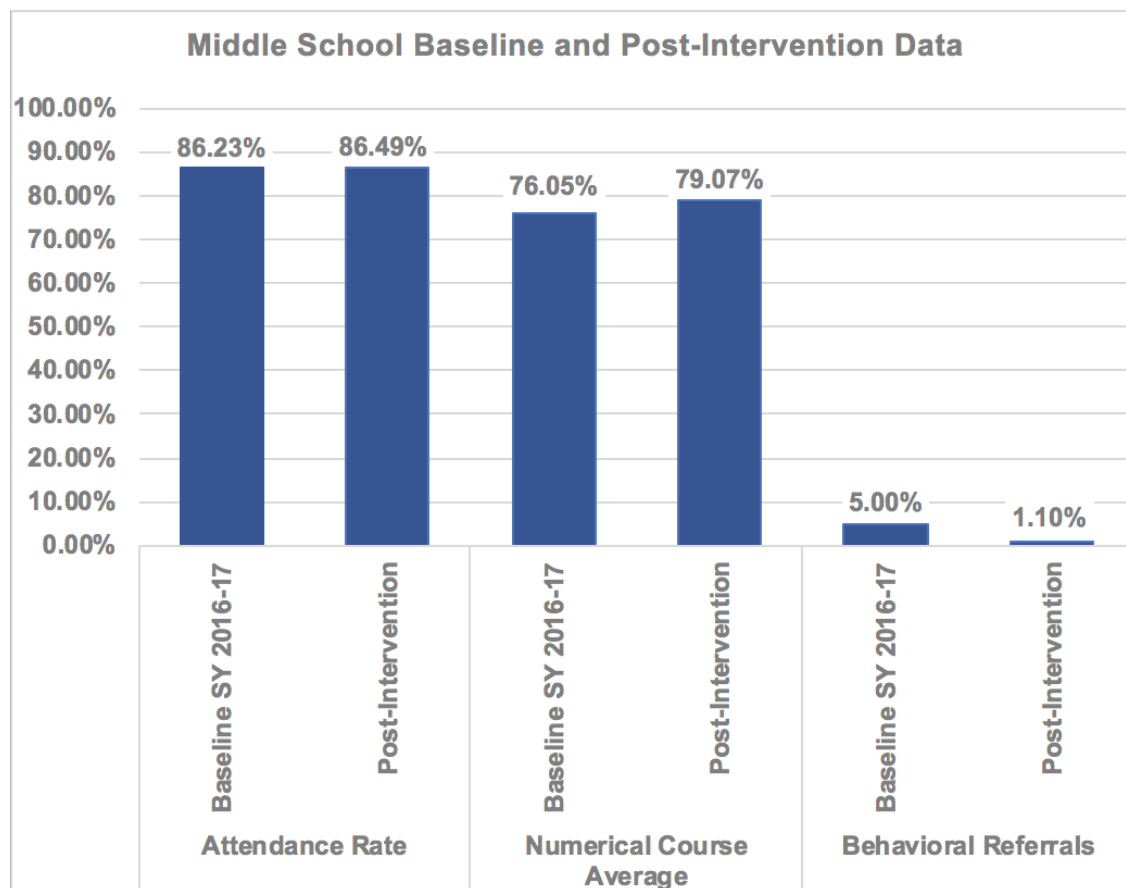


Figure 19. Sun Valley Middle School participant baseline and post-intervention data.

Riverview High School. When considering the quantitative summative data, participants collectively made improvements in all three outcome areas – attendance, academic performance, and behavior – from SY 2016-17 to post-intervention in January 2018 (Figure 20 and Appendix P). Student 1 stands out because of improvement across all outcomes: increase in attendance rate from 85.44% to 90.72%; increase in numerical average of courses from 67.50 to 75.25; decrease in behavior referrals from 5 to 0; and a decrease in suspension days from 18 to 0.

Attendance. The mean attendance rate increased from 87.41 to 89.34. Remarkable individual increases can be noted in attendance rates for student 2 (+8.53).

Academics. The mean course average increased from 78.70 to 84.00. Students 3 and 4 made gains in academic performance with a gain of 13.75 points for student 3 and 8.75 for student 4.

Behavior. Mean behavior referrals decreased from 2.0 to 0.43. Most notably is the decrease in mean suspension days, which dropped from 7.14 to 0.14. Data for student 7 indicates a noteworthy decrease in behavior referrals from 6 to 3 and a drop in suspension days from 22 to 1.

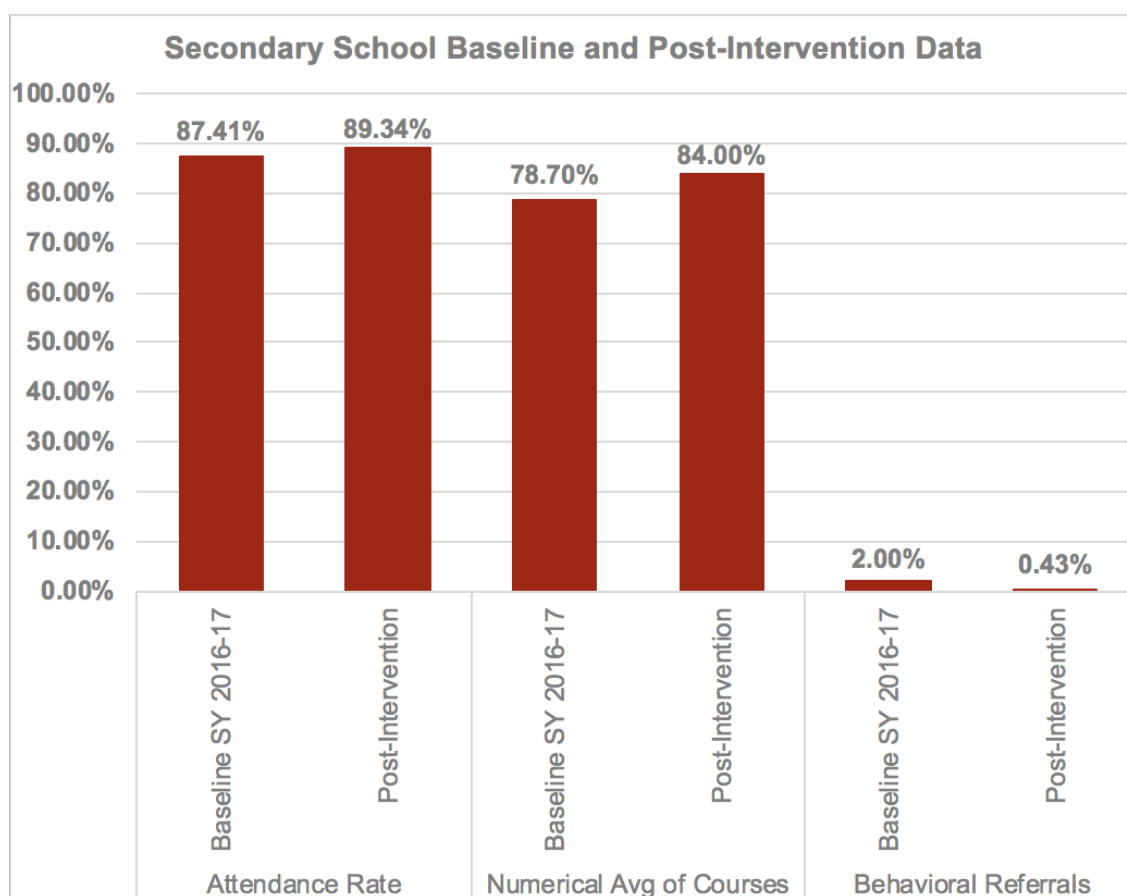


Figure 20. Riverview High School participant baseline and post-intervention data.

Student Outcomes Across Schools

Using SPSS, we ran a paired samples t-test to determine if there is a statistical difference between the attendance, academic performance, and behavior of participants from pre-

intervention to post-intervention. Even though we have a small sample size, there is no minimum for a t-test. According to Dr. Hinnant-Crawford, a “t-test is robust, and the size of the distribution changes with the degrees of freedom, corresponding with the sample size” (personal communication, March 6, 2018).

Paired-samples t-Tests (Appendix Q) were conducted to compare attendance, grades, and behavior referrals between participants’ pre-intervention and post-intervention data. While there is an increase from participants’ pre-intervention attendance ($M=86.71$, $SD=2.41$) to their post-intervention attendance ($M=87.66$, $SD=4.56$) with a mean difference of .95, the analysis concluded the increase was not significantly different, $t(16)=-1.01$, $p=0.326$. Participants’ averaged grades also rose from pre-intervention ($M=77.14$, $SD=9.49$) to post-intervention ($M=81.10$, $SD=8.88$) with a mean difference of 3.96; the analysis determined the increase is marginally significant, $t(16)=-1.74$, $p=0.10$. Finally, participants’ behavior referrals decreased from pre-intervention ($M=3.76$, $SD=6.70$) to post-intervention ($M=0.82$, $SD=0.82$) with a mean difference of 2.94. Again, analysis showed the difference is marginally significant, $t(16)=1.96$, $p=0.07$.

Tabular Form*Table 8: Participant Attendance Rate Baseline and Post Intervention*

	Baseline		Post Intervention		Difference	t(16)	p	95% CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD					
All	86.71	2.41	87.66	4.56	0.95	-1.01	0.326	[-2.9, 1.0]	-0.26

Table 9: Participant Grades Baseline and Post Intervention

	Baseline		Post Intervention		Difference	t(16)	p	95% CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD					
All	77.14	9.49	81.10	8.82	3.96	-1.74	0.10	[-8.8, 0.86]	-0.43

Table 10: Participant Behavior Referrals Baseline and Post Intervention

	Baseline		Post Intervention		Difference	t(16)	p	95% CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD					
All	3.76	6.70	0.82	1.07	2.94	1.96	0.07	[-0.24, 6.12]	0.61

Summary. Participants in the mentoring program improved their attendance, grades, and behavior. Statistically, though, these improvements were either not significant or they were marginally significant. This does not mean the improvement initiative was not successful. When a retained student from Sun Valley worked so hard with his mentor and teachers that he was promoted to high school at the mid-year point, we know the program was successful. When “Student 1” at the high school improved his attendance to above 90%, his grades from a D average to a C, and his behavior referrals dropped from 5 to 0, we know the program was successful.

Validity/Reliability of Methods. To enhance the validity and reliability of this mixed-methods embedded design, we collected baseline attendance, course performance, and behavior data for all participating students and maintained consistency between both intervention sites and among the mentors at each site. All mentors used the same data collection and reporting methods, using parallel data collection methods at both schools. Supporting the reliability of the disquisition is our use of tools from a vetted program, Check & Connect™.

We promoted validity through triangulation, via the variety of data sources and methods: qualitative (mentor logs, and open-ended survey questions) and quantitative (attendance, grade average, behavior, and surveys). Both of us coded open-ended survey responses to support inter-rater reliability.

We monitored elements or activities that could have influenced the intervention or its outcomes, including the fidelity of implementation by mentors and other Improvement Initiative Leadership Team members. The process data collected by mentors and the leadership team included data that informed outcome data. The student monitoring forms, for instance, provided

opportunity for mentors to collect weekly (process) data that shaped short-term goals and next steps, and that weekly data were tallied to produce post-intervention (outcome) data.

Despite carefully applied methods and implementation processes, the small sample size detracts from the overall validity and reliability of the intervention. This does not suggest that the improvement initiative and results are not valuable. The design of the initiative was intentionally small to allow us to effectively engage in improvement science methodology as we attacked our problem of practice. Although the results are not statistically significant, we know that students have made progress.

Lessons Learned, Implications, and Recommendations for School Leaders

Evidence gathered across two schools suggests that implementing a site-based mentoring program modeled after Check & Connect™ can improve attendance, academic performance, and behavior for those considered chronically absent. Based upon input from participants and our data analysis, we recommend the implementation of a site-based mentoring program like Check & Connect™ with the following lessons in mind:

Lesson 1. Teachers from each of our schools are the ones who volunteered and committed to serve as mentors for an entire school year; however, a teacher's time is limited. Leaders should consider the challenges of data collection and the time it takes to complete each of the three Student Progress Monitoring Forms. Reducing the amount of data collection by eliminating certain pieces and editing to shorten the more formal monitoring forms to create the most useful data collection form to support mentor efforts is key.

Lesson 2. It is vital that leaders begin a mentoring program like this in the summer prior to the start of the school year. Having a team of mentors trained in the summer, or during pre-

service days, will allow for students to benefit from the additional support of having a mentor on the first day of school.

Lesson 3. Leaders should get mentors on board with the improvement initiative early to allow time and opportunity for them to contribute to the structure and schedule of the program. Student schedules often did not mesh well with their mentor's teaching schedules, making it very difficult for some mentors to meet with their students at a convenient time for either party.

Lesson 4. Leaders should consider making the home connection even stronger when implementing a mentoring program like this. A home visit from the mentor, with possible support from the school social worker, to actually meet the parent/guardian can help establish this connection early on to promote better communication, improve the process, and increase the outcomes.

Lesson 5. Implementing a mentoring improvement initiative to improve attendance can give educational leaders a new lens through which to see those policies, practices, and events that impact attendance. Policy often does not influence results as much as we would like. Schools have attendance policies that, if met, would ensure no students would be chronically absent. Practices, though, on the part of the parent, school, and student, interfere with attendance. Leaders must decide how much influence they will exercise over practices and develop standard procedures to support improved attendance.

Lesson 6. Leaders must know the unique culture of the community in which they are leading. The culture and community can heavily influence attendance with particular events keeping students away from school. Close-knit communities, for instance, can be heavily impacted by illness or death, which will impact a student's attendance.

Lesson 7. Leaders should encourage communication between the school and home to help families realize how much of a barrier chronic absenteeism is to a student's academic and future success. It is imperative, too, to look beyond the numbers to see the student.

Lesson 8. For leaders considering implementing a site-based mentoring program, they should consider piloting a program with a small number of mentors and students and consider using tools from improvement science. Engaging in PDSA cycles for a mentoring initiative, or any improvement initiative, is a most useful tool for educational leaders. It yields feedback that leads to ongoing, continuous improvement that best supports students. It may be easier to make tweaks to a pilot program than to completely revamp a full-scale initiative. Educational leaders should also consider implementing improvement initiatives, like this mentoring program, with partner sites in order to form a Networked Improvement Community to learn from one another, support one another, and share resources.

Bryk et al. (2015) tell us a shift from “*going fast and learning slow*” to “*learning fast to implement well*” within “very different organizational arrangements” allow us to “solve a shared problem [and] accelerate improvements even further” (pp. 6-7).

Issues of Equity and Social Justice

Students of color, particularly students who are Native American, African American, and students from a low socioeconomic background, and/or identified with disabilities are more likely to exhibit chronic absenteeism (Erbstein et al., 2015; Ginsburg et al., 2014; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Neither Sun Valley Middle School nor Riverview High School were meeting the needs of these particular populations with respect to attendance support prior to the implementation of this improvement initiative. With this mentoring program, each school asserts a commitment to meet the needs of these students. Chronic absenteeism of these

particular groups of students is continuing to grow the opportunity gap. By increasing attendance, increasing academic performance, and decreasing negative behaviors, students' chances for success beyond school will likely improve.

Grogan (2014), citing Shoho et al., 2005, states, "leading for social justice refers to the practice of leadership that is guided by a set of ethical principles including, but not limited to, equity, equality, fairness, diversity and inclusiveness" (p. 4). These principles for social justice were integrated into our disquisition by the diverse population of students we served, the inclusiveness of those participating, and the equity afforded these seventeen chronically absent students by the extra supports, attention, and encouragement through the mentoring program. In training mentors (Appendix R) we emphasized the importance of appreciating the participants' cultural and ethnic backgrounds, striving toward cultural proficiency. We also focused attention on "not promot[ing] values and beliefs of one group as superior to those of another". We believe our disquisition work highlights our orientation toward leadership for social justice and equity; we responded to the inequities created by students' missing school "by valuing, identifying, taking responsibility, acting to correct injustices and implement new processes that embody social justice and equity for all" in our schools (Jayavant, 2016, p. 3).

Transferability and Limitations

This improvement initiative can be implemented at other sites with different populations of students. Using a vetted national program like Check & Connect™ and pairing it with improvement science processes, a mentoring intervention can be tailored to suit the unique needs of individual schools.

One limitation for both sites was the duration of the intervention. Because the few weeks prior to the start of school and the first few weeks of school are typically hectic and schedule-

packed, the plan was to have mentors trained and in place on the first day of school, which was August 14 for Riverview High and August 28 for Sun Valley. We were unable to engage in any portion of the improvement initiative until WCU's Internal Review Board approved the project, which occurred on August 1, which did not allow time for mentor recruitment, commitment, and professional development before school began. This decreased the amount of time we were able to engage in actual mentoring by five weeks for SVMS and eight weeks for RHS. However, the improvement initiative continues today even though it is not receiving the same level of scrutiny as provided by a disquisition process.

A limitation implementing this improvement initiative at RHS was the sample size. Our goal was to serve ten chronically absent students, but only nine staff members volunteered to mentor. Of the seventeen chronically absent students from the targeted cohort, we were able to obtain commitment and consent for seven of them.

Conclusion

In an educational setting where engagement is crucial to the success of the students, a student cannot engage if not present. Too many students are missing school leading to a lack of success both in and beyond school. Offering extra support, encouragement, and connectedness through a relationship with a trained mentor does help improve student attendance leading to improved academic performance and reduced negative behaviors.

Both schools in this disquisition plan to continue the mentoring program through the end of this school year and expand it for SY 18-19 with the ultimate aims of reducing the dropout rates and increasing the on-time graduation rates.

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Appendix A

Mountain Sky Board Policy 4400

ATTENDANCE

Policy Code: **4400**

The [REDACTED] (“Board”) believes that regular school attendance is of crucial importance for educational achievement, that learning experiences that occur in the classroom are essential components of its learning process, that time lost from class tends to be irretrievable in terms of opportunity for instructional interaction, and, therefore, that each student should attend school every day. The State of North Carolina requires that every child in the State between the ages of seven (7) (or younger if enrolled) and sixteen (16) attend school. Further, the Board affirms that the primary responsibility for regular attendance resides with the parents/guardians and the individual student.

Students are expected to arrive on time and remain in school the full day. Tardies and early dismissals cause students to miss important information and are strongly discouraged. The school attendance team will develop appropriate interventions for students who are chronically tardy or who leave early. Tardies and early dismissals will be considered excused for the same reasons allowed for excused absences listed below in section B. II.

The Board shall adhere to the North Carolina General Statutes pertaining to student attendance except to the extent this policy imposes stricter regulations. Furthermore, the Board is committed to the implementation of a student attendance policy that is nondiscriminatory, discourages dropouts, and encourages regular attendance.

A. ATTENDANCE RECORDS

School officials shall keep accurate records of attendance, including accurate attendance records in each class. Attendance records will be used to enforce North Carolina’s compulsory attendance statutes (G.S. 115C-378 through -383).

B. ABSENCES

I. Attendance Requirements by Grade Level

1. Elementary and Intermediate Schools Grades K-6

Elementary and Intermediate School students in grades K-6 may only have a maximum combined total of fourteen (14) excused and unexcused absences in a school year. Students must be in school one half of the day to be counted as present. Any absences over 14 must be made up in accordance with the school’s Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R).

2. Middle School Grades 6-8

Middle School students in grades 6-8 may only have a maximum combined total of fourteen (14) excused and unexcused absences per school year. Any absences over fourteen (14) must be made up in accordance with the school’s Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R). Students must be in attendance one half (1/2) of the day to be counted present for the day. For any courses resulting in high school credit, students must follow attendance rules

for High School grades 9-13.

3. High School Grades 9 – 13

i. Semester-Long Courses

Students in grades 9-13 in semester-long courses may only have a maximum combined total of five (5) excused and unexcused absences per semester per class. Absences are considered for each class and students must be present two thirds (2/3) of the class to be counted as present. Absences over five (5) days may be made up in accordance with the school's Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R) in order to receive credit.

ii. Year-Long Courses

Students in grades 9-13 in year-long courses may only have a maximum combined total of ten (10) excused and unexcused absences per class. Absences are considered for each class and students must be present two thirds (2/3) of the class to be counted as present. Absences over ten (10) days may be made up in accordance with the school's Attendance Make-up Program (see 4400-R) in order to receive credit.

II. LAWFUL (EXCUSED) ABSENCES

When a student must miss school, the parent or legal guardian must supply documentation regarding the reason for the absence to the school upon the student's return to school. Absences are listed as unexcused until documentation is received. Documentation will not be accepted after thirty (30) days without prior approval from a school administrator or the attendance team.

Absences due to extended illnesses generally require a statement from a physician if there is a history of chronic absences. As soon as a parent anticipates a student's extended absence because of a severe, prolonged, or chronic illness under a physician's care, the parent shall notify the principal. The principal shall make arrangements for homebound/hospital-bound, or other appropriate instruction following procedures outlined by Special Services homebound guidelines.

In the case of excused absences and short-term out-of-school suspensions, the student will be permitted to make up any tests or other work missed. (See also policy 4351, Short-Term Suspension.) The teacher will determine when work is to be made up. The student is responsible for finding out what assignments are due and completing them within the specified time period.

An absence may be excused for any of the following reasons.

1. Personal illness or injury that makes the student physically unable to attend school.
2. Isolation ordered by the local health officer or the State Board of Health.
3. Death in the immediate family.
4. Medical or dental appointment.
5. Participation under subpoena as a witness in a court proceeding.
6. At least two (2) days of excused absences must be allowed each academic year for religious observances required by the faith of a student or a student's parents.
7. Participation in a valid educational opportunity, such as travel or service as a legislative or Governor's page, with prior approval from the principal.
8. Pregnancy and related conditions or parenting, when medically necessary.
9. A student whose parent or legal guardian (a) is an active duty member of the uniformed services, as defined by policy 4050, Children of Military Families; and (b) has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting will be granted additional excused absences at the discretion of the superintendent or designee to visit with his or her parent or legal guardian.

III. UNLAWFUL (UNEXCUSED) ABSENCES

For students who are entitled to attend public school and who have enrolled in a public school, *unlawful* absence is defined as:

1. A student's willful absence from school with or without the knowledge of the parent;
2. A student's absence from school for any reason other than those listed in Section B under "Lawful Absences"; or
3. When students are not permitted to attend school because they lack proper immunization.

The principal or the principal's designee must notify the parent, guardian, or custodian of his/her child's excessive absences after the child has accumulated three unlawful absences in a school year. After not more than six (6) unlawful absences, the principal or the principal's designee must notify the parent, guardian, or custodian by mail that he or she may be in violation of the Compulsory Attendance Law and may be prosecuted if the absences cannot be justified under the established attendance policies of the State and local boards of education. (G.S. 115C-378)

In the case of unexcused absences, the student will be permitted to make up any tests or other work missed. The teacher will determine when work is to be made up. The student is responsible for finding out what assignments are due and completing them within a specified time period.

1. Mandatory Attendance and Truancy

Unexcused absences may include any reasons not covered above. Students are considered truant after the tenth (10th) unexcused absence. Upon the tenth (10th) unexcused absence, a conference is required to develop an attendance improvement plan. Truancy charges may be filed against the student, the parent, or both if unexcused absences continue.

“After 10 accumulated unexcused absences in a school year, the principal or the principal’s designee shall review any report or investigation prepared under G.S. 115C-381 and shall confer with the student and the student’s parent, guardian, or custodian, if possible, to determine whether the parent, guardian, or custodian has received notification pursuant to this section and made a good faith effort to comply with the law. If the principal or the principal’s designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has not made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal may notify the district attorney and the director of social services of the county where the child resides. If the principal or the principal’s designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal may file a complaint with the juvenile court counselor pursuant to Chapter 7B of the General Statutes that the child is habitually absent from school without a valid excuse.” (NCGS 115C-378(f)) This statute applies to students up to age 16.

C. SCHOOL-RELATED ACTIVITIES

All classroom activities are important and difficult, if not impossible, to replace if missed. Principals shall ensure that classes missed by students due to school-related activities are kept to an absolute minimum. The following school-related activities will not be counted as absences from either class or school:

1. field trips sponsored by the school or [REDACTED];
2. school approved job shadows and other work-based learning opportunities, as described in G.S. 115C-47(34a), which are not to exceed two (2) days without prior principal approval;
3. school-initiated and -scheduled activities;
4. athletic events that require early dismissal from school;
5. Career and Technical Education student organization activities approved in advance by the principal; and
6. in-school suspensions/ completions of alternative to suspension program.

Assignments missed for these reasons are eligible for makeup by the student. The teacher will determine when work is to be made up. The student is responsible for finding out what assignments are due and completing them within the specified time period.

D. EXCESSIVE ABSENCES

Class attendance and participation are critical elements of the educational process and may be taken into account in assessing academic achievement. Students are expected to be at school on time and to be present at the scheduled starting time for each class. Students who are excessively tardy to school or class may be suspended for up to two (2) days for such offenses.

The principal shall notify parents and take all other steps required by G.S. 115C-378 for excessive absences. Students may be suspended for up to two (2) days for truancy.

Each principal will establish a school attendance team to monitor school-wide attendance and design interventions to reduce individual student excused and unexcused absences. Schools will collect and review data regularly to make decisions about individual interventions, targeted group interventions, and school-wide incentives for improved attendance. If a student is absent from school for five (5) or more days in a semester, the attendance committee shall consider whether a specific plan to improve attendance is necessary.

The principal or committee shall review other measures of academic achievement, the circumstances of the absences, the number of absences, and the extent to which the student completed missed work when developing a plan. Interventions could include: 1) parent education/counseling sessions; 2) individual/student counseling; 3) referral to appropriate community agencies; 4) positive behavior supports for students and parents; and 5) assigned time to make-up missed work. Students may be required to attend after-school or summer school or mini-mester sessions to make up missed days (See 4400-R).

Parents must receive notification (documentation required) when students have accumulated three (3) unlawful absences. Once a student has been absent for any unlawful reason for six (6) cumulative days, the principal or designee shall notify the student's parents in writing, in accordance with the NC Compulsory Attendance Law. Subsequently an individual attendance intervention plan will be developed through the school based attendance committee in cooperation with the parent, guardian, or custodian.

The Board approved Discretionary Admission of an out-of-district student may be revoked due to excessive absences, tardies, and/or early dismissals. The principal shall recommend the revocation in writing to the Superintendent or designee. When the determination is made, the principal will inform the parent or legal guardian in writing that the Discretionary Admission has been revoked and list the date the student must return to their home district school.

Each school will provide the opportunity for attendance make-up through an Attendance Make-up Program, which may include Saturday school, after school make-up tutoring sessions, Attendance Summer School, or other make-up requirements as identified by the principal and attendance teams. Information about the school's Attendance Make-up Program will be readily available to students and parents in the student handbook, on the school's website, and in the front office. A fee for attendance make-up will be assessed where applicable. See Board Policy 4600, Student Fees, for fee schedule.

E. Other

Occasionally unique or unusual situations arise which are not specifically addressed by this policy. The superintendent, upon written recommendation from the school principal, may authorize alternatives to the policy in order to achieve fairness to the student without weakening the effect of the policy.

F. Non-Promotion

Pursuant to this policy, students failing to meet attendance requirements in any required course for promotion shall neither be promoted nor allowed to participate in promotion exercises.

G. Distribution

A copy of this policy will be available in the student handbook and on the school's website. Paper copies may be requested in the front office. Students transferring from another administrative unit will have attendance policy information provided prior to enrollment, and will be allowed to have absences prorated based on the number of school days remaining in the school year.

Legal References: G.S. 115C-47, -84.2, -288(a), -375.5, -378 through -383, -390.2(d), -390.5, -407.5; 16 N.C.A.C. 6E .0102, .0103; State Board of Education Policies TCS-L-000 through -003; NC Board of Education School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual.

Cross References: Education for Pregnant and Parenting Students (policy 4023), Children of Military Families (policy 4050), Short-Term Suspension (policy 4351)

Adopted: June 6, 2013

Revised: January 9, 2014

REPLACES BCS POLICIES:

- 401 – Attendance – High School – Grades 9-12
- 402 – Attendance – Middle School – Grades 6-8
- 403 – Attendance – Elementary

Appendix B

Mountain Sky Board Policy 4400-R

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES

Regulation Code: **4400-R**

A. ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION TEAMS

Each principal will establish a school attendance intervention team to monitor school wide attendance and design interventions to reduce individual student excused and unexcused absences. This document is intended to provide clarification and specific procedures for [REDACTED] 4400 - Attendance. The purpose of the procedures is to ensure consistency in the implementation of Policy 4400. In addition, 4400-R provides attendance teams with guidelines and procedures for development of attendance plans and/or initiation of court proceedings for excessive absences and consideration of absence waiver applications.

I. Composition of Attendance Team

The term “attendance team” in Policy 4400 - Attendance and in this document refers to any group of school employees who are assigned to collect and analyze attendance data, develop attendance plans to address excessive absence, and to make decisions regarding attendance related issues, such as absence waivers and alternative make-up time for student absences. The following members are required participants: school social worker, at least one school counselor, and one administrator. Other members may be included as needed or as designated by the school administrator: school nurse, Graduation Initiative personnel, teacher(s) as assigned by principal and the school-based therapist, or DHHS prevention caseworker (only if students are on their caseload). It is strongly encouraged to have teacher representation on this team to assist in developing attendance plans.

II. Attendance Team Implementation of Mandatory Attendance Law

In accordance with G.S. 115C-378, every parent, guardian, or custodian in North Carolina having charge or control of a student between the ages of 7 and 16 years shall cause the student to attend school continuously for a period equal to the time which the public school to which the student is assigned is in session. Every parent, guardian, or custodian in North Carolina having charge or control of a child under age seven who is enrolled in a public school in grades Kindergarten through two shall also cause the child to attend school continuously for a period equal to the time which the public school to which the child is assigned shall be in session unless the child has withdrawn from school. No person shall encourage, entice, or counsel any child of compulsory age to be unlawfully absent from school. The parent, guardian, or custodian of a child shall notify the school of the reason for each known absence of the child, in accordance with local school board policy.

School attendance intervention teams will establish regularly scheduled meetings. Schools will collect and review data regularly to make decisions about individual interventions, targeted group interventions, and school-wide incentives for improved attendance. The attendance intervention team will analyze individual student attendance data to determine whether a child is excessively absent and determine if interventions are necessary.

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURESRegulation Code: **4400-R**

The attendance intervention team may:

1. Review individual attendance data.
2. Consider the reasons for the student absences.
3. Encourage the child's teacher to follow up with the child's parent about the impact excessive absences may be having on the child's academic progress.
4. Require mandatory physician documentation.
5. Required appointment verification.
6. Develop an attendance intervention plan if needed.

G.S. 115C-378 requires the following actions and/or interventions at the following benchmarks for unexcused absences:

At 3 Unexcused Absences

1. Requirement under G.S. 115C-378: School must notify the parent, guardian, or custodian of child's excessive absences after child has 3 unexcused absences. The parent will be notified with a 3 Day Unexcused Absences Letter*, telephone contact, or face-to-face consultation.

After Not More Than 6 Unexcused Absences

1. Requirement under G.S. 115C-378: The principal or principal designee *shall notify the parent, guardian, or custodian by mail* that they may be in violation of the compulsory attendance law and may be prosecuted if the absences cannot be just justified under the established attendance policies for the State and local board of education. The parent will be notified with a 6 Day Unexcused Absence Letter.*
2. Once the student has accumulated not more than 6 unexcused absences and the parent has been notified, the attendance intervention team will review any additional information that may be potentially impacting the students overall academic performance, i.e.: attendance history, health issues, family issues, environmental issues in the home, mental health needs, specific educational needs, social/behavioral needs, etc.

The school counselor and/or school social worker will work with the child, and child's family, to analyze the causes of the absences and develop strategies to improve the student's attendance, i.e., adjust school-based services or instructional supports as warranted by student's academic/behavior needs, refer to community resources for basic or mental health needs, assess child and family needs and refer to other supportive services, provide supportive counseling or social work resources in/out of the school setting, and develop behavioral strategies for parent implementation.

3. The attendance intervention team could review additional information that may be potentially impacting the students overall academic performance, i.e., attendance, history of attendance issues/patterns, health issues, family issues, environmental

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURESRegulation Code: **4400-R**

issues in the home, mental health needs, specific educational needs, social/behavioral needs, etc.

An individual attendance intervention plan will be developed through the school based attendance committee in cooperation with the parent, guardian, or custodian.

4. Law enforcement officer may assist in conducting home visits as needed.

After 10 Accumulated Unexcused Absences in a School Year

1. Requirement under G.S. 115C-378: The principal or designee shall review any reports or investigations relating to G.S. 115C-381, school social workers; reports; prosecutions. This section gives authority for school social workers and other designees to file court petition under the compulsory attendance law.

“The school social worker shall investigate all violators of the provisions of this Part. The reports of unlawful absence required to be made by teachers and principals to the school social worker shall, in his hands, in case of any prosecution, constitute prima facie evidence of the violation of this Part and the burden of proof shall be upon the defendant to show the lawful attendance of the child or children upon an authorized school. (1955, c. 1372, art. 20, ss. 3, 5; 1957, c. 600; 1961, c. 186; 1963, c. 1223, ss. 8, 9; 1981, c. 423, s. 1; 1985, c. 686, s. 3.)”

2. Upon the tenth (10th) unexcused absence, a conference is required pursuant to G.S. 115C-381. The parent will be notified with a 10 Day Unexcused Absence Letter.* See Attendance Conference Form to develop an intervention plan.
3. The school social worker and/or attendance team will confer with the student and student’s parent, guardian, or custodian to determine whether or not the parent, guardian or custodian has:
 - A. Received notification pursuant to the law.
 - B. Has made a good faith effort to comply with the law
 - C. If the principal or designee determines that the parent, guardian or custodian has not made a good faith effort to comply, then the principal shall notify the District Attorney and the Director of Social Services where the child resides.
4. The attendance intervention team will continue to monitor the student’s overall attendance and academic progress and revise the plan as needed. The attendance intervention team will continue to assess the student/family needs and make referrals as appropriate. If unexcused absences significantly decrease, the intervention plan can be continued without further legal action. If the plan does not result in reduced unexcused absences, legal petition may be filed.

III. Attendance Team Procedures for Absence Waivers

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES*Regulation Code:* **4400-R**

In some cases, parents/students may request a waiver for some excused absences that exceed number of total absences allowed by [REDACTED] Board of Education for promotion/credit. Waived absences are still recorded as absences on the student record, but do not count against the student for promotion standards or athletic eligibility.

The following documented reasons will be considered when determining absence waivers:

1. Chronic illness: Requires a doctor's note that includes explanation of the illness, specific days missed from school and the duration of the chronic illness. Parent notes may be accepted if there is a clear doctor's note stating that the student may not be seen every time an episode occurs, i.e. debilitating migraines, asthma attacks, etc.
2. Acute Illness: An illness of 5 or more days due to acute illnesses such as, influenza, etc. Doctor's notes must be provided for all days missed.
3. Death in an Immediate Family: Up to 3 days may be waived. Obituary/service program must be provided
4. Court appearances: Only waived if student is subpoenaed as a witness in a court case. Court appearances for involvement in criminal activity will not be waived.
5. Other: Compelling circumstances may be considered on a case by case basis.

A Request for Absence Waiver Application* must be completed and submitted to the attendance team with the required documentation and a signed release of information for the appropriate sources of documentation. The attendance team will review the application and make recommendations to the principal regarding the number of days waived. Parent/students will receive written decision from the principal regarding any make-up work or make-up study sessions required, or other requirements as determined by the attendance team or principal. Each school will establish an attendance make-up program consistent with requirements of Policy 4400, Attendance.

Appropriate fees may apply for attendance make-up time that occurs after school, on Saturday, or during the summer.

B. Student Athlete Attendance

1. Student athletes in grades 9-12 in semester-long courses may only have a total of five (5) absences per semester per class for the previous semester. Absences are considered for each class and students must be present two-thirds (2/3) of the class to be counted as present. Absences over five (5) days may be made up or waived in accordance with the school's attendance make-up program in order to receive credit and maintain athletic eligibility.
2. A student athlete must, at the time of any game in which he or she participates, be a regularly enrolled member of the school's student body, according to local policy. A student athlete must be in attendance for at least one-half (1/2) of the student's school day

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES*Regulation Code:* **4400-R**

to participate in that day's contest (the principal retains the right to waive this attendance requirement due to extenuating circumstances).

3. The student athlete must be enrolled within the first 15 days in regular attendance for the present semester to be eligible for athletics. A student athlete whose family has moved into a school district shall immediately assume the same status in the new district as that from which he moved. Summer school attendance shall be counted in determining athletic eligibility and approved homebound programs to fulfill the attendance requirement.
4. Student athletes who are ineligible because of attendance at the end of the previous semester have a maximum of 30 school days to regain eligibility by fulfilling approved attendance make-up requirements as determined by the school's attendance committee and principal.

* 3, 6, and 10 Day Unexcused Attendance Letter, Medical Provider Note Required Letter, Attendance Conference Form, and Request for Absence Waiver Application are available to parent/guardian as needed from school staff. School staff may access these documents on the employee website on the Student Services page.

Cross Reference: Attendance, Policy 4400

Submitted for Information: September 4, 2014

Revised: April 14, 2015

Replaces Administrative Regulation 401

History of 401R

Adopted: June 2, 1994

Revised: June 25, 1997

Revised: April 14, 2016

Appendix C

Sun Valley Middle School Student Chronic Absenteeism Data

Chronically Absent Current School - Based on Data Collection from Powerschool, 1.8.17

Name	Grade	PS#	Absences	Membership	Absence %
	7		9	79	11.39
	7		8	79	10.13
	7		10	79	12.66
	7		8	79	10.13
	7		9	72	12.5
	7		11	79	13.92
	7		3	28	10.71
	7		9	79	11.39
	7		12	79	15.19
	7		10	79	12.66
	7		10	79	12.66
	7		11	79	13.92
	7		3	18	16.67
	7		10	79	12.66
	7		8	79	10.13
	7		11	79	13.92
	7		8	79	10.13
	7		24	73	32.88
	7		9	79	11.39
	7		14	79	17.72
	7		8	79	10.13
	7		21	78	26.92
	7		13	79	16.46
	7		11	78	14.1
	7		9	77	11.69
	7		9	79	11.39
	7		8	79	10.13
	7		8	79	10.13
	7		10	79	12.66
	7		10	79	12.66

Appendix D

Riverview High School Attendance Policy

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ATTENDANCE

1. Students are expected to be in attendance each day school is in session. *Classroom instruction starts at 8:00 a.m.* The parent/guardian has the legal responsibility to ensure that a child attends school regularly. The school will cooperate in every way with the parents. Time spent on learning in the classroom cannot be replaced. Once enrolled in [REDACTED] the attendance policies will be enforced for grades K-12.
2. Regular attendance by each student is mandatory. When a student is absent from school, a written excuse from a doctor, parent note, or court documentation should be presented to the attendance office on the day the student returns to school for re-admission to classes. Without an admit slip from the office, a student may not return to class. *A valid doctor's statement, parent note, or a court note, must be given to the attendance office at this time or within three days to be acceptable. After the third day, if no valid doctor's statement or court note has been turned in, the student will receive an irrevocable unexcused absence.*

Excused Absences:

(EX1) (exempt)

1. Illness
 - Student must present a doctor's note after two days of absence.
 - For a prolonged or ongoing diagnosed illness or injury the parent/guardian must provide medical documentation to the attendance office. This diagnosis may require the school to implement a 504 plan for the student. It will be the responsibility of the student and/or the parent to make arrangements for making up work.
 - Students sent home by the school nurse.
2. Medical or Dental appointment
 - Students must submit appropriate information to the Attendance Coordinator.
3. Subpoena from the court system. (Student must be a party to the action.)
 - Student must submit proper documentation to the attendance office upon returning to school.
4. Death in the immediate family: father, mother, legal guardian, siblings, grandparents, aunt, and uncle. Prior approval from the school administrator may be granted for extenuating circumstances.
5. Religious Observance.
6. Educational events off campus with prior approval from the school administrator.
7. Active participant in a cultural activity.

(EX2)

1. Illness - Student must present a parent's note after one day of absence.

*Senior Skip Day is not encouraged or condoned by school administration and is counted as an unexcused absence.

The student and/or parent must make arrangements with the teacher for make-up work. Upon returning to school the student will be given one week (7 calendar days) to complete and return

assignments to teachers. In case of extenuating circumstances arrangements may be made by the teacher and/or principal.

Students cannot miss more than eight (8) days per semester with a maximum of four (4) unexcused days during the semester. **REMINDER: HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IS TAKEN FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL CLASS.**

- On the fourth (4th) unexcused absence the attendance office shall notify the parent, guardian, or custodian in writing that they may be in violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law and may be prosecuted if the absences cannot be justified. The school Social Worker will contact the parent/guardian to obtain details and offer assistance.
- On the sixth (6th) absence, the attendance office will send a **certified letter** to the parent regarding the student's attendance and a request to attend a meeting with the Social Worker.
- On the eighth (8th) absence, the attendance office shall notify the parent, guardian, or custodian by mail that they may be in violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law if anymore absences occur and cannot be justified. The student and parent will be required to meet with the attendance committee at this time.

COPIES OF ALL CORRESPONDENCE WILL BE MAINTAINED IN THE ATTENDANCE OFFICE AS DOCUMENTATION.

3. *Staff must document early departure in the attendance office for students participating in extracurricular activities. Coaches and other staff in charge of trips requiring early departure from school will be required to turn in a list of all students participating on any given day prior to leaving campus, so these absences can be recorded as an ACT in NASIS.*
4. A student may be checked out ONLY by his/her parent/guardian or the approved emergency contact.
Emergency situations will be dealt with on a case by case basis by administration.

ATTENDANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

All appeals pertaining to these policies or opposing views must be made to the School's Attendance Review Committee which meets as requested by the student and parent/guardian when needed. Students absent because of extenuating circumstances, who wish to appeal their case to the Attendance Committee, will be required to appear before the Attendance Committee with their parent or guardian. This committee consists of a cross-section of the school staff from the High School to hear matters regarding extenuating or mitigating circumstances that are contributing to the excessive absences. Decisions to grant exceptions to the four (4) unexcused day rule and the eight (8) total absences rule for the High School and opportunities for make-up time, will be based on matters submitted for consideration, student declared intentions, and quality of makeup work as determined by the teachers.

(Note: If it is determined that the student will be allowed to make-up time for absences, the student must make up time with the teacher whose class was missed. A student will not be allowed to make up more than 10 class periods.)

A student/parent or guardian requesting an appeal for attendance matters will be given a decision from the attendance committee within two days. If a student/parent/guardian does not agree with the committee's decision, the student may request a hearing with the principal. If they are not satisfied with that decision, they may appeal to the Superintendent and lastly the School Board to review the decision. In addition to the school board and Superintendent, a representative from the Attendance Committee will be required to be present. All paperwork for appeals must be turned in to the Attendance Committee by the last Monday of the last week of school.

At the end of each month during the school year, the attendance committee will review those students whose records indicate excessive absences.

Due Process Attendance Rights

Once a student has gone over the limit set by school policy, the student must do the following:

- Contact Attendance Coordinator for a printed copy of attendance to determine the number of days the student has missed.
- Contact Attendance Review Committee Chairperson (Sam Marr) to receive record sheet for grades and number of days for appeal.
- Complete record sheet in full and return to Attendance Review Committee Chairperson (Sam Marr).
- Contact Attendance Review Committee Chairperson (Sam Marr) to set time and date for the appeals committee to hear appeal.
- On appointed date student and parent will meet with the committee.
- A decision will be made by the committee as soon as possible and returned to the student or parent. Please leave a working phone number.

Appendix E

Ninth Grade Chronic Absenteeism Data, SY 2015-16

STUDENT	MEMBERSHIP DAYS	ABSENT DAYS	PRESENT DAYS	UNEXCUSED ABSENCES	PERCENT IN ATTENDANCE
1792	178	19.99	158.01	14.45	88.77
SY14-15	179	23.07	155.93	9.17	87.11
1788	180	30.76	149.24	17.55	82.91
3477	180	29.20	150.80	20.48	83.78
2528	180	25	155	20.97	86.11
SY14-15	179	19.74	159.26	16.07	88.97
1617	180	20.17	159.83	17.45	88.79
1875	180	30.27	149.73	18.53	83.18
SY14-15	170	17.12	152.88	11.12	89.93
3814	118	19.17	98.83	10.57	83.75
1874	180	19.57	160.43	17	89.13
2591	180	31.63	148.37	14.15	82.43
1722	180	18.96	161.04	9.48	89.47
SY14-15	179	23.13	155.87	15.36	87.08
1508	127	14.81	112.19	9.80	88.34
1635	180	22.17	157.83	14.96	87.68
SY14-15	179	35.52	143.48	24.02	80.16

3750	86	11.75	74.25	8.75	86.34
1848	180	20.21	159.79	20.21	88.77
SY14-15	179	17.95	161.05	15.69	89.97
1883	180	31.13	148.87	19.55	82.71
SY14-15	179	25.78	153.22	16.97	85.60
2174	180	21.12	158.88	19.39	88.27
1826	180	43.87	136.13	18.59	75.63
SY14-15	179	25.37	153.63	6.83	85.83
2371	180	19.45	160.55	16.49	89.19
SY14-15	179	21.22	157.78	9.22	88.15
1662	152	23.73	128.27	16.03	84.39
SY14-15	179	31.76	147.24	4.99	82.26
1912	180	19.63	160.37	12.87	89.09
3795	81	12.44	68.56	12.44	84.64
1648	47	6.36	40.64	4.64	86.47
3024	180	18.41	161.59	18.41	89.77
SY14-15	179	21.68	157.32	5.78	87.89
1963	180	21.25	158.75	19.25	88.19
1835	180	20.48	159.52	14.53	88.62
SY14-15	177	23.32	155.68	5.83	86.97

1836	180	18.37	161.63	14.35	89.79
1838	180	24.79	155.21	20.79	86.23
1860	180	27.99	152.01	15.45	84.45
3827	70	7.12	62.88	3.79	89.83
1806	180	30.49	149.51	19	83.06
SY14-15	179	31.93	147.07	19.20	82.16
1853	180	32.73	147.27	19.03	81.82
SY14-15	63	8.31	54.69	7.31	86.81
1809	180	22.73	157.27	12.31	87.37

Appendix F

Mentor Recruitment Flyer



Mentors:

- Are school staff members
- Are student advocates
- Have a personal belief that students can make progress and positively influence their educational path
- Believe in the power of problem solving
- Are willing to cooperate and collaborate with school staff and families
- Are able to work independently in a variety of settings



To volunteer as a student mentor, as part of a research-based improvement initiative designed by WCU EdD candidates Debora Foerst, Principal of ██████ High School, and Wendy Hannah, Assistant Principal of ██████ Middle School, please contact your respective school administrator.

What will Mentors Do?

- Participate in targeted professional development
- Engage in weekly meetings with students
- Serve as student advocates
- Engage in goal setting and progress monitoring with students
- Attend relevant student meetings (e.g., IEP, 504, FBA)
- Attend problem solving meetings with the Improvement Initiative Leadership team
- Participate in student recognition events that highlight student progress

What are the Benefits for Students & Mentors?

- Students have a positive relationship with a caring adult
- Students learn self-advocacy skills
- Students increase their connectedness to school
- Mentors receive refreshments at meetings
- Mentors receive trade days for summer training(s)
- Mentors may receive gift cards and/or stipends
- Mentors may receive reduced duties
- Mentors and students experience personal satisfaction for overall accomplishments and achievement

Appendix G

Mentor Consent Form

Western Carolina University Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Project Title: Reducing Student Absenteeism through Site-Based Mentoring to Increase Academic Achievement and Graduation Rates

Principal Investigator: Jess Weiler, PhD, Assistant Professor & EdD Program Director, Educational Leadership, WCU

Other Research Personnel:

Debora Kinsland Foerst, [REDACTED] High School Principal & WCU EdD Student

Wendy Hannah, [REDACTED] Middle School Assistant Principal & WCU EdD Student

Description and Purpose of the Research: In order to increase graduation rates in our respective school districts, researchers are implementing a mentor intervention program during eighth and ninth grades to improve student attendance for students exhibiting chronic absenteeism.

What mentor participants will be asked to do: A mentor will be paired with a student identified with chronic absenteeism to check in with student once a week, help student establish attendance, academic, and future goals, arrange tutoring as student needs arise, and follow-up with parent(s)/guardian(s) on a regular basis. Mentors will spend no more than 30 minutes a week with students and will engage in activities that promote good attendance, improve academic performance, and support on-time graduation.

Mentors will be asked to document weekly meetings using a mentor log and a student progress monitoring form and complete a brief survey about their assigned students to assist in reducing participant absenteeism and provide feedback about the mentor program.

Time Frame: This project will begin in August 2017 and will conclude in May 2018. We will learn from this project as we go, so we can determine if we need to expand it for other students for the next year.

Risks and Discomforts: There are no anticipated risks from participating in this research.

Benefits: Benefits for participants may include improved school attendance, increased academic performance, and on-time graduation.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security: Participant data will be confidential with no student identifiers used in presentations, published in articles, or included in doctoral documents. For inclusion in their doctoral disquisition efforts, researchers will use pseudonyms for direct quotes, summary data from a whole group, and a coding system for individual students.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on mentor's positions or job evaluations. If you would like to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation, please submit your request in writing to Debora Foerst at [REDACTED] OR Wendy Hannah at [REDACTED].

Compensation for Participation: Mentor participants will receive no payment, extra credit, or other form of compensation for being in the study.

Contact Information: For questions about this study, [REDACTED] parents or participants should call or text Debora Foerst at 828-736-3517 or e-mail at debfoerst@gmail.com and [REDACTED] parents or participants should call or text Wendy Hannah at 828-507-6761 or e-mail at wendyhannah@gmail.com. You may also contact Dr. Jess Weiler, the principal investigator and faculty advisor for this project, at jrweiler@wcu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns as a mentor participant in this study, you may contact the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Administration by calling 828-227-7212 or emailing irb@wcu.edu.

My signature below indicates that I consent to participate as a mentor in this study. I understand what is expected of me and that participation is voluntary.

Mentor Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you would like to receive a summary of the results, once the study has been completed, please write your email address (as legibly as possible) here:

Appendix H

Student Progress Monitoring Form

PROGRESS MONITORING FORM – STUDENT MENTORING

Student _____ **ID** _____ **Grade** _____
Mentor _____ **Date** _____

Academic Data –

Course _____	Numerical Grade _____	Δ _____
Course _____	Numerical Grade _____	Δ _____
Course _____	Numerical Grade _____	Δ _____
Course _____	Numerical Grade _____	Δ _____
Course _____	Numerical Grade _____	Δ _____
Course _____	Numerical Grade _____	Δ _____

Attendance Data –

Unexcused Absences _____	Δ _____
Excused Absences _____	Δ _____
Unexcused Tardies _____	Δ _____
Excused Tardies _____	Δ _____
Early Dismissals _____	Δ _____

Behavioral Data –

Number of Office Referrals _____	Δ _____
Number of ISS Days _____	Δ _____
Number of Bus Suspension Days _____	Δ _____
Number of Days Skipping Class _____	Δ _____
Number of Minor Incidents _____	Δ _____
Number of OSS Days _____	Δ _____
Number of Detention Days _____	Δ _____
Number of Days Skipping School _____	Δ _____

PROGRESS MONITORING FORM – STUDENT MENTORING

Month _____

Communication		M	T	W	R	F	M	T	W	R	F	M	T	W	R	F	M	T	W	R	F	
Student Communication:	<i>Formal</i>																					
	<i>Informal</i>																					
Family Communication:	<i>Phone</i>																					
	<i>Email</i>																					
	<i>Text</i>																					
	<i>Note</i>																					
	<i>Meeting</i>																					
	<i>Attempted – Not Reached</i>																					
Communication with School Staff:																						
Communication with Outside Agency:																						

Interventions	M	T	W	R	F	M	T	W	R	F	M	T	W	R	F	M	T	W	R	F	
Share data with student																					
Share data with family																					
Problem solve with student																					
Facilitate goal setting with student																					
Discuss academic progress and supports																					
Discuss attendance progress and supports																					
Discuss behavior progress and supports																					
Facilitate participation in school or community activities																					
Facilitate social skills support																					
Facilitate tutoring/small-group support																					
Teach study skills																					
Teach problem solving strategies																					
Teach organizational skills																					
Other:																					

PROGRESS MONITORING FORM – STUDENT MENTORING

Month _____

Monthly Summary of Mentor Notes:			
Date:	Notes:	Goals:	To Do:
Date:	Notes:	Goals:	To Do:
Date:	Notes:	Goals:	To Do:
Date:	Notes:	Goals:	To Do:
Date:	Notes:	Goals:	To Do:

Appendix I

Post-Intervention Mentee Survey

Student Survey for Improvement Initiative

Q1 Choose your school.

- [REDACTED] Middle School (1)
- [REDACTED] School (2)

Q2 How do you rate the mentoring program?

- Excellent (1)
- Very good (2)
- Okay (3)
- Poor (4)

Q3 Do you enjoy being a part of this program?

- Yes (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- Not much (3)
- No (4)

Q4 Do you like your mentor?

- Yes (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- Not much (3)
- No (4)

Q5 How often does your mentor communicate with you?

- Once a week (1)
- More frequently (2)
- Less frequently (3)

Q6 Does your mentor communicate well with you?

- Yes (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- Not really (3)
- No (4)

Q7 Do you feel comfortable sharing personal information with your mentor?

- Definitely yes (1)
- Mostly (2)
- Somewhat (3)
- No (4)

Q8 Does having a mentor help you do better in school?

- Yes (1)
- Somewhat (2)
- Not much (3)
- Not at all (4)

Q9 How is your school attendance?

- Better than last year (1)
- The same as last year (2)
- Worse than last year (3)

Q10 How are your grades?

- Better than last year (1)
- The same as last year (2)
- Worse than last year (3)

Q11 Did your mentor help connect you with tutoring?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I have not needed tutoring (3)

Q12 What do you like best about the mentoring program?

Q13 What do you think we should change or do differently to improve the mentoring program?

Q14 Is there anything else you would like to share about the mentoring program?

Appendix J

Post-Intervention Mentor Survey

Mentor Survey for Improvement Initiative

Q1 Choose your school.

- [REDACTED] Middle School
- [REDACTED] High School

Q2 How do you rate the mentoring program?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Okay
- Poor

Q3 Do you enjoy participating in this program?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not much
- No

Q4 Did the mentor training session help you prepare for your mentoring experience?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not much
- No

Q5 Would you benefit from additional training for mentors?

- Yes
- Maybe
- Probably not
- No

Q6 How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Q7 How do you feel about the amount of time you have spent with your mentee?

- It was too much time
- It was a sufficient amount of time
- It was not enough time

Q8 Is participating in the mentoring program helping your mentee become a better student?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not much
- Not at all

Q9 Choose the best description for your mentee's attendance.

- Better than last year
- The same as last year
- Worse than last year

Q10 Choose the best description for your mentee's grades.

- Better than last year
- The same as last year
- Worse than last year

Q11 How beneficial is the reward and celebration component of the mentoring program?

- Very beneficial
- Somewhat beneficial
- Not beneficial at all

Q12 What do you like best about the mentoring program?

Q13 What do you think we should change or do differently to improve the mentoring program?

Q14 Is there anything else you would like to share about the mentoring program?

Appendix K

Post-Intervention Parent Survey

Parent/Guardian Survey for Improvement Initiative

Q1 Please select your child's school.

- [REDACTED] Middle School
- [REDACTED] School

Q2 How do you rate the mentoring program?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Okay
- Poor

Q3 Does your child enjoy being a part of the mentoring program?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not much
- No

Q4 Does your child like his/her mentor?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not much
- No

Q5 How often does your child's mentor communicate with you?

- Once a week
- More frequently
- Less frequently

Q6 Does your child's mentor communicate well with you?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not really
- No

Q7 Do you feel comfortable sharing personal information with your child's mentor?

- Definitely yes
- Mostly
- Somewhat
- No

Q8 Does having a mentor help your child do better in school?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- Not much
- Not at all

Q9 What do you like best about the mentoring program?

Q10 What do you think we should change or do differently to improve the mentoring program?

Q11 Is there anything else you would like to share about the mentoring program?

Appendix L

Improvement Initiative Leadership Team Self-Assessment Rubric

TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM – STUDENT MENTORING

Components	Elements	Description	Rating			
			1 <i>Not Occurring</i>	2 <i>Plans in Place to Implement</i>	3 <i>Implementation in Place</i>	4 <i>Implementation in Place with Evidence to Support it is Occurring</i>
Mentor	Relationship Building	<i>Relationship with student is built upon mutual respect and trust.</i>				
	Commitment	<i>Mentor is committed to working with student and family for at least one school year.</i>				
	Persistence	<i>Mentor serves as a persistent source of motivation.</i>				
Data Tracking and Monitoring	Consistent, Systematic Monitoring	<i>Mentor monitors and tracks student attendance, behavior, and academic data on a weekly basis.</i>				
Individualized Support and Intervention	Problem Solving	<i>Mentor teaches and engages student in problem solving.</i>				
	Capacity Building	<i>Mentor teaches student skills for self-advocacy, self-regulation, organization, and effective studying.</i>				

Adapted from *Check & Connect: A comprehensive student engagement intervention: Implementing with fidelity* (2012).

TEAM SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM – STUDENT MENTORING

	Elements	Description	Rating			
			1 <i>Not Occurring</i>	2 <i>Plans in Place to Implement</i>	3 <i>Implementation in Place</i>	4 <i>Implementation in Place with Evidence to Support it is Occurring</i>
	Personalized, Data-Driven Intervention	<i>Mentor facilitates interventions for student that is based on data.</i>				
	Encouragement of School Connectedness	<i>Mentor facilitates participation in school and/or community activities.</i>				
	Recognition of Student Progress and Success	<i>Mentor and Design Team facilitate recognition from data each quarter at the three-, six-, and nine-week mark.</i>				
Engagement with Family	Communication and Partnership	<i>Mentor consistently engages with family to encourage a partnership that promotes student success.</i>				

 Assessors

 Date

Appendix M

Sun Valley and Riverview Post-Intervention Student Survey Data

QUESTION	RESPONSE A	RESPONSE B	RESPONSE C	RESPONSE D
Q1 - Choose your school.	SVMS - 64.3%; 9 students	RHS - 35.7%; 5 students	Not applicable	Not applicable
Q2 - How do you rate the mentoring program?	Excellent - 57.1%; 8 students	Very Good - 28.6%; 4 students	Okay - 14.3%; 2 students	Poor - 0%; 0 students
Q3 - Do you enjoy being a part of this program?	Yes - 78.6%; 11 students	Somewhat - 21.4%; 3 students	Not Much - 0%; 0 students	No - 0%; 0 students
Q4 - Do you like your mentor?	Yes - 85.7%; 12 students	Somewhat - 14.3%; 2 students	Not Much - 0%; 0 students	No - 0%; 0 students
Q5 - How often does your mentor communicate with you?	Once a Week - 50.0%; 7 students	More Frequently - 35.7%; 5 students	Less Frequently - 14.3%; 2 students	Not applicable

Q6 - Does your mentor communicate well with you?	Yes - 85.7%; 12 students	Somewhat - 14.3%; 2 students	Not Much - 0%; 0 students	No - 0%; 0 students
Q7 - Do you feel comfortable sharing personal information with your mentor?	Definitely yes - 42.9%; 6 students	Mostly - 42.9%; 6 students	Somewhat - 14.3%; 2 students	No - 0%; 0 students
Q8 - Does having a mentor help you do better in school?	Yes - 50.0%; 7 students	Somewhat - 42.9%; 6 students	Not Much - 7.1%; 1 student	Not at all - 0%; 0 students
Q9 - How is your school attendance?	Better than last year - 71.4%; 10 students	Same as last year - 14.3%; 2 students	Worse than last year - 14.3%; 2 students	Not applicable
Q10 - How are your grades?*	Better than last year - 38.5%; 5 students	Same as last year - 61.5%; 8 students	Worse than last year - 0%; 0 students	Not applicable

Q11 - Did your mentor help connect you with tutoring?	Yes - 28.6%; 4 students	No - 21.4%; 3 students	I have not needed tutoring - 50.0%; 7 students	Not applicable
<i>*One student from the middle school did not respond to question 10.</i>				

Sun Valley and Riverview Post-Intervention Mentor Survey Data

QUESTION	RESPONSE A	RESPONSE B	RESPONSE C	RESPONSE D
Q1 - Choose your school.	SVMS - 62.5%; 10 mentors	RHS - 37.5%; 6 mentors	Not applicable	Not applicable
Q2 - How do you rate the mentoring program?	Excellent - 0%, 0 mentors	Very Good - 87.5%; 14 mentors	Okay - 12.5%; 2 mentors	Poor - 0%; 0 mentors
Q3 - Do you enjoy being a part of this program?	Yes - 62.5%; 10 mentors	Somewhat - 37.5%; 6 mentors	Not Much - 0%; 0 mentors	No - 0%; 0 mentors
Q4 - Did the mentor training session help you prepare for your mentoring experience?	Yes - 62.5%; 10 mentors	Somewhat - 37.5%; 6 mentors	Not Much - 0%; 0 mentors	No - 0%; 0 mentors

Q5 - Would you benefit from additional training for mentors?	Yes - 37.5%; 6 mentors	Maybe - 31.3%; 5 mentors	Probably Not - 18.8%; 3 mentors	No - 12.5%; 2 mentors
Q6 - How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?	Very good - 56.3%; 9 mentors	Good - 37.5%; 6 mentors	Fair - 6.3%; 1 mentor	Poor - 0%; 0 mentors
Q7 - How do you feel about the amount of time you have spent with your mentee?	Too much time - 0%; 0 mentors	Sufficient time - 43.8%; 7 mentors	Not enough time - 56.3%; 9 mentors	Not applicable

<p>Q8 - Is participating in the mentoring program helping your mentee become a better student?</p>	<p>Yes - 12.5%; 2 mentors</p>	<p>Somewhat - 68.8%; 11 mentors</p>	<p>Not Much - 18.8%; 3 mentors</p>	<p>Not at all - 0%; 0 mentors</p>
<p>Q9 - Choose the best description for your mentee's attendance.</p>	<p>Better than last year - 87.5%; 14 mentors</p>	<p>The same as last year - 12.5%; 2 mentors</p>	<p>Worse than last year - 0%; 0 mentors</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p>Q10 - Choose the best description for your mentee's grades.</p>	<p>Better than last year - 56.3%; 9 mentors</p>	<p>The same as last year - 43.8%; 7 mentors</p>	<p>Worse than last year - 0%; 0 mentors</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>

<p>Q11 - How beneficial is the reward and celebration component of the mentoring program?</p>	<p>Very beneficial - 31.3%; 5 mentors</p>	<p>Somewhat beneficial - 43.8%; 7 mentors</p>	<p>Not beneficial at all - 25.0%; 4 mentors</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
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Sun Valley and Riverview Post-Intervention Parent/Guardian Survey Data

QUESTION	RESPONSE A	RESPONSE B	RESPONSE C	RESPONSE D
Q1 - Choose your school.	SVMS - 62.5%; 5 parents	RHS - 37.5%; 3 parents	Not applicable	Not applicable
Q2 - How do you rate the mentoring program?	Excellent - 50.0%, 4 parents	Very Good - 37.5%; 3 parents	Okay - 12.5%; 1 parent	Poor - 0%; 0 parents
Q3 - Does your child enjoy being a part of the mentoring program?	Yes - 75.0%; 6 parents	Somewhat - 25.0%; 2 parents	Not Much - 0%; 0 parents	No - 0%; 0 parents
Q4 - Does your child like his/her mentor?	Yes - 87.5%; 7 parents	Somewhat - 12.5%; 1 parent	Not Much - 0%; 0 parents	No - 0%; 0 parents

Q5 - How often does your child's mentor communicate with you?	Once a week - 87.5%; 7 parents	More frequently - 0%; 0 parents	Less frequently - 12.5%; 1 parents	Not applicable
Q6 - Does your child's mentor communicate well with you?	Yes - 50.0%; 4 parents	Somewhat - 50.0%; 4 parents	Not Really - 0%; 0 parents	No - 0%; 0 parents
Q7 - Do you feel comfortable sharing personal information with your child's mentor?	Definitely Yes - 12.5%; 1 parent	Mostly - 25.0%; 2 parents	Somewhat - 62.5%; 5 parents	No - 0%; 0 parents

Q8 - Does having a mentor help your child do better in school?	Yes - 87.5%; 7 parents	Somewhat - 12.5%; 1 parents	Not Much - 0%; 0 parents	Not at all - 0%; 0 parents
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Appendix N

In Vivo Coding of Post-Intervention Participant Surveys

POST-INTERVENTION PARTICIPANT SURVEYS					
Students		Mentors		Parents	
<i>What do you like best about the mentoring program?</i>	<i>What do you think we should change or do differently to improve the program?</i>	<i>What do you like best about the mentoring program?</i>	<i>What do you think we should change or do differently to improve the program?</i>	<i>What do you like best about the mentoring program?</i>	<i>What do you think we should change or do differently to improve the program?</i>
"Talk"	"Nothing"	"enjoy relationship with student"	"more training on how to improve attendance"	"keep me in track of what's going on"	"Nothing"
"Helps"	"Nothing"	"paying attention to her progress"	"training with both together" to "establish relationship"	"someone there for my child"	"more parent involvement"
"Talk"	"Nothing"	"spending time with student"	"choose mentors/mentees the year before"	"quality time w/child"	"fine the way it is"
"Helps"	"Nothing"	"getting to know student better"	"no down period between the start of school and mentoring"	"helping my child"	"nothing"
"Talking"	"shouldn't change anything"	"positive influence in young person's life"	"Nothing"	"increased motivation for attendance"	"don't know much about mentoring"
"Talking"	"I don't know . . . seems good"	"build rapport with student"	"difficult to mentor 8th grade student"	"child mention mentoring session in positive manner"	"nothing"

"Helped"	"set day for mentoring"	"enjoyed getting to spend time with student"	"not feasible to have 7th grade teachers participate"	"child enjoys it"	"nothing"
"Grades"	"I don't know"	"enjoy talking with NAME"	"less paperwork and more interface"	"helping her"	
"Talking"	"nothing"	"encouraging him"	"amount of paperwork is not necessary to build relationships with students"	"helps NAME to be more confident about doing better"	
"talk about missing work"	"NOTHING"	"identifying issue taking steps to address it"	"paperwork has zero impact on performance"	"helps my son"	
"Grades"	"nothing"	"interaction with the students"	"time is a big concern"		
"Talk"	"nothing"	"one on one time with student"	"need to find the time"		
"Seeing teacher"	"see mentors twice a week"	"create a bond"	"data is the issue"		
"Set goals"	"nothing"	"student appreciates school cares for him"	"meeting more would be easier if informal"		
"Achieve goals"		"advocate for him"	"sufficient time"		
"Talk"		"getting to know a struggling student"	"resource bank of articles or worksheets on specific skills"		

"Talking"		"be of service to a young person"	"don't think there is anything"		
"Help"		"getting to know a student on a more personal level"	"would like to see program expanded"		
"Keeping grades up"		"enjoyed getting to know NAME on a personal level"			
"Helps"		"make a positive impact"			
"Work"		"specific goals set"			
		"discuss and navigate goals"			
Themes	Green responses focus on the relationship between the student and mentor.	Yellow responses relate to the support provided to the student by the mentor.	Gray responses suggest no changes need to occur.	Peach responses indicate participants believe structural or design changes will improve the program.	Blue responses suggest additional training for parents or mentors will improve the program.

Appendix O

Sun Valley Participant Baseline and Post-Intervention Data

	Attendance Rate		Numerical Average of Courses		Behavioral Referrals		Suspension Days	
	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention
Student 1	88.70	90.54	69.24	79.67	1	1	5.25	0
Student 2	86.44	82.43	79.58	76.50	0	1	0	1
Student 3	84.75	81.08	81.59	70.50	0	1	0	3
Student 4	85.88	91.89	73.50	73.33	8	1	8	1
Student 5	85.88	87.84	88.08	94.00	0	0	0	0
Student 6	84.40	87.84	57.56	87.67	27	2	27.70	1
Student 7	80.60	75.68	78.54	68.58	6	3	7	1.70
Student 8	87.35	86.49	87.25	88.75	0	0	0	0
Student 9	88.90	90.54	86.83	87.83	0	0	0	0
Student	89.40	90.54	58.35	63.83	8	2	16	0
Mean	86.23	89.19	76.05	79.07	5.00	1	6.40	0.77

Appendix P

Riverview Baseline and Post-Intervention Data

	Attendance Rate		Numerical Average of Courses		Behavioral Referrals		Suspension Days	
	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention	Baseline SY16-17	Post-Intervention
Student 1	85.44	90.72	67.50	75.25	5	0	18	0
Student 2	83.65	92.18	80.40	82.50	2	0	5	0
Student 3	88.19	87.35	74.75	88.50	0	0	0	0
Student 4	89.09	89.33	84.00	92.75	0	0	0	0
Student 6	88.47	83.67	79.25	83.75	0	0	0	0
Student 7	88.57	92.13	76.75	78.00	6	3	22	1
Student 8	88.43	90.00	88.25	87.25	1	0	5	0
Mean	87.41	89.34	78.70	84.00	2.00	0.43	7.14	0.14

Appendix Q

Paired Samples t-Test

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Attendance Baseline	86.6744	16	2.48031	0.62008
	Attendance PostInt	87.735	16	4.69735	1.17434
Pair 2	Grades Baseline	76.5106	16	9.42133	2.35533
	Grades PostInt	80.6194	16	8.88156	2.22039
Pair 3	Behavior Baseline	4	16	6.85079	1.7127
	Behavior PostInt	0.875	16	1.08781	0.27195

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Attendance BL-PI	-1.06063	3.95397	0.98849	-3.16754	1.04629	-1.073	15	0.3
Pair 2	Grades BL-PI	-4.10875	9.64704	2.41176	-9.24929	1.03179	-1.704	15	0.109
Pair 3	Behavior BL-PI	3.125	6.34429	1.58607	-0.25563	6.50563	1.97	15	0.068

Appendix R

Mentor Training Materials

MENTOR TRAINING AGENDA

- I. Welcome/Overview of Training Session
- II. Introductions and Expectations
 - A. Participant introductions (via pair interviews or substitute ice breaker or introduction exercise)
 - B. Identify participants' concerns and expectations
- III. Overview of Specific Mentor Program Structure
- IV. Mentor Roles and Tasks
- V. Stages of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship
- VI. Communication Skills
- VII. Exploring Diversity and Its Impact on the Mentoring Relationship

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR MENTORS

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR MENTORS

(Adapted from Mass Mentoring Partnership, Mentoring 101 Train the Trainer Curriculum).

It is not possible to anticipate every situation and the appropriate behavior to apply when mentoring a student. However, here are a few suggestions to use as general guidelines:

DO:

- Get to know your mentee. Try to really understand the current state of affairs for your mentee.
- Be positive, patient, dependable, honest, and sincere.
- Be consistent but flexible.
- Expect that plans will change.
- Encourage, praise, and compliment – recognizing even the smallest of accomplishments goes a long way.
- Be an active listener.
- Use language that your mentee and his or her family can easily understand.
- Give concrete explanations.
- Be straight, honest, and sincere (students pick up on falseness and shallowness).
- Ask for opinions and participation in decision-making.
- Work *with* your mentee. Share your knowledge rather than giving advice.
- Be enthusiastic – it's contagious.
- Stress the positive.
- Be firm. Have your mentee assume responsibilities and hold him or her accountable.
- Help your mentee turn mistakes into learning experiences.
- Be fair – they'll notice if you're not.
- Help identify your mentee's talents, strengths, and assets.
- Tell your mentee about yourself, especially what you remember from your middle school years. Show awkward middle school pictures. Let your mentee know that school can be difficult for everyone – even teachers, counselors, and administrators.
- Help mentees identify the significance of the information you are discussing we it relates to their own lives (e.g., possible future profession, similar experiences, etc.) – tell them how they can use the information.
- Have mentoring activities planned in advance.

- Take initiative. Mentors who fail to attend mentor meetings or reschedule when needed must meet with the disquisitioner so that problems can be resolved, and mentoring sessions can begin again, if applicable.
- If your mentee is absent from school, you will receive notification from the school data manager. Make contact with your mentee's parent/guardian to determine why he or she is absent. Contacts should be positive, yet firm. If possible, speak with your mentee and state that you look forward to seeing him or her the next school day (or later in the school day, if possible). Remind the parent/guardian to send a note to the homeroom teacher on the date the student returns to school explaining the absence(s).
- If you must miss a mentoring session, immediately inform the disquisitioner, and communicate with your mentee in advance, if possible. It is important to let your mentee know that you did not forget about your mentoring session.
- Learn to appreciate your mentee's cultural and ethnic background. Strive toward cultural reciprocity.
- Be open to what your mentee can teach and share with you.
- Honor your commitment – This is extremely important! You'll hear this over and over again!
- Have fun!

DON'T:

- Expect to have instant rapport with your mentee.
- Be lenient in order to be liked; it won't earn respect. Students need consistency and structure.
- Lecture, moralize or preach.
- Tell your mentee what to do; rather, suggest, invite, encourage, etc.
- Share personal problems unless it is to explain your current disposition (e.g., tired or irritable).
- Make promises you can't keep.
- Be convinced that what students say is always what they mean. Students may demonstrate difficulty articulating what they are actually trying to convey.
- Pry into the young person's life. If a mentee questions your personal life, it is okay to say that some things are private, just as they are in his or her life.
- Be afraid to admit that you do not know an answer or that you have made a mistake. Find the correct answer and learn together. It helps the mentee to see that you are learning too.
- Interpret lack of enthusiasm as a personal rejection or reaction to you.
- Be sarcastic or use excessive teasing.
- Refer to adolescents who reside in public housing as being from "the projects".
- Lend money.

- Violate confidences, with the *exception of crisis intervention situations*, in which case you must contact the disquisitioner privately and immediately.
- Forget your own adolescence. What do you wish an adult had said to you or done for you at that time in your life?
- Attempt to become a surrogate parent to a child.

MENTOR ROLES AND TASKS

(Adapted from Mass Mentoring Partnership, Mentoring 101 Train the Trainer Curriculum).

MENTORS ARE –

- **Trusted guides**
Young people today do not get much of an opportunity to be friends with adults, especially adults who are going to listen to them.
- **Caring, responsible adults**
He or she provides access to people, places and things outside the mentee's routine environment.
- **Positive role models**
A role model is someone students aspire to be like, whereas a mentor is someone who offers to help students be whoever he or she wants to be.

KEY QUALITIES OF A GOOD MENTOR

- Good listener;
- Persistent;
- Committed;
- Patient.

MENTORS ARE NOT –

Mentors must understand that they cannot be all things to their mentees. Quite often when mentors encounter problems in mentoring relationships, it is because the mentor, the mentee, or the parent/legal guardian do not understand the proper role of a mentor. Ineffective mentors may be observed taking on one of the following inappropriate roles:

- **Parent/Legal Guardian**
 - The role of the parent or legal guardian (governed by law) is to provide food, shelter and clothing. It is not the mentor's role to fulfill these responsibilities. If the mentor believes his or her mentee is not receiving adequate support, the mentor should directly communicate with the disquisitioner, rather than trying to meet the needs of the mentee.

- **Social Worker**
 - A social worker is a licensed professional who obtains necessary skills and training to assist with family issues. If a mentor believes there are challenges in the mentee's home life, the mentor should share this concern with the disquisitioner and should not assume the role of a social worker and attempt to solve the problem.

- **Psychologist**
 - A mentor is not a formal counselor or therapist. A psychologist is a licensed professional who obtains a skill set that is very different from a classroom teacher, school administrator, school counselor, or school social worker.

*It is more appropriate for a mentor to act as a **resource broker** and show the mentee how to access the services and resources he or she needs than to provide those services.*

FOUR PRIMARY TASKS OF A MENTOR

- 1) Establish a positive, personal relationship with mentee:**
 - Establish mutual trust and respect;
 - Maintain regular interaction and consistent support;
 - Make your meetings enjoyable and fun.

- 2) Help the mentee develop or begin to develop life skills:**
 - Work with your mentee to accomplish specific program goals (e.g., dropout prevention, general career awareness);
 - Instill the framework for developing broader life-management skills, (e.g., decision-making skills, goal-setting skills, conflict resolution, money management).

- 3) Assist mentee in obtaining additional resources:**
 - Provide awareness of community, educational and economic resources available to youth and their families, and how to access these resources. Act as a resource broker as opposed to a resource provider;
 - Act as a guide and/or advocate, coach and/or model;
 - Avoid acting as a professional case manager. View the role of a mentor as a friend rather than a counselor.

- 4) Increase mentee's ability to interact with people/groups/things from various backgrounds (cultural, racial, socioeconomic, etc.):**
 - Respect and explore differences among people/groups from various backgrounds. Do not promote values and beliefs of one group as superior to those of another.

TIPS FOR BUILDING A POSITIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

(Adapted from the California Governor's Mentoring Partnership and Los Angeles Youth Mentoring Connection).

1) Be there.

When you show up for every meeting with your mentee and strive to make things work out you send your mentee a strong message that you care and that he or she is worth caring about.

2) Be an advocate – not an all-knowing authority.

Be the adult in your mentee's life who is present and does not make him or her feel there is something that needs to be fixed. Spending time and talking with your mentee is conducive to healthy development. Young people learn more by engaging in conversation with adults than by simply listening to them.

However, if your mentee comes to you for help or advice, it is appropriate to work with your mentee to develop solutions. It is also appropriate to check in with your mentee during non-scheduled mentoring sessions if you suspect he or she is struggling with something.

3) Be a role model.

Lead by example. By becoming a mentor, you've already modeled the most important thing a human being can do: caring about another. Additional ways mentors can be positive role models for mentees are noted below:

- Keep your word: Call when you say you will. Do what you say you will. Be there when you say you will;
- Return phone calls and emails promptly;
- Have a positive outlook;
- If your program has group sessions, participate fully;
- If you enter a competitive activity with your mentee, keep it in perspective and by all means do not cheat (or even fudge a little) to help your mentee win, get a better place in line at an event, etc.;
- Let your mentee see you going out of your way to help others.

4) Help and encourage your mentee to assist you with determining and developing meeting activities.

Some mentees will have a lot of suggestions about what you can do together, but most will need a little guidance. If your mentee doesn't have any preferences, start by giving them a range of choices.

5) Be ready to help.

If your mentee shares that he or she is struggling with a problem, employing the following strategies may prove conducive to alleviating the problem:

- Be there for your mentee;
- Make it clear that you want to help;
- Serve as counsel, not an all-knowing authority;
- As difficult as this may be, do not fix/solve the problem for your mentee;

- Ask your mentee questions, and assist or teach your mentee how to engage in problem-solving to allow him or her to arrive at their own answers/solutions;
- Model ways to solve problems. You can also be a role model by describing how you overcame a similar problem in your life. Metaphor is a great teacher;
- Give your mentee a say: Once he or she comes up with a solution, don't try to come up with a better one, but help explore all the possibilities and offer support;
- Be ready to help out by checking back and seeing how things worked out.

RESPONSIBLE MENTORING

(Adapted from The Mentoring Partnership of New York, Mentoring in the Faith Community: An Operations Manual for Program Coordinators).

Difficult Issues

By Dustianne North, M.S.W.

Sensitive issues that come up between a mentor and mentee require different levels of response and intervention. These issues have been grouped below as delicate topics, issues of concern and crises requiring intervention. However, any of these issues may move up or down this continuum depending on the seriousness of the actions involved.

DELICATE TOPICS

Generally speaking, delicate topics should be discussed only when initiated by the mentee. These topics can be sensitive, and they can strongly affect the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentors are encouraged to seek support and feedback from other mentors, the disquisitioner, or the Improvement Initiative Team when their mentee brings issues such as these to their attention.

Examples of delicate topics include:

- Sex;
- Peer pressure;
- Hygiene;
- Behavior;
- School performance;
- Self-image/personal insecurities;
- Identity issues: class, cultural and sexual.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Issues of concern are those that may have lifelong implications for the mentee, and therefore *the mentor needs to report them to the disquisitioner or a member of the Improvement Initiative Leadership Team*. However, these issues do not necessarily require direct intervention. Examples of Issues of Concern include, but are not limited to:

- Engaging in unsafe sex;
- Fighting at school;
- Depression;
- Delinquent behavior;
- Gang affiliation;
- Substance abuse;
- Verbal harassment: sexual, racial, bullying.

CRISES REQUIRING INTERVENTION

Crises involve issues of grave concern that generally require direct and immediate intervention. Some of these issues, such as child abuse and/or neglect, are mandated by law to be reported. Other circumstances may require direct intervention by the mentoring program.

MENTORS SHOULD NEVER BE EXPECTED TO HANDLE CRISIS SITUATIONS ALONE

Many issues presented to mentors by mentees require collaboration with families, mentees, and outside agencies. The disquisitioner should be notified of all situations that require crisis intervention. Examples of crises requiring intervention include, but are not limited to:

- Child abuse and neglect;
- Abusive relationships: sexual abuse, incest, dating violence/rape;
- Chemical dependency;
- Serious delinquency/arrests;
- Suicidal behaviors and/or articulation of suicidal thoughts;
- Mental illness;
- Physical harassment: sexual, racial, bullying, or other;
- Physical or mental trauma.

DISCUSSING DELICATE ISSUES: GUIDELINES FOR MENTORS

(Adapted from The Mentoring Partnership of New York, Mentoring in the Faith Community: An Operations Manual for Program Coordinators).

PUT YOUR MENTEE AT EASE

- Stay calm.
- Use body language to communicate attentiveness (e.g., maintain eye contact, sit at same level).
- Avoid judgmental statements such as “Why would you do something like that?” or “I think you know better.”
- Be honest if you are getting emotional or upset.
- Let the mentee know you are glad he or she came to you.
- Reassure the mentee that his or her confidentiality will be honored.
- Be tactful but be honest.
- Allow the mentee to talk at his or her own pace – don’t force an issue.

- Do not pry – allow mentee to bring up topics he or she is comfortable with.
- Do not collaborate with mentee’s family to provide discipline.

HONOR YOUR MENTEE’S RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

- Focus on your mentee’s feelings and needs rather than jumping to problem solving.
- When an issue is shared by your mentee, ask questions such as,
 - “What do you think you would like to do about this situation?”
 - “How would you like me to help?”
- If you are uncomfortable with how your mentee wants to proceed, evaluate your mentee’s thought processes before you respond or determine how to move forward.
- If your mentee wants to proceed in a way that is not possible, gently explain why his or her idea of moving forward is not an option and apologize to the mentee for not being able to move in his or her desired direction.
- Ask your mentee to brainstorm alternative solutions that would make him or her comfortable.
- Encourage critical thinking through strategic questioning and asking your mentee to reflect on the issue.
 - Use statements such as “I don’t know” or “What do you think?”

PROBLEM SOLVE AND OFFER RESOURCES

- Know your appropriate role as a mentor.
- Be honest with your mentee if confidentiality does not hold.
- Suggest that your supervisor or the Improvement Initiative Leadership Team may have some ideas if you’re not sure what to do.
- Ask your mentee if he or she would like to talk to an outside agency if necessary.
- Provide information to your mentee and his or her family if they are unaware of resources or options.
- Brainstorm with your mentee and be creative in finding a solution – there is usually more than one way to handle a situation and this process is educational for the mentee.
- Offer to accompany your mentee if he or she is uncomfortable with something he or she has decided to do at school.
- *Be collaborative* – you are a team.
- *Follow through with any and all commitments.*

HELPFUL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

(Adapted from Mass Mentoring Partnership, Mentoring 101 Training Curriculum).

The following four communication skills are very helpful for mentors to develop and practice. These skills are particularly useful when your goal is to open up communication with a young person. They are also useful skills that you can help your mentee develop:

- **Active Listening**

Active listening is an attempt to truly understand the content and emotion of what the other person is saying by paying attention to verbal and nonverbal messages. The task is to focus, hear, respect, and communicate your desire to understand. This is not the time to be planning a response or conveying how

you feel. Active listening is *not* nagging, cajoling, reminding, threatening, criticizing, questioning, advising, evaluating, probing, judging or ridiculing.

- Skills to Use:
 - Eye contact;
 - Body language: open and relaxed posture, forward lean, appropriate facial expressions, positive use of gestures;
 - Verbal cues such as “um-hmmm,” “sure,” “ah” and “yes”.
- Results of Active Listening:
 - Encourages honesty – helps people free themselves of troublesome feelings by expressing them openly;
 - Reduces fear – helps people become less afraid of negative feelings;
 - Builds respect and affection;
 - Increases acceptance – promotes a feeling of understanding;
 - Mentor and mentee cooperate in solving the problem – and in preventing future problems.

- **“I” Messages**

These messages give the opportunity to keep the focus on you and explain your feelings in response to someone else’s behavior. “I” messages don’t accuse or place blame on another person; therefore, they avoid judgments and help keep communication open. At the same time, “I” messages continue to advance the situation to a problem-solving stage.

For example: “I was really sad when you didn’t show up for our meeting last week. I look forward to our meetings and was disappointed not to see you. In the future, I would appreciate it if you could call me and let me know if you will not be able to make it.”

Avoid: “You didn’t show up, and I waited for an hour. You could have at least called me and let me know that you wouldn’t be there. You are irresponsible.”