

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Presented in chapter 2 is a synthesis of research that supports the evaluation of the attendance policy and attendance program of Newport News Public Schools. Included in the chapter is a historical overview of attendance, the importance of attendance, overview of Newport News Public Schools, theoretical framework, causes or predictors of student absenteeism, descriptions of related attendance policies/ programs, and a review of perceptions and attitudes about attendance policies/programs as indicated by literature review.

#### Historical Overview

Early homesteading laws allowed the settlers free land on which to build schools. Schooling was perceived as the key to success for individuals and to the excellence of society (Mitchell, 1993). Free and compulsory education came to England and Wales following the Elementary Education Acts of

1870 and 1876, although not always on a full time basis. The Education Act of 1918 finally abolished half time schooling, and made elementary education entirely free and compulsory until the end of the term after the child's fourteenth birthday. Nevertheless, in most parts of the United States the problem of illegal absence dates from 1876 (Galloway, 1985). In the 1850s urban schools suffered from an extremely high turnover of students. Many students were needed at home to do many of the chores, especially if they lived on a farm. Other students worked outside of the home to help support the family. Poor attendance was a problem to teachers and parents well before school attendance became compulsory (Pallister, 1969). Pallister notes that enthusiasm for education varied with the standards of the school; good schools quickly obtaining the support of parents, and similarly bad schools, least in the eyes of parents, quickly losing support.

School administrators were immediately faced with new concerns considering that in 1900 only 6 percent of Americans had a diploma (Wise, 1994; Kay, 1991). It is clear that attendance rates varied little between 1904 and 1938, except in 1920 when lower average attendance followed the social upheaval of the First World War. Galloway noted that there is little evidence that attendance rates over the last ten to fifteen years (1970-1985) differ very much from those earlier in the century (Galloway, 1985). Even with the increased

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attendance and the increased graduation rates over the last 100 years, education is relatively the same. A glaring example of this is the release of students for farm work in extremely industrialized society. Our culture has changed but the reasons for excused absences have not changed (Wise, 1994).

School attendance was a problem before education became free and compulsory, and based on the researcher's knowledge and experience as an educator, it has continued to be one ever since. The researcher notes that attendance figures can be interpreted in different ways. There is little evidence that school attendance rates have changed noticeably throughout the twentieth century.

### Importance of Attendance

Government officials, teachers' groups, and individual parents all have voiced their concerns over the need to develop policies and practices to counteract the problems facing our nation's schools today such as the dropout rate, drug abuse, and declining education performance (Bernstein, 1990). Poor school attendance arouses strong feelings in teachers, parents, members of the educational support services, educational administrators, politicians, and pupils. These strong feelings are expressed in different and often

contradictory ways, depending on the individual's own perspective (Galloway, 1985).

The statistics related to school absenteeism are staggering. Each school day, 2,500,000 students are reported absent from school. The dropout rate is estimated at 27 percent nationally and over 45 percent in some cities. The 27 percent dropout rate equates to 65 busloads of students who leave United States schools each week and do not return. In a year's time, 700,000 students will be lost. In two years, the number will exceed one million (Person, 1990).

The Virginia Department of Education has created a system for better and more accountable schools through what is now called the Outcome Accountability Project (OAP). This program establishes the criteria for how schools and school divisions will be held accountable for meeting the commitment of improving learning for all. The data from the OAP provides a framework for analyzing the school district by breaking the whole into some of its parts.

The attendance data for secondary students provided by the OAP for the State of Virginia indicates that 66 percent of students in grades 9-12 during the school year '95-'96 were absent 10 days or less from school. The OAP data further lists Newport News Public Schools as having 55 percent of its grades 9-12 students absent 10 days or less from school (OAP Report, 1997). The school philosophy, in general, is one that stresses to teachers, pupils, and parents the importance of

regular school attendance. This is because it is the belief that only through regular school attendance can students progress academically at a successful rate (Jett & Platt, 1979). Attendance is part of a pupil's cumulative record. It is important that good school attendance habits be established for later years when pupils seek employment (Jett & Platt, 1979). Jett and Platt conclude that attendance and its importance should be taught to students. Basic to that philosophy is the belief that poor student attendance and truancy are some of the first signs of decay of a school and school system. Therefore, it is incumbent upon educators to do all they can to promote good school attendance habits among their pupils.

Anyone who has skipped or had to repeat a grade, has been placed in or excluded from a special program, or has been denied academic credit because of absences knows the importance of local school policies. While scholarly attention has tended to focus on federal and state education policy, those who attend and work in schools realize that their lives can be affected greatly by policy made at the school and district level (Duke and Canady, 1991).

Guba (1984) identifies eight distinct conceptions of policy. They include the following:

Policy is an assertion of intents or goals.

Policy is the accumulated standing decisions of a governing body, by which it regulates,

controls, promotes, services, and otherwise influences matters within its sphere of authority.

Policy is guide to discretionary action.

Policy is a strategy undertaken to solve or ameliorate a problem.

Policy is sanctioned behavior.

Policy is a norm of conduct characterized by consistency and regularity in some substantive action area.

Policy is the output of the policy-making system.

Policy is the effect of the policy-making and policy-implementing system as it is explained by the client.

The researcher believes that each of the above conceptions by Guda has some value for the study of school district and school policy. Duke and Canady (1991) refer to school policy as any official action taken at the district or school level for the purpose of encouraging or requiring consistency and regularity. They further state that the definition implies intentionality on the part of those developing policy.

Pizzo (1983) refers to school policy as fitting into an ecology of public policies. In other words, where the operation of public schools is concerned, a range of policy

sources can be identified. Pizzo further states that policies are derived from Congress, the Department of Education, the courts, state legislatures, intermediate agencies, school boards, and school-based personnel. To understand educational policy in the United States, it is necessary to understand each of these policymaking entities and the relationships among them.

Duke and Canady (1991) identify three reasons to study policy. First, many of the education policies likely to have a direct effect on the lives of students, parents, and teachers are local school policies. A state legislature may pass legislation concerning the allocation of resources for education, but the legislation does not become meaningful for clients, patrons, and employees until local policy decisions determine how the available resources will be utilized. Second, schools serving similar groups of students can differ greatly in areas such as student achievement, attendance, dropped rate, teacher morale, and school climate. The third reason to study school policies according to Duke and Canady (1991) is the fact that the number of locally developed policies is likely to increase in the future. Interest in shared decision making, teacher empowerment, school-site management, and the restructuring of schools suggests that the locus of educational policymaking may be shifting.

Duke and Canady point out that ample justification exists for the systematic study of local school policy. Such

study promises to shed light on school effectiveness, the process of school improvement, and local control of education.

In addition, Duke and Canady state as interest in at-risk students grows, questions need to be raised regarding the extent to which local school policies enhance or impede these youngsters' chances for success.

So frequent and so complicated have problems related to student attendance become that many school systems consider them to be separate from other discipline problems. This fact may be explained, in part, by the relationship between school attendance and state aid to education and the link between attendance and a student's constitutional right to an education. Attendance rules include those pertaining to unexcused absence from school and class, tardiness, and leaving school without permission. Since, by law, students must attend school up to the state-mandated school-leaving age, attendance-related issues for local policymakers do not concern rules so much as the consequences for absenteeism and attendance practices (Duke and Canady, 1991). In recent years, school policymakers concerned about the relationship between the time spent in school and student learning have begun to condone denying course credit and awarding failing grades for chronic absenteeism. The number of absences resulting in denial of credit or a failing grade usually ranges from 10 to 24 in a semester (Sedlak et al, 1986).

According to Eastwold (1989), the truant is likely to be



a boy and to be in the eleventh or twelfth grade. The student is truant more often as the year progresses, and skip some classes more often than others. He says he skips because he dislikes the classes or considers them to be too boring to attend. However, he does not necessarily intend to drop out of school. This student may have a job, or may have been asked by parents to work at home or care for children.

Rood (1989) views absenteeism as a constant interruption of the learning process. The more absences a student accumulates, the less he or she can be expected to adequately participate in and understand classroom activities. Rood continues by stating that it is no secret that the skill levels of many high school students have declined while absenteeism continues to increase. He writes that on an average Monday, many urban high schools have an absence rate of more than 30 percent. It is common for many secondary students to miss 20 to 90 days of school in an academic year. Rood (1989), Levanto (1975), and Hegner (1987) have identified the following characteristics of non-attenders:

Age - absenteeism increases as a student progresses through high school.

Gender - in the first three years of high school, girls will have higher rates of absenteeism than boys will.

Race - minority students are more likely to be

absent than whites.

School success - students with higher grades and/or IQs have better attendance.

Program - students in college preparatory programs are present more often than those in vocational, general, or business programs.

Family setting - students from a one-parent family have poorer attendance rates than those from the more traditional family.

School involvement - participants in a variety of co-curricular activities will generally be in attendance more often than will non-participants.

Eastwold (1989) indicates that some researchers believe that truancy problems can be blamed on ineffective school attendance policies. In some cases the costs in time and energy to enforce compulsory education statutes seem to outweigh the benefits. As a result schools will develop policies that devote the most energy to those students expected to have the best chance of success.

Eastwold (1989) indicates that the burden of reducing truancy rates rests primarily with schools, and a message that can be drawn from the research is that schools can affect truancy rate whenever they give high priority to effective attendance policies. Eastwold identified the most effective policies as those that have the following elements:

Expectations and outcomes are clear and well publicized

Policies are followed consistently by everyone

Students are held responsible for their actions.

Parents are involved.

If revision of the district/building attendance policy seems a necessary part of the solution, there is no dearth of literature dealing with the subject. School authorities generally utilize one of these types of policies:

Policies that attempt to provide incentives for good attendance.

Policies that dispense punitive, administrative consequences, such as detentions or suspensions.

Restrictive and punitive policies that penalize students academically by withholding credit or lowering grades when a number of predetermined absences is reached (Rood, 1989).

#### Overview of Newport News Public Schools

Based upon the attendance reports of Newport News Public Schools, student daily attendance has averaged 92 percent over the past 10 years. Newport News Public Schools attendance data for 1995-1996 reveal secondary student attendance 11 percent below the state average of 66 percent. The 1995-1996 dropout rate for the school division was 1

percent higher than the reported state percentage of 5 percent. Newport News Public Schools minority dropout rate 1995-1996 equals the state's 7 percent. Over the past five years attendance, the dropout rate, and the minority dropout rate have been worse than the state average (OAP, 1996).

The school board, superintendent, central office administrators, building based administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders have kept the issue of student attendance at the forefront of their agenda throughout the years. However the problem that faces a majority of the school divisions around the country has not escaped Newport News Public Schools.

In 1996 the combination of appointed school board members and elected school board members listened to small groups of teachers and interested community members regarding the development of an attendance policy more stringent than the current attendance policy of Newport News Public Schools. The small group of teachers wrote school board members letters in support of a more stringent attendance policy. The lobbying by a small group of teachers and the interest by certain appointed board members prompted many conversations between board members, the superintendent, and administrative staff.

The superintendent charged the assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services with the task of developing a draft attendance policy and attendance program

that could be given to the school board for possible consideration.

The assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services formulated an attendance committee to assist his staff in writing a draft attendance policy that could be brought before the school board for consideration. The attendance committee consisted of school board members, central office administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders. The attendance committee members were given the charge of exploring a policy that would hold students accountable for missing classes or school. The charge was approved by the superintendent and the assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services. The attendance committee submitted a draft attendance policy and attendance program to the school board for their consideration.

The school board discussed the draft attendance policy and program many times during school board work sessions before adopting the proposed attendance policy. The attendance policy and program were adopted by the board in 1996 for full implementation during the 1996-1997 school year. After the school board approved the proposed attendance policy, funding the attendance program became a priority issue. During the budget process, the overall attendance budget was reduced to assist the superintendent with the task given to him by the city manager to lower the

school division budget. With reduced funding for the attendance program, the assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services submitted a recommendation to the superintendent to reallocate available attendance resources to the high school. The superintendent accepted the recommendation.

The recommendation was submitted by the superintendent to the school board for board approval. The school board approved the reallocation of attendance resources for the 1996-97 school year.

The assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services reallocated seven attendance officers to the high schools from the elementary and middle schools. Each high school was allocated an attendance clerk with the responsibility of managing the attendance program data collection.

During the summer of 1996 the appointed school board members' term of office ended. The appointed school board members were replaced by elected school board members. Later during the summer months, the superintendent of Newport News Public Schools decided to accept a position in another school division. The elected school board appointed an interim superintendent who later was appointed as superintendent of schools.

The school board wanted to know if the new attendance policy and attendance program made a difference in the

attendance of high school student attendance. The newly appointed superintendent struggled with providing the school board with a definite answer because the attendance data had been analyzed only by looking at raw data collection. The superintendent requested the assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services to provide him with a data analysis that could provide information to the school board. This data could determine if the new attendance policy and attendance program had effected positively high school attendance.

The assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services retired before the data analysis of attendance was completed. The superintendent appointed an individual from outside of the school division as assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services.

The newly appointed assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services was asked by the superintendent to provide him with data that could assist him in explaining the effectiveness of the new attendance policy and attendance program. The newly appointed assistant superintendent could not generate a study done by the school system on its attendance policy or attendance program. To assist the school division, the superintendent and assistant superintendent of administrative and alternative services agreed that a study of the attendance

policy and attendance program was needed to provide data for utilization by the school division(See Appendix C).

### Theoretical Framework

Previous research studies by De Leonibus (1978) suggest that student absenteeism and lack of motivation are intertwined. Educators have begun to investigate the theories of motivation in order to apply them to create policies in an attempt to reduce the problem of student absenteeism (De Leonibus, 1978).

Motivation is usually considered as being related to human needs, which in turn motivates behavior. The classical management view of motivation is based on the belief that people need money, so if the employer pays them well, they will be motivated to work hard. Conversely, those who are lazy are penalized by receiving a lower pay rate. The premise behind this theory is that a carrot (incentive of extra pay) and stick (penalty of lower pay) will motivate the worker to do the job well (Owens, 1987).

As further explained by Owens (1987), once the lowest order of needs on the hierarchy is met, a higher order need appears and the individual has a desire to satisfy that need. The hierarchy of needs as used in Maslow's theory of motivation are as follows: basic physiological needs (food, water, shelter); security and safety; social affiliation;



esteem; and self-actualization (Owens, 1987).

Ames (1990) views motivation as a process aimed at creating motivational thought patterns that contribute to self-regulating action. Students are motivated for different reasons. Motivation isn't synonymous with achievement, but a positive feeling of self-worth that is a strong motivational construct. Ames defines self-worth as an expectation or belief that one is capable of performing a specific task, organizing and carrying out required behaviors in a situation.

Glasser (1990) in his work on what he deems to be the quality school has created what he refers to as the control theory. This theory is based on the belief that no one can make anyone do anything--it is the job of the manager (teacher) to make it easy for the workers (students) to see a strong connection between what they are asked to do and what they believe to be worth doing. Glasser makes an industrial analogy between school and the workplace, stating that school should be made relevant and interesting because bored workers won't produce high quality work.

According to Glasser (1990), there are two different management styles; boss-management and lead-management. Boss-management style is based on coercion and lead-management on cooperative action. Effective teachers manage students without coercion. Coercion begets coercion, which turns the students into adversaries thus reducing the

opportunity to motivate.

Glasser (1990) further explains his control theory by stating that all motivation comes from within oneself and not from outside. However, what happens outside has a lot to do with what one chooses to do, but the outside events don't cause the behavior. All one gets from the outside is information.

Shanker (1990) adapted the principles of economics to the theories of student motivation. The free market theory (capitalism) and the theory of the planned or command economy (communism), according to Shanker, can be utilized in directing people toward action. Shanker further stated that school incentives are aligned incorrectly and teachers are not rewarded for improving student outcomes. The students have only one incentive--a diploma. Shanker writes that incentives do work; they are a major motivator of the behavior of individuals and systems. School should be designed to use competition and teamwork to achieve established goals. Shanker writes just as in a free market system, this will result in a high level of production.

All of the motivational theories discussed showed the common elements of the importance of intrinsic sense of belonging and self-worth to motivation. Individuals need to feel a sense of achievement and are motivated by extrinsic acknowledgements of this achievement (Person, 1990).

### Causes or Predictors of Student Absenteeism

According to Woog (1992), three theoretical categories identify the causes or predictors of student attendance specifically are: those which identify the cause of the absenteeism with the student or his/her family characteristics, those which identify the student's social or economic environment as the causal factor, and those which examine the effect of various school characteristics as influential in the absentee rate of students.

The 1977 Educational Research Service report identifies age, IQ, achievement, religion, and co-curricular activities as associated with various rates of absenteeism. Older students, students living with one parent, students with lower IQ scores, students with lower grades, students who did not participate in school activities, and non-Jewish students all were noted to have higher absentee rates than did their counterparts. Galloway (1985) reports that frequently absent students have a fear of teachers or specific subjects. He also reports that the families of absent students were noted as scoring much higher on measurements of familial stress. Both of Galloway's reports identified an unfavorable parental attitude toward school as a significant influence on the absence rate of their children.

Galloway's (1985) research showed excessive absentees

as students whose families had experienced financial problems or whose parents experienced poor health. Galloway suggests that the poor economic condition of the family may generate a negative attitude toward school either because the family needs the student to work and contribute to the family income or because education is not perceived to be an avenue to increased economic status.

The largest factor in the average daily attendance of a school is generated from influences which occur independently of the school's organizational or attendance policy characteristics (Petzko 1990). Petzko's research concluded that student's absenteeism is related to familial or cultural characteristics.

School climate and organization characteristics of the school have also been suggested as predictive factors in student absenteeism (Woog 1992). The Education Research Services Report (1977) suggests that staff/student relationship, quality of instruction, curriculum standards, and attendance procedures may affect absenteeism. Duke and Meckel (1980) studied two California high schools and identified five organizational variables potentially related to student attendance. Duke and Meckel conclude that division of labor, micro-level decision making, rewards and sanctions, macro-level decision making, training, and selection play a large part in the cause of attendance problems at the two schools.

An investigation by Greene (1963) attempted to determine if a significant difference existed between students having favorable and unfavorable attendance records and whether absenteeism varied significantly between economically advantaged and disadvantaged school communities. A variety of assessment instruments were used to compare the top and bottom 10 percent of attendance in two economically distinct high schools. Greene found that in both schools favorable attenders earned consistently higher marks than unfavorable attenders. In the economically disadvantaged school, favorable attendance was associated reliably with high IQ scores, high socio-economic status, and parental opinion of the school. Greene concluded that absenteeism is a behavior which is individually symptomatic of an unfavorable adjustment between the learner and the educational and social environment in which he/she is functioning.

#### Description of Related Attendance Policies/Programs

The decisions that are made when attendance policies are formed and the administering of these policies sometimes makes the idea of compulsory attendance an expensive one (Woog, 1992). Woog further suggests that administrators are confronted frequently by differing philosophies of teachers as they try to enforce attendance policies in a consistent

manner. Teachers who do not feel a need to state, review, and implement age-appropriate attendance expectations make the implementation and administration of an attendance policy difficult for administrators. Woog (1992) reports that students also will not comply with policies. Woog further reports that rewards and/or consequences used in the attendance policies can be adjusted and improved in an attempt to reduce school attendance problems.

Attendance policies address excused and unexcused absences and truancy. Numerous school district policies have a grade or course credit consequence for unexcused attendance. Academic sanctions deny the offender course credit or grade after a number of unexcused absences have been collected and deemed excessive.

Bredahl (1981) discusses the effects of a new attendance policy in a rural school of 540 students. Students earned a credit if they satisfactorily completed course requirements and if they had regular attendance. If students were absent for more than 15 days, they would not receive credit for the course. Bredahl (1981) reports that the absence rate was reduced by 30 percent. The results of the implementation showed a decrease in the failure rate and also an increase in the attendance rate.

Suprina (1979) reported that there was a drastic decline in the amount of class cutting as a result of the

implementation of an attendance policy that withdrew a student from a class after three unexcused absences. Suprina (1979) discussed another policy which instituted a mandatory failing grade upon the seventh unexcused absence in a quarter. Suprina explained that parents were informed after the third, sixth, and seventh absences. Also a review board was established for appeal purposes. Suprina (1979) reports that the new policy implementation led to attendance being increased on an average of six additional school days per student, with failing students gaining an average of 10 school days.

In the fall of 1974 a West Chicago high school established attendance as a top priority in the school. Daily calls were made to parents on all absences. Disciplinary consequences were initiated towards any student who had an unverified absence. Incentives were established for good attendance, including use of a student lounge, an unscheduled class period, off-campus lunch, and early dismissal. Attendance was charted and weekly meetings were held with all personnel involved in the attendance procedures (DuFours, 1983). Attendance increased from 87 percent in 1974 to 97 percent in 1982. DuFours (1983) further reports that improvement in attendance appeared to improve climate, attitude, and achievement.

#### Perceptions/Attitudes of Attendance

The performance or effectiveness of parents is affected by varying family conditions, the changing structure, mobility of family and poor socio-economic circumstances. However, even where two parents are present in the home, they may not be effective parents. The character of the parents themselves, their family attitudes and attitudes towards their children, especially in the exercise of parenting skills, and their attitude towards and involvement in school, especially in support for the child, convey strong messages (Harte, 1995).

The parents' skills in the home and their attitudes towards the child in the school and towards school in general are linked to attendance performance. Parents of students with low attendance rates are often described as being only nominally interested in school, as rarely inquiring about studies, as never budgeting home study time, as fearing school and as avoiding teacher-parent interviews (Harte, 1995).

### Summary

An important aspect of students' access to education is the amount of time actually spent in the classroom. When students are absent from school, arrive late, or cut class, they are reducing their opportunities to learn. Furthermore, when students disrupt classes by being late or



frequently absent, they interfere with other students' opportunities to learn. Perhaps most importantly, the habits of consistent and on-time attendance are habits that will serve young people well in their future work lives (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

The literature described the history of attendance in the public school system while validating the importance of good school attendance. The literature continued by describing a clear picture of attendance issues in Newport News Public Schools followed by theoretical frameworks, and causes or predictors of students' absenteeism. The literature concluded with a description of related attendance policies/programs and perceptions and attitudes of school attendance.

Chapter Three will describe the methodology used in this evaluation study.