

Students' Perceptions of the Causes  
of Truancy and Interventions  
to Reduce Truancy

by

Kevin J. Kampmann

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Masters of Science Degree  
in

Guidance and Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



Dr. Denise Zirkle Brouillard

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

July, 2007

**The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, WI**

**Author:** Kampmann, Kevin J.

**Title:** *Students' Perceptions of the Causes of Truancy and  
Interventions to Reduce Truancy*

**Graduate Degree/ Major:** MS Guidance and Counseling

**Research Adviser:** Dr. Denise Zirkle Brouillard

**Month/Year:** July, 2007

**Number of Pages:** 53

**Style Manual Used:** American Psychological Association, 5<sup>th</sup> edition

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify high school students' perceptions of the underlying causes of truancy and the possible interventions aimed at reducing truancy in their school. A survey was completed by 98 subjects comprised of male and female students in 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in a central Wisconsin high school. The results of the study indicated several underlying causes to truancy such as problems with school staff, difficult school work, behavior problems, and parents who do not care if their child misses school. These results support the research that truancy has multiple causes including school factors, family factors, individual factors, and community factors. As a result of the large number of underlying causes of a truancy, a multimodal and collaborative intervention strategy is needed to reduce truancy. The students who

participated in the study identified several intervention strategies that they felt would work to reduce truancy in their school.

This study was a replication of a portion of a study completed by R. Fitzgerald in 2005. Both studies used the same instrument to measure student perceptions. A comparison of the results between the two studies identified a close correlation in the data collected in the two studies.

## Acknowledgements

Throughout my graduate school journey I have been very fortunate to have been surrounded by loving and supportive individuals who have made this journey possible for me. I would first like to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Denise Zirkle Brouillard. Her guidance and support lead me through the writing process and her flexibility made the long distance completion of this thesis possible.

I would also like to thank Wausau West High School students and staff for their active support and participation in this research study.

In addition this journey would not have been possible without the help and support that I received from my parents Ronald and Lavern, and my in-laws Randy and Sandy. Thank you for the encouragement and support that you gave me when I needed it most. Also thank you for the many hours of babysitting that allowed me the time to reach this goal.

Most of all I would like to thank my wife Melissa. Thank you for your unwavering support and constant motivation throughout this journey. You were very understanding of the many hours that I was away and you always believed in me. I am very lucky to have you in my life.

## Table of Contents

	Page
.....	
Abstract.....	ii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i> .....	4
<i>Research Objectives</i> .....	4
<i>Definition of Terms</i> .....	4
<i>Assumptions and Limitations</i> .....	5
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	7
<i>Introduction</i> .....	7
<i>Causes of Truancy</i> .....	7
<i>School factors</i> .....	7
<i>Family factors</i> .....	10
<i>Individual factors</i> .....	13
<i>Community factors</i> .....	14
<i>Ethnic minority status</i> .....	15
<i>Interventions to Reduce Truancy</i> .....	16
<i>Parental and family involvement</i> .....	17
<i>Firm sanctions for truancy</i> .....	18
<i>Meaningful incentives for parents and students</i> .....	22
<i>Ongoing truancy prevention programs in school</i> .....	23
<i>Law enforcement involvement</i> .....	26
<i>Summary</i> .....	27
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	28

<i>Introduction</i> .....	28
<i>Subject Selection and Description</i> .....	28
<i>Instrumentation</i> .....	28
<i>Data Collection Procedures</i> .....	29
<i>Data Analysis Procedures</i> .....	30
<i>Limitations</i> .....	30
Chapter Four: Results.....	32
<i>Introduction</i> .....	32
<i>Demographic Information</i> .....	32
<i>Item Analysis</i> .....	33
Chapter Five: Discussion.....	36
<i>Introduction</i> .....	36
<i>Discussion</i> .....	36
<i>Limitations</i> .....	39
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	39
<i>Recommendations for Further Research</i> .....	40
References.....	41
Appendix A: Student Perceptions of Why Students Skip Class (Table A1).....	45
Appendix B: Student Perceptions of Who Students Skip Class With (Table B2).....	46
Appendix C: Student Perceptions Whether Parents Care if Students Skip Class (Table C3).....	47
Appendix D: Student Perceptions Whether Teachers Care if Students Skip Class (Table D4).....	48

Appendix E: Students Awareness of School Districts Truancy Policy (Table E5).....49

Appendix F: Students Perceptions of What Works to Prevent Truancy (Table F6).....50

Appendix G: Truancy Perception Survey.....51

Appendix H: Consent Form.....53

## Chapter One

### *Introduction*

Truancy is a very serious problem that is affecting communities across the country. National averages show that 10% to 19% of the national student body is truant from school on any given day throughout the school year (Gullatt & Lemonie, 1997). This number is even higher in highly populated urban areas (Baker, Sigman, & Nugent, 2001) and schools with a large number of students. (Walls, 2003) On an average day in New York City, there are approximately 150,000 students out of 1,000,000 absent from school (DeKalb, 1999). In Pittsburgh, approximately 12% of the student population is absent from school on any given day.

Truancy is also of great concern in less populated states or states with smaller city populations, such as Wisconsin. In the 2000-2001 school year, the state of Wisconsin reported that 16% of its high school students had been identified as being habitually truant sometime during the school year (Mallory, 2002). Once again, in urban areas the truancy rate was much higher. For example, the city of Milwaukee indicated that 65% of its high school students had been habitually truant during the 2000-2001 school year.

The Wausau school district, which in the 2003-2004 school year had 8,396 students enrolled in the district, has seen its truancy rate for all enrolled students decrease from 6.1% in 2000-2001 to 4.9% in 2003-2004 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003). During this same time period the statewide truancy rate was constant at 9.4%.

The issue of truancy is one that has been around for many years. Even back in the mid nineteenth century, governments identified the importance of students attending

school (Gullatt & Lemonie, 1997). In 1853, Massachusetts was the first state to pass state school attendance laws. The purpose of these laws was to protect young children from working in factories at a young age. The laws were also intended to instill the importance of education in the citizens of the community. The next year the state of New York also instituted school attendance laws. This trend continued until the mid 1930's, when all of the states had adopted school attendance laws.

States derive their authority to enact truancy laws from the doctrine of *parens patriae* (Gullatt & Lemonie, 1997). This doctrine stands for the proposition that the state has responsibility to protect children because it is "the father of all children" (Gullatt & Lemonie, 1997 p.6). As a result of this responsibility and authority, the states have the power to hold parents accountable for a child's unauthorized absences from school. A state's authority for such action was affirmed in the 1882 case of County of McLean v. Humphrey.

Wisconsin has taken steps in exercising its responsibility to protect children. In 1997, Wisconsin made important changes to its truancy laws in a hope of reducing truancy in the state (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau, 2000). At that time, the state changed the definition of habitual truancy, gave more flexibility to municipalities to pass laws and hold the students accountable, and increased the possible penalties that parents could be subjected to as a result of their child's truancy.

It is significant that states take a stand against truancy because truancy is often an indicator of future problem behaviors. According to the Manual To Combat Truancy, truancy is the first sign that a youth may be in trouble and may have future behavior problems (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996). Truancy is

often a gateway to crimes like burglary and vandalism. The results of a study in Miami stated that “71 percent of 13 to 16 year-olds prosecuted for criminal violations had been truant (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 p.3). Truancy has also been identified as a risk factor in the likelihood of students dropping out of school. The students who drop out of school often demonstrate a pattern of increased absences from school over a period of time (Epstein & Scheldon, 2002). The students who eventually drop out are three and a half times more likely to be convicted of a crime later in life than an individual who graduates from high school (Gullatt & Lemonie, 1997). Truancy has also been identified as an indicator of future drug use (Hallfors, Vevea, Iritaini, Cho, Khatapoush, & Saxe 2002), and as an indicator of the probability a student may run away from home (Man, 2000).

Truancy can also be an indicator of future success. Those students who drop out of school are two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than a high school graduate (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). Students who drop out of school are also twice as likely to be unemployed than a high school graduate. In addition, students who drop out of school but find employment, tend to have jobs with lower paying salaries than their classmates who graduate.

There are many different possible causes of truancy. These factors or causes include: school factors, personal factors, developmental factors, family factors, community factors, and cultural factors (Teasley, 2004). In order to reduce the truancy rate, we must be aware of these different factors and how they contribute to students' truancy.

This study will look closely at the causes of student truancy from the students' perspectives. It will also enable the researcher to investigate the students' perspective on effective interventions and preventions to truancy. This information can then be used to look at the current interventions used in the community to see if such interventions are addressing the needs of the students.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to document the factors of truancy from the high school students' perceptions and the interventions that would best reduce truancy in their school. Data will be collected through surveys distributed by homeroom teachers at Wausau West High School in the spring semester of 2007.

### *Research Objectives*

This study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To determine high school students' perceptions of the underlying causes of truancy in a central Wisconsin school district.
2. To determine high school students' perceptions of the interventions that should be used to reduce truancy in their schools.
3. To compare data from a previous research study on truancy using the same instrument.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following are definitions for several terms used throughout this document and the definitions apply to each instance the term is used in the document:

**Acceptable excuse** -student's absence from school will be deemed acceptable if the absence meets the requirements of the school's written policies on absences

and the student has written permission from his or her parent or guardian for said absence.

**Drop out** –Section 118.153(1)(b), Wisconsin Statutes- a child who ceased to attend school, does not attend a public or private school, technical college or home-based private educational program on a full-time basis, has not graduated from high school and does not have an acceptable excuse to be absent from school.

**Habitual Truant** –Section 118.16(1)(a), Wisconsin Statutes- a pupil who is absent from school without an acceptable excuse for part or all of 5 or more days in which school is held during a school semester.

**Truancy** –Section 118.16(1)(c), Wisconsin Statutes- absences of part or all of 1 or more days from school during which the school attendance officer has not been notified of the legal cause of such absence by the parent or guardian of the absent pupil.

#### *Assumptions and Limitations*

The following are the assumptions of this study:

1. All of the students will have the consent forms signed by their parents and returned to their homeroom teacher.
2. All of the students participating in the study will answer the questions honestly.
3. All of the students will return the survey once it is completed.
4. All of the students will interpret the questions the same.

5. The sample of participants selected will be representative of the total population of students in the Wausau School District.

The following are the limitations of this study:

1. All students from the sample group may not return their survey.
2. All students may not interpret the questions the same.
3. The sample of participants may not be representative of the total population of students in the Wausau School District.
4. The students may answer the questions the way they believe the researcher would like them to.

## Chapter Two

### *Literature Review*

#### *Introduction*

Truancy is a very important issue affecting our schools and our communities every day throughout the nation. There are multiple reasons students are forced or tempted to be truant. Our communities have realized the importance of reducing truancy ever since the mid 1800's (Gullatt & Lemonie, 1997). Numerous strategies and interventions have been developed to combat truancy. This chapter will examine the different causes of truancy, as well as the different strategies and interventions that have been developed to reduce truancy.

#### *Causes of Truancy*

The causes of truancy are as different and as diverse as the students who make-up our schools. There is not a clear cut and easily identifiable cause of truancy. Instead, there are many different factors and combinations of factors that lead to truancy. These factors include the operations of a school, such as a school's enforcement of its truancy policies, a student's family life and living environment, and the student's own personal and developmental factors (Reid, 2005). There are many additional factors that also contribute to the likelihood that a student will attend school. For example, the student's community, ethnic or minority status, and economic status also are possible causes of a student's truancy.

#### *School factors.*

When looking at the causes of truancy, the natural focus would be to first look at the school and its rules and operations, to determine if the school has any affect on its

students' truant behaviors. There are numerous aspects within a school that could contribute to and encourage student truancy. The school may not be able to control some of these causes, such as its location and its size. However, some of the causes are within a school's control, such as a school's enforcement of its truancy policies and the student's knowledge of the school's truancy protocol (Walls, 2003). Research has also shown that teachers and staff can affect a school's truancy rate as well as the overall school climate.

Research has shown that the size and location of a school, factors not in the school's control, have a relationship to truancy levels in the school. While there is no national data on truancy, research has shown that schools in larger cities report higher truancy rates than schools located in smaller cities (Baker, Sigman, & Nugent, 2001). Other research completed by the National Center for Education Statistics (1996) found that inner city urban schools tend to have higher truancy rates than schools that are located in rural or suburban locations. In a study by Puzzanchera, Stal, Finnegan, Tierney and Snyder (as cited in Walls, 2003), schools that have a larger student population tend to have higher truancy rates than schools with smaller student populations where teachers and staff are able to give more attention and consideration to each student.

According to a report on the dropout rates in the United States in 1996, students who attend school in the western or southern portions of the United States are more likely to skip school than students who receive their education in the midwest or in the northeastern region of the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). The 16 highest dropout rates in the United States were in schools located in the West or South. Within each region, there is a significant similarity in school dropout rates.

Another factor contributing to a school's truancy rate is the degree to which the school enforces its truancy policies, a factor within a school's control. A study by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) demonstrates that schools that have established goals aimed at reducing truancy actually saw an increase in their rate of daily student attendance. On the other hand, those schools that did not enforce their truancy policies or did not make students aware of the school's truancy policies consistently tended to have higher truancy rates. Yet, many schools do not have truancy consequences which are severe enough to deter students from skipping school (Baker et al., 2001).

A school's truancy rate is also influenced by the teachers, their teaching style, and the curriculum at the school. For example, according to research performed by Dougherty in 1999 (as cited in Teasley, 2004), students are more likely to skip school if their teachers are not supportive, or if the teachers do not make an effort to develop relationships with the students. If a teacher does not have high expectations for his or her students, the students may not feel supported by the teacher and may be more likely to skip school (Baker et al., 2001). Students are also more likely to skip school when they are bored with school and not challenged by the academic curriculum (Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson, & Kirk 2003). A teacher's inability or refusal to use a variety of teaching styles to meet each of his or her student's learning styles has also been shown to negatively affect a school's truancy rate.

The expertise of teachers and staff is also a consideration. Research by Strickland in 1998 (as cited in Teasley, 2004) has shown that there is a correlation between a high truancy rate and a lack of experienced and qualified teachers and staff. Students are more likely to skip school when a substitute teacher is conducting class versus a full-time

experienced teacher who has a relationship with the students (Malcolm et al., 2003). This increases the need for districts to properly manage staff and reduce the staff turnover rate.

Students who skip school may also be influenced by other students. For example, students who are bullied or teased at school are more likely to avoid the teasing all together and skip school (Malcolm et al., 2003). Also, students may succumb to peer pressure and skip school if their friends are also doing the same. A fear of isolation that comes from being teased or not fitting in at school causes truant behavior.

*Family factors.*

A student's family life affects his or her willingness to attend school on a regular basis. The structure of a family affects a student's attendance at school. Children living in a single parent household tend to have higher truancy rates than children who live in a two-parent household (Reid, 1999). In addition, students who live in families with a large number of children also tend to have higher rates of truancy. These children are often at home caring for their younger siblings or their parents who are sick because of a lack of resources available to pay for care for such individuals. (Malcolm et al, 2003).

The socioeconomic status of a family is also a predictor of the likelihood of a student's truancy. Students who come from families in poverty tend to have higher rates of truancy (Baker et al., 2001). The lack of financial stability in the family may result in a higher rate of truancy because of overcrowded living conditions or poor living conditions (Reed, 1999). Children from such families are often unable to afford the necessities of school, such as school uniforms, supplies, or equipment, and are more likely to skip school (Malcolm et al., 2003).

Contrary to families who are considered to be in a low socioeconomic status, families who are considered to be in a higher socioeconomic status, tend to be more involved in their child's education resulting in lower truancy rates (Teasley, 2004). These parents tend to interact with their children's teachers and other school staff on a more regular basis and may be more likely to become involved in school activities.

However, parents who work long hours tend to be less involved in their child's education which may lead to an increase in the child's truancy rate (Malcolm et al., 2003). Similarly, children who do not have a strong relationship with their parents tend to be truant from school more often than those with a strong family relationship (Teasley, 2004).

As noted, it is very important for parents to take an active role in their child's education. In a study by Epstein and Sheldon (2002), children whose parents are actively involved in their education have lower truancy rates. This involvement ranges from taking a simple interest in the child's grades and abilities in school, to actively monitoring the child's homework and other school activities. Even parental involvement in the school PTA results in a decrease in the probability of a child being truant. Conversely, children whose parents display a lack of guidance or supervision are more likely to have unauthorized absences from school (Baker et al., 2001).

The Epstein and Sheldon study (2002) demonstrates that schools can affect parental involvement in a child's education simply by providing the parents with the name and phone number of the school personnel designated to discuss attendance issues. The schools can also encourage parental involvement in a student's education by informing the parents of a child's unauthorized absence from school, visiting the home of

a truant student or even conducting workshops for families of truant students. Such attempts at garnering parental involvement may lead to a decrease in a student's truancy.

The values and beliefs of a child's parents also affect the absenteeism of a student. For example, parents who do not value the importance of an education or do not care if their child regularly attends school are more likely to permit a child to stay home from school without a valid excuse (Malcolm et al., 2003). Children may also be more likely to skip school if their parents are not aware of the school or state attendance laws (Baker et al., 2001). Parents who are not aware of the possible legal ramifications if their child is truant are less likely to care about their child's school attendance than those who are knowledgeable about the legal ramifications (Malcolm et al., 2003). Also, children of parents who are hostile to or who are unwilling to accept external support for their child's education may be more likely to skip school (Reid, 1999).

Children who are a part of families in which the parents or other siblings have criminal records, or families that are already involved with social services, are also more likely to be truant from school. A child's exposure to violence in the home is a factor leading to truant behavior (Reid, 1999). Such violence includes physical and emotional abuse and other types of family conflicts. Not only does physical and emotional abuse have a correlation to a student's truant behavior, but alcohol and drug abuse within the family environment tends to increase the chance of student truancy (Baker et al., 2001).

As noted in the school factors section above, according to research performed by Dougherty in 1999 (as cited in Teasley, 2004), children are more likely to skip school if they do not establish a relationship with their teachers and other school staff. Similarly, children whose families are constantly moving or are transient are less likely to attend

school on a regular basis (Malcolm et al., 2003). A child's frequent relocation from school to school resulting in few established relationships results in a higher probability that the student will be absent from school without a valid excuse (Teasley, 2004).

*Individual factors.*

There are several personal factors of the truant student that may contribute to his or her willingness or ability to attend school regularly. The first factor is the individual student's physical and mental health (DeSocio, Van Cura, Nelson, Hewitt, Kitzman, and Cole, 2007). Students might not attend school if they have a physical illness or injury. Even though many schools will excuse a student's absence for medical reasons, some students do not have the means available to obtain a doctor's excuse.

Mental health diagnoses such as depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, and antisocial disorder also have an affect on a student's desire to attend school. A student who suffers from antisocial disorder will have a very difficult time functioning in a socially interactive classroom (Reid, 2005). That student may then try to avoid school as a result of his or her mental illness.

A second factor is the individual student's personal skills and abilities. Research has shown that a student's lack of academic ability in a subject area may also impact the student's willingness to attend school (Reid, 2005). Longitudinal studies demonstrate that students who have academic difficulties in specific subject areas in elementary school tend to avoid those subject areas in middle school and high school (Teasley, 2004). This results in students skipping those subject area courses in high school and middle school.

In addition, those students who lack social skills tend to have higher rates of school absence (Reid, 2005). The lack of social skills may result in poor relationships with peers, which affects the student's willingness to attend school. The lack of social skills may also have an impact on the student's level of self-esteem. Research indicates that a low level of self-esteem is an underlying cause of truancy.

A third factor that may affect a student's willingness or ability to attend school is their involvement in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse or sexual activity. A research study in May of 2002, indicated that there was a strong correlation between truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and sexual activity (Hallfors et al., 2002). Students who are often truant show little connection to their school and tend to affiliate with other students who also show little connection to their school. These students typically turn to deviant behavior including substance abuse and sexual activity.

There are numerous other factors that may affect an individual student's decision to attend school. These factors range from a lack of knowledge or understanding of their states attendance laws, to missing school due to employment (Walls, 2003). In fact, some students may just feel that they do not have any incentive to go to school.

#### *Community factors.*

The community or neighborhood a student lives in may also have an impact on students' willingness and ability to go to school. The communities attitude towards education may be passed on to the student and affect the student's motivation to attend school (Reid, 2005).

The overall socioeconomic status of a neighborhood will also have an affect on the student's exposure to both mental and physical stressors. Neighborhoods with lower

socioeconomic status tend to have stressors such as neglect, domestic violence, condemned housing, and abandoned automobiles (Teasley, 2004). Exposure to these issues may affect the students' physical and mental health, which research has identified as an underlying factor to truancy (DeSocio et al., 2007).

Affluent neighborhoods tend to have access to resources that contribute to reducing the risk of truancy (Teasley, 2004). These resources include affluent parents who take an active role in their child's education. Affluent parents often maintain contact and build relationships with school personnel. These relationships between parents and school personnel reduce the risk of truancy for students.

Affluent neighborhoods also tend to have residents who are more stable and maintain their residency in the community (Teasley, 2004). Many of these individuals own their own home and tend to invest in their communities and the children in their community. Residents in low income neighborhoods tend to move around more often than residents in affluent neighborhoods. This often results in lower numbers of residents who own their own home, and thus a lower investment into a community.

*Ethnic minority status.*

Research has shown that students in the ethnic minority often have unique factors that influence their reluctance to attend school (Reid, 2005). One of these factors is racial harassment (Osler & Hill, 1999). A minority student who is bullied by students of the dominant culture may be fearful to attend school. Students with an ethnic minority status may also feel isolated and alone, which again, may promote truancy.

Another factor associated with increased truancy in ethnic minority students is linguistic differences. Students who are not proficient in English tend to become

frustrated in English speaking classrooms (Walls, 2003). As a result, many of these students lose their interest in academics and fall behind in their course work, which results in the students trying to avoid their classes (Teasley, 2004).

The majority of the largest school systems in the United States are located in inner cities and are largely comprised of minority students,. Many of these school districts consist of student populations where 70% of the population is African American, and 20% of the population is Hispanic (Teasley, 2004). Some of these inner city school systems report that 20% of their student population is truant from school on any given day. One reason these rates might be so high is that, “Many African American and Hispanic youths from poor inner city urban neighborhoods attend overcrowded schools with lower funding per pupil, compared with schools in affluent suburban communities.” (Teasley, 2004 p121). Thus, students in ethnic minority neighborhoods are also likely to attend schools with others of lower socioeconomic status. As noted above, this has an affect on a student’s truancy.

#### *Interventions to Reduce Truancy*

There are many different intervention methods and techniques are available to reduce truancy. Research has shown that there are many different underlying causes of truancy (Teasley, 2004). Thus, it is important to use intervention strategies that utilize a multimodal and collaborative approach (Walls, 2003). In this approach, multiple risk factors should be addressed across several different areas. (National Dropout Prevention Center/ Network, 2007). To create and maintain an effective truancy intervention program schools, parents, community resources, law enforcement, and juvenile courts need to work collaboratively to reduce truancy (Walls, 2003). In fact, communities that

have had the most success in reducing truancy have used a “Comprehensive strategy that focuses on incentives and sanctions for truants and their parents.” (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 p2).

In 1996, the Department of Justice developed the *Manual to Combat Truancy*. This report documented primary elements that should be incorporated in a school’s and community’s strategy to reduce truancy. These elements include: involving parents, firm sanctions for truancy, meaningful incentives, ongoing school truancy prevention programs, and involvement of law enforcement (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). Recent research by numerous individuals supports the findings of the Department of Justice in 1996.

#### *Parental and family involvement.*

The involvement of parents is a key element in reducing truancy (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). Therefore, it is important for schools to build trust and communication with the families of their students. Research by Epstein and Sheldon has shown that schools are much more likely to reduce truancy if their plan includes reaching out to parents.

To build relationships with parents, teachers should be encouraged to make regular contact with parents (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). It is important to build relationship with parents before any truancy issues arise. After such issues arise, research indicates that teachers or administrators should try to inform parents of each absence (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Informing parents of a child’s absence has been shown to result in an increase in student attendance.

If there is no established line of communication between a school and parents, the school can be required, by law, to develop and foster that communication (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau, 2000). In Wisconsin, schools are bound by Wisconsin Statute 118.16(2)(cg) to inform parents or guardians when their child has met the legal criteria for habitual truancy. The law states that the schools are required to inform the parents through certified or registered mail so that the schools can be assured that the parents received the information.

Another way to reach out to parents is through mediation (Walls, 2003). A program that was developed in Ohio called, Truancy Prevention Through Mediation, invited parents to a mediation session after their initial parental notifications failed to reduce the student's truancy. The goal of this mediation session is to identify the reasons why the student is truant. Once the reasons have been identified an action plan is created to help reduce the student's truancy.

Overall, the research indicates that any parental or family involvement with the school tends to lead to lower truancy rates (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Besides communication between the parents and school, parents can be involved in a child's education in many other ways. For example, parents can be involved in monitoring the student's school work at home or participating in school events. In addition, parents can become involved in a child's education by becoming a member of the school's PTA. All of these forms of involvement are associated with reducing the risk of truancy.

*Firm sanctions for truancy.*

A second key element to reducing truancy is to establish firm sanctions for truant students (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996). The level and

number of sanctions vary greatly between states, as well as between schools within each state. For instance, Delaware and Connecticut have day time curfews that allow law enforcement to question youth to see if they have a valid excuse for not being in school. In New York, a student can receive a failing grade if they miss a certain number of classes.

One avenue for sanctioning a student is through the juvenile justice system. Trends have shown that the juvenile justice system is increasingly being used as a means to intervene and reduce truancy (Baker et al., 2001). Once again, the sanctions that are utilized depend on each state's laws.

In Wisconsin, there are a number of municipal sanctions that are available to punish truants (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau, 2000). The Wisconsin statutes grant the municipalities with the option to prosecute truant students under local ordinances, or refer the students to the county for prosecution in circuit court. The benefit of municipal sanctions are that the students can be prosecuted much faster than if they were referred to the county circuit court. The sanctions available to municipalities under the Wisconsin statutes:

- Suspension of a drivers license for 30 days to one year;
- A fine of up to \$500.00;
- Court ordered counseling, community service, or supervised work program;
- Revocation of a student's work permit;
- A court order to attend school;
- A referral to teen peer court;
- Placement in formal or informal supervision for up to one year;

- Court ordered counseling for the parents of the habitually truant student; and
- A curfew;

In central Wisconsin, Marathon County has developed a Truancy Court that is available to any school located in the county (Marathon County Truancy Court, n.d.). Students can be referred to Truancy Court once they have met the legal criteria of missing school for all or a part of five days in any given semester. Once referred, the students are requested to appear in court on a scheduled date and time. If the student does not appear in court on their scheduled court date a *capias* will be put out for their arrest. Those students who do appear before the judge can receive the same sanctions as listed above, and in addition they can be subject to the following orders:

- No contact with certain designated people;
- Appearance in court to determine if the court orders have been followed;
- Participation in an alcohol and other drug screen or assessment;
- Report to the Wausau Truancy Abatement Program;
- Revocation of a student's hunting or fishing license;
- Home detention by means of electronic monitoring; and
- Placement in secured or non-secured detention for up to five days.

One of the possible sanctions listed above was the Wausau Truancy Abatement Program. This is a community program which students can be required to attend by formal court order or may attend voluntarily after a referral from his or her local school (Boys & Girls Club of the Wausau Area, 2007). This program focuses on treating the underlying causes of truancy by providing tutoring programs, drug prevention or intervention programs, mentorship, campaigns to involve parents, and referrals to social

service agencies. If a student fails to follow through with the program, the student can face a fine or a referral to formal truancy court.

Another sanction listed was the placement of a truant student in secured or non-secured detention. Research has shown that a sanction such as this can often be counter-productive (Walls, 2003). Such detention is often traumatic for families, it is not very cost effective, and it often results in students missing even more school. In Marathon County, for example, the parents of a student sanctioned to secured detention can be ordered to pay up to \$130 a day for each day the student is in detention (Marathon County Truancy Court, n.d.).

Not only can courts provide a venue for sanctioning truant students, but schools can also provide such a forum. Schools can educate their student body about their attendance policy and establish clear expectations with regards to attendance (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). The school must then be consistent in the enforcement of their policy and possible discipline measures. Research studies have demonstrated that schools with an identified plan addressing absenteeism are more effective at reducing truancy (Tealsey, 2004).

Wausau West High School, which is located in central Wisconsin, explains their attendance policy, as well as possible discipline measures that may be taken for unexcused absences, in their student handbook. This handbook is provided to every student at the beginning of the year and is also posted on their school website. According to the 2006-2007 Wausau West Student Handbook, a student is considered to be habitually truant if they miss all or part of five days of school without a valid excuse. If a student becomes habitually truant the following steps will be taken:

1) Attendance Specialist may meet with the student. Detentions and/or in-school suspensions will be assigned by an administrator and the student may be required to participate in the Wausau Area Truancy Abatement Program. If that venue is pursued and the student chooses not to participate, they will be issued a \$50.00 municipal citation which requires court intervention.

2) Continued class absences will necessitate counselor and parental involvement. The counselor will determine if curriculum modifications would remedy the truancy.

3) A certified letter will be sent to the parent/guardian scheduling a meeting to discuss the student's truancy in depth. This meeting will include the student, parents, counselor, attendance specialist, and associate principal. Program modifications, continued counseling assistance, or other decisions will be discussed in order to decrease the student's truancy.

4) If all efforts have failed and the student continues to be truant, a referral will be made to either Marathon County Courthouse or Marathon County Department of Social Services. (Wausau West Student Handbook, 2006 p32-33)

These steps clearly identify what discipline measures will be taken by Wausau West High School if a student becomes habitually truant. A clearly identifiable policy and clear ramifications for violating the policy are important to reducing truancy.

*Meaningful incentives for parents and students.*

A third key element to reduce truancy is to create meaningful incentives for parents to promote school attendance and for students to attend school (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). These meaningful incentives may be

---

different for each community depending on what motivates the students and their parents. It is up to the community to determine exactly what these incentives should be.

A study by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) demonstrated that schools rewarding students for improved attendance reported overall improvement in attendance from year to year. The researchers felt that official recognition may motivate some students to attend school. The recognition mentioned in the study included having a small party, providing gift certificates, or public recognition at assemblies.

There are also several ways to motivate parents through meaningful incentives (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). These incentives can be either positive or negative in nature. Negative incentives include such things as formal sanctions for adding to the delinquency of a minor, required attendance in a parent education class, or loss of public assistance. While positive incentives include increased eligibility to participate in publicly funded programs.

*Ongoing truancy prevention programs in schools.*

A fourth key element in reducing truancy is for schools to develop ongoing truancy prevention programs (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996). These truancy prevention programs should include interventions that combat the root causes of the truancy and address the unique needs of the students in a particular school. These interventions may include: tutoring programs, mentorship programs, added security measures in the school, and hands on learning opportunities.

Tutoring programs can help reduce truancy in those students who are avoiding class because of a lack of academic understanding or academic success in a specific

subject area (Teasley, 2004). The tutoring programs should be flexible and tailored to the needs of the students (McCray, 2006).

One form of tutoring that can be implemented is peer tutoring (Teasley, 2004). In peer tutoring, older students, who are experiencing academic success, are trained to work with younger students who are having attendance problems. Peer tutoring programs, such as the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, have been effective in reducing truancy rates and improving student academic performance.

Mentoring has also proven to be an effective component of a truancy prevention program in schools. Research has shown that students who are truant tend to lack positive and consistent relationships with adults (McCray, 2006). Mentoring has proven to be particularly effective in countering this lack of relationships with adults, especially with students from single parent households and with students who are disengaged from their parents (Teasley, 2004). Mentoring can help truant students develop trusting relationships with adults, bolster their intrinsic motivation, reduce their feelings of victimization, facilitate family involvement, and improve their work ethic through role modeling (McCray, 2006).

In 2007, DeSocio, VanCura, Nelson, Hewitt, Kitzman, and Cole conducted a study that evaluated a possible truancy intervention program. In this intervention, students, who had been truant at least 15 days in the prior year, were provided with a mentor. This mentor was a teacher in their school who was excited about helping students achieve success. The teacher would be responsible for building a personal relationship with the student, facilitating tutoring sessions, and advocating for the student in problem situations. The study found that previously truant students who developing a

mentor relationship had a significantly higher probability of staying in school than truant students who did not have such a relationship.

Schools can also reduce truancy levels by taking certain measures designed to help their students feel safer in school (Lauchlan, 2003). One way to do this is to have policies and programs established that protect students from bullying or harassment. For example, increased supervision of the restroom and playground areas help reduce bullying and harassment.

One established program that has been proven to reduce truancy up to 18% is The Comer School Development Program (National Center for School Engagement, 2007). This is a school based program that is designed to create a positive and supportive school climate that is free from interpersonal violence for students age six to fourteen. This particular program consists of three main components. The first component is comprised of a team of school staff and parents that make important decision about school policies and school programs that influence the climate of the school. The second component is a support team that identifies ways for students and staff to respond appropriately to difficult situations, such as violence. Finally, there is a component that works to increase parent involvement with the school.

Another technique schools can utilize to reduce truancy is to offer hands-on options to engage students in learning (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). For example, schools can offer school-to-work opportunities and career exploration programs as alternatives to the normal classroom. By offering career exploration opportunities students become more aware of possible careers (DeKalb,

1999). This helps the students to develop educational goals which will allow them to obtain their career goals.

An example of a hands-on program is the Career Academy. The Career Academy is an established school based program that strives to engage high school students in education and to teach them the skills that they will need to be successful in a post-secondary education and in a career (National Center for School Engagement, 2007). The Career Academy is actually a small school within a larger school. The students at Career Academy learn in small groups. Each one of these small groups has a small number of students and teachers who work together for three to four years in high school. By creating this core group, the students experience a more personalized and supportive learning environment which builds connections between the worlds of school and work. This program has documented a significant improvement in students' attendance and a reduction in drop-out rates.

*Law enforcement involvement.*

A fifth key element in reducing truancy is to incorporate local law enforcement involvement (U.S. Department of Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). The term local law enforcement refers to local police, probation officers, juvenile and family court employees, and detention center employees. The local law enforcement can work with schools in enforcing school attendance policies and sanctions.

The Police Led Truancy Intervention is a program that has documented positive results in reducing truancy (National Center for School Engagement, 2007). This program consists of law enforcement officers who patrol communities looking for students who are not in the presence of adults during school hours. The students who do

---

not have a valid excuse are processed and transported to an identified facility. At the facility, the students must sit quietly for up to six hours until they are released to a parent or guardian. During the 1999-2000 school year, this program documented that 71% of students who were processed and taken to the truancy facility returned to school the next day. In addition, 43% of the students who were contacted by local law enforcement missed fewer days of school after the police contact as compared to before the police contact.

### *Summary*

Truancy is a national problem that not only affects students, but also their families, and the neighborhoods and communities they live in. The literature has shown that there is no one specific cause for truancy. Instead, there are many different factors and combination of factors that lead to students' willingness or ability to go to school. Due to the diversity in the underlying causes of truancy several interventions have been developed to address and reduce truancy. Research has identified that many of these intervention have proven to be successful to increase student attendance in school.

## Chapter Three

### *Methodology*

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will provide information regarding the selection of the subject participants in the study, and a description of those subjects. The instrument that was used is also described. In addition, a description of the data collection procedures and data analysis procedures will also be provided. Finally the chapter will end with a description of the limitations of the methodology of this study.

#### *Subject Selection and Description*

The subjects of this study were comprised of male and female students in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade from Wausau West High School. Wausau West High School is located in central Wisconsin and has a current enrollment of approximately 1,681 students. Exactly 381 students were selected randomly by homeroom. Each homeroom at Wausau West High School is comprised of 10 to 26 students from all four grade levels. In all, 25 homerooms were randomly selected to participate in this study from a master list of all Wausau West High School homerooms. Each student in the selected 25 homerooms received a consent form that they needed to have signed by a parent or guardian in order to participate in the research study.

#### *Instrumentation*

The survey used in this study was developed by a previous researcher, Ryan Fitzgerald. Ryan (2005) developed the survey for a research project comparing students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the causes of truancy and possible solutions to reduce truancy. Permission to use and modify the instrument, was sought and granted in spring

2000. The only modifications made to the instrument were the removal of the phrase “Eau Claire Area School District” with a replacement of “your School District”. No measures of validity or reliability have been documented for this instrument.

The survey is two pages long and is printed on one piece of paper with printing on both sides of the paper (See Appendix G). It is comprised of two different sections entitled demographic information and survey questions. The demographic information included two questions identifying gender and current grade of the subject. This information was gathered for group comparison purposes only. The second section included eight different survey questions intended to identify such things as the frequency the subject skipped classes, why the student felt he or she or other students skip class, and what works to prevent truancy.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

After permission to conduct the study was granted 25 homerooms were randomly selected for participation. These homeroom teachers were first contacted by e-mail to describe the voluntary study. Then consent letters for all of the selected subjects were placed in the selected homeroom advisors mailbox along with directions to distribute the consent letter to all students in their homeroom. This consent letter consisted of a description of the study and explained the purpose, participation and confidentiality, risks, benefits, and the right to withdraw at anytime from the research study. The researcher was identified and contact information for the researcher, the thesis advisor, and the Director of Research Services at the University of Wisconsin-Stout was provided if there were any questions or concerns.

The students received the consent letter on Monday May 14, 2007, in their assigned homeroom. Instructions were provided to the homeroom teachers to advise the students to return their signed parent consent letter by no later than Friday May 18, 2007, if they wanted to participate in the research study. The homeroom teachers collected the returned signed parental consent letters and placed them in an unmarked manila envelope. On Friday May 18, 2007, the homeroom teachers distributed the surveys to those students who returned a signed consent letter. The students were provided time in their homeroom to complete the survey. The surveys were then collected by the homeroom advisor and were placed in the same unmarked manila envelope as the signed consent letters. The homeroom advisors were then instructed to return the sealed unmarked envelopes to a marked basket located in the staff mailroom.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Of the 381 students who were asked to participate in the study 98 returned consent forms and completed surveys. This resulted in a 25.7% participation rate. The data from these students was coded and entered into a spreadsheet by the researcher. The data, which was composed of nominal and ratio data, was evaluated by the researcher for statistical significance. This data was then compared to previously recorded data from another study using the same instrument to see if a relationship existed between the two data sets.

#### *Limitations*

There are several limitations to this study. First, the instrument that was used in this study has no documented measures of validity or reliability. Also, only those students who were in homeroom, and returned a signed parental consent form were able

to participate in this study. Additionally, the sample is only from one high school in central Wisconsin, and the results may not be representative of other high school students. Finally, it is assumed that all students who completed the survey interpreted the questions the same and they responded to the questions honestly.

## Chapter Four

### *Results*

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to document high school students' perceptions of the underlying causes of truancy and the possible interventions that could reduce truancy in their school. The following chapter will report the results of the data that was collected in this study. The demographic information that was collected and the students' responses to the eight survey questions will be discussed. The data collected in this study will also be compared to data collected in a previous study, using the same instrument, in another high school.

#### *Demographic Information*

There were 381 students who were provided with a consent form and were invited to participate in this study. Of those 381 students, 98 (25.7%) returned the consent form and completed the survey. The 98 students were comprised of 43 (43.9%) males, and 55 (56.1%) females. The students ranged in grade level from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The sample population was made up of 27 (27.6%) 9<sup>th</sup> grade students, 22 (22.5%) 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, 24 (24.5%) 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, and 25 (25.5%) 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Based on this demographic information, this researcher concluded that there was nearly an equal participation in the study across all grade levels in the school, and also between male students at 43.9% participation and female students at 56.1% participation.

### *Item Analysis*

The first question on the survey asked the students how many classes per week, on average, they skipped or intentionally missed. Of the 98 students who responded, 84.7% of the students indicated that they do not skip any classes, 12.2% indicated one to three classes per week, 1% indicated four to six classes per week, and no one indicated that they skip more than seven classes per week.

The second question asked the students why they believe students skip or intentionally miss classes. The students had eighteen choices and they could select all of the statements that apply. Every possible choice was selected by at least one student. However, four answers were chosen more frequently than the other choices. These answers were: problems with teachers or school staff (58.2%), difficult coursework (50.0%), behavior problems (50.0%), and parents do not care (54.1%). The results are reported in Table A1.

The third question asked the students, with whom they believed students most often skip or intentionally miss class. A large number of subjects, 83.7% stated that students tend to skip or intentionally miss classes with friends from the same school. It was interesting to note that 96.9% indicated that students mostly skip classes with friends. It was only three subjects' opinion that students mostly skip classes with family members. The results are reported in Table B2.

The fourth question asked the students, if, in their opinion, parents or guardians care if they skip or intentionally miss classes. The results indicated that 83.8% of the subjects felt that their parents cared very much if they skip or intentionally miss classes.

Only 9.2% of the subjects indicated that their parents would be somewhat concerned if the student would skip or intentionally miss classes. The results are reported in Table C3.

The fifth question asked the students if they felt that their teachers or other school staff care if they skip or intentionally miss classes. Forty-three and nine/tenths percent (43.9%) of the students indicated that their teachers cared very much, 35.7% indicated that their teachers cared somewhat, 11.2% only felt that their teachers cared a little, and 3.1% felt that their teachers did not care at all if they skipped or intentionally missed class. The results are reported in Table D4.

The sixth question asked if the students were aware of the School District's habitual truancy policy. Of the 98 students who participated in the study, 60.2% indicated that they were aware of the policy. However, 38.8% of the students were not aware of their School District's habitual truancy policy. The results are reported in Table E5.

The seventh question asked the students if they considered themselves to be habitually truant. The results indicate that 67.4% of the students did not consider themselves to be habitually truant and only 3.1% of the students did feel that they are habitually truant from school. A significant number of students (28.6%) indicated that they were not sure if they were habitually truant. It is interesting to note that earlier in the survey, 13.2% of the students indicated that they miss anywhere from one to six classes per week, which would more than meet the criteria for habitual truancy.

The eighth and final question asked the students what programs, penalties, or other techniques they believe work to prevent truancy. The students had ten different options to choose from, including an area where the students could write in their own

ideas. The students were once again instructed to select all of the answers that they felt applied. The results are reported in Table F6.

Four interventions were selected most frequently by the students. These four interventions were: parent notification (46.9%), truancy citation (31.6%), truancy court (50.0%), and juvenile probation/supervision (34.7%). Several students (9.2%) chose to write in other options that they felt would work to prevent truancy. Some of these suggestions included (responses typed verbatim):

- “Talk to kids, perhaps their misunderstood.”
- “Put a steel fence around the school.”
- “Place them in a more structured school.”
- “Make classes more interesting.”
- “The problem is that people go to court, suck up to the judge, apologize, & do it again.”
- “Give students incentives to go to class.”
- “Just have a talk with the kid.”
- “No open Campus, kids don't want someone else do their thinking.”

## Chapter Five

### *Discussion*

#### *Introduction*

This chapter discusses the results of the study completed for purposes of this thesis. These results will be compared to the major findings in the literature and to data from a previous research study that used the same instrument. The limitations of the study will be discussed along with a final summary of the study. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research on truancy.

#### *Discussion*

The results of this study indicated four key reasons why students skip or intentionally miss class. These reasons include: problems with school staff (58.2%), parents who do not care (54.1%), difficult coursework (50.0%), and behavior problems (50.0%). These key reasons parallel the literature on truancy and school absenteeism. The research of Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) identified that problems with school staff, and parents who do not care, tend to be key factors in increased truancy rates. Difficult coursework has also been identified by Reid (2005), and Teasley (2004) as underlying causes of truancy. Finally, the research of Hallfors, Vevea, Iritani, Cho, Katapoush, and Saxe (2002) noted that behavior problems are another key cause of truancy.

The findings of this research study were also consistent with the research findings of Ryan Fitzgerald (2005). Of the four key reasons identified in this research study, three were also identified by Fitzgerald as key causes. These three factors include: parents

who do not care (56.0%), problems with school staff (58.2%), and behavior problems (51.9%). The comparison of these results were reported in Table A1.

The results of the research study also indicate that students tend to skip class with friends attending the same school (83.7%). These results were again consistent with Fitzgerald's study (2005), which noted that students tend to skip class with students from the same school (48.4). This is a key component for school administrators to analyze when attempting to reduce their school's truancy rate. The research of Hallfors, Vevea, Iritani, Cho, Katapoush, and Saxe (2002) indicated that students who are truant tend to affiliate with other students who show little connection to their school. Thus, it is important for school administrators to identify new ways to engage these students and to help them build a stronger connection to their school. The comparisons of these results were reported in Table B2.

Another parallel between the results in this study and Fitzgerald's study (2005) was with regard to the students' perceptions of whether parents care if they skip class. This study identified that 83.7% of the students felt that their parents cared if they skipped class, while 78.1% of the students from Fitzgerald's study perceived that their parents also cared if they missed class. These findings are consistent with the research of Epstein and Sheldon (2002) which specified that children's parents who take an active role in their education tend to have lower truancy rates. In addition, the research of Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) indicated that children whose parents display a lack of guidance or supervision are more likely to have unauthorized absences from school. The comparisons of these results were reported in Table C3.

The research also indicated that students are more likely to skip school if they do not have a relationship with their teacher or if they feel that their teacher is not supportive of them (Baker et al. 2001). The results from this study identified that 43.9% of the students felt that their teachers cared if they missed class. These results were again consistent with Fitzgerald's results (2005) which specified that 42.2% of the students felt that their teachers cared if they missed class. This may be another area of focus for school administrators who aim to reduce truancy in their school. According to the literature, administrators can attempt to reduce their truancy rates by reducing teacher and staff turnover, and by hiring teachers who truly care about their students (Malcolm et al., 2003). The comparisons of these results were reported in Table D4.

In addition, the results of this study indicated that 60.2% of the students who participated in the study were aware of their school district's truancy policy. These numbers were again consistent with the findings of Fitzgerald's study, in which 61.7% of participants indicate that they were aware of their school district's truancy policy. The literature notes that it is important for schools to communicate their truancy policy to their students and the students' parents. A 2002 study by Epstein and Sheldon stated that schools that do not make their students aware of truancy policies consistently tend to have higher truancy rates. The comparisons of these results were reported in Table E5.

Finally, the students who participated in the research study identified four interventions that they felt might work to prevent truancy. These interventions included: truancy court (50.0%), parent notification (46.9%), juvenile probation/supervision (34.7%), and a truancy citation (31.6%). These interventions were included in the *Manual to Combat Truancy* as effective ways to reduce truancy (U.S. Department of

Education & Department of Justice, 1996 ). The *Manual to Combat Truancy* (1996) specified that parental involvement, firm sanctions for truancy, and the involvement of local law enforcement were effective tools to be utilized in reducing truancy.

Once again, the most frequently reported interventions of this study were consistent with the top four interventions in the Fitzgerald study (2005) which included truancy court (46.2%), parent notification (43.3%), juvenile probation/ supervision (37.8%), and truancy citation (37.5%). The comparisons of these results were reported in Table F6.

### *Limitations*

It is important to note that there are several limitations to this study. The instrument that was used in this study has no documented measures of validity or reliability. In addition, only those students who were present in their homeroom, and who returned a consent form were able to participate in the study. Also, the sample is made up of only 98 students from one high school in central Wisconsin, and thus, the results cannot be generalized to other school populations.. It is also assumed that all of the students who completed the survey interpreted the survey questions the same and responded to the questions honestly. Finally, the raw data of the Fitzgerald study (2005) was not available and thus, no formal conclusions can be drawn from the comparison.

### *Conclusion*

The results of this study are consistent with the literature's conclusions that students tend to skip school because of problems with school staff, parents who do not care, difficult coursework, and individual behavior problems. With the knowledge of these underlying causes of truancy, schools can improve their truancy rates by taking an active

role in building meaningful relationships with students and their parents. Teachers and parents can reduce truancy rates by showing concern over student's truancy behaviors. In this study, a majority of the students were aware of their school district's truancy policy. Schools need to consistently educate all of their students about their truancy policies. Students who are aware of their schools' truancy policies tend to skip school more than students who are knowledgeable about the policies. The students also indicated that parental involvement and formal punishments such as truancy citations, juvenile probation, and truancy court are effective ways to prevent and reduce truancy problems in their school. This data is consistent with the literature findings that a multimodal and collaborative approach is needed to reduce truancy (Walls, 2003).

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This research study took place in one high school in central Wisconsin. As identified in the literature, the size and location of a school can have an affect on its truancy levels (Baker et al., 2001). The literature also stated that different levels of truancy have been reported in different geographical locations. It is recommended that research be conducted at a national level that would address different geographical areas including rural and urban schools with varying levels of diversity and socioeconomic status.

In addition this study only identified the perceptions of high school students. A future study that would identify the perceptions of middle school or elementary students would be beneficial.

## References

- Baker, M.L., Sigmon, J.N., Nugent, M.E. (2001). *Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 468 296)
- Boys & Girls Club of the Wausau Area (2007). *Truancy abatement program at the boys & girls club*. Retrieved June 30, 2007 from [http://www.bgclub.com/main\\_sublinks.asp?id=9&sid=73](http://www.bgclub.com/main_sublinks.asp?id=9&sid=73)
- DeKalb, J. (1999). *Student truancy*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 429 334)
- DeSocio, J., VanCura, M., Nelson, L.A., Hewitt, G., Kitzman, H., & Cole, R. (2007). Engaging truant adolescents: Results from a multifaceted Intervention Pilot. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(3), 3-11. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from Academic Search Elite.
- Epstein, J.L., & Sheldon, S.B. (2002, May/June). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research, 95*(5), 308-318. Retrieved April 3, 2006, from Academic Search Elite.
- Fitzgerald, R. (2005). *Student and faculty perceptions of the causes and solutions to truancy*. Unpublished masters thesis, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie.
- Gullatt, D.E., & Lemonie, D.A. (1997). *The school truancy dilemma*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 409 652)
- Hallfors, D., Vevea, J.L., Iritani, B., Cho, H., Katapoush, S., & Saxe, L. (2002, May). Truancy, grade point average, and sexual activity: A meta-analysis of risk

indicators for youth substance use. *Journal of School Health*, 72(5), 205-211.

Retrieved April 3, 2006, from Academic Search Elite.

Lauchlan, F. (2003). Responding to chronic non-attendance: A review of intervention approaches. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 19(2), 133-145. Retrieved April 3, 2006, from Academic Search Elite.

Malcolm, H., Wilson, V., Davidson, J., and Kirk, S. (2003). *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven leas*. Research Report No 424, Retrieved April 27, 2006, from <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR424.pdf>

Mallory, J. (2002). *Start smart, stay smart, Milwaukee: State of Milwaukee's children, 2002* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 472 542)

Man, A. F. De. (2000). Predictors of adolescent running away behavior. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 28(3), 261-268. Retrieved April 3, 2006, from Academic Search Elite.

Marathon County Truancy Court, (n.d.). *Information for parents and students who have been referred or may be referred to truancy court*. [Brochure]. Marathon County, WI.

McCray, E.D. (2006) It's 10 a.m.: Do you know where your children are? *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42(1), 30-33. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from Academic Search Elite.

National Center for Educational Statistics (1996). *Drop out rates in the united states*. Retrieved April 27, 2006, from <http://165.224.221.98/pubs98/dropout/>

- National Center for School Engagement (2007). *Blueprints for violence prevention programs that reduce truancy and/or improve school attendance*. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from <http://www.schoolengagement.org/TruancyPreventionRegistry/Admin/Resources/Resources/115.pdf>
- National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (2007). *Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs*. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from [http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major\\_reports/communities\\_in\\_schools/Dropout%20Risk%20Factors%20and%20Exemplary%20Programs%20Cover%20Pages%205-16-07.pdf](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/resource/major_reports/communities_in_schools/Dropout%20Risk%20Factors%20and%20Exemplary%20Programs%20Cover%20Pages%205-16-07.pdf)
- Osler, A., & Hill, J. (1999). Exclusion from school and racial equality: An examination of government proposals in the light of recent research evidence. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 29(1), 33-62. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from Academic Search Elite.
- Reid, K. (1999). *Truancy and schools*. New York: Routledge.
- Reid, K. (2005). The causes, views and traits of school absenteeism and truancy. *Research in Education*, 74, 59-82. Retrieved April 3, 2006, from Academic Search Elite.
- Teasley, M. L. (2004, April). Absenteeism and truancy: Risk, protection, and best practice implications for school social workers. *Children & Schools*, 26(2), 117-128. Retrieved April 3, 2006, from Academic Search Elite.
- U.S. Department of Education, & U.S. Department of Justice (1996). *Manual to combat truancy*. (ERIC Reproduction Service No. ED 397 526)

- Walls, C. (2003). *New approaches to truancy prevention in urban schools*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 480 916)
- Wausau School District (2006). Wausau west student handbook 2006-2007. Unpublished manual. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from <http://wausau.k12.wi.us/west/Handbook0607.DOC>
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2003). *Wisconsin school performance report*. Retrieved April 23, 2006, from <http://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/spr/>
- Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau (2000). Truancy reduction efforts: A best practice review. *Journal of State Government*, 73(4), 13-15. Retrieved April 3, 2006, from Academic Search Elite

## Appendix A

Table A1

*Student Perceptions of Why Students Skip Class*

	<b>Current Study Results</b>	<b>2005 Fitzgerald Study Results</b>
Problems with School Staff	58.2%	55.4%
Problems with Other Students	32.7%	29.0%
Bullies in School	10.2%	17.1%
Difficult Coursework	50.0%	39.3%
Lack of Challenge in School Work	12.2%	16.2%
Behavior Problems	50.0%	51.9%
Lack of Connection to School	33.7%	35.4%
School does not Consequence Students	13.3%	14.4%
Lack of Family Involvement	25.5%	28.1%
School Phobia	7.1%	23.1%
To Commit Delinquent Acts	17.4%	28.9%
To Use Alcohol	32.7%	44.9%
To Use Marijuana	31.6%	53.6%
To Use Other Drugs	33.1%	50.8%
To Baby-sit Siblings	7.1%	8.8%
To Work	17.4%	10.9%
Parents Do Not Care	54.1%	56.0%
Other Family Problem	34.7%	34.6%

## Appendix B

Table B2

*Student Perceptions of Who Students Skip Class With*

	<b>Current Study Results</b>	<b>2005 Fitzgerald Results</b>
Alone	11.2%	8.5%
Friend(s) Not in School	16.3%	5.1%
Friend(s) from Same School	83.7%	48.4%
Friend(s) from Other Schools	11.2%	2.9%
Family Member(s) Not in School	1.0%	2.8%
Family Member(s) from Same School	1.0%	0.5%
Family Member(s) from Other Schools	1.0%	0.3%
Other	0.0%	0.0%

## Appendix C

Table C3

***Student Perceptions Whether Parents Care if Students Skip Class***

	<b>Current Study Results</b>	<b>2005 Fitzgerald Study Results</b>
Very Much	83.7%	78.1%
Somewhat	9.2%	11.1%
A Little	1.0%	4.8%
Not at All	0.0%	6.1%
I'm not sure	5.1%	5.0%

## Appendix D

Table D4

*Student Perceptions Whether Teachers Care if Students Skip Class*

	<b>Current Study Results</b>	<b>2005 Fitzgerald Study Results</b>
Very Much	43.9%	42.2%
Somewhat	35.7%	37.5%
A Little	11.2%	11.0%
Not at All	3.1%	9.3%
I'm not sure	5.1%	6.4%

## Appendix E

Table E5

*Students Awareness of School Districts Truancy Policy*

---

	<b>Current Study Results</b>	<b>2005 Fitzgerald Study Results</b>
Yes	60.2%	61.7%
No	38.8%	34.3%
No Response	0.0%	3.2%

## Appendix F

Table F6

*Students Perceptions of What Works to Prevent Truancy*

	<b>Current Study Results</b>	<b>2005 Fitzgerald Study Results</b>
Monitoring Local Hangouts	20.4%	24.3%
Students Academic Failure	22.5%	25.3%
School-Based Detention	26.5%	26.4%
Suspension	23.5%	24.8%
Parent Notification	46.9%	43.3%
Truancy Citation	31.6%	37.5%
Truancy Court	50.0%	46.2%
Juvenile Probation/ Supervision	34.7%	37.8%
Nothing	23.5%	22.0%
Other	9.2%	17.2%

## Appendix G

## Truancy Perception Survey

**This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.**

## Truancy Perception Survey

You are being asked to participate in a research study on student perceptions of the causes of and possible interventions to reduce or prevent truancy. You are not required to complete the survey and may withdraw at any time. If you do not wish to participate you may leave the survey blank and place it in the envelope when the class is instructed to do so. All information will be kept confidential and used only for statistical purposes in aggregate form for a research report. There are no risks to you as a result in participating in this study as information will be tabulated anonymously. Your participation in this survey will help to provide a better understanding of why students skip classes and how to effectively reduce this problem.

### Demographic Information

*The following questions are being collected for comparison purposes only*

<b>Gender:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male	<b>Current Grade:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <sup>th</sup> (Freshman) <input type="checkbox"/> 10 <sup>th</sup> (Sophomore) <input type="checkbox"/> 11 <sup>th</sup> (Junior) <input type="checkbox"/> 12 <sup>th</sup> (Senior)
---	--

### Survey Questions

*The following questions pertain to truancy and your perceptions of truant behavior*

**1. On average, how many CLASSES PER WEEK do you skip or intentionally miss?**

<input type="checkbox"/> None	<input type="checkbox"/> 7-9
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-3	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 or more
<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6	

**2. In your opinion, WHY do students skip or intentionally miss classes? (Select all that apply)**

<input type="checkbox"/> Problems with Teachers or School Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> School Phobia
<input type="checkbox"/> Problems with Other Students	<input type="checkbox"/> To Commit Delinquent Acts
<input type="checkbox"/> Bullies in School	<input type="checkbox"/> To Use Alcohol
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficult Coursework	<input type="checkbox"/> To Use Marijuana
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Challenge in School Work	<input type="checkbox"/> To Use Other Drugs
<input type="checkbox"/> Behavior Problems	<input type="checkbox"/> To Baby-sit Siblings



## Appendix H

## Consent Form

**This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.**

## UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study investigating students' perceptions of the underlying causes of truancy and their perception of interventions used to reduce truancy. I am seeking students from Wausau West High School to voluntarily participate in a study by completing a short anonymous survey during their homeroom class period on May 18, 2007. Your child is not required to participate in this survey and may withdraw at anytime.

All information that is gathered will be kept confidential and will be reported in statistical form for a research report. Completed surveys will not be available for Wausau West staff to view, and student names or other identifying information will not be gathered. The completed surveys and this consent form will be kept in sealed envelopes.

#### **RISKS**

The risks associated with this study are minimal. All results will be reported in statistical form, thus no identifying personal information will be reported.

#### **BENEFITS**

By participating in this study your child will have the opportunity to identify what they feel are the underlying causes of truancy, as well as possible interventions to reduce truancy. Wausau West High School can benefit from this information by identifying methods to reduce or prevent truancy. By signing this document you are consenting to your child's participation in the study.

If you have any questions please feel free to ask. You can contact Kevin Kampmann, at (715) 297-0594 or e-mail at [kampmann@uwstout.edu](mailto:kampmann@uwstout.edu). You may also contact Dr. Denise Zirkle Brouillard, thesis supervisor at (715) 232-2599 or e-mail at [brouillardd@uwstout.edu](mailto:brouillardd@uwstout.edu). Questions can also be answered by Sue Foxwell, Director of Research Services at (715) 232-2477 or [foxwells@uwstout.edu](mailto:foxwells@uwstout.edu).

By signing this document, you are consenting to your child's participation in this study. Please have your child return this form to their homeroom teacher as soon as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent / Guardian Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Student Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)