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Leadership Practices That Influence Teacher Attendance in a Low and High Teacher Absentee School

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LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT INFLUENCE TEACHER ATTENDANCE IN A LOW
AND HIGH TEACHER ABSENTEE SCHOOL

by

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(Under the direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

The impact of teacher absenteeism is all encompassing. Teacher absenteeism affects student achievement and behavior as well as the morale of other teachers. It strains an already overburdened school budget and poorly trained substitute teachers are with students for as much as one whole year of the time that students are in school from kindergarten to twelfth grade.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine what leadership practices affect teacher attendance at school. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to conduct this study. A school culture survey, which included items addressing three major areas, tasks, processes and relationships, was administered to teachers. The teachers were employed in two middle schools, one with a high rate of teacher absenteeism and one with a low rate of teacher absenteeism. There were 103 surveys completed and returned to the researcher. The researcher analyzed the data and used a t-test to determine if there were any statistical differences in the answers of the respondents. Data analysis revealed that teacher absenteeism was lower at the school where the culture was more positive.

The qualitative portion of the study involved both individual and focus group interviews. Seven teachers per school were chosen at random from a list of teachers. Individual interviews as well as the focus group interviews were conducted using a series of questions designed to elicit responses about leadership practices regarding discretionary absence at their particular school.

INDEX WORDS: Absenteeism, Practices, Attendance, Leadership

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DEDICATION

To my children and grandchildren, perseverance pays off and hard work never goes without rewards although they may not always be evident.

My Children

Jennie VanHouten
Will Owen
Sarah Owen

In Memory

Taylor Owen
February 23, 1983-August 12, 2007

My Grandchildren

Karsyn VanHouten
Owen VanHouten

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There was a time when I did not think I would finish this. Thanks to Judy and Veronica who kept after me until I did.

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Thanks to my Mama and Daddy (Mildred Taylor Lindsey and Ronald Conyers Taylor), who instilled in me the importance of education and the determination to always finish what you start and work hard at whatever you do.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Teacher absenteeism is a problem for school districts due to a variety of reasons. In a state wide study conducted by Norton (1998), 71% of personnel directors reported that teacher absenteeism was one of the leading problems that they faced in their district. In today's economic climate and with pressure from No Child Left Behind (2001), student achievement and budget allotments for substitute teachers are major considerations for the leadership teams within school districts.

School districts across the nation have tried various methods to curb teacher absenteeism. Because several different methods of deterring absence behavior have often been tried all at once, studies have failed to determine any one factor that influences absenteeism. Some absences are unavoidable due to necessity but some are discretionary in nature. Discretionary absences, for the purpose of this study, are defined as those absences taken by teachers that are not due to personal illness or that of a family member, some type of jury or legal duties or bereavement. The analysis of teacher absenteeism by Miller, Murname and Willet (2007 & 2008) suggests that teachers exercise some control in the deliberate placement of the days taken off from school even though the days are attributed to illness. Teachers who make the decision to be absent from school to take care of personal business, especially on short notice, may not want to acknowledge those reasons so they simply use illness as an excuse to miss school, knowing that it will not be questioned by administration.

Student achievement on standardized test scores as well as student attendance and misbehavior are directly affected by the teacher's presence or lack thereof in the classroom (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Flash Research Report, 2000; Miller Murname, Willet, 2007

& 2008; Uehara, 1999). In addition to the effect on student achievement, school districts face the financial burden and emotional toll of having substitutes in the school often and for various reasons (Chaudbury, Hammer, Kremmer, Maralidharan & Rogers, 2007; Norton, 1998). All of these concerns are of particular importance to school leaders who are trying to improve their schools' performances.

Teacher absenteeism causes an interruption in the educational process and provides a poor example for students (Harclerode, 1979). Research has shown that teachers are absent more frequently in schools with higher percentages of low-income students (Bruno, 2002) and schools in which students score below grade level on standardized tests in reading and mathematics (Clotfelter, et al., 2007; Flash Research Report, 2000; Miller et al., 2007, 2008). While schools must provide leave days for their employees, teachers have been shown to have a higher rate of absenteeism than that of other professionals (Podgursky, 2002). School reform efforts using insights gained from Effective School research dictate that every possible avenue should be explored to improve student achievement, and when teachers are present more often, students achieve at a higher rate (Bruno, 2002; Edmonds, 1979; Firestone, Bliss & Richards (1991); Miller et al. 2007 & 2008).

Excessive teacher absence can be a sign of other underlying problems within the school. The fact that teachers are struggling to be effective and need additional assistance from administration to be successful in the classroom may contribute to the attrition problem that exists with teachers who have less than five years experience (Little, 2000). In addition, the culture of the school involves such things as job satisfaction and morale, which directly correlates with leadership practices and how they impact teachers and other staff. Those same leadership practices connect to the instructional leader correlate of effective school research

which evolved during the 1980's (Edmonds, 1979; Firestone et al. 1991; Miller et al., 2007; Scott & Wimbush, 1991).

Therefore, teacher absenteeism becomes a problem for school leaders when teachers are absent frequently from their classrooms. Some absences are unavoidable, but Pitkoff (2003) suggests that there are many school leader practices that might encourage teachers to make the choice to be absent when another alternative might be found if given incentive by school leaders. School leaders are very much aware of the extreme cost of hiring substitute teachers as well as the fact that teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement and must work towards developing school policy practices that keep teachers in the classroom as much as possible.

Background of Study

Teacher absenteeism is increasing and is problematic to the educational system in terms of economics and instruction. Absenteeism by teachers affects the school economically since the budget has to allow for the payment of substitute teachers and through loss of instruction, due to the fact that absent teachers do have an effect on student achievement. According to the District Management Council (2004), teachers nationally average two weeks out of the classroom each year due to illness, personal days and other excused absences such as staff development. Michael Podgursky (2002), an economics professor at the University of Missouri-Columbia, found when comparing teacher's absences to those in other professions, teachers are absent almost double the amount of time. Podgursky concluded that teachers take more time off simply because they have leave days built into their contract, and this concurs with research findings by Clotfelter et al. (2007) and Pitkoff (2003).

Evan Pitkoff (2003), superintendent in Newton, Connecticut, suggests that school districts almost encourage teachers to be absent because of their current practices regarding leave

policies. He describes the types of leave and ways to curtail teachers taking advantage of those days which amounts to reducing the number of sick leave days that are available as well as doing away with sick leave banks. In addition, he encourages school systems to require stricter documentation for emergency leave, and believes that attendance should be a part of teachers' annual review. Furthermore, he suggests that staff development should be conducted at times when teachers will not have to be away from students such as during planning times, evenings or on Saturdays.

When other professionals are absent from their jobs, the work accumulates, but when teachers are absent, substitutes are put into place to supervise the students. The substitute teachers who are assigned to the class often cannot carry out the lessons plans because they lack the skill or knowledge that is required. In addition, teachers report that they do not leave meaningful lesson plans for substitute teachers because they do not want to take the time to make them since they feel that the substitute cannot carry them out effectively (Cardon, 2002). Subsequently, the students have a lost day where nothing of value is accomplished and student's behavior may suffer because they are not involved in an engaging task (Croom & Moore, 2003).

While there are limited studies to examine the effects of teacher absenteeism, several findings emerge from the literature; student achievement is the most significant and one of the most important concerns for school leaders. However, financial loss to the system is another major area of concern that has also emerged from the research. Absenteeism is not just a problem in the United States; data from studies conducted in Ecuador reports that the financial loss was near 16 million dollars a year while data from India reports 2 million dollars per year lost due to teacher absenteeism (Banerjee & Duflo, 2005; Duflo & Hanna, 2005). School districts are financially responsible for paying substitute teachers, recruiting substitutes and other

administrative tasks associated with the management of substitute teachers as well as paying the absent teachers' salaries. Long and Ormsby (1987) report that anywhere from $20-$25 billon a year was spent on substitute teachers in the United States, and with rising costs, this estimate would be substantially more today. The financial impact alone is worthy of note by school leaders since any financial loss to the school system is money that cannot be spent on educational programs and supplies for the students.

Rates of absenteeism and the effects of employee absences on the productivity of the organization are topics that have been studied, discussed and evaluated in many countries as well as the United States (Chaudbury et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2007). Duflo and Hanna (2005) report that financial payment incentives that are a direct result of teacher attendance rates have reduced the rate of absenteeism, which indicates that some of the absences taken by teachers are discretionary, and employing certain school practices might curtail those absences by a substantial amount. Duflo and Hanna (2005) also report that absences were cut by almost 50% in India by using financial incentives, but in reality that may not be feasible in most places due to lack of funding or lack of support from the school district and community at large.

There are many studies that have revealed some of the reasons given by teachers to explain why they are absent from school. Discretionary absences account for a large portion of teacher absences (Duflo & Hanna, 2005; Miller et al. 2007 & 2008) which means that some absences could possibly be avoided if procedures for acquiring a substitute teacher or other leadership practices were changed. Rhodes and Steers (1990) found that Monday and Friday were the most prevalent day of absenteeism; however, in another study the researcher found Wednesday to be the most prevalent day for teachers to be absent from their classrooms (Unicomb, Alley, & Barak,1992). Rhodes and Steers (1990) also found that leave time for

illness is typically for shorter periods of time, such as a day or two which require no medical documentation for the time of illness.

Bradley, Green and Leeves (2004), using primary and secondary teachers employed in the Queensland, Australia public sector in 2001-2002, discovered that rates of absenteeism changed from school to school. When teachers who taught at a school with a low rate of absenteeism moved to a school with a high rate of absenteeism, their days of leave increased, which suggests that the school environment as well as factors such as job satisfaction influenced their taking of leave time from work. When Chiang (2003) questioned administrators, they indicated that a positive school culture might encourage teachers to be present at school more often. These findings indicate that a school climate that stimulates personal growth, enhances positive self image of the school and promotes achievement would improve the overall culture of the school. This is further supported by Haberman (2005) as well as findings provided by the Samarbetsprogram mellan Arbetslivsinstitutet, LO, TCO, och SACO (SALTSA) Project on Work Organization and School Work-life (2003), a joint program for working life research in Europe, whose findings from many European countries involved in the project report that job satisfaction and self efficacy both have an influence on how many days employees are absent from work during a period of time.

Promoting and helping to create a positive school culture is fostered by the leaders of the school. Rosenholtz (1989) found the when people experience low self motivation, they feel dissatisfied and alienated, and subsequently they begin to engage in behaviors at work that reinforce their task failure, including absenteeism from the workplace. Rosenholtz and Haberman (2005) agree that workplace satisfaction and burnout can account for absenteeism and

attrition. Teachers' attitudes about school leaders and practices as well as their perceptions regarding school tasks, processes and relationships have an impact on attendance at school.

Teacher absenteeism, in developing countries as well as large urban areas in the United States, has been identified as a problem which directly affects student achievement (Banerjee & Duflo, 2005; Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al. 2007; Duflo & Hanna, 2005; Miller et al., 2007 & 2008; Unicomb et al., 1992). Clotfelter et al. (2007) found that for each additional sick day a teacher takes, the student's score on a mathematics standardized test dropped by 0.17% of a standard deviation and his reading standardized test dropped 0.09% of a standard deviation. These findings agree with the Flash Research Report (2000) and Miller et al., (2008) that student achievement is negatively impacted by the teacher's absence from school.

A vast majority of school improvement plans have a component to reduce student absenteeism as it is a factor that impacts student learning as well as a predictor for drop out rate, but there is very little in the way of focus on teacher absences. School leader procedures concerning the taking of leave from school that are both formal and informal in nature have appeared to be successful in improving teacher attendance in the past. Teachers' rates of absenteeism appear to be associated with the number of days provided by the school district for paid illness and personal leave (Educational Research Service, 1980; Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees & Ehrenberg, E., 1991; Winkler, 1980). Rates of absences drop when bonuses or monetary incentives are used to reward exceptional attendance (Boyer, 1994; Duflo & Hanna, 2005; Ehrenberg et al., 1991; Jacobson, 1990; White, 1990, Winkler, 1980). However, findings by Duflo and Hanna (2005) revealed that while incentives seemed to work initially, they did not bring long lasting results. Miller et al. (2007) found that while monetary incentives were not always successful in the long term, some states, such as Georgia, provide up to six months of

retirement credit for unused sick leave and this does seem to make a difference. Miller et al. (2007) state that in their Harvard study findings there is virtually no research about what level or kind of incentive teachers might respond to which is in contrast to what Jacobson (1988) and The District Management Council (2004) concluded. Their research purported that pay incentives, job satisfaction and recognition did indeed improve teacher attendance at school.

Scott, Markham and Taylor (1987) believe, based on their findings that for any attendance policy utilizing incentives to be effective, there must be some sort of punitive or disciplinary action for teachers who abuse leave time. Pitkoff (2003) found that when teachers have to report directly to the principal when they are absent as opposed to speaking with a secretary or other office personnel or an answering machine, they are absent less often.

When one examines all of the aspects of teacher absenteeism, one must also consider the correlates of Effective School research (Edmonds, 1979; Firestone et al., 1991). These correlates, which are the means to achieving equitable levels of student learning, involve a leadership role. From school leadership, teachers should receive support for their teaching in a caring culture in which morale is positive and teachers think twice before making the choice to take a discretionary day of absence (Keller, 2008).

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

Teacher absenteeism impacts schools in several different ways. Student achievement, behavior and attendance are affected as well as the school budget when teachers are absent. The impact does not stop there since there is often a toll on other teachers to get together lesson plans or fill in for other duties when teachers are absent which may affect school culture and teacher morale. Teacher incentive programs appear to work initially but may not work over a long period of time. Teacher absenteeism is currently on the rise, and with accountability for student

achievement at the forefront of school improvement, this is an issue that could be examined in more depth by school leaders so as to improve attendance by teachers in their schools.

Studies have been conducted to assess teacher absenteeism and the effects on a student's achievement, attendance, and behavior as well as to examine some incentive programs that might reduce the amount of leave taken by teachers. Limited studies have yielded findings concerning teacher absenteeism in regard to job satisfaction and school culture issues as well as incentives to improve attendance of teachers. Current research, which focuses specifically on leadership practices that might possibly influence teacher absenteeism, is lacking. School leaders may be able to implement certain strategies or practices that would inhibit discretionary absences, which would mean that students would have more access to their teacher instead of a substitute teacher. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine school leader practices that influence the decision of teachers to be absent from their classrooms.

Research Question

The researcher will consider the following overarching question in this study: What school leader practices influence teacher absenteeism?

Significance of the Study

Studies have been conducted to assess teacher absenteeism and the effect on student's achievement, attendance, and behavior as well as to examine some incentive programs that may reduce the amount of leave taken by teachers. Schools are plagued by the rising cost of substitute teachers and the need to meet school improvement goals. Those goals can only be met if teachers are in the classroom actively teaching students. Data from multiple sources has shown that the impact of teacher presence does have a significant effect on student achievement, attendance and behavior. In addition, the more often the teacher is absent the lower the

standardized test scores for the students that they teach as well as increased absences and more discipline referrals for those students. Studies also show that some incentives work with some groups of teachers but other incentive programs show no positive difference. Job satisfaction and positive school culture have been shown to have an impact on teacher attendance as well which would lead one to examine the leadership practices that might impact whether teachers take discretionary days off here and there, which given an entire school or school district, would amount to quite a number of leave days over the course of a year.

This study will be significant to both school leaders and teachers in terms of both format and results. The format will include a quantitative component which will include an attitudinal survey of all teachers within two schools as well as focus groups made up of teachers. One focus group will be made up of teachers from a district where the attendance is high, and one group from a district where the attendance is low which will allow the participants to provide information that is unique to them. The semi structured interview of focus groups will allow the researcher to probe for additional information and clarification when necessary. In addition, an individual interview will be conducted with teachers if deemed necessary by the researcher to clarify any unclear information. Principals will be interviewed individually by the researcher to obtain information and gain understanding from the point of view of the school leaders.

This study will provide insight into leadership practices that may encourage teachers to be absent more often or deter them from being absent from school as much. The study will yield outcomes that will be beneficial to school leaders by revealing some of the leadership practices that influence a teacher's decision to be absent from school. This data can be used to implement strategies that will reduce the amount of absenteeism among teachers, thereby decreasing time that students spend with substitute teachers. This study may provide insight into how schools

may reduce teacher absenteeism, which will yield better test scores, reduce student misbehavior and lower budget costs.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

A mixed method approach was used by the researcher for this study so as to provide triangulation of the data. The researcher chose this method of examining the data because it is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification and increases the credibility and validity of the results. The first component, an attitudinal survey, was analyzed quantitatively using a t-test to determine any statistical difference in the teachers' attitudes in the two middle schools. The first component provides a very broad piece of investigative research to identify top level issues and to provide a better scope for the next component. The second component, which is more detailed and focuses on a smaller area than the first level consists of individual interviews with principals and focus groups made up of teachers. The researcher focused on data that provides an understanding of school leader practices that influence teachers in their decisions to be absent.

The qualitative section of the study is phenomenological in nature since some studies lend themselves to research that attempts to understand phenomena that is difficult to explain and they involve people and their lived experiences (Lichtman, 2006). Creswell (2003) and Lichtman (2006) describe this method as a means to gain an in depth understanding of the feelings and thoughts of the participants. This process helps to more fully explain the experiences of the participants and allow the researcher to gather the data necessary to answer the research questions.

Participants

Participants in this study were certificated school personnel from two counties in a

Northeast Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency district. After collecting attendance

data by district and by school from human resource officers in each of the districts, the

researcher chose the school districts and schools with the highest and poorest rate of attendance

by teachers. In choosing the districts, the researcher excluded absences by all personnel in the

school except teachers, since the overall goal of the study is to determine leadership practices

that influence teachers' attendance. Teacher participants were chosen at random from a list and

invited to participate in the focus group. If one participant had declined to participate then

another would have been chosen at random and invited to participate. The researcher also

emailed individual principals at the two chosen schools asking them to participate in an

individual interview

The researcher then arranged a time and place that would be convenient for participants

to be interviewed and for the focus group to take place. After the focus group session, a decision

was made by the researcher on whether to follow up with separate interviews with individual

teachers from the group. The researcher also interviewed a principal from each of the districts to

ascertain their views on the subject of teacher attendance.

Instrumentation

The study was conducted using a mixed methods approach; therefore there was a

quantitative and a qualitative component. The first was an attitudinal survey which was given to

all teachers at the two chosen middle schools. The researcher analyzed the survey by using a t-

test to determine if there were any differences in teacher attitude toward leadership practices as

they relate to tasks, process and relationships. Focus group questions were added as needed as a

result of the survey data. The next component is qualitative in nature. Focus groups, made up of

teachers from the two middle schools, as well as individual interviews with principals from both

schools were conducted.

The survey data allowed the researcher to determine if there was any statistical difference

in the attitudes of the teachers at the two schools. The interviews and focus group discussion

provided descriptions, context and details of school leadership practices that impact teacher

absence either positively or negatively. The attitudinal survey data was analyzed using a t-test.

This test compared statistically the attitudes of the teachers regarding leadership practices in

regards to tasks, processes and relationships within the schools.

Focus groups, made up of 7 teachers, from the schools with the highest and poorest rate

of attendance were used to obtain unique data from the teachers' perspectives. This allowed the

researcher to gather data about perceptions, feelings and attitudes toward the topic under study.

The focus group discussions provided descriptions, context and details of the school practices

that contribute to a teacher's decision to be absent. Focus groups are helpful to promote

discussion about the topic of interest and participants may share more ideas than in individual

interviews. Sometimes people are less reserved in a group of their peers, and the group tends to

generate some spontaneous questions and ideas that might not come up in an individual

interview format (Lichtman, 2006). Follow up interviews with individual teachers allowed

further exploration of sensitive issues that emerged during the course of the focus group

discussions.

The researcher also conducted individual interviews with principals from the two middle

schools. These interviews were used to obtain the unique perceptions and views of leadership

practices within the school and how those might impact a teacher's decision to be absent from

school for reasons other than necessity. The principal interviews allowed the researcher to

obtain data from a completely different perspective than that of the teachers in the focus group.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the research for the proposed study from

the County Board of Education, principal of each school, dissertation committee, and the

Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board. The study was conducted late during

the 2009-2010 school year. The study's intent and methodology was explained to teachers and

administrators in a detailed email. A survey was administered to gauge teachers' attitudes

towards leadership practices that may influence teacher attendance at school. The survey was

given to all teachers at both schools and analyzed using a t-test.   Participants for the focus

groups were selected at random from a list of all teachers at the school. The teachers selected

were invited via email to participate, in the focus groups. If one of the participants that was

chosen had declined to participate then another would have been selected at random from the list

until there are 7 participants to make up the group. Administrators from those same schools

were asked to participate in an individual interview. The researchers assured the confidentiality

of the study and encouraged teachers and administrators to participate since this topic could

directly impact policy and procedure in the future.

The researcher conducted the teacher focus group discussions and individual interviews

of administrators at a time and place that was convenient to the participants. In addition, the

participants were asked to sign a consent form before any of the interviews took place. The

researcher tape-recorded each session as well as recorded observations during the focus group

discussions and interviews so as to include non-verbal reactions such as gestures and body

language. Each focus group discussion and individual interview was transcribed in order for the

researcher to analyze the data for common themes and patterns that may have emerged throughout the discussions.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected by the researcher it was thoroughly analyzed to gain a deep understanding of school leader practices that influence teacher absenteeism. The survey was given to all teachers in both middle schools and analyzed by administering a t-test. The t-test was used to determine differences in the mean scores from the survey so as to gauge the teachers' views and feelings about leadership practices as they relate to tasks, process and relationships. To answer the research question, the researcher examined the survey data as well as focus group and principal interview transcripts. The information obtained from the interviews and focus groups was examined for common themes that identified patterns that indicate common leadership practices that might encourage or deter teachers in their decisions to be absent from school. The researcher described the practices that the participants identified as ones that may encourage absenteeism from school using themes emerging from the data collected.

Limitations

1. Participant responses may not be truthful and may slant their answers to make themselves look better in the eyes of the investigator and/or their focus group peers.

Delimitations

1. All the data was collected in two schools within the Northeast Georgia RESA district; hence the findings may not generalize to other schools inside or outside of the state of Georgia.

2. This study included participants who have worked in a public school setting as opposed to charter, magnet or private school district and findings may not, therefore, be generalizable to other school districts within or outside of Georgia.

Summary

The researcher employed a mixed methods research approach in order to understand teacher discretionary absenteeism in two middle schools in the Northeast Georgia RESA district. This study lends itself to a mixed methods approach since the researcher is seeking to understand and describe the school leader practices that reduce or possibly encourage teacher absences from school. The study was able to obtain survey information from all teachers within the two schools. Additionally, information was obtained from specific teachers and administrators chosen at random from the two middle schools with high and low teacher attendance records.

The survey data provided insight into whether the attitudes of teachers at the two schools were similar or different which helped to understand the cultural tone for the two schools. The focus groups and interview methods were chosen in an effort to find common themes that emerged from the responses of the participants in the study. In an effort to make the study groups comparable, the researcher chose two middle schools from a Northeast Georgia RESA district. The two middle schools that were chosen are somewhat similar demographically. The two schools that were chosen are Title I schools, one with 1047 students with a free and reduced lunch percentage of 56%. The other school has 901 students with a rate of 69% free and reduced lunch. The median income of the communities in which these schools are located is $36,000 for one and $29,000 for the other respectively. The communities are similar in that they are rural and there is very little industry in either. The implications of the study will impact leadership

practices in the future with regard to the procedures surrounding teachers' absenteeism from school.

Chapter II

Review of Research and Related Literature

Introduction

In spite of a lot of progress in teaching technology in recent decades, the teacher continues to be the most essential input in the learning process. When a teacher is absent, for whatever reason, cognitive acquisition suffers.

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A review of the literature on teacher absenteeism is important in order to provide a background for the study. Absenteeism is generally defined as the chronic absence from something such as school, and teachers can take leave time for sickness, injury, personal necessity, jury duty and any other time that they are away from the job. (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Hovey, 1999). Discretionary absence is an absence from the job that an employee has chosen to take that may not be a necessity for reasons of illness, bereavement, jury duty or other legal obligations. Teachers also are allowed professional leave time for conferences or other types of training. In public school education, teachers have a certain amount of leave time that can be taken and accumulated over the years which can then be used for absences of long duration that might occur in the teacher's tenure. Teachers also have the option of accumulating leave time to be used towards early retirement or even a monetary payment for unused days at the time of retirement. Absenteeism is a major leadership concern and one that affects not only student achievement but the school budget as well.   Many schools have a budget allotment for substitute teacher pay and that is less than half of what is really needed to meet those needs (Finlayson, 2009).

The first section of the review provides a historical context for the subject of teacher absenteeism as well as how it relates to the leadership correlate of Effective School research. The second section looks at impacts of teacher absenteeism on the school budget in terms of hiring substitute teachers to fill in for the regular teacher when they are absent from school and also on student achievement. The third section examines the reasons teachers are absent from the classroom. The fourth and final section reviews leadership practices that impact whether a teacher chooses to be absent from the classroom.

Background

Absenteeism in the workplace has been written about and examined in over 500 books and papers during in the past twenty or so years. However, the problem of absenteeism has not garnered nearly as much scholarly interest in educational terms as it has in the business and industrial sector. In terms of financial cost, lost learning, and achievement gaps, absenteeism is huge in terms of impact.

Since the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) issued its report entitled, *A Nation at Risk*, educators in the United States have been involved in an attempt to reform schools. Reform requires change and change requires leadership (Fullan, 1999). In schools, principals are required to provide leadership at the school level for effective change to occur. Leaders and what they do impact everything about the functioning of the school, and the sustained change must be fostered by school leaders as well as all of the stakeholders (Boerlijst, Munnichs, & Van Der Heijden, 1998). Effective School research reinforces the notion since leaders play such a huge role in successful schools by providing leadership and support to the teachers under their supervision (Firestone et al., 1991). That implies, then, that school leaders may impact teacher absenteeism.

Effective School research identified six factors that successful schools possess and in 1979, Edmonds found that effective schools possessed certain characteristics that enable students to perform at high levels of achievement. These characteristics became known as the Effective School Correlates. The correlates are categorized under the following areas: 1) leadership, 2) instructional personnel, 3) environment, 4) overall program, 5) low socio-economic schools and 6) Limited English Proficient schools. In the case of teacher absenteeism, two of these correlates are important because research suggests that 1.) teachers are absent more often in schools that have students that are low socio-economic status and 2.) there may be school culture issues that directly affect teacher absenteeism. The Effective School Correlates are only a small part of the research, but the culture of the school and ultimately the teachers' decisions to be absent when it is strictly discretionary are worthy of note.

Leadership is the first correlate of an effective school and has to do with how the leaders in the school support the teachers within their school. In addition, the research suggests that the quality of the education that a child receives is directly related to the effectiveness of the teacher during instruction (Haycock, 2005). Effective teachers have high expectations for students and are confident that students can reach their full potential if they are taught effectively. Effective teachers believe that they teach students rather than subject matter and are capable of adapting lessons to students needs (Cawelti, 1999). Effective teachers use the time they have in a positive way and see that instruction is maximized (McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003). Teachers cannot do any of these things if they are not present in the classroom. Hence, it is up to the principal to do everything in his/her power to see to it that teachers are in attendance and able to do their jobs effectively.

Norton (1994) reported that almost three-fourths of personnel directors stated that teacher absenteeism was one of the leading problems that they faced. The major research study in this area is the Rhodes and Steers (1978) model of absenteeism which has been touted as the most influential and most often cited model in literature (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000). In 2007, the Commerce Clearing House Unscheduled Absence Survey reported that while 34 percent of people who call in sick to work at the last minute due to "personal illness," 66 percent are taking time off to deal with personal or family issues. These issues, which are discretionary, are things that could be handled at another time. The survey also found that an entitlement mentality and the number of employees reporting absence due to stress have been growing each year for the past few years. These perceptions by teachers tie back to the idea that leadership, support, and morale may play a large role in the decision of teachers to be absent from school. This idea is further supported by studies conducted by Scott and Wimbush (1991), who suggest that job involvement and job satisfaction are factors that have a tremendous influence over attendance.

Rhodes and Steers (1978) focused primarily on how attendance was influenced by ability and motivation of the employee to attend the workplace. The idea that motivation, ability and the relationship between the two controlled an employee's decision to either be absent or not from work was central to the research. Another study conducted by Clotfelter, et al., (2007) examined the idea of whether teacher absences were even worth worrying about, and Miller et al. (2008) collected data on the impacts of teacher absence from school. These studies determined that, indeed, teacher absences are an important concern for school leaders since American school teachers appear to have relatively high rates of absenteeism compared to workers in other occupations. It was also determined that public school teachers in the United States are absent

an average of between nine and 10 days per year which means that, based on those statistics, a

student could be taught by a substitute teacher two thirds of a year between kindergarten and

12th grade.

Burton, Lee, and Holton (2002), as well as Podgursky (2003), suggest that the data

introduces the possibility that practices and conditions specific to public education might

encourage more absences and that policies might be incorporated that would reduce absenteeism

within this specific group of workers. This idea reinforced earlier data found by Ehrenberg et al.

(1991) whose detailed analysis of teacher contracts in New York school districts revealed that

certain provisions were associated with higher incidents of absenteeism by teachers.

Accumulated sick and personal leave as well as administrative procedures for being absent from

school were indicated as being responsible for more teacher absences.

Bruno (2002) concurs with Ehrenberg et al. (1991), in the idea that decisions about an

absence of a discretionary nature might be made more easily because employees feel entitled to

leave since a certain number of days per year is provided in the annual contract. Leave time is

usually referred to as "earned" leave, and the use of the word "earned" implies ownership.

Spiller (2002) found that the term "earned" was perceived by teachers as leave that can be used

for whatever the teacher chooses to do with the time rather than a privilege that has been earned

to use within the constraints of the employee's contract.

Administrators might conclude that attendance by teachers is a reflection of their work

ethic. Unless there are unusual circumstances for the teacher, teachers must surely understand

that ethics, or the lack thereof, might be called into question. Students are expected to be at

school and complete their work in a timely manner; therefore, if teachers are absent, students

cannot complete their work which involves direct student instruction as well as record keeping and other duties.

There are many important contributions that are made by teachers, but some of the most vital are effort, commitment and involvement. The quality of the teacher's contributions not only relates to student learning but is also the ultimate means through which schools are able to get many other resources that are necessary for the functioning of the school. Vital resources for academically successful schools, through greater teacher effort and involvement, might include greater parental involvement, support and assistance for their children's learning than unsuccessful schools. Therefore it is imperative that teachers cultivate student and parental connections by being present at school (Clark, Lotto & Astuto, 1984; Epstein, 1986; Schneider, 1985). This idea is supported by more recent research of Wegge, Schmidt, Parkes and van Dick (2007) who found correlations between work attitudes, job satisfaction and absenteeism. Weege et al. also found that workers who had high levels of job satisfaction had higher attendance rates than workers who did not have high levels of job satisfaction.

Impacts of Absent Teachers

There are many considerations when looking at the impact of having substitute teachers in the classroom, and although student achievement and budget considerations may be at the forefront, other reasons definitely figure in to the overall picture as well. School districts must meet adequate yearly progress for student achievement, but they must also be able to balance a budget and make sure that the school can operate within the budgetary constraints as well as run smoothly on a day to day basis. Other considerations which may not be as obvious or as pressing as finding a substitute at the last minute is the loss of collegiality among teachers and student

misbehavior. When teachers are not regularly in attendance, other teachers often have to fill in during planning times as well as provide lesson plans for the class in which the teacher is absent (Scott, Vaughn, Wolfe, & Wyant, 2007). Students also tend to misbehave more and administrators and other teachers must spend more time addressing discipline issues (Bowers, 2001; Croom & Moore, 2003).

One of the largest expenditures annually is for substitute teachers for classrooms where the teacher is absent. Teacher compensation accounts for more than half of the public education budgets (Miller et al. 2008). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2008) put expenditures on substitute teachers at about $4 billion annually, and these expenses are usually paid for by the local school system budget. Through three presidential terms, the educational reforms have been handed down to systems for implementation. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 promised that there would be classrooms filled with highly qualified teachers. It did not provide that assurance when substitute teachers are needed to fill in for the regular teacher.

Miller et al. (2008) found that about 56% of leave days taken by teachers fit into the discretionary category. Some teachers refer to these days as mental health days, which simply means that they need a day off to rest or to take care of other personal business that they may need or want to attend to. Teachers are given 12.5 days of sick leave as well as three days of personal leave each year in Georgia, but often teachers save those days in case they need to ask for personal leave, which must be approved ahead of time. In addition, Georgia is a non union, right to work state, which allows employees and employers some freedom concerning leave time and conditions that are placed on leave days within the state and also within the district. Calling in sick is an easy way to use sick leave for reasons other than being ill. Like professionals in

other fields, teachers evidently are using sick leave days to take care of errands, extend a

weekend break, or even to do holiday shopping.

Most substitute teachers can be employed as a substitute with no educational training or

experience at all except that provided by the county during a training session which usually lasts

only a few hours. Most substitutes have only a high school education and are rarely capable of

giving any kind of instruction to the students. Most principals are grateful to simply get a warm

body to occupy the classrooms for supervision and legal reasons. Sykes (2002) found that

students spend about 10% of their time each year being supervised by a substitute teacher, which

would indicate that over their entire school career students spend the equivalent of a full year

with substitutes.

Because teacher attendance has not been published in the past, there is little information

about teacher absences in Georgia. However, the Cobb County Georgia system spent 8.5 million

dollars for substitutes in the 2008-2009 school year to fill 6,800 classrooms. The system had

only budgeted 4.6 million for substitute teachers which left a tremendous shortfall in their annual

budget (Finlayson, 2009).

Another indicator of absenteeism is low socioeconomic status of the school. Teachers

who taught at schools serving low-income or minority students did have a higher incidence of

absenteeism (Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2007). The interruption in the educational process

negatively impacts students in that they tend to score lower on standardized test anyway due to

lower socioeconomic status and that, in combination with the loss of instruction, simply

compounds the problem (Bruno, 2002). Bruno (2002) states unequivocally that teacher

absenteeism definitely impacts student achievement in a negative way. Persistently high teacher

absenteeism tends to be one of the common denominators for troubled schools (Clotfelter et al., 2007, Miller et al., 2008).

Research shows that teachers are the most important factor determining student achievement (Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, 2006; Rivkin, Hanuskek, and Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). What teachers do when present is very important and matters a great deal; therefore, when teachers are absent, those things most often will not take place. Another consideration is that students in a classroom eventually lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent and the delivery of the instructional program is by an array of substitute teachers (Bruno, 2002). It is not hard to understand that substitute teachers can never measure up to the regular classroom teacher, nor can that be expected of them. An extensive knowledge of the curriculum for which the teacher is responsible as well as knowing the students that they teach are both integral parts of the student teacher relationship.

Reasons for Teacher Absence

In recent years, much has been made of the increase in student absenteeism. However, an issue that has not received as much attention, but one that is equally critical to childhood education is that of teacher absenteeism. In *Global Security in the 21st Century: The Quest for Power and the Search for Peace*, author Sean Kay (2002) emphasizes that teacher absenteeism is a problem that can eventually contribute to upsetting the delicate balance of global security. Kay notes that Bangladesh reports a rate of 16% absenteeism a day for teachers while India and Uganda report even higher rates at 25% and 27% respectively. In the United States and other western nations, the percent of daily teacher absenteeism is less, estimated between 6-8% but is still of concern and reportedly on the rise. This estimate agrees with Clotfelter et al. (2007),

Duflo & Hanna, (2005) and Miller et al. (2008). However, teachers in highly industrial countries are absent less often than American teachers (Bowers, 2001; Bradley, Green & Levee, 2007).

It is important to note that one of the six correlates of Effective School research is the instructional leadership component (Edmonds, 1979; Firestone, et al. 1999). This correlate states that all effective schools have leaders that manage the instructional environment and in doing so lead and support the teachers so that they can carry out their duties in the best possible way. Stress is one of the most common causes of low employee morale, and when a focus of common educational goals and support for teaching are not met by the administrator, then stress may increase to the point that teachers deal with it by not being present at school. In a business setting several factors may increase the stress levels of employees, but the main reason employees experience stress is their relationship with the manager, and research shows that highly authoritarian managers are likely to cause an increase in absenteeism. It only stands to reason that relationships at school would also be important and high levels of stress and burnout would affect attendance at school (Hilton, Sheridan, Cleary & Whiteford, 2009).

For over two decades, interest has increased in the teacher stress and burnout phenomenon. Stress is reported as one of the primary reasons that teachers leave the field of teaching or say if they had to choose again, they would choose another profession other than teaching (Borg, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Greenberg, 1984). Stress and strain might lead to loss of productivity and be harmful to teachers in other ways such as in their personal lives, number of days absent from the classroom, and their work with their students.

It is important to note that schools are not only centers of learning but also institutions that provide continuity for children, many of whom have little other stability in their lives. Teachers offer consistency in schools and in communities, conveying important messages of

stability and societal well-being. Many reasons have been identified as factors for increased absenteeism. Female teachers and those who have longer commutes tend to be absent more often than others who have more family stability and live closer to the school where they are employed. School environment tends to have an impact on teacher absences since elementary schools, most urban schools with larger populations of students, and low income schools tend to have a higher incidence of teacher absenteeism in respect to a variety of reasons (Bruno, 2002).

Another reason that may contribute to teacher absences is increased pressure at work. The SALTSA project on Work Organization and School Work-life (2003), which conducted its research in Sweden, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, found that teachers reported more pressure associated with their work. Not unlike teachers in the United States, teachers felt that society was placing more and more demands on them as educators. These feelings are felt by teachers across nations and continents. School settings vary widely and many of the reasons teachers give for dissatisfaction have a common theme and this dissatisfaction may in turn lead to more teacher absences.

Society has increased its demands on the educational system and stress is a consequence of those increased demands. With educational reforms come increased performance requirements for teachers as well as students, and with those demands come increased stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Teaching is a high stress job because many of the conditions which determine teacher effectiveness are completely out of the teacher's control and because a very continuous high level of alertness is required to do the job well (Haberman, 2005). This stress, in combination with other factors, contributes to the overall school culture and morale. These things involve job satisfaction and teachers' self efficacy which in turn affects many factors such as attendance at school (Nir & Kranot, 2006).

Leadership Practices that Impact Teacher Absenteeism

Despite the evidence that teacher absences harm student achievement, and advice given by experts, educational leaders have so far ventured to do very little to try and solve the problem of teacher absenteeism. Some districts are experimenting with different methods to try to reduce absences, but teacher advocates argue that abuse of leave time is rare and that the generous benefits and leave options are needed to attract quality people into the field of education (Keller, 2008).

Miller, Murnane, and Willet (2008) look at excessive absences of teachers as an indicator of weak management and poor labor-management relations. In addition, if there is a high rate of teacher absenteeism at a school then questions should be asked about morale, leadership and support (Keller, 2008). This concurs with evidence that lack of teacher attendance is one of the characteristics of schools where there is disagreement over the goals of education, low morale, and poor quality of supervision and lack of interpersonal relationships among the staff (Bowers, 2001), Wegge, et al. (2005).

Studies show that a high level of job satisfaction at a workplace motivates the employees to serve the organization, and this attitude may serve to improve attendance (Burton, Lee & Holton; 2002; Norton, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989, Wegge et al. 2005). The relationships between the teachers as well as their relationship with the school leaders is a major component of school culture as well as the way in which teachers are allowed to work within the school. One study produced evidence that schools where the employees perceived the principal as a strong and supportive person and where there were good physical working conditions, high levels of collegiality, high levels of teacher influence on school decisions, and high levels of teacher control over curriculum and instruction, have considerably better teacher attendance (Hammond

& Onikama, 1996, Wegge et al., 2005). These findings follow what is known about the leadership correlate of Effective School research.

Miller et al. (2008), as well as Shirom and Rosenblatt (2006), suggest that by reducing rates of employee absence, productivity will be improved drastically based on a few premises: some absences are discretionary, absent teachers do have an impact on productivity, and policy changes can reduce the rates of absenteeism among teachers. Burton et al., (2002) found when examining two components of the Steers and Rhodes Model (1990) that the motivation to attend and the ability to attend did affect overall absenteeism and would indicate that other variables, such as leadership practices, might influence workers when they make the decision to be absent from school for a reason other than illness or some other necessity.

In looking at leadership practices, one also has to look at which teachers are absent most often and why they are absent from school. Clotfelter et al., (2007) found that female teachers, like female workers in the workforce, at large were absent more often than men in a certain age bracket. This was due to obvious reasons such as child birth within the year and or caring for small children who might be ill since women are still the primary family caregivers. Other categories that had a higher incidence of absences were teachers who had taught less than five years and also teachers over the age of 57.

Miller et al. (2008) discovered through their research that absence patterns by educators were statistically significant in that 56 percent of the absences were discretionary while other reasons such as illness, jury duty, and bereavement stayed relatively stable over the school year and the discretionary absences changed seasonally. Teacher absences rose throughout the fall and peaked in December around the holiday season. They fell in January and February, only to rise again by the end of the school year. Discretionary absences were also likely to occur on

Monday and Friday of the week which supports the idea that teachers were indeed planning longer blocks of leave time for themselves (Miller et al., 2008; Pitkoff, 2003).

Findings by Winkler (1980) and Ehrenberg et al. (1991) were found to still hold true in that teachers are absent more often when their contracts furnish them with more days of paid leave for illness and personal reasons (Miller et al., 2008). There may be any number of incentives that might reduce teacher absences enough to pay for themselves. Educational leaders in Aldine, Texas, created a bonus incentive for teachers with excellent attendance. The savings that resulted from paying fewer substitutes more than offset the cost of the bonuses. The school system computes that substitutes cost on average about $5 per student per year. The right combination of policies could free up much of the budget money that would normally go for substitute pay (Miller et al., 2008). This view conflicts with others that indicate that more punitive actions would bring the desired results (Pitkoff, 2003).

Teacher absenteeism has important implications for school reform, educational leadership, teacher training, and educational issues related to social justice aimed at promoting equity and excellence in the schools (Bruno, 2002). The use of substitute teachers puts extra strain on the efforts towards school reform as well as increasing the costs of instruction in the schools which are struggling to balance their budgets in the current economic times. Teacher absenteeism is a growing problem in the United States, and effective school leaders seek ways to stem the discretionary absenteeism of their teachers.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology used in this study. It provides the research

question, setting, participants, and a thorough description of the mixed methods

approach that has been used. This chapter describes the research design that was used and a

description of the population that has been studied. It also describes the research instrument that

was used for this research. Procedures and guidelines for the focus group sessions are described

as well as the type of methods of data collection. A description of the method of how the data

was analyzed to determine the findings as well as conclusions is included in this chapter.

Introduction

The study is made up of two components: a survey that has been analyzed quantitatively

and focus groups of teachers and principals that have been analyzed using qualitative methods.

The survey was used to determine the overall attitude of teachers at the individual schools in

regards to tasks, processes and relationships as they relate to leadership practices within the

schools in which they teach. Administering the survey allowed the researcher to add interview

and focus group questions when needed based on the responses.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine what leadership practices affect

teacher attendance at school. Research studies on teacher absenteeism can be found in the

literature with most of the research being quantitative (Miller, et al., 2007 & 2008). The literature

contains information about educational consequences of teacher absenteeism on student

achievement and misbehavior; the literature also discusses the ruinous effect teacher absenteeism

(Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2007) has on district budgets (Chaudbury et al., 2007; Norton,

1998). The literature also examines some of the methods used by leaders to deter teachers from

being absent as well as incentives that motivate teachers to attend school more often (Keller, 2008; Pitkoff, 2003).

By using a mixed method design, the researcher has attempted to understand why one middle school in northeast Georgia has high teacher absenteeism while another middle school experiences low teacher absenteeism. One of the main reasons this researcher chose to use a mixed methods design was to have a quantitative component that compares the attitudes of the teachers in both schools and a qualitative component in which the researcher gained more experience with the phenomenon of interest, teacher absenteeism. The researcher believes that by using a primarily qualitative design, complex and sensitive issues have been exposed as well as attitudes associated with school which may influence a teacher's discretionary absence from school.

Research Question

Information concerning teacher absenteeism is available through the individual school districts. School districts collect demographic information on teachers such as age, gender and years of experience. There are numerous studies detailing the effects of teacher absenteeism, but there is very little mention of how leadership practices influence teachers' decisions when it comes to discretionary absences. The following overarching research question will guide this study: What school leader practices influence teacher attendance?

Research Design

The first part of the study was quantitative in nature. An attitudinal survey was given to all teachers at both schools to collect data concerning teachers' attitudes toward leadership practices as they relate to tasks, processes, and relationships at school. The survey provided insight into the culture of the two schools from which the participants were chosen. The second

part of the study was designed to investigate the perspectives and experiences of an individual or group of people. A qualitative research design was chosen for this portion of the study as the most appropriate tool. Qualitative research methods are inductive and helped the researcher gain insight and in-depth understanding of the phenomena of leadership practices and how it affects teacher attendance. Creswell (1994) reinforced the researcher's decision to pursue the study using qualitative methods as well as quantitative methods due to the nature of the subjects under study. In addition, focus group questions could be added if necessary as a result of the survey data.

       This study is significant to both school leaders and teachers in terms of format and results. The mixed methods approach included a survey for all teachers in both schools. The survey results were used to provide an understanding of the culture of the schools. The study included a focus group from each of two schools-a school with high teacher absenteeism and a school with low teacher absenteeism. Individual interviews with teachers could have been conducted if necessary to gather more information or clarify certain points that may have arisen during the focus group sessions. Focus groups allow for group dynamics which allow participants to benefit from the ability to build on one another's ideas and comments typically provide more extensive and revealing input that would not otherwise be possible. In addition, the non-verbal component of observing the behavior of the participants as they discuss the topics provides information beyond the words that they actually speak. Not only did participants build on each other's comments, but the focus group facilitator was able to modify the interview plan and adjust the types of questions that were asked as the session progressed. The modifications that were made were based on the comments by the participants and how they said it based upon using verbal or non verbal cues.

Principals were also interviewed concerning their perspectives about teacher absenteeism which allowed the administrator participants to provide information that was unique to them. The individual interviews with principals within the low and high teacher attendance schools provided information specific to the perspectives of the particular respondent at the time of the interview. These interviews also gave some insight into practices of individual schools that may not be written school policy or consistent among administrators within the school.

A mixed method approach, using primarily qualitative methods and specifically focus groups and interviews, allowed the researcher to examine input from people with various roles and backgrounds and with different perspectives (Lichtman, 2006). An emerging interview process that collects unique data can be useful in future research to help establish practices for reducing teacher absences. The principal interviews and teacher focus groups provided insight into leadership practices that possibly encouraged teachers to be absent more often or may have deterred them from being absent from school as much. The study yielded outcomes that may be beneficial to school leaders by revealing the leadership practices that influence a teachers decision to be absent from school. This data can be used to implement strategies that will reduce the amount of absenteeism in the future. The increased attendance by teachers may prove to be helpful in improving student achievement for students as well as reducing student misbehavior and budget costs.

The researcher focused on data that will provide an understanding of school leader practices that influence teachers in their decisions to be absent. The first step in the study was quantitative in nature. The survey was used to collect data about teacher attitudes and provided insight into the school's culture as a whole. The second part of the study, a phenomenological study, was conducted since some studies lend themselves to research that attempts to understand

phenomena that are difficult to explain, and they involve people and their lived experiences. (Lichtman, 2006). Creswell (2003) and Lichtman (2006) describe this method as a means to gain an in depth understanding of the feelings and thoughts of the participants. This process helped to more fully explain the experiences of the participants and allowed the researcher to gather the data necessary to answer the research questions.

Research Participants

Participants in the study included certificated personnel from two middle schools in a Northeast Georgia Regional Education Service Agency district. The researcher collected data reports that included the number of absences at each individual school within each district. This data was obtained from human resource officers in each of the counties in the RESA district; the researcher chose two middle schools, one with the highest and one with the poorest rate of attendance by teachers. The researcher excluded absences by all personnel in the school except teachers since the overall goal of the study is to determine leadership practices that influence teachers' attendance. The survey was given to all teachers in both schools so as to collect data from a large number of participants within the school concerning leadership practices within the schools.

The qualitative portion involved teacher participants that were chosen at random from a list and invited to participate in the focus group. If one declined to participate, then another was chosen at random and invited to participate. The researcher also emailed individual principals at the two chosen schools asking them to participate in an individual interview. The researcher then arranged a time and place that was convenient for participants to be interviewed and for the focus group to take place. After the focus group session, a decision was made on whether to follow up with separate interviews with any teacher from the group that might have made

specific comments that may be particularly insightful. The purpose of these individual interviews, if they had been needed, would have been to simply clarify statements that were not clear to the interviewer. Individual interviews with teachers will be conducted only if the researcher feels that clarification needs to be made or if the focus group data is inadequate. The interviews with a principal from each of the two schools were conducted to ascertain their views on the issue of teacher attendance. The same questions were used to interview the principals and the focus group participants.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

Since the researcher was employing a mixed methods approach, there was a quantitative and a qualitative component to this study. The first part of the study was an attitudinal survey which was distributed to all teachers at the two chosen middle schools. The researcher analyzed the survey by using a t-test to determine if there were any statistical differences in teacher attitude toward leadership practices as they related to tasks, process and relationships. Focus group questions were not added as a result of the survey data.

The next component of the study was qualitative in nature. Focus groups, made up of teachers from the two middle schools, as well as individual interviews with principals from the two schools were conducted. The primary instrument of the qualitative component was the researcher. Glesne (1992) believes that the facilitator of the focus group or interviewer is the primary instrument in the study due to the interaction between the researcher and the participants. Interviews of individual principals, focus group sessions as well as survey data were used to gather data for this study. The surveys allowed the researcher to determine the attitude of the two schools and the interview component allowed the researcher to gather data about perceptions, feelings and attitudes toward the phenomena, teacher absenteeism.

The survey data allowed the researcher to determine if there was any statistical difference in the attitudes of the teachers at the two schools. The interviews and focus group discussion provided descriptions, context and details of school leadership practices that impact teacher absence either positively or negatively. Focus groups are helpful in that they tend to promote discussion about the topic of interest and a group generally generates more ideas than individual interviews. Sometimes people are less reserved in a group of their peers and spontaneous questions and ideas may surface that would not have been uncovered otherwise. Follow up interviews, if they had been needed, would have allowed further exploration of sensitive issues that may have emerged in the focus group which would have provided a unique view of teacher absences. The administrator interviews allowed the researcher to examine teacher absenteeism issues from a completely different perspective. This view allowed the researcher to see similarities and differences in the views of the different participants.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

1. Participant responses may not have been truthful and may have slanted their answers to make themselves look better in the eyes of the investigator and/or their focus group peers.

<div align="center">Delimitations</div>

1. All the data was collected in two schools within the Northeast Georgia RESA district; hence the findings may not generalize to other schools inside or outside of the state of Georgia.

2. This study included participants who have worked in a public school setting as opposed to charter, magnet or private school district and findings may not, therefore, be generalizable to other school districts within or outside of Georgia.

Data Collection

The researcher gained permission from the both school districts boards of education as well as the principal of each school, dissertation committee and the Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board. The study was conducted during the 2009-2010 school year. All teachers from the chosen schools were emailed an explanation of the study, with rationale and purpose of the study as well as a letter of consent. All teachers were given an opportunity to complete the attitudinal survey for the study. The focus group participants were chosen at random from a list of teachers and invited to participate in the focus group sessions. If one of the participants had declined the researcher would have selected another at random from the list of teachers from the school.

This research study employed a mixed methods approach to the collection of the data. The first component, the survey, was given to all teachers in the chosen schools and then analyzed using a t-test to determine if there were any statistical differences in the attitudes of teachers within the schools. The researcher then conducted the next component, which was qualitative in nature. The focus groups were conducted at a time that was agreeable with all of the participants. To begin the session the researcher defined discretionary absence as it was being used in this study for the group. Discretionary absences, for the purpose of this study, was defined as those absences taken by teachers that are not due to personal illness or that of a family member, some type of jury or legal duties or bereavement.

The researcher asked permission to distribute the surveys to teachers within the two schools. When teachers had completed them they were returned to a central location and the school secretary and the researcher collected them from there for analyzing. For the second component the researcher tape recorded the focus group session and then had the tapes

transcribed so that they could be examined in written form. All data, including tape recordings and transcripts were kept in a locked file drawer at the researcher's home. The researcher used the transcribed scripts of the focus group sessions and carefully analyzed and examined them in an attempt to identify common themes that emerged during the group discussions. Interviews with administrators were also conducted in the same way to ascertain the views and policies regarding absences in the individual schools.

The researcher examined the transcripts in order to categorize the responses by respondents to the questions posed during the focus group. The transcripts were also examined for use of multiple words or phrases that occurred repeatedly. The documents were then scanned for common themes and patterns that emerged during the discussions and any enlightening thoughts on teacher absenteeism that emerged.

Data Analysis

The data, when collected, was analyzed to gain deep understanding of school leader practices that influence teacher attendance. To answer the research question, the researcher examined responses provided by the two principals to gain insight into how principals view teacher absenteeism. The information obtained from the interviews and focus groups was examined for common themes to identify patterns that indicate common leadership practices that might encourage or deter teachers in their decisions to be absent from school. The researcher described the practices that the participants identified as ones that encouraged absenteeism from school using themes that emerged from the data collected.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2003) discusses the issue of ethics and, in particular, addresses the issues of harm, consent, privacy and confidentiality when conducting research of this type since the

researcher is working directly with human subjects. The researcher endeavored to protect the privacy of the individual participants in the study. All the members of the focus groups were volunteers and meeting times, dates and places were arranged for the convenience of the participants.

The research study was explained in depth to all volunteer participants and informed consent forms, required by Georgia Southern University, were signed by the participants. The consent forms ensured that the subjects were aware that they were a part of the study and all participants were allowed to withdraw from the focus group if they decided that they no longer wanted to participate. Informed consent forms were prepared and signed before the actual data collection took place as required by the Institutional Review Board of Georgia Southern University.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

This study focused on the teachers' and principals' perspectives as they related to teacher absenteeism and the leadership practices that impact those absences. This study attempted to understand and explain what leadership practices encourage teachers to be present at school and which ones make it easier to make the decision to take discretionary absences.

By studying two separate schools, one with good teacher attendance and one with poor teacher attendance, the researcher explored the perspectives of both teachers and leaders as they relate to leadership practices that impact their decisions to be absent. The overarching question of the study is: What school leader practices influence teacher attendance?

Qualitative and Quantitative methods were used to gather information for this research project. Information was gathered through the use of an attitudinal survey as well as focus groups formed of seven members from the individual schools. Additional individual interviews,

had they been needed, would have been conducted with teachers to clarify anything that was unclear after the focus group. In addition, interviews were conducted with leaders from each of the two schools. All of the focus group discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed as part of the analysis process. The analysis of the data was examined in an effort to find common themes and patterns as well as major ideas as they emerged and related to the perspectives of the participants and their view of teacher absenteeism at school.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

Most teacher absences are legitimate in nature and no principal would want sick teachers coming to school, but increasingly the problem of teacher absence is taking its toll in many different ways. School budgets are stretched to the breaking point and most districts allot a tremendous amount of money to pay substitutes for teachers who are absent (Pitkoff, 2003). In addition, Miller et al. (2008) found that about 56% of leave days are discretionary in nature. Teachers taking days off to conduct personal business or simply for mental health are days that students are often with someone who is simply a "warm body" and has no teaching credentials or experience. Persistently high teacher absenteeism is common when examining data on schools that are not performing well (Clotfelter et al., 2007, Miller et al., 2008).

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the leadership practices that influence teachers' in their decision to be absent from school for discretionary reasons. Two middle schools were chosen, one with high teacher absenteeism and one with low. The school with high absenteeism averaged 8 days absent per teacher and the school with low absenteeism averaged about 4 days per teacher.   Both schools are similar in size, socioeconomic status and location. Both are located in rural northeast Georgia school districts with little industry. Most citizens in the community work in surrounding counties and about half of the students receive free or reduced price meals. More than half of the teachers employed at both schools live in the community in which they work. These school districts are also very close to a major university and several smaller colleges. Teachers who leave the district often do so because their spouses complete a higher degree and moves due to job opportunities elsewhere.

After receiving approval from Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Superintendent of the two school districts, the researcher distributed a school attitudinal survey to all teachers at both of the chosen schools. The researcher then randomly chose teachers from a list and contacted prospective participants about the research project via email. The project was explained and an invitation to join the research project as a focus group member was extended. Individual interviews with principals were arranged by contacting them via email and scheduling appointments.

The researcher first sent out the survey forms with a cover letter explaining to all teachers in both schools the purpose of the study and how the survey would be used (Appendix A). The cover letter also explained that random teachers would be contacted to participate in focus group interviews to further explore teacher absenteeism. The researcher conducted focus group interviews of seven participants at each of the two schools chosen. The sessions lasted from sixty to ninety minutes each. At the beginning of the focus group interviews and individual principal interviews the researcher provided the informed consent to be signed by the participants (Appendix C).

To help protect participant confidentiality, real names of the participants have not been used. The focus group interviews as well as individual principal interviews were audio taped in order to allow the researcher to transcribe the data and to report the findings. The researcher analyzed the interview responses of the participants about their direct experience and perceptions about teacher discretionary absenteeism and identified common themes that emerged during the interview process. Two demographic tables of the participants in this study are found in this chapter. Table 4.1 provides demographic data of the participants from the school with low absenteeism and the second, table 4.2 provides the demographic information for participants

from the school with high absenteeism. The charts provide the pseudonyms that are used in this

chapter. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 provide detailed information about each teacher that participated in

the focus group interviews as well as the principal who participated in the individual interview

from the two schools that were chosen for the study based on the absenteeism rates.

Demographic Table 4.1

Participant Demographics   First Middle School (Group 1, Low Absentee)

Name	Position	Years of Experience	Gender	Race	Nature of Contact	Degree	Resident of County
Sarah	Teacher	12	Female	White	Focus Group	Masters	Yes
Vickie	Teacher	5	Female	White	Focus Group	Bachelors	No
Deborah	Teacher	3	Female	White	Focus Group	Bachelors	Yes
Max	Teacher	24	Male	African American	Focus Group	Specialist	Yes
William	Teacher	4	Male	White	Focus Group	Bachelors	Yes
Jennie	Teacher	9	Female	African American	Focus Group	Masters	Yes
Christine	Teacher	29	Female	White	Focus Group	Specialist	No
Dr. Jones	Administrator	26	Female	African American	Individual Interview	Doctorate	Yes

Demographic Table 4.2

Participant Demographics   Second Middle School (Group2, High Absentee)

Name	Position	Years of Experience	Gender	Race	Nature of Contact	Degree	Resident of County
Betsey	Teacher	2	Female	African American	Focus Group	Bachelors	Yes
Jeff	Teacher	6	Male	White	Focus Group	Masters	No
Angela	Teacher	13	Female	African American	Focus Group	Bachelors	Yes
Venetta	Teacher	22	Female	White	Focus Group	Specialist	No
Teresa	Teacher	18	Female	White	Focus Group	Masters	Yes
Jonathan	Teacher	1	Male	White	Focus Group	Bachelors	Yes
Susan	Teacher	8	Female	White	Focus Group	Bachelors	No
Mr. Smith	Administrator	15	Male	African American	Individual Interview	Specialist	Yes

The study is guided by one research question: What school leader practices influence teacher attendance? The chapter is divided into two sections, quantitative and qualitative. The first component of the study was quantitative in nature; a survey was given to all teachers within both school districts. The surveys were examined and a t-test was performed using the data collected from the surveys. The purpose of performing the t-test was to show the statistical differences in the means of the two groups. The data was used to gauge the attitude of the teachers from the individual middle schools regarding teacher absenteeism. Examining the survey data provided a look at the school climate as it relates to tasks, processes and relationships within the schools. School climate and teacher morale have been shown to impact stress and burnout of teachers, which, in turn, tends to cause an increase in absenteeism (Little, 2000, Miller et al., 2007) Teachers relationships and interactions with students influences not

only teacher absence but student absence and student performance as well (Clotfelter et al., 2007, Miller et al. 2007 & 2008). The survey data was used to gain insight into teachers thinking when considering being absent from school for discretionary reasons. By dividing the survey questions into three sections (Tasks, Processes and Relationships) the researcher was able to identify specific leadership practices that might influence teachers to a significant degree.

The second component of the study is qualitative and involves focus groups of seven teachers from each school as well as individual interviews with school leaders from each of the two schools. The focus group interviews provided ideas and information which answered the research question and identified common themes and insights into the leadership practices that influence teachers decisions to be absent from school for reasons of a discretionary nature.

Return Rate

All teachers in the two public middle schools in northeast Georgia (N=106) were given the survey questionnaire. Fifty-nine survey questionnaires were distributed to First Middle School, and all but two were returned. Forty-seven were distributed to Second Middle School, and all but one was returned. The return rate for the survey was approximately 97%. The data for this study consisted of one hundred three questionnaires as well as 7 focus group members plus one administrator were chosen from each of the two middle schools. The high rate of return on the survey was attributed to the fact that the researcher administered the survey at a faculty meeting and provided refreshments. The faculty members were given the survey as they entered the meeting and they returned it directly to the researcher as they left the meeting picking up refreshments as they left.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data examined were the results of a 17 question school culture survey, with three areas of interest: Task (questions 1-5), Process (questions 6-11), and Relationships (questions 12-17). The survey was given to all teachers present at a faculty meeting at the time of the survey at each school (57 teachers at the low-absenteeism school, and 47 teachers at the high-absenteeism school). All teachers who took the survey answered all questions. For each question, teachers answered on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being considered the most desirable answer and 1 being the most undesirable answer.

Table 4.3 gives the results of the analysis. For each question, a t-test comparing the results of the two schools was performed. The t-test looks at the average response of the teachers at each school, and the spread of answers (i.e., if a lot of people chose the same answer or if different answers were fairly common), and then uses that information to determine whether teachers at the two schools answered each question similarly. The p-value answers the following question: if the overall populations of all who might teach at the two schools would agree on the answer, what is the probability of the sample average answers being as far apart as they are or farther: If this value is small (.05 or 5% chance), then we reject the idea that the overall populations would agree on the answer.

According to the t-tests of the individual questions, there were significant differences in how the teachers at the two schools answered many of the questions (p-value<0.05). In each case where a significant difference was found, the low-absenteeism school had a higher average score on the question, meaning teachers at the low-absenteeism school tended to give a more desirable answer. Questions where answers were significantly different were 1, 4, and 5 in the Task section, 7, 8, 10 and 11 in the Processes section, and questions 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17 in the

Relationship section. The questions with the highest significant difference were question 5, "The

planning/organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective

units/teams rather than as separate individuals", indicating this question may be a key issue

where the two schools differ.

Table 4.3
Analysis of Teachers' Response to School Culture Survey

		Low Absenteeism		High Absenteeism			
	Task	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	p
Q1	Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.	4.28	0.62	3.30	0.84	6.57	<,0.0001
Q2	Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.	2.51	0.97	2.76	0.74	-1.46	0.1473
Q3	Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.	3.47	0.89	3.24	0.82	1.38	0.1715
Q4	The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.	3.46	1.07	2.87	0.72	3.31	0.0013
Q5	The planning/organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.	4.42	0.65	3.24	0.60	9.44	<0.0001
	Process						
Q6	When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.	2.91	0.93	3.09	0.66	-1.11	0.2691
Q7	School members are interdependent and value each other.	3.67	0.92	3.04	0.59	4.17	<0.0001
Q8	Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.	3.47	0.91	2.98	0.77	2.94	0.0041
Q9	Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.	3.47	0.87	3.22	0.66	1.65	0.1021
Q10	The school staff is empowered to make instruction decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.	3.63	1.01	3.24	0.74	2.28	0.0249
Q11	People work here because they enjoy it and choose to be here.	3.98	0.83	3.30	0.63	4.57	<0.0001
	Relationship						
Q12	Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.	3.44	0.93	3.07	0.57	2.51	0.0139
Q13	Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company.	2.77	0.78	2.78	0.84	-0.07	0.9469
Q14	Our school reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	3.42	0.86	2.93	0.68	3.11	0.0024
Q15	Our schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	3.58	0.91	2.93	0.71	3.94	0.0001
Q16	Our school supports and appreciates sharing of new ideas by members of our school.	3.35	0.90	2.78	0.73	3.47	0.0008
Q17	There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.	3.42	1.13	2.89	0.67	2.94	0.0041

Statistical significance is indicated at <.05

The next three tables, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 show the statistical significance of the groups of questions arranged by section (Tasks, Processes and Relationships). This data shows average responses to questions by section. Statistical significance for this data in all three tables is indicated at < .05.

In addition to testing each question individually, the researcher also looked at the average responses to questions by section (Task, Process, and Relationships). The two schools had significant differences on each section of the survey. The largest difference was in the average answer on the Task section (3.628 for the low-absenteeism school versus 3.083 for the high-absenteeism school); the next largest difference was in the average answer on the Relationships section (3.330 for the low-absenteeism school versus 2.899 for the high-absenteeism school); and the smallest difference was in the average answer on the Process section (3.523 for the low-absenteeism school versus 3.145 for the high-absenteeism school).

Table 4.4 shows the results of the first section of questions which were labeled as "Tasks". The questions in this section of the survey asked about specific tasks and level of teacher involvement in the decision making process and planning for the organization. The largest difference between the low absentee school and the high absentee school was shown in this section.

Table 4.4

T-test for "Tasks" questions (Q1-Q5)

Low Absenteeism		High Absenteeism			
M	SD	M	SD	t	p
3.628	1.095	3.083	0.775	6.61	<0.0001

Table 4.5 shows the results of the second section of the survey questions entitled "Process". The questions in this section focused on process that teachers might employ when

solving problems within the school or how empowered they felt concerning instructional decisions within the school. This section of questions was third in significance of the three sections of the survey questions that were examined.

Table 4.5

T-test for "Process" questions (Q6-Q11)

Low Absenteeism		High Absenteeism			
M	SD	M	SD	t	p
3.523	0.962	3.145	0.683	5.71	<0.0001

Table 4.6 shows the results of the third section of questions of the survey entitled "Relationships". The questions in this section involved the relationships within the school. Relationship in this section might be personal or professional and involved level of communication as well as the support the school provided for it's employees. This section of questions was second in significance when compared to the other sections.

Table 4.6

T-test for "Relationships" questions (Q12-Q17)

Low Absenteeism		High Absenteeism			
M	SD	M	SD	t	p
3.330	0.953	2.899	0.706	6.46	<.0001

Qualitative Data Analysis

Seven teachers were chosen at random from a list of teachers' names and contacted via email to invite them to participate in the focus group interviews. First Middle School contacts responded positively and all agreed to participate. A time and place was arranged that was mutually agreeable for all involved. Second Middle School teachers were contacted in the same way, via email. Two declined to participate at which time the researcher selected two additional

names at random from the list and contacted them. They both agreed to participate and a time

and place was arranged to conduct the focus group interviews that was agreeable for all. The

middle school student population ranged from 850 to 1200 students and teachers there have been

employed anywhere from 1 to 31 years.

 This study is guided by one research question: What school leader practices influence

teacher absenteeism? A script, (Appendix D) which included the focus group questions was

followed so that all of the participants understood the meaning of discretionary absence for this

particular discussion. The researcher divided the responses of the participants by interview

questions followed by a discussion of any common themes or insights that emerged during the

discourse of the focus group members.

<center>Common Themes</center>

There were several themes that emerged during the focus group interviews. The themes

that emerged were all related to tasks that teachers are asked to perform, support that they

receive from school leaders and the relationships that are present within the schools. One of the

first themes that emerged was that of support from school leaders. Teachers expressed

repeatedly that time flexibility within the school day might help them be in school more days

rather than taking discretionary days off to take care of doctor's appointments or other personal

business. The next major theme that emerged had to do with the relationships at school among

fellow teachers and school leaders. The participants agreed that leadership practices definitely

influenced whether they took discretionary days off during the school year.

In the following text selections teachers describe why they or other teachers they know

might choose to be absent from school for reasons other than illness. Included are some

comments that teachers made.

Well sometimes my sister will call me when she is sick or her kids are sick and she

cannot take the day off, so she calls me to help her out because she knows that I have a

good many days saved up that I can use for illness so she calls me because if she misses a

day she doesn't get paid. So I just call in sick and then go help her with the kids or

whatever. (Sarah, Group 1)

Then other teachers commented, if somewhat indirectly, concerning teacher stress. Vicki's

comments, that follow, were confirmed by others in the group.

Um… well I hate to admit it but sometimes you just need a mental health day and stay at

home and rest. My kids can go on to school and then I can have a day to just rest and

maybe get some things done around the house that need doing and if the kids are home I

can't get anything done. I have those days allotted to me so I feel that it is not wrong to

use them. (Vickie, Group 1)

 Others in the group stated that there was simply not enough time after work to take care

of the many things that must be done and that people who are not in education do not always

understand the schedule that teachers must adhere to. Teacher's schedules are such that they

begin before most business and offices open and they finish their day too late in the day to get

anywhere after work. Jeff's comments emphasize that sentiment.

Well, I take a day here and there to just do personal business. There are times when I

have things to take care of and you just can't get those things done after school. I usually

just plan several things in one day to take care of and do those things. For example, not

long ago I scheduled two doctors' appointments and then did some shopping and went to

the bank to take care of some banking business. I could have done those things after

school on separate days but just didn't want to have to go do something every single day

after school, so I just took a day. (Jeff, Group 2)

Principals from both schools indicated that even though teachers used illness as an excuse

they were aware that teachers used sick leave to take care of personal business and even

sometimes just took a day off for rest or to create a long weekend.

The responses of the participants revealed very similar views about why teachers take

time away from school for discretionary reasons. Sarah felt like those days were hers and that

she could take them to help out family members if they needed her.   Most schools have similar

policies in regard to what is considered a necessary absence and illness is one that is never

questioned. A teacher certainly cannot attend school if they are ill or if their children need to be

cared for due to illness but, based on the responses of Vickie and Jeff, they felt as if they needed

to take a day to rest or take care of personal business. They did not seem to feel that they needed

to work around their school schedules.

When teachers are asked if there was anything school leaders could do to deter

discretionary teacher absence their answers were very revealing.

Well, I believe if there was more flexibility within the school day that we could use to

help get some personal things done…like comp time. Like last year I worked ballgames

several times, which amounts to being at school from about 9 am until around 4 pm.

That's seven hours of time that I gave to the school. If they would let me leave early to

get to a doctors appointment, or go during my planning to run an errand, then I would not

have to take an entire day off to do those things. (Teresa, Group 2)

Agreement came from many other participants in the group with the following

comments.

I agree. It seems like we are always being asked to do more and more for the school that

we don't get paid for, like ballgames and other extra curricular activities, but when we

ask to leave a few minutes early to make an appointment we have to fill out a form and

answer a lot of questions about why we need to leave ten minutes early. (Jonathan,

Group 2)

Sarah's comments revealed the frustration and stress that comes from not feeling valued

by the administration and how that affects attitude and performance.

Here at our school, all we do is attend meetings of some sort or another. Sometimes we

meet to talk about a meeting which is absurd. Then we have to work at home on school

work and stuff. Sometimes I think that the principals don't realize how much work we

actually do and if we could get a little perk like leaving early to get to an appointment or

being able to run to the bank during planning, something like that, it would mean a lot.

Sometimes I take a day to get caught up on personal business. (Sarah, Group 1).

Christine's comments are really telling with their descriptions of school procedure

concerning the acquiring of substitute teachers for her individual school.

Well, personally, there have been times that I needed to take a half-day for something and

the person in charge of finding substitutes practically encouraged me to just take the

whole day so that the sub would get a whole days pay. If the administrators at our school

would actually handle that and listen to what you are saying about why you need some

time off they might be able to find another solution rather than taking the day. But our

administrators don't handle it here; they have the secretary do it. (Christine, Group1)

The administrator at First Middle School seemed to recognize that there should be some

monitoring of teacher absences and her comments indicate that she has attempted at least one procedure that might have made a difference in discretionary absence of teachers.

I have tried to implement some practices that might deter teacher absenteeism. If anyone requests a day off before or after a holiday they have to write several paragraphs explaining why they want those specific days off. They also have to request this well in advance of the days requested. (Dr. Jones, Group 1)

The teachers stated, if indirectly, that if the support was there and if principals would be more flexible with time, then they might work a little harder to be in school each day. They also indicated that teachers would not take an entire day to take care of something that might only take an hour; or if they could leave school early to make an appointment then maybe the entire day would not be lost. Teacher participants also indicated that if workers had to talk with the supervisor, then absences would go down. Some of that might be credited to the fact that if the employee had to talk directly with the boss, then it would be more difficult or uncomfortable for the employee, and they would just come on in to work rather than explain why they needed to be absent. While there may be some merit to that thought, that process might also allow school leaders to better understand what it going on personally with their teachers and allow the school leader an opportunity to offer some different alternatives to being absent the entire day for a one hour doctor's appointment. In the following quotes, teachers reflected on why some teachers have high rates of discretionary absenteeism and some have low rates of discretionary absences.

Um…I think some people just don't like to come to work every day. I hear some people say, I just can't take another day of this, I have got to rest, or on the other hand, some say they come to school everyday because it is so difficult to be out. I personally hate to be

absent because there is so much to do to prepare to be absent and then dealing with all the

stuff, like discipline, when you return. (Venetta, Group 2)

At our school we have those people who are out all the time for whatever reason; it is

something every week that they have to be out for. We have one teacher that sometimes

will be out two days in the same week for nothing. She says she was sick or her kid was

sick but everyone knows that is not the case. You and your children don't always get

sick on a Monday or Friday. (Jennie, Group 1)

The sentiments voiced by these two teachers expressed what was stated over and over

again by teachers participating in the focus groups at both schools. Some people are just out

more than others and they do not seem to be overly concerned with the work it takes to be absent

nor the results of being absent, like discipline issues which seem to increase with having a

substitute teacher in the room or the work that it caused other teachers if they did not have lesson

plans prepared ahead of time for the substitute.

When the participants were asked about deterrents of absenteeism, many felt this way:

Well, we talked earlier about if there was more flexibility with time in the day, we,

teachers would not have to take an entire day to go to the doctor, or the bank, or whatever

needs to be done. For example: Doctors don't like to take appointments after a certain

time and we have to be at school too early to go in the morning to go before school. If

our administrators would listen to us and try and work around the schedule then we could

say, I am going to go to the doctor tomorrow during my planning so that I will not miss

the entire day. Everybody here knows that we take work home, work extracurricular

events, attend parent meeting days in the evenings, stuff like that. We certainly make up

for missing a little work time, but most figure if they are going to take a fourth of a day

from you for missing an hour then you might as well take half a day or even a whole day whereas if you knew you were not being docked you would go straight and do your business and then get right on back to school. Any accommodations for things like that would definitely deter most teachers from taking the entire day. (Susan, Group 2)

Sometimes our principals act like they have forgotten what it is like to have a room full of students. I see some of them talking and visiting while I am running around from one meeting to another and just the other morning I was rushing to a meeting and there was the principal and one of the assistants sitting at the front desk talking and laughing while I scurry by. When I leave the meeting some fifty minutes later they are still there doing the same thing. So…I am thinking that if they have so little to do during the day, maybe they could cover a teacher's class so they could get to an appointment and not have to miss an entire day of school. Also, maybe if they have so little to do that is bad for us to see. Who would feel obligated to come to school when people that are there don't actually work? (Christine, Group 1)

I think some of these young teachers don't see the long term effect of not saving their days. If they would just use only what they have to use then those days that are accumulated can be used for maternity leave or even saved for early retirement, but they don't think that far ahead. (Max, Group1)

Well I know at our school the person in charge of securing substitutes is really good friends with one of the subs and she almost acts like an agent for her. If you go in there to talk about taking half a day she talks you into the entire day and gets her friend to sub for you. Maybe if you actually talked to the principal or assistant principal and they took care of getting the subs then not as many people would be out as much.(Susan, Group 2)

The views expressed by Susan were expressed in both groups in both schools. Effective deterrents of discretionary absence involve allowing some flexibility within the school day within the constraints of the school day. Anyone that knows anything about schools understands that the day starts early, before most other businesses and offices and ends when most business or offices are ending their day. They also understand that students must be supervised at all times so you cannot just leave them to tend to other business. Some agreed with Susan that the secretary often recommended that they take an entire day rather than just a portion.

Christine's story was somewhat different in that she had the view that her administrators did not care about her, and therefore made no effort to relieve teachers in their day to day activities. She suggested that maybe teachers might be absent more often because they feel that they are not appreciated and their hard work is not noticed. Her suggestion that administrators might cover class so that teachers do not have to take an entire day of leave for an appointment might be cost effective as well as a morale booster. A teacher would most of the time rather leave a little early or come in a little late instead of having to miss the entire day. Max also brought up a valid point, maybe if administrators emphasized that days can be accumulated and saved for events like maternity leave, extended sickness or even later for early retirement, then maybe teachers would think twice before taking the day.

With regard to leadership practices considered but not practiced, teachers had mixed reactions.

In my district I cannot recall anything really put into place as a deterrent except for years ago they used to let you be absent and pay your own substitute out of your own pocket and not take it away from your sick leave days. I remember that we could just be out and pay our substitute whatever the pay was for that day and still have our allotted number of sick leave days in the pool if we needed them. So people really never really ran out of

sick days then, in fact some of the older teachers from that time retired with lots of sick

days they never used so they went towards retirement time. (Christine, Group1)

In our county there is no deterrent to being absent. You just call in sick to the secretary

and she says, "Ok, we will get you a sub." If they cannot get a substitute for you they

usually get a parapro or assign teachers to cover on their planning time. If you think that

doesn't make people mad, whooo, there is nothing worse than losing your planning time

for someone laying out of work. Now if we know someone is really sick or has a genuine

problem we don't mind, but sometimes you just know, they were not really sick. (Betsey,

Group 2).

In some school districts personnel call a secretary or some other staff member who has

been designated as a contact who in turn finds a substitute for that day. Some school districts

have begun to use automated systems where teachers simply call in and give the information to

an answering machine and then a person will find a substitute and send them to the appropriate

school. Focus group participants believed that by not talking directly to an administrator, the

employee feels less uncomfortable about taking leave and thus makes it easier to take a

discretionary day of leave here and there.

When teachers were asked what they believe reduces discretionary teacher absence they

had these thoughts about the relationships formed within the school and how they supported each

other both emotionally and physically.

I remember when we were a much smaller school; there were two middle schools instead

of one as there is now. We would cover for one another and if someone had to leave

early, if their child got sick or whatever, we would divide the kids up or whoever had

planning would divide the time up and most times we were able to go on with the lesson

or do review work or something beneficial rather than busy work. Often times that is

what the kids get when there is a sub. I think we had less absence then because people

would try and come regardless, knowing that if they had to leave we would all work

together to help one another out. We also had a principal who had three children and he

knew how it was. He would let us bring our children to school with us if they were just a

little sick and I have taught lessons with my child asleep in the back of the room on a

pallet or in my arms. I think the students learned a valuable lesson from this also, they

learned that you do what you have to do and that their teachers and principals valued

family as well as them. (Christine, Group 1)

When asked about leadership practices that impact teacher discretionary absence, many

ideas were expressed by the teacher participants, not the least of which was how they felt about

the support that they received from the administration.

In our school, it is a fact that we all know that our administrator doesn't know or care if

we are present. He doesn't want to fool with talking to any of us and most of the time he

just walks off while we are talking so he never knows if there is a problem or not. One

time I requested leave for something very important. I told the secretary that I

understood that it was parent meeting day but this was health related and could not be

changed. I would leave appropriate notes for all parents attending. The principal

approved it without looking or caring and then got all upset the day before because I

would miss the parent meeting. I explained that I had advised them ahead of time and no

one had talked with me at all until that day. I went ahead and took the day but once again

he didn't even know what was going on in his own school. (Venetta, Group 2)

I think that knowing that my school leaders are there to support me if a big issue with whether I want to come to school or not. If you have to come to school each day and deal with discipline issues it can make you very stressed out. I have gotten up and just not wanted to come to school because I didn't want to deal with certain kids that day. If I know that I have someone standing behind me with discipline issues then I can come to school knowing that if I need help then the principal will help and I can take care of teaching like I am supposed to do. Sometimes at the end of the day I am so exhausted because of dealing with discipline, whereas if I could have just taught classes without all the issues I and the students would have enjoyed the day. (William, Group 1)

Discipline wears you out. When you are constantly putting out fires in the classroom, instructional time is lost. I have called in sick before just so I would not have to come to school and deal with some of these kids. Our principal doesn't support us like he should." (Vickie, Group 1)

Teacher participants believe that teacher absenteeism is directly related to school climate. Angela's thoughts on teacher motivation to attend were insightful and thought provoking.

Well, I believe that it would be a motivation to come to school if we had a happy environment. Everyone comes to school looking like they would rather be anywhere else. They know that if they need help with discipline they are not going to get it. Teachers just cannot understand why admin doesn't see that if kids are disrupting then the entire class is penalized. Even the kids say when you talk to them informally that they want to be where the teacher can teach and not have kids disrupting all the time. So if the administration would just take care of discipline then I could take care of my class. (Angela, Group 2)

I agree I get up some mornings and think, if I could just go and teach and not have my third period. That class is so awful that I spend all my time trying to keep them under control instead of actually covering the material. I was not surprised that their standardized scores were just awful. If my administrators could just act like they understand what we are facing and when we ask for help they act like something is wrong with us and we can't handle the class. I guarantee if they would just support us consistently then the kids would learn and start behaving. If that could happen morale among teachers and students would improve and then teacher attendance would and so would everything else including student attendance and achievement.

(Jonathan, Group 2)

The one big thing that helped this year for us was each teacher was given a certain number of passes for students. If a student was getting on my nerves really bad I could send them and their assignment to the office and they would stay the entire period working. No questions asked by the office and no office referral. That was a big thing. Another big thing that made morale better was having a certain time allotted to planning. Granted we have to divide our planning block into two parts, one for planning and one for meetings but at least we got it most days. That made a big difference in attitude and morale. (Christine, Group 1)

Being supported by the administrators would make a huge difference in teacher attitude. I have heard others say they had to take a day off just so they wouldn't say or doing something to get them into trouble. I myself have had to hold my tongue to keep from being insubordinate at times. I wonder if administrators forget what it is like to be in the classroom with no relief in sight. (William, Group 1)

These remarks by different teachers in different schools make common statements about what leaders can do to influence their decisions to be absent or not. The two respondents from Group 2 both indicate that they need to have a better morale at school and that morale would come if administrators tried to support them with their discipline. Group 1 also comments that their morale at school seems to be fairly good but they still think they have some problems with administrative support.

When discussing leadership practices that would create an environment where teachers would chose to attend school rather than choose to take a discretionary day off responses were very revealing. Teachers expressed their thoughts about lack of support from administration and their feelings and frustrations about how administrators had lost their perspective on being a classroom teacher.

> Most days I like coming to school and look forward to the day. For the most part all of my fellow teachers are very supportive and we all help one another. That is the best thing about this school is that most people care about one another and support one another. We often talk about how we would like for all of our administrators to support us like we do one another. One of our administrators always listens, she may not be able to help us with a particular problem, but she always listens. Another one is somewhat helpful but sometimes makes you feel like you are not quite on her level and the other two do absolutely nothing to help us at all, which is discouraging: (Christine, Group 1)
>
> There are numerous leadership practices that might encourage me to come to work rather than take a day off. Sometimes I get so weary of the demands of the job. I don't mind teaching students; I don't even mind the occasional discipline but the constant demands of documentation of every little thing and the constant demand of test scores just wear

you out. Sometimes a mental health day is in order. I think that maybe like we have

discussed before, more flexibility, and more recognition for things done well and extra

recognition when we go the extra mile might go a long way in making us feel good about

the work that we do thus encouraging us to be here teach. (Venetta, Group 2)

Yea, I feel like we don't get recognized for all the hard work we do and how intense our

day is. We are constantly with kids and then we supervise at lunch and then at break

when we have one and then someone says "you mean you haven't done so and so yet?"

and I feel like telling them, well come to my room and try to get something done during

the day, you can't cause the kids are nuts, if you don't watch them every single minute

you have something bad happen. Most of my students can't do anything independently

so I am constantly helping them complete tasks. (Jonathan, Group 2)

Speaking for me personally, if our administrators would be more visible I think it would

make a huge difference. Neither the students nor I see the principal much. Our AP sticks

her head in fairly often but the head principal rarely is seen. Some of the kids don't know

who he is. This is bad for student morale and teacher morale. It just makes you wonder

what he is doing and when we do see him he is not working. He often just shoots the

breeze with the coaches about sports. (Betsey, Group 2)

Based on these comments given by participants from both focus groups flexibility of time

during the school day and support of administration with discipline definitely influenced teachers

decisions to attend or be absent from school.

Principal Individual Interviews

Common themes that emerged when interviewing principals were that there was very

little that principals could do about teacher absenteeism considering there were days built in by

the state for teachers to take. Principals became defensive and critical of state practices that they

see as encouraging teacher absenteeism. Comments that follow seem to indicate that they did

not want to question teachers about days that were legally theirs based on state mandates.

> The state provides a certain amount of sick leave for teachers and by law they can take
>
> those days. We do require that if they are out more than three days they document that in
>
> some way, however if it is the illness of a parent or spouse it is difficult to secure
>
> documentation from a doctor saying that they needed to be there for the care etc. It is a
>
> very difficult situation. You don't want the teacher to think you don't believe them, but
>
> there have been times when in my mind I questioned some things (Principal, First Middle
>
> School).
>
> Well the state does provide days for teachers and I am not going to question them for
>
> every day they take. I just don't feel comfortable doing that to my teachers (Principal,
>
> Second Middle School).

Principals did agree that there were some, very limited, things that they could do that

would deter teacher absences and that they had only a very limited influence on a very small

amount of teacher absenteeism. Some of their frustration comes through in their comments about

practices that they have tried to implement at their school.

> Any time a teacher requests time off ahead of time for personal leave I always have the
>
> employee submit their request at least two weeks ahead of time. I have also made it clear
>
> that only a limited amount of people can request and receive permission for personal
>
> leave before a major holiday that way if they really want leave they will do it way ahead
>
> of time and I can simply say if I have to deny someone that they didn't get the request in

before the others. Some will just wait and call in sick instead of requesting ahead

(Principal, Second Middle School).

Well, since we are in football country here I always have some issues with employees

wanting to leave early on Fridays or even take Friday off if there is an away game on

Friday so I have to really watch that but some teachers have learned not to request ahead

and they just either "get sick" or the kids "get sick" at the last minute and it just happens

to fall around the game day (Principal, First Middle School).

When asked about leadership practices that might be implemented to deter absenteeism at

their respective schools principals agreed that they were very limited in what they felt they could

do since state law provided for the days that employees could take per year. The researcher

followed that up by asking who took the calls at their schools from employees or if it was an

automated system. The principals responded with these telling comments.

My secretary handles the calls from employees. My employees just call her at home and

they know not to call before 6:00 am.   She takes all the calls and writes them down and

then starts calling subs so that when I get to school she tells me who is going to be out

and why as well what sub will be there for them (Principal, First Middle School).

My secretary takes all those calls. She arrives here at the school by 7:00 am and the

teachers that need subs on the spur of the moment call her here and then start trying to fill

those spots the best they can. Sometimes we cannot get subs and have to put parapros in

those positions or fill with teachers who are having they planning time. It is just easier

for her to take the calls and keep track of that for me (Principal, Second Middle School).

Principals views differed drastically when asked about leadership practices that they believed would influence a teacher's decision to be present at school rather than take a discretionary day of leave.

I believe that nothing that I do personally will influence a teacher's decision to be absent. If they want to take a day off, they will. I have tried to do things to build morale and encourage teachers about their role and influence on students, but sometimes I wonder… I have tried to give them what they have asked for as far as time to do the required work but sometimes I think that they just don't want change and want to complain about what we have to do. There are a lot of federal and state requirements in education and those are passed down to the teachers and staff because they are the ones that work with students. Sometimes I think that they don't see the big picture that principals have to look at (Principal, Second Middle School).

I believe that what I do impacts everyone from the teachers right on down to the students. I believe that principals have to be the cornerstone of the entire school. I am not the most important person in the school but my influence is far reaching and very important. I try to be seen by the teachers as well as the students, I try to let teachers know by my actions that I am working just as hard as they are and that I am there to support them. When I see my staff being overwhelmed by their work or other outside pressures I try to step in and do something to lighten the load. It may be only a small thing, like covering a class while they get caught up on something, providing treats in the workroom for them to enjoy during the day or simply a card saying that I see the good job they are doing. All these things, however small, I believe impact an employee's decision to either be here or not (Principal, First Middle School).

The principals had vastly different views concerning their influence on teacher absenteeism. Even though they both expressed some helplessness about curbing absenteeism, the principal from the low absenteeism school did recognize that small gestures which helped build relationships between she and the teachers did impact their decision to take discretionary days off. On the other hand the principal from the high absenteeism school felt that nothing he did impacted teacher attendance and did not indicate that he did anything to improve school environment or develop a more personal relationship with his faculty.

Summary

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to study leadership practices that influence teachers' decisions to be absent from work in high and low absenteeism middle schools in rural Georgia. A mixed method procedure was chosen so as to be able to triangulate the data and provide more validity to the study. By employing survey results as well as interviews with teachers and principals emphasized the common themes that emerged during analysis of the data. The quantitative data was collected by using a 17 item school culture survey, which was administered to middle school teachers and one principal from each of the respective schools. The analysis of the quantitative data found that schools where the teachers felt more positive about the culture of the school the better the attendance of the teachers. Specifically, three areas were examined; Tasks, Processes and Relationships. Teachers indicated that the amount of planning and organizational time allotted to them was very important as well as their ownership of school procedures. Teachers also responded overwhelmingly that they felt that the relationships within the school among teachers, staff and leadership made them enjoy their work thus influencing their choice to attend school each day.

The data that was collected from the qualitative portion of this study were analyzed to describe the leadership practices that influenced teacher's decision to be absent from school for discretionary reasons. To accomplish this, the researcher conducted 60 to 90 minute focus group interviews with teachers and individual interviews with principals. The researcher conducted all focus group sessions and individual interviews at the schools in which the participants worked. All focus groups and individual interviews were conducted using the interview guide designed by the researcher. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriber. When the transcriptions were complete the researcher analyzed the data for possible recurring themes, patterns and noteworthy responses.

The qualitative data for this research study were collected through the use of focus group interviews of teachers and individual interviews of principals. There were two focus groups, one at each school under study, made up of seven teachers each. These teachers were chosen at random from a list of teachers from their respective school. The researcher conducted the focus group interviews as well as the principal interviews and then had them transcribed for analysis. Any common themes, patterns, or noteworthy comments were noted during the analysis. Pseudonyms were given to all participants in order to maintain confidentiality of all participants. The significant findings regarding teachers and principals views with respect to leadership practices influence on teacher absenteeism in the workplace are presented in the text selection form followed by the respondent's pseudonym that was assigned. A discussion of the significance and implications of the findings of this study are included in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on the results of this study. The statistical procedures employed in this study were (a) descriptive statistics (b) t-test analysis, and (c) focus group and individual interview techniques in research. By using a mixed methods approach to the study the researcher endeavored to triangulate the data thereby strengthening the validity and showing a great amount of significance between the responses of all the respondents. This chapter relates the purpose and significance of the study to the conclusions, implications and recommendations. The research question, which served to provide focus and has guided the study, also provided a framework for the discussion in this chapter.

The purpose of this study explored leadership practices that influence teachers' decisions to be absent from the workplace. The researcher used focus group interviews and individual principal interviews for the qualitative portion of the study and a school culture survey questionnaire for the quantitative portion. This researcher attempted to find common themes as well as differences in the responses of teachers at one middle school with low teacher absenteeism and another middle school with high teacher absenteeism. The researcher also attempted to find common themes and differences in the responses between the principals that were interviewed from the two middle schools under study.

The focus group sessions, individual principal interviews and the school attitudinal survey were all conducted late in the 2009- 2010 school year. A series of questions explored what leadership practices influenced teachers decisions to be absent from school for discretionary reasons. Sessions with teachers and principals were audiotape, transcribed and

analyzed to identify common themes. Throughout this method, data were constantly reviewed and sorted to identify common themes.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed in this research project. The quantitative portion of the study involved the administration of a school culture survey questionnaire with seventeen questions relating to three different areas; tasks, processes and relationships. The survey results were then used to gauge the attitude of the teachers within their respective schools. All teachers were given the opportunity to fill out the survey at both schools. The qualitative portion of the study involved focus group interviews with seven teachers from each of the two schools. These participants were chosen at random from a list of teachers and asked to be a part of the focus group. The following overarching research question guided this study: What school leader practices influence teacher attendance?

Throughout the study the researcher found emerging themes that promote the impact that school leader practices have on teacher absence from school. Analysis of the quantitative data indicated that there were significant differences between the two schools based on the way survey questions were answered by the respondents. The three areas of the survey questionnaire, tasks, process, and relationship all showed marked significant differences which were reiterated in the focus group interviews analysis of the qualitative portion of the study. Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed the following themes: (1) Group planning and organizational time was very important to teachers. (2) People want to come to work where they feel empowered and have ownership in the decision making process within the school. (3) Relationships at school among fellow teachers and the leadership team encourage them to attend school if at all possible because they feel they have a responsibility to those people with whom they have a personal relationship. (4) Finally, it was also suggested that there be some discretion and

flexibility of planning time for individuals so that they might not have to miss an entire day of school for an individual appointment off campus.

Conclusions

Conclusions derived from the results of this study include the following:

1. Inquiry into the problem of teacher absenteeism has not been investigated as aggressively as the seriousness of the problem would indicate. School leaders admitted that teacher absenteeism is one of the most serious problems that they dealt with in their work. Teachers understand that their presence in the classroom is essential but that sometimes they just have to take time off to take care of personal business and appointments. The responses from teachers on the school culture survey as well as comments made during the focus group interviews indicated that whether or not teachers feel needed and valued does, indeed, influence their decision to be absence from school for discretionary reasons. Teachers indicated that if more leadership support was present then they would be more willing to be in school each day.

2. Teachers felt that the principals needed to spend more time actually doing real school work. From the in depth focus group interviews the researcher concluded that in schools where the principals are perceived as working just as hard as the teachers the teachers are more inclined not to miss school. When teachers feel that their leaders are not working nearly as hard as they are then they do not make the extra effort to be at school. Teachers felt that principals needed to be much more visible in the trenches with the teachers rather than simply doling out the work that they want accomplished by their faculty and staff.

3. Teachers from both the low absentee school as well as the high absentee school expressed in the focus group interviews many of the same ideas and values concerning teacher

absenteeism. However, the school climate survey showed that teachers who perceived tasks, processes and relationships in a more positive light had lower absenteeism. Teachers realized that each time they were absent from their classrooms, the students are the ones that suffered in the long term. They also indicated that they felt that their presence was important but that when they were overwhelmed with work and felt abandoned by their principal they were more inclined to choose to be absent.

4. The items in the school culture survey concerning planning and organizational time allotment was very telling. Teachers from the low absenteeism school indicated that they were given time during the day to accomplish the assigned tasks and that was very important to them. The survey also indicated that relationships at the school were very good and that those relationships were important often helped them through the difficult times. They indicated that the people at school helped one another and it did influence their decision of whether to be absent from school or not.

5. Young teachers at both schools seemed less concerned than older teachers with being absent from school. This may be because they are not thinking in terms of retirement like the older teachers. Younger teachers did not seem to realize how beneficial those saved days might be upon retirement later.

6. Teachers indicated that if there was more flexibility in the schedule of the day it would certainly prevent as much absenteeism. Teachers from both schools indicated that if they could use their planning time or leave early in the afternoon for an appointment it would cut their days absent tremendously. They felt that since teachers overall work so many hours that are not even recognized that this time would certainly be made up by doing work at home or other school related extracurricular duties.

7. Principals at both low absenteeism and high absenteeism schools seemed to feel helpless about influencing teacher attendance. The surveys, however, suggest that when teachers feel more positive about the culture of their school their absenteeism is affected. Based on the comments made by the principals in the individual interviews they did not seem to see the connection between teacher absenteeism and a more positive school culture.

Discussion of the Research Findings

Teacher absenteeism is a problem for school districts for many reasons. The pressure from No Child Left Behind (2001) for schools to improve student achievement and attendance is a huge part of the picture in recent times. Not only are schools trying to improve student performance but do it with less money than in the past. School districts across the nation have tried various methods to curb teacher absenteeism to no avail.

Miller et al., (2007 & 2008) suggested that teachers do exercise some control over the deliberate placement of days taken off from school and this was supported by the comments made by the members of the focus groups conducted in each of the two middle schools involved in the study. This study focused on teachers perspectives as they relate to the influence that school leaders have on a teacher's decision to be absent for discretionary reasons. The researcher attempted to find commonalties and differences in the responses of teachers in one middle school with low teacher absenteeism and those provided by teachers in another middle school with high teacher absenteeism. The qualitative data exposed more in-depth and insightful descriptions into the teachers thoughts and feelings concerning decisions to be absent from school.

Teachers participating in the focus group stated that they did indeed take days off using an excuse of illness even though they were not genuinely ill. They admitted that they did take

discretionary days off from time to time to take care of things they didn't have time for during the regular work week due to the hours that teachers are required to be in school. In looking at the research question to be answered by this study all of the comments and suggestions made in the focus group sessions were in essence behaviors by leaders that do indeed influence teacher decisions concerning attendance at school.

According to the school culture survey teachers expressed that they valued time to plan together as a team or group as well as have some input into the decisions about how the school will operate. They also stated how important relationships are at the school and how they need to feel a connection to other teacher s as well as their administrators. The teachers in the low absenteeism school had more positive comments to make about these three key themes than did the teachers at the higher absenteeism school.

Effective schools research identified the importance of a strong leader. A strong leader supports the teachers within their school providing the physical and emotional assistance that they need to do a good job. The difference in being a good or great organization is the people that make up the organization and good leaders support the people that make up their organization. The quality of the education that a child receives is directly related to the effectiveness of the teacher (Haycock, 2005). To be effective the teacher must be in the classroom which in turn creates an effective school overall (Clotfelter, 2007). The quality of the teacher's contributions not only relates to student learning but is also the ultimate means through which schools are able to get many other resources necessary for the functioning of the school. These resources for success are obtained through greater teacher effort and involvement and might include such important aspects as greater parental involvement as well as support and assistance for their child's learning (Clark et al., 1984; Schneider, 1985; Epstein, 1986,

Kyriacou, 2001). To be effective, a teacher must be in school and actively working for the good

of the school and the students. Teachers in the current study acknowledged how important their

presence is at school.

Teachers reiterated over and over that if they felt their leader was working hard then they

would in turn work hard also. Teachers seemed very comfortable sharing their thoughts and

feelings concerning the involvement of the leaders at their school especially when it concerned

their perceptions of how hard their leaders worked. Teachers at the low absenteeism school

described their leaders as ones who would pitch in and help with whatever tasks there were to do

whereas the teachers from the high absenteeism school described their leader as not working as

hard and often seeming to have nothing to do during the day. They described them as visiting

with one another, talking and laughing while the teachers scurried about trying to attend required

meetings and do the work that had been assigned to them as well as planning lessons and

teaching. These perceptions, by teachers, of lack of support from the leadership team combined

with the pressure to perform their duties well contribute to job stress. Constant stress and strain

on the job contributes to teacher burnout which in turn results in increased absenteeism (Hilton et

al., 2009).

Stress has been cited as one of the primary reasons that teachers leave the field of

teaching and thus it is reasonable to assume that it also contributes heavily to the absenteeism

rates for teachers as well (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Bruno (2002), Wegge et al., (2005) and

Holton (2002) all found that school environment had a profound effect on teacher attendance at

school and the school environment may be positively or negatively affected by the actions are

lack thereof of school leaders.

Implications

The findings of this research study add to the body of research concerning the differences between the perspectives of the teachers in the high teacher absenteeism school and the perspectives of the teachers in the low absenteeism school with respect to what leadership practices actually influence teacher absenteeism. This section will discuss the implications for further research and implications for practitioners in the field of education. The purpose of the study was to investigate leadership practices that influence teachers decisions to be absent from school for discretionary reasons. The two middle schools examined in this study provided valuable insight into the inner workings of the schools and to what degree that influenced absenteeism. Based on these findings the following should be considered:

1. Teachers must have both emotional and physical support from their principals in addition to a feeling of ownership in the operation of the school. Based on the information provided in the school culture survey as well as the in-depth focus group interviews, it is recommended that school leaders look at ways to better support their teachers in both physical and emotional ways by providing opportunities for relationships to be initiated and developed among teachers and leaders.

2. Examine flexibility of the school day to accommodate teachers and staff so that they might not have to be absent from school for an entire day. The study implied that many of these practices were already in place in the school with low absenteeism while the school with high absenteeism was lacking in these areas.

3. Teacher absenteeism is important and has an impact not only on students but on other teachers as well. Teacher attendance impacts student attendance as well as student achievement.

Recommendations

This section offers recommendations and implicates possible issues that could affect policy decisions by the school district administrators regarding teacher absenteeism and substitute teachers. It is recommended that these individuals and groups consider the information presented in this study to focus on the present and future status of teachers' absenteeism in school districts in rural Georgia.

Based on a thorough study of the quantitative and qualitative data collected in this study the findings supported the need for further study of teacher absenteeism and leadership practices that influences those decisions. As rural school districts struggle to meet budget demands and maintain student achievement goals additional studies may provide more insight into what practices have the most influence. Positive practices by leaders would provided the benefit of having more teachers present in the classroom thus saving money on substitute teachers while increasing student learning by having the teacher present in the classroom rather than a substitute. The following are additional recommendations for further research:

1. Due to the fact that this study was limited to only two middle schools in rural Georgia further qualitative studies which include high schools and elementary schools should be conducted to compare their perceptions of leadership practices that influence absenteeism within their individual school.

2. Studies may be done to test the relationship between teacher perceptions of leaders and leadership quality that creates a more positive learning environment.

3. Studies may be done to test the relationship between teacher input and job satisfaction as it relates to tasks, processes, and relationships.

4. Future studies could examine policy to determine if there is any flexibility within the daily school schedule.

This study extends the knowledge of a subject that has far reaching implications but that has been studied very little. Despite the relevance of the findings, many questions still remain unanswered about teacher absenteeism. Research confirms that leadership practices do indeed influence teachers in their decisions to be absent from school and also provides some suggestions that may improve the overall attendance of teachers should these practices be implemented and the overall benefits to the school will be overwhelming and far reaching.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

A summary and detailed discussion of this study has been provided as it relates to relevant literature. Implications of the findings for further research were presented and discussed. This research study extends the knowledge of teacher absenteeism a subject that has not received a tremendous amount of recognition and study up to this point.

One school had better teacher attendance than the other, and it appeared to be directly related to a more positive school culture and more positive school leadership. Principals sometimes underestimate a positive school culture's influence on teacher attendance at school.

It is very important that leadership teams review the results of this study. Leaders that are already in place in schools are in positions where their leadership practices impact teachers every day. The findings of this study will add to their understanding of leadership practices that influence teacher attendance and specific perspectives concerning work place absenteeism.

With school budgets strained to the limit and with even more budget cuts on the horizon, school leaders are seeking out ways to save money while still maintaining the same quality of education for the students. Substitute teachers to replace classroom teachers when they are absent are a huge portion of a school's budget allotment. Millions of dollars are spent each year throughout the United States on substitute teachers that might have been saved by making the effort to influence teachers who might be making a decision to be absent for discretionary reasons.

Teacher absenteeism affects other teachers in the school by causing them to have to give up planning time to cover classrooms when substitutes cannot be found as well as making plans for teachers who may be absent and did not leave plans that the substitute teacher can actually carry out. They should review the findings and may be able to identify specific areas in which to improve their practice so as to positively influence teachers' decisions concerning discretionary absence.

One powerful point that was brought out in this research project was that school leaders and what they do have a tremendous influence and impact on the people that make up the organization of the school. That fact was supported by all the members of the focus groups and respondents to the school culture survey. Time and again, it was made evident that schools are not buildings but people. The people that make up the school and the relationships within that school are the cornerstone for everything else that goes on whether it is attendance by teachers and students, student achievement or teacher achievement.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL CORRESPONDENCE

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Phone: 912-478-0843 Veazey Hall 2021
P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719 IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu Statesboro, GA 30460
To: Allison Owen
P.O. Box 292
Danielsville, GA 30633
CC: Charles E. Patterson
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College
From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)
Date: June 3, 2010
Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research
After a review of your proposed research project numbered H10363 and titled "Leadership Practices that
Influence Teacher Attendance in a Low and High Teacher Absentee School," it appears that (1) the
research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities
involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to 120 subjects.
Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to
notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.
This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there
have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an
additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant
adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the
event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must
notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended
application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required
to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.
Sincerely, (Signer's identity unknown) Signed by Eleanor Haynes
<ehaynes@georgiasouthern.edu> Time: 2010.06.03 14:13:55 -04'00'
Eleanor Haynes   Compliance Officer

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY WITH COVER LETTER

Task	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always or almost always
1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The planning/organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
Process			3		
6. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.	1	2	3	4	5
7. School members are interdependent and value each other.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The school staff is empowered to make instruction decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
11. People work here because they enjoy it and choose to be here.	1	2	3	4	5
Relationships					
12. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Our school reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Our schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Our school supports and appreciates sharing of new ideas by members of our school.	1	2	3	4	5
17. There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.	1	2	3	4	5
Subtotals					
Total =					

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This data will help me complete part of my research for my dissertation. It will only take a few minutes to complete and your input will be very valuable.

Thanks,

Allison Owen

Survey Adapted from:

Phillips, G. (1993). *The school-classroom culture audit.* Vancouver, B.C. Eduserv, British Columbia School Trustees Publishing. Retrieved 4/29/2010 from: http://www.nxds.org/library/publications/jsd/wagner233.cfm

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Educators,

I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University pursuing a doctoral degree in Education Administration. As part of graduation requirements, I plan to conduct a research project regarding teacher absenteeism at two middle schools in Northeast, Georgia. Due to the current No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and high stakes testing, raising student's achievement has placed importance on attendance for students but also for teachers. When teachers are present students learn and attend better, when they are absent learning and attendance suffers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore what leadership practices might influence teacher attendance at school. It is my desire as an educator to share these results with other leaders so as to improve teacher attendance at school. The results of the study will provide educators with descriptive data regarding leadership practices that influence teacher attendance and will be available upon request.

You have been selected at random from a list of teachers to participate in the research project. In order to answer the research question, focus groups with teachers and individual interviews with principals have been planned to last sixty to ninety minutes in length. I will be contacting the participants to logistically determine a timetable for the focus group interviews. There will be no information collected that will identify participants or jeopardize confidentiality. Please be informed that all responses are absolutely confidential and cassette tapes and transcribed information will be destroyed upon completion of the project. The research project is voluntary and participants have the right to end their participation at anytime by communicating to the person in charge. Participants may also decline from answering any interview questions that they do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep with your records. You may also contact the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843. Thank you for your assistance in this study of teacher absenteeism. Your time and willingness to participate is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Allison T. Owen

Title of Project: Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Attendance in a Low and High Attendance School

Principal Investigator: Allison T. Owen

Other Investigator(s): None

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Linda Arthur, P.O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA 30460
912-681-0697 or <u>larthur@georgiasouthern.edu</u>

_____   _____

Participants Signature   Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

_____   _____

Investigator Signature   Date

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCRIPT AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus Group Script for Facilitator

Interviewer:

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. I want you to know how much I appreciate your participation in this discussion. My name is Allison Owen and I will be the facilitator of today's focus group discussion.

I am a currently a teacher and a graduate student at Georgia Southern University. I am currently working on a dissertation to complete my degree. The purpose of our discussion is to learn more about teachers' use of leave time and to examine leadership practices that influence teacher's decisions when it comes to discretionary absence.

Discretionary absences, for the purpose of this study, are defined as those absences taken by teachers that are not due to personal illness or that of a family member, some type of jury or legal duties or bereavement.

I am interested in your personal opinions on the topic we discuss. There is no right or wrong answers here and we are not trying to achieve a consensus; so please feel free to share your ideas even if they differ from what others have said. Also, keep in mind that I am just as interested in negative comments as positive comments.

We will use your feedback to facilitate our discussion so as to learn what leadership practices actually do influence teacher's decisions to be absent from school or not to be absent from school. I feel that it is important to get the perspectives of teachers and administrators as I examine this important issue of discretionary absence in the workplace.

Our discussion should last about 60 to 90 minutes.

Let us get started by going around the table and introducing yourselves and what grade(s) subject(s) you teach.

I will now ask you some questions about absence from school.

Questions

1. Other than illness why are teachers absent from school?

2. Is there anything that school leadership can do to deter discretionary teacher absence?

3. Why do some teachers have high rates of discretionary absenteeism and others have low rates of discretionary absenteeism?

4. What are effective deterrents of teacher discretionary absence?

5. What leadership practices have been considered in your district to deter teacher discretionary absence but not put into effect?

6. In all your years in education tell me about a school where there was low teacher discretionary absence and what you attributed that to.

7. What leadership practices impact discretionary absence of teachers?

8. What are some leadership practices that you believe would influence teacher's decisions to be absent from school?

9. What are some leadership practices that you believe would influence a teacher's decision to be present at school rather than take a discretionary day of leave?

10. What are some leadership practices that would create an environment where you would not take discretionary days off?

APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW GUIDE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Script for Individual Principal Interviews

My name is Allison Owen and I would like to thank you so much for meeting with me today. I want you to know how much I appreciate your participation in this interview.

I am a currently a teacher and a graduate student at Georgia Southern University. I am currently working on a dissertation to complete my degree. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about teachers' use of leave time and to examine leadership practices that influence teacher's decisions when it comes to discretionary absence.

Discretionary absences, for the purpose of this study, are defined as those absences taken by teachers that are not due to personal illness or that of a family member, some type of jury or legal duties or bereavement.

I am interested in your personal opinions on the topic we discuss. There is of course no right or wrong answers just personal opinion and what you know based on personal experience with this topic.

I will use your input to help me understand teacher absenteeism from a leadership perspective.

Our discussion should last about 60 to 90 minutes.

Interview questions:

1. Other than illness why are teachers absent from school?

2. Is there anything that school leadership can do to deter discretionary teacher absences?

3. Why do some teachers have high rates of discretionary absenteeism and others have low

    rates of discretionary absenteeism?

4. What are effective deterrents of teacher discretionary absence?

5. What leadership practices have been considered in your district to deter teacher

    discretionary absence but not put into effect?

6. In all of your years in education, tell me about a school where there was low teacher

    discretionary absenteeism and what you attributed that to.

7. What leadership practices impact discretionary absence of teachers?

8. What are some leadership practices that you believe would influence teacher's decision to be absent from school?

9. What are some leadership practices that you believe would influence a teacher's decision to be present at school rather than take a discretionary day of leave?

10. What are some leadership practices that would create an environment where you would not take discretionary days off?

APPENDIX   F

ITEM ANALYSIS

Item Analysis for Focus Group and Principal Individual Interview Questions

Research Question: What leadership practices influence teacher attendance at school?

Focus Group/Individual Interview Questions	Source
1. Other than illness why are teachers absent from school?	Clotfelter (2007), Pitkoff (2003)
2. Is there anything that school leadership can do to deter discretionary teacher absences?	Keller (2008), Pitkoff (2003)
3. Why do some teachers have high rates of discretionary absenteeism and others have low rates of discretionary absenteeism?	Keller (2008), Spiller (2002),
4. What are effective deterrents of teach discretionary absences?	Bruno (2002), Miller et al. (2007 & 2008), Wegge et al.(2007)
5. What leadership practices have been considered in your district to deter teacher discretionary absence but not put into effect?	Bower (2001), Miller et al.(2007 & 2008),
6. In all your years in education, tell me about a school where there was low teacher discretionary absenteeism and what you attributed that to.	Clotfelter et al. (2007), Duflo & Hanna (2005) Kay (2002), Miller et al. (2007 & 2008)
7. What leadership practices impact discretionary absence of teachers?	Bruno (2002), Burton et al. (2002), Podursky (2003)
8. What are some leadership practices that you believe would influence teachers' decision to be absent from school?	Bruno (2002), Miller et al. (2007 & 2008), Pitkoff (2003)
9. What are some leadership practices that you believe would influence a teacher's decision to be present at school rather than take a discretionary day of leave?	Burton et al. (2002), Miller et al. (2007 & 2008), Nir & Kranot (2006)
10. What are some leadership practices that would create an environment where you would not take discretionary days off?	Kyriacou (2001), Nir & Kranot (2006)