

SCHOOL AND WORK TARDINESS
IN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RURAL WISCONSIN

by

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ABSTRACT

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Businesses expect employees to arrive at the workplace with basic Asoft skills@ which include personal attributes like punctuality. The purpose of this research study was to examine the relationship between school and work tardiness in high school students in rural central Wisconsin.

The literature review covered tardiness and absences in the work and school environment, school failure and its relationship to school tardiness and absenteeism, school interventions to change deviant behavior, students= insights about deviant school behavior, the home influence on school tardiness and absences, and the effect of work on school behavior and

performance.

The research showed that working students are significantly different than their fellow students. Working students are more punctual at school classes, have fewer unexcused school absences, and have higher Grade Point Averages (GPA). The hypothesis that working students will exhibit the same tardiness pattern at work as well as at school was strongly supported. That is, students who were punctual at school were also punctual at work while students who were tardy at school were also tardy at work. Ancillary findings included a correlation between students tardiness and unexcused absences at school, a negative correlation between unexcused school absences and GPA, no significant differences between genders on tardiness and unexcused absences in school, a significantly higher GPA for females than for males, and a significant difference between high school grade levels and their tardiness and unexcused absence behavior.

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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE

Introduction

During the economic boom times of the late 1990s and early 2000s unemployment rates were low and many businesses were either unable to fill all of their job openings or were hiring more people than ever before with marginal skills and work experience. These entry-level workers did not readily fit into the traditional job orientation and training regimes employers had used in the past. As employer frustration mounted, Job Center staff, private employment agencies, Workforce Development Boards, and the U.S. Department of Labor began to hear a common theme which ran, “Just send us people who show up on time every day ready to work and then we’ll take care of their training.”

These businesses expected employees to arrive at the workplace with basic “soft skills” which include punctuality and reliability. These personal attributes are not specifically taught in primary, secondary or post-secondary schools. Rather, as children mature into adults, society assumes that they will gradually acquire the habits which lead to job and life success. However, some employers would characterize this assumption as “wishful thinking” - at least for a segment of the American population.

Individuals who are late or absent for work are at great risk of being fired. They develop a poor work history which further inhibits their ability to get a good job. They may well retain the basic personal habits of tardiness and unreliability, making long-term success at any job improbable. People lacking stable, good-paying jobs are unable to support themselves and their families and become increasingly dependent upon public assistance programs or involved with the criminal justice systems. Given the importance of “soft skills” to life success, further study into the development of these habits seems warranted.

The remainder of this chapter will cover the problem statement, objectives, significance and limitations of the study, assumptions, and definitions.

Problem Statement

This research explores the relationship between school and work tardiness in high school students. School personnel, school boards, parents, and employers who examine this data will have a better understanding of school tardiness, related school deviant behaviors, and punctuality in a work setting. The study population was limited to students attending one rural, central Wisconsin high school over a two month period in 2002.

Research Objectives

The objectives for this study of tardiness Central Sands High School* students are to determine:

1. If working students, compared to other high school students,
 - a. Are more or less likely to be tardy at school,
 - b. Are more or less likely to have unexcused absences at school, and
 - c. Have higher or lower Grade Point Averages (GPAs).
2. If high school students working at local employers are similar to each other in terms of:
 - a. Tardiness at work,
 - b. Tardiness at school,
 - c. Unexcused absences at school, and
 - d. GPA.
3. The relationship of school tardiness to work tardiness.
4. If an employer intervention can change the school or work tardiness of its high school employees.

5. If school tardiness and unexcused absences are affected by:
 - a. Gender,
 - b. Grade level
 - c. Time of year/term
6. The relationship between:
 - a. School tardiness and unexcused absences,
 - b. School tardiness and GPA, and
 - c. Unexcused absences and GPA.

Significance of the Study

In 1996 the United States federal government acted on welfare reform by passing Temporary Assistant to Needy Families - TANF (Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, 2003). This law replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Act which had provided economic help to low-income families since it was authorized in 1935 (Britannica, 2003). Unlike AFDC, which provided a monthly payment to parents until their youngest child turned eighteen years old, TANF set a time limit of sixty months for cash assistance. The intent was to break inter-generational dependence on public assistance and provide short-term help to families in need.

Parents now must quickly learn to take financial responsibility for their families, and for many the transition has been rough. Low-income adults and young single parents may lack marketable job skills. Nationally only 51% of the TANF recipients between 1999 and 2000 had completed twelve or more years of education, and 19% had gone to school nine years or less (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003). Besides lower academic achievement, TANF recipients generally bring poverty class values to a work environment which

assumes/presupposes that people have a middle class work ethic (Payne, DeVol & Smith, 2001).

In November of 1997 the national unemployment rate dropped to 4.6%, and by April of 2000 it had fallen even lower to 3.8% - a fortunate situation for the individuals affected by TANF (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003). Lacking a good work history and education, many were still able to enter the mainstream workforce because there was a worker shortage. With the “best” workers already employed, businesses hired more job applicants with marginal skills. Post-secondary institutions, primarily technical colleges in Wisconsin, were positioned to deliver job skills training, but employers found that new employees needed “soft” skills, not technical skills, for these entry level jobs. They wanted workers who showed up on time every day ready to work. Unfortunately, no quick-fix course to teach these life skills is available.

Are “soft” work skills - like punctuality and attendance - indeed habits which must be taught by the family and reinforced in students’ educational settings? What responsibility do schools have for students who do not demonstrate these habits? If school tardiness is a predictor of work tardiness, schools can identify students at-risk for potential job failure and develop policies and interventions to reinforce good life and work habits.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are that:

1. The results are limited to the students in one rural central Wisconsin school district.
2. Not all local employers participated in the study.
3. Not all students working at participating employers chose to be in the study.
4. The student population is fairly homogenous.
5. The data collection period from employers was nine weeks.

Assumptions

1. Participating employers have a precise and accurate system for tracking attendance.
2. Participating employers will provide attendance information for study subjects to the researcher on a regular basis.
3. Employers expect students to work on days they are scheduled.
4. Employers inform employees about and enforce their tardiness and absence policy.
5. School district staff inform students about and enforce their tardiness and unexcused absence policy.
6. Employers may alter who they hire in the future as a result of information collected during the study.
7. The school district staff, administration, and School Board may change the tardiness or unexcused absence policy or its enforcement and develop intervention strategies in the future as a result of information collected during the study.

Definitions

GPA - Grade Point Average. The cumulative summary of a student's academic performance on a 4.0 scale with 4 = "A" and 0 = "F".

Learning Disability (LD). Decreased functioning in school despite the fact that the student, "...is a) not mentally retarded, b) not emotionally disturbed, c) not impaired in his modalities (e.g. blind, deaf,), and d) has had an opportunity to learn not hindered by excessive absences, poor teaching, frequent family moves, etc." (Lavoie, 1990, p.

Tardy/Tardiness. Being late for any measurable length of time past the stated or scheduled start time for work or school. At Central Sands High School, "Students will be considered tardy if they are not in the room when the bell starts to ring" (Central Sands High School Student Handbook, 2001, p. 3).

Truant. In Wisconsin, “A habitual truant means a pupil who is absent from school without an acceptable excuse for part or all of 5 or more days on which school is held during a school semester” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003).

Unexcused absence. Not attending or showing up for class or work while also not having a valid reason as defined by the school or employer for the absence, such as illness, funeral, vacation, or approved school activity. At Central Sands High School a student receives an unexcused absence if he/she does not show up for class within ten minutes of the bell ringing. “Unexcused absences include, but are not limited to: 1. shopping, 2. hair/nail appointments, 3. visiting friends, 4. concerts, and 5. vehicle repair” (Central Sands Student Handbook, 2001, p. 3).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Problem Statement

Good work habits - like punctuality and attendance - are important employability traits. This research explores the relationship between school and work tardiness in high school students to determine if school tardiness is a predictor of work tardiness.

Tardiness and Absences in the Work Environment

Getting and keeping a job are instrumental factors in determining a persons' success in life. Beside the obvious economic benefit to the individual, a job affects self-esteem, helps define social position, reduces the probability of involvement with the criminal justice system, and creates a taxpayer contributing to the local, state and national economy.

Given the importance of employment, this study explores two behaviors which are present in a work and school setting. When hiring, human resources managers look for - among other characteristics - dependability in job applicants. Tardiness and absences are indicators of undesirable employee behaviors, and, "...employers may wish to avoid hiring individuals who regularly engage in such behaviors..." (Sackett & Wanek, 1996, p. 815). Once hired, satisfactory attendance on the job and acceptable levels of effort and loyalty become part of the old social contract between employees and employers (Weidenbaum, 1995).

Abernathy (1989) cites studies which show that tardiness and absenteeism are two common reasons for employee terminations. Private business and government entities alike use these measures to discipline and fire employees (Michigan State Department of Civil Service, 2003). The objectivity and relative ease in data collection of tardiness and absenteeism records appeal to human resources departments.

Thus work tardiness and absenteeism data is used by business for many reasons such as determining if training had an effect on work habits (Abernathy, 1999) and examining the dimensions of alienation from work (Cummings & Manning, 1977). Businesses track and analyze the tardiness and absentee rates of their employees to learn about their workforce, similar to taking the pulse to help assess the health of an organism.

Employers also watch tardiness and absenteeism rates because they affect profitability. Companies lose productivity if employees are late or missing. Businesses may need to maintain a substitute or “on-call” list or pay overtime to regular workers to fill gaps left by absent employees. These substitutes may not be as familiar or as skilled at a job, or they may be tired from working extra hours. Their output is less, the product quality lower, and accident rate higher. Yet employers may be reluctant to terminate unreliable workers because turnover affects profits (Hacker, 2003). Time is money to business, and it takes time to hire and train new employees. When unemployment rates are low, employers have fewer applicants from which to choose and no guarantee that the individuals they hire will be “better” than the ones who were fired.

Clearly businesses want to hire the best applicants. “The antecedents of discharges reside in the hiring and firing systems of an organization. An organization that selects employees carefully need not discharge as many employees...” (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, Douglas, & Gupta, 1998, p. 4).

While tardiness and absenteeism are undesirable traits in the workforce, research is not clear on the relationship of work tardiness to absenteeism. Leigh and Lust (1988) found no correlation between the two behaviors in employed people. Their findings contradict that of Rosse’s (1983) study of female hospital employees. Rosse tested five models of employee

tardiness, absence, and turnover.

An analysis of the results, though failing to provide unequivocal support for any of the five models, did verify the interrelatedness of withdrawal behaviors....The progression of withdrawal model was most strongly supported, demonstrating a progression from lateness to absence to turnover (p. 1).

As originally proposed this study sought to provide insight into the relationship of work tardiness and absenteeism in high school students in rural Wisconsin.

If employers expect people to arrive at the workplace on time and on every scheduled day, then it follows that they expect people to have learned these skills before entering the workforce. Secondary education in the United States provides a universal environment where future workers - high school students - can demonstrate the same behaviors of punctuality and attendance. But are school tardiness and absenteeism predictors of these work behaviors?

Hotchkiss and Dorsten (1985) hypothesized that deviance in high school - as measured by truancy, tardiness, and cutting classes - would result in deviance on the job and subsequent lower wage and employment outcomes. They were not able to directly measure deviance on the job but found no reduction in hours, wages, or employment for young workers who as high school students had poor school behavior.

Research on the direct relationship of school and work tardiness and absenteeism is limited, perhaps because it seems so intuitively logical that a person would exhibit similar behavior in both environments. One anecdotal account speaks directly to this question.

A local businessman who said he was having problems with workers arriving late and calling in sick asked to look at the high school attendance records for some of his current employees. After checking the attendance records, he found that - down to the person -

the students who had problems attending class were now the adults having problems attending work (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 50).

The purpose of this study is to collect relevant data in order to quantitatively substantiate or refute the connection between work and school punctuality.

Tardiness and Absences in the School Environment

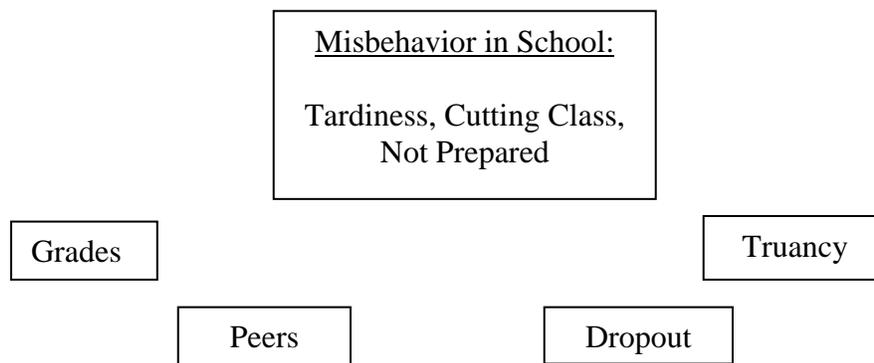
Many researchers have developed checklists of “deviant” school behaviors which are associated with poor school performance. In 1963 a Background Paper on Dropouts and Youth Employment stated that potential dropouts could be described and identified at least five years before they dropped out. Irregular attendance and frequent tardiness were two of the five dropout indicators. Mizell (1987) included tardiness and excessive absences as part of twenty-one criteria which predict the likelihood of dropping out of school. Stradford (1993) found that tardiness and absences are characteristics of potential 9th and 10th grade at-risk students. Ligon and Jackson (1988) discovered that excessive absences and tardiness constituted the 3rd most common reason for student failure in school. Low attendance and habitual tardiness were among the common characteristics of low-achieving Hispanic high school students (Cuellar, 1992). Estcourt (1986) found that low achievement correlated with chronic absenteeism in high school students. Ediger (1987) included “cutting classes and frequent tardiness in school” among the indicators of at-risk students with drug and alcohol abuse problems (p. 3).

Like businesses, schools collect data on student tardiness and absences to learn about their populations. These behaviors are a barometer indicating the likelihood of student success. Many school interventions to improve student performance use tardiness and absences as indicators of success or failure of the intervention.

However, the relationships among tardiness, absences, and grades and dropping-out or

school failure are complex. Hotchkiss and Dorsten (1985) conducted a large, longitudinal study which provided part of the data for the High School and Beyond data base. In 1980 the answers of 58,000 sophomores and seniors generated data for the base year. The researchers did subsequent follow-up surveys in 1982 and 1984. After extensive analysis they found that, “Poor grades stimulate misbehavior and dropping out. Similarly, time spent with friends stimulates misbehavior and dropping out.... The predominant paths in these findings can be reduced to the following parsimonious model” (p. 80).

Model of Deviance in High School



School Interventions to Change Deviant Behavior

Perhaps not knowing about or trusting this model and underestimating the power of grades to predict school behavior, some schools try to tackle the problem of tardiness and absences head-on. Chronically tardy students might get “administrative detention” (Tomczyk, 2000). Schools create policies intended to reduce absences (Malbon & Nuttall, 1982) or create more accurate tracking systems (Hernan, 1991). After learning that one employer found a direct correlation between school and work tardiness (see page 9 of this paper), St. Pierre (2002) instituted a strict policy for his high school classes in which being tardy directly affected the

student's grade for the class. While well-intentioned, this approach seems particularly misguided if the model accurately predicts that lower grades increase deviant behavior, including tardiness.

The model suggests that to reduce school deviant behavior educators must focus on their basic mission - to educate youth well. Based upon a National Educational Longitudinal Study in 1988 the U.S. Education Department (1990) issued a call for schools to be transformed into "communities for learning." This survey of 25,000 American eighth graders revealed that,

...such learning communities are seldom found in our schools. Regarding school relationships, data show that by spring of the school year, 35 percent of the eighth grade students said they had not talked with their teacher about coursework during the school year and 65 percent had not discussed their course selections with a school counselor. Concerning learning readiness, teachers said that 20 percent of sampled eighth graders were inattentive; 47 percent of the students said they were bored at least half the time spent in school. Over 10 percent of eighth graders were frequently absent, and a third had been sent to the office for misbehaving. School climate is far from engaging, with a significant percentage of students citing tardiness, absenteeism, cutting class, and class disruption as serious problems (p. 1).

Schools which make changes in their delivery of academic instruction may find improvement in school deviant behavior. Cordogan (2001) reported that a suburban Chicago, Illinois high school administrator initiated an interdisciplinary curriculum. A four-year study which tracked 161 discipline-based and 247 interdisciplinary students found that students in the interdisciplinary program demonstrated more positive behavior such as decreased absences and lower suspension rates. The interdisciplinary students also had higher grade point averages

(GPAs) and ACT test scores, and their scores on the Iowa Test of Educational Development were equal to or higher than the discipline-based group.

Other schools have made smaller academic changes and have seen positive results. Tardiness decreased when a rural secondary school went to block scheduling (McCoy, 1998). An urban Illinois school reduced tardiness and disruptive behavior in physical education classes by introducing, "...a series of co-operative learning activities to address interpersonal skill development, and creation of physical education portfolios to increase student goal setting and decision making skills" (Anderson & Windeatt, 1995, p. 88). Lazerson et al. (1988) reported a decrease in truancy by junior high learning-disabled (LD) students when they tutored younger LD students. A self-contained dropout prevention class for middle school students with a behavior modification program to teach time management skills resulted in a decrease from an average of fifteen tardies per week to zero tardies for the last three weeks of the program (Johnson, 1995). A pilot project aimed at improving vocational education programs divided sixty 10th grade students with high drop out potential into experimental and control groups. The control group received the traditional vocational programming while the experimental group received intensive, competency-based skills utilizing a new instructional delivery system. The experimental group had academic performance gains and, "...a reduction in truancy, suspensions, tardiness, class cutting, absenteeism and students dropping out of school" (Wilson, 1977, p. 100).

School interventions incorporating work have been less successful at reducing deviant school behavior. Back in 1968 the Michigan Department of Research and Development reported on an in-school paid work experience project for fourteen and fifteen year old junior high students. There was no statistically significant change in absences or tardiness or changes in

academic grades or citizen marks for the 140 student enrollees over a one year period of participation. Levinson and Felberbaum (1993) studied the Earn and Learn program, a, "...work-experience program initiated in 1972 as a school-based, goal-oriented program for at-risk middle school students..." Using a pretest-posttest experimental-control group design they ran two evaluation studies and concluded there were no over differences, "...between Earn and Learn students and control groups for achievement test data, report card grades, tardies, suspensions, and graduation rates" (p. 1).

Students' Insights on Deviant School Behaviors

Only a few researchers directly question students about the reasons for student tardiness. Damico et al. (1990) found that student perceptions on why they were late for and cut classes included crowded halls, limited opportunities for social interaction, irrelevant course content, and teacher indifference. Having worked with at-risk high school students, Britt (1998) noted, "Students complained about the inconsistency of school rules, especially those related to tardiness and eating in school, and they noted the double standard that allowed teachers to do many things students were not allowed to do" (p. 1). Supporting the latter students' perceptions, Scott (1990) reviewed the literature on school tardiness and found that consistency in dealing with tardiness was the most important factor in reducing tardiness.

Home Influence on School Tardiness and Absences

Students are products not only of their school but also of their community, and most especially their home environment. Within one school the family circumstances of the student population can vary greatly. Family stability, economics, and values are all intertwined and have an effect on the children.

Family composition appears to have a substantial impact on student performance.

Featherstone et al. (1992) studied 530 middle school students and found that, "...students from intact, two-parent families had fewer absences and tardies, higher grade point averages, and fewer negative and more positive teacher behavioral ratings than did those from reconstituted and single-parent families" (p. 1).

In the book Bridges Out of Poverty (2001) Payne, DeVol and Smith contend that children and adults come to school and the workplace with values they learned at home. The authors postulate that there are certain values associated with the poverty, middle and wealthy classes. Schools and businesses operate with values from the middle class culture. Parents from the poverty class may sanction, condone, and reward attitudes and behaviors which may not reinforce school policies based upon middle class standards. Being poor also increases the likelihood that families are evicted from their homes or may need to move frequently. Single-parent households generally have lower incomes than two parent households. Of necessity, the custodial parent may be at work when the children are getting ready for or coming home from school. All of these factors - values, instability and lack of supervision - can affect students' school attendance and punctuality.

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (1995) has documented the relationship of family income and absenteeism. In central-city high schools twelve percent of the students were absent per day; in public high schools with forty percent or more of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch ten percent were absent; and in schools with a lower free and reduced lunch rate seven to eight percent were absent. Lerman (2000) found that high school students from low-income and welfare families do less homework, have much higher rates of expulsion and suspension, and are absent from school more.

One intervention used by schools to create a link from the classroom directly to the family is a school-home contact program. Dating back to the early 1970s, these programs, “...send paraprofessional workers who are familiar with the community into the homes of students who show serious problems in attendance, adjustment, or achievement” (Erickson et al., 1972, p. 1). Payne et al. (2001) contend that people from the poverty class value personal relationships and that in order to effectively communicate with low-income parents, school staff need to make a personal connection with them. They stress the importance of listening. Indeed, communication is a major objective of school-home contact programs. Erickson et al. evaluated these programs in twenty schools involving one thousand student subjects, one hundred eighty parents, and forty-eight high school professional staff and found a reduction in absenteeism, class cutting, tardiness, and school dropouts.

Effect of Work on School Behavior

The literature is unclear about whether working while in high school helps or hurts students academically and behaviorally. Lerman (2000) found that high school students from low-income families are less likely to work than their peers, that deviant school behaviors were only weakly linked to long work hours, and that working teens have fewer school absences and extensive behavioral or emotional problems. Stern and Briggs (2001) reviewed the literature and found that, “Previous research shows that secondary students with moderate working hours perform better academically than those with no work or longer hours” (p. 355). After conducting a longitudinal study involving 714 high school students, Hotchkiss (1982) concluded that there was little evidence that the number of hours worked by high school students had a negative impact on tardiness, absenteeism, involvement in extracurricular activities, and grades.

In contrast, Price and Phelps (1996) surveyed 229 rural Tennessee high school students

and discovered that, “Working students were more likely to be tardy or absent and to be making poor grades” (p. 1). In this study over half of the employed students worked more than twenty hours per week. Shanahan and Flaherty (2001) indicated that some studies showed, “Contemporary adolescents spend more time in paid, nonfarm work, which has been linked to illicit drug use, problem behaviors, and reduced educational attainment” (p. 385) and “...high levels of involvement in the workplace increase the likelihood of school dropout” (p. 386). However, they felt this was a simplistic picture of how work affected students and proceeded to do an extensive longitudinal study of 1,139 high school students on the use of their time.

Shanahan and Flaherty found that students fell into different patterns of time use, such as “Active Workers,” “Active Nonworkers,” and “High Leisure,” among others. These patterns change from 9th to 12th grade. Students who work fall into various categories he created: “Active Workers,” “Work, No Extracurricular,” “Work/Friends, No Homework,” “Work/Extracurricular, No Homework” and “Work Full-Time, Chores.” In addition to finding that students with future school plans and higher GPAs were more likely to have time-use patterns which included school extracurricular activities, they also discovered that students involved in only one or just a few domains of activity, like “Work, No Extracurricular” were already in ninth grade considered more at-risk. Students in the “Work/Friends, No Homework” and “Work Full-time, Chores” were also likely to disengage from school.

The Work Full-Time, Chores class was strongly associated with poor grades: Students who did poorly in school were much more likely to have begun working full-time by the eleventh grade. Indeed, full-time workers represented about one-third of all dropouts in the eleventh grade and one-half of all dropouts in the twelfth grade (p. 397).

The time-use category which was most likely to predict dropping out was “No Work, No

Extracurricular.” Sixty-five percent of the students who had dropped out of school by the eleventh grade were in this category.

Shanahan and Flaherty concluded that students who were engaged in many activities were likely to be successful in school. They also found that, “...most students who worked were highly engaged in all of the domains of activity assessed” (p. 398). Work in itself is not a predictor of academic and behavior success in school - hence the discrepancies among studies. Rather the student’s degree of commitment to multiple activities, including work, is a better indicator of probable high school and post-secondary educational success.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

While there is a large body of research on work and school tardiness and absenteeism, no study in the literature review examined the direct relationship between school and work tardiness in high school students. The primary objective of this research is to collect quantitative information to see if school tardiness can predict work tardiness. Secondary objectives are to a) compare the tardiness, absenteeism and GPA records of working students to the general high school student population, b) determine if working students at different employers are similar to each other, c) see if selected demographics influence school tardiness and unexcused absences, d) examine the relationship of school tardiness and unexcused absences in the general high school population, and e) test whether an employer intervention can change the school or work tardiness of high school employees.

This chapter will cover the research design, population studied, employer and student worker recruitment, data collection process, intervention instrument, and the data validity and reliability.

Research Design

This is an experimental study using control and experimental groups to test one of the objectives. Tardiness, unexcused absence and GPA data from working high school students are compared to the same variables for the remaining high school population.

The literature review provided several major longitudinal studies exploring tardiness, unexcused absences, grades and employment in high school students. However, none of them collected actual tardiness data on working high school students from their employers. This study will show the relationship of school tardiness to work tardiness by connecting individual

students' punctuality records in their education and employment settings over the same period of time. The control-experimental portion of the study will test whether a mild employer intervention can affect the tardiness behavior of employed students.

Information collected on the general high school population and the subgroup of working students will be analyzed. Subsequent findings, summary, conclusions and recommendations will be shared with appropriate staff of the school in the study, the school board, the participating employers, and interested parents and students who took part in the study.

Population

The population studied was high school students who attend a rural high school in south-central Wisconsin. The school district covers just over 500 square miles and serves slightly more than 2,000 students from four years old through high school. Central Sands County has a year around population of 18,643. The county's two "twin cities" - Central (population 1,914) and Sands (population 698) are located in the heart of the school district which is also in the center of the county (U. S. Census Bureau, 2003). All of the participating business are located in Central Sands, as are most businesses in the county.

The 645 high school students are a fairly homogenous group who are 94% Caucasian. Around 36% of the 9th - 12th graders receive free or reduced lunches, and around 16% are in special education.

The actual number of this high school's students who were working during the study period is unknown. However, the geographical isolation of the majority of students and the concentration of employers in Central Sands results in a majority of working students being employed by only a few employers during the school year.

Sample

The researcher contacted five businesses which had the highest concentrations of youth employees in the county and collectively employed the majority of the school students during the winter months. At the time the study started they had a total of forty-eight student employees. One business, which employed four students, decided not to participate because of the manager's health problems which resulted in time constraints. All forty-four student workers from the remaining four employers received letters inviting them to participate in the study. A total of thirty-one students returned signed consent forms resulting in a 70% participation rate.

Employer and Student Worker Recruitment

In November of 2001 the researcher made personal visits to each of the five selected employers to explain the purpose of the study, to determine if they had accurate methods for tracking "punch-in" time, and to ascertain their willingness to collect information and participate in the study if it were approved by the UW Stout Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. At that time all five employers agreed to be part of the study.

Following the approval by the Review Board in March 2002 the researcher hand-delivered an instructional letter (Appendix A) to the employers and found that one business needed to remove itself from the study. The researcher gave each of the remaining employers the packet which contained a letter customized to their business which could be copied on company letterhead and signed by the owner or manager. That same week the employers gave this letter (Appendix B) to each student employee along with an information note titled, "???" Questions Youth Might Have About This Information ???" (Appendix C), a "Student Consent Form" (Appendix D), a letter to parents (Appendix E), and a self-addressed, stamped enveloped deliverable to the researcher. Each student would receive \$10 for participating in the study and returning a completed Consent Form. The students would not be asked to do anything during the

course of the study beyond giving the researcher permission to collect punctuality and attendance from their workplace and school.

As students returned the Consent Forms, the clerical support staff person at the high school Guidance Office helped out by distributing the \$10 in cash and obtaining a student sign-off on the “Cash Receipt Verification” (Appendix F). After two weeks the researcher took the list of students who had returned Consent Forms back to the employers and made one attempt to contact each of the remaining students by phone. By the beginning of April 2002 thirty-one of the forty-four students (70%) had signed the Consent Form and were part of the study.

Data Collection Process

On April 6th the researcher delivered a letter to each employer with instructions and the names of the participating students from whom consent was obtained (Appendix G). The employers were asked to provide time records from March 30 - June 7, which was the last week of the school year. The researcher picked up the time records from the business on weekly or bi-weekly trips, depending upon the individual employer’s pay period.

Each employer had a different process for “clocking in.” One business had an electronic time keeper for which every employee had a code. Another used a special feature of the cash register, and the others used a more traditional time clock for punching in. The human resource staff or managers gave the researcher either hand-written or an electronic print-outs of the students’ clocked-in time and also a copy of the students’ scheduled time. Time records were kept to the nearest minute.

The researcher then converted the scheduled and actual times to military time (one hour = 100 rather than 60) for ease of data analysis and keyed the data into Excel. Each student had an individual record which included the employer, date, scheduled “in” time, actual “in” time, and

the scheduled out time.

To obtain the school information the researcher worked with the clerical support staff of the high school guidance office. After the last day of school and using the school database, Skyward, she ran several sets of reports which included the tardiness and unexcused absence records for each of the working students from April 3 - June 5th and also for the entire school year and their cumulative GPAs. She also ran the same tardiness and absence reports for the entire high school student body. The researcher keyed all of this data into Excel, with the school tardiness, unexcused absence, and GPA data tied to the work tardiness data for all of the participating students. For analysis the data was then imported into SPSS. Minitab software was used for follow-up analysis on the results.

Intervention Instrument

One objective of the study was to determine if a mild employer intervention could change the punctuality of working students either at work or at school. To test this hypothesis the thirty-one students who had signed consent forms were randomly divided into two groups with sixteen in the control group and fifteen in the experimental group. The serial number from a dollar bill was used to enter the random number table with a coin toss to determine horizontal or vertical selection of numbers. The names of the students from all employers were mixed together, arranged in alphabetic order by last name, and assigned a sequential number. The first fifteen numbers on the random number table determined which students were in the experimental group.

The intervention was a customized, short letter written by the researcher commenting on a student's school tardiness and unexcused absence record for the previous two weeks. The letter was signed by the employer and given by the employer to the specific experimental group

student for whom the letter was written. The letter expressed either congratulations (excellent punctuality and attendance record - Appendix H), praise for improvement (Appendix I), questioning (Appendix J) or disappointment (Appendix K). To create each letter the researcher obtained the student's school tardiness and unexcused absence information from the school database. The letters were written and delivered every other week during the study period. Each experimental group student received a total of four letters dated April 17, April 28, May 10, and May 23.

After the delivery of the first letter on April 17 high school clerical staff and an employer notified the researcher that they had received phone calls on April 19 from three parents who were upset by the customized letter their child had received. All three had received "disappointment" letters. Two of these three students worked for the same employer. This employer did not want to lose these students as employees and their parents as customers and therefore wanted to withdraw from the study. This business employed the greatest number of students, and rather than lose 45% of the participants in the study, the researcher decided to stop sending letters to the experimental group participants employed at this business. This reduced the experimental group to ten, all employed by the other three businesses. The control group therefore increased to twenty-one.

Data Validity and Reliability

All data for this study is taken from the actual time and attendance work records used for payroll purposes and from the school district's official student database, Skyward, which has specific fields for tardiness and unexcused absences and which calculates GPA by a uniform formula for all students. The data is therefore highly valid.

The data from the employer work record is very reliable as all employers used an

electronic process initiated by the individual worker “clocking-in.” Employees are very motivated to punch in on-time or ahead of schedule because their paychecks are dependent upon their clocked hours.

The school data is less reliable. While school policy states that students must be counted as tardy if they arrive at class after the bell rings, some teachers implement this policy strictly and others in a lax manner. If a student is absent from class and the school clerical staff has not received a valid reason for the absence - such as illness or funeral - the student will receive an unexcused absence. However, a parent may not yet have called in to explain the student’s absence or a teacher may not have given a list of students involved in an approved extracurricular activity to the office staff. These students would initially be coded as “unexcused” but might later be changed to “excused” if the student, parent, or teacher supplies the office staff with new information. While GPAs are dependent upon the students’ academic performance, some teachers have rigid grading policies and others are more lenient, allowing extra credit and opportunities to make up missed or late work. Taken as a whole, however, the school data is very reliable. All tardiness, absence and GPA data are recorded on or calculated in an identical manner in the school database. The students’ records are a composite of behavior and performance exhibited in six to eight classes per term with a variety of teachers.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Businesses expect employees to arrive at the workplace with basic soft skills which include personal attributes like punctuality. The purpose of this research was to study the development of these soft skills by examining a) the relationship between school and work tardiness in high school students and b) the differences and similarities between working and non-working students on school tardiness, unexcused absences and academic achievement - possible precursors of workplace habits and skills.

Forty-four student workers were identified. Thirty-one (70%) agreed to participate in the study which would link their records on school and work tardiness, school unexcused absences and academic performance, as measured by their GPA. In addition, the records of these working students were compared with the remaining high school population of 615 on measures of tardiness, unexcused absences and GPA.

Throughout the rest of this chapter the various hypotheses to be tested will be listed. For each hypothesis a description of the finding will be followed by a table of the results.

Findings

Hypothesis 1: Working students are less likely than other high school students to be tardy at school.

The research supports the supposition that working students are less likely to be tardy at school than the general student population. On average working students were tardy for 17.03 classes per year while the rest of the student body was tardy for 25.30 classes (Table 1). The punctuality of working students was superior for the entire school year ($t = -2.085, p < .05$) and also for 4th Quarter ($t = -2.739, p < .01$). Levene's Test of Equality of Variances was used

(Table 1A).

TABLE 1	# of Classes Tardy per Student					
	2001-2002 School Year			4 th Quarter 2002		
Student Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Working	29	17.03	20.311	31	4.23	5.548
Non-working	615	25.30	30.233	603	7.14	9.053
TABLE 1A * Equal variances not assumed			t-test for Equality of Means			
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
# Tardies for Year			-2.085	34	.05	
# Tardies for 4 th Qtr.			-2.739	38	.01	

Hypothesis 2: Working students are less likely than other high school students to have unexcused absences at school.

The research supports the supposition that working students are less likely to have unexcused absences at school than the general student population (Tables 2 and 2A). This result has a higher level of statistical significance than the tardiness results. On average, working students were absent from classes 21.34 periods per year (or 2.66 days) without an excuse, while the rest of the student body was absent 64.69 periods (or 8.08 days). The working students' attendance was better for the entire school year ($t = -7.009$, $p < .001$) and also for 4th Quarter ($t = -6.721$, $p < .001$). Levene's Test of Equality of Variances was used.

TABLE 2	# of Unexcused Absences per Student
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	2001-2002 School Year			4 th Quarter 2002		
Student Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Working	29	21.34	26.428	31	7.42	10.598
Non-working	615	64.69	93.302	603	24.23	39.859

TABLE 2A * Equal variances not assumed	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
# Unexcused Absences for Year	-7.009	69	.001
# Unexcused Absences for 4 th Qtr.	-6.721	87	.001

Hypothesis 3: Working students have higher GPAs than the general student population.

The research supports the supposition that working students have higher academic achievement as measured by Grade Point Averages (GPAs) than the general student population. On average working students' GPAs were 3.20 on a 4.0 scale - or above a B+ - while the rest of the student body's GPA was almost a full grade lower at 2.29, $t = 7.103$, $p < .001$ (Tables 3 and 3A). Levene's Test of Equality of Variances was used.

TABLE 3	Grade Point Average of Students for 2001-2002 School Year		
Student Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Working	31	3.19558	.679764
Non-working	615	2.28935	.919132

TABLE 3A * Equal variances not assumed	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Grade Point Average	7.103	35	.001

Hypothesis 4: Working students will exhibit the same tardiness pattern at work as

at school, i.e. students who have high rates of tardiness at school will also have high rates of tardiness at work and vice versa.

Data for two measures of tardiness at work was collected 1) the number of days tardy and 2) the number of minutes tardy. On the first measure, number of days tardy at work, the hypothesis was strongly supported. That is, students who were punctual at school were also punctual at work while students who were tardy at school were also tardy at work. When examining the school tardiness pattern for working students in the 4th quarter of the school year, Table 4 shows that there was a strong correlation for the first three weeks of the study period ($p < .001$), the third three weeks of the study period ($p < .007$), and the whole nine weeks of the study period ($p < .001$).

The correlations are even stronger for students' tardiness records for the entire school year. Table 4 also shows that students' school tardiness is highly correlated with every time period of work tardiness: 1st three weeks, $p < .000$; 2nd three weeks, $p < .043$; 3rd three weeks, $p < .001$; and the whole nine weeks, $p < .000$.

TABLE 4	Working Students= Days Tardy at Work
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		1st 3 Weeks	2nd 3 Weeks	3rd 3 Weeks	9 Weeks Total
Classes Tardy in 4th Qtr.	Pearson Correlation.	.611	.204	.499	.589
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.001	.298	.007	.001
	N	28	28	28	28
Classes Tardy for Year	Pearson Correlation	.631	.385	.590	.693
	Sig (2 tailed)	.000	.043	.001	.000
	N	28	28	28	28

On the second measure of tardiness - minutes late at work - the hypothesis is also supported for most weeks in the study period. That is, students who were punctual at school were also punctual at work while students who were tardy at school were also tardy at work. When comparing the working students= school tardiness during the 4th quarter, the results were significant for the 3rd three weeks of the study period and also for the nine week total of the study period ($p < .000$ and $p < .012$ respectively). The data is stronger when using the student= school tardiness pattern for the entire year. The correlation was almost, but not quite significant for the 1st three weeks of the study period, $p < .052$. However, the results were significant for the 2nd three weeks ($p < .040$), the 3rd three weeks ($p < .000$), and the whole nine weeks of the study period ($p < .004$).

TABLE 4A**Working Students Minutes Tardy at Work**

		1 st 3 Weeks	2 nd 3 Weeks	3 rd 3 Weeks	9 Weeks Total
Classes Tardy in 4th Qtr.	Pearson Correlation.	.317	.256	.685	.468
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.101	.188	.000	.012
	N	28	28	28	28
Classes Tardy for Year	Pearson Correlation	.370	.391	.669	.531
	Sig (2 tailed)	.052	.040	.000	.004
	N	28	28	28	28

Hypothesis 5: Student tardiness and unexcused absences at school are not correlated.

In general, this hypothesis was disproved: usually student tardiness and unexcused absences are positively correlated (Table 5). That is, students who are frequently tardy also have frequent unexcused absences, and students who are usually punctual have fewer unexcused absences. Using Pearson's Correlation, there is a high degree of certainty for this finding, $p < .000$, when examining data for the entire student body and for the student body with the working students taken out. This level of probability is true for the entire school year and for the 4th Quarter only.

However, the behavior of the working students is less predictable. The working student data shows a large correlation, $p < .000$, when looking at class tardies and absences for the entire year. While still significant, the probability decreases for both the 4th Quarter tardiness, $p < .019$, and 4th Quarter unexcused absences, $p < .016$. Furthermore, working student data is no longer statistically significant, $p < .058$, for the correlation between 4th Quarter tardies and 4th Quarter unexcused absences.

TABLE 5		Class Tardies for Year			Class Tardies 4 th Qtr.		
		All	Non-W	Work	All	Non-W	Work
Absences Year	Pearson Correlation.	.339	.334	.616	.239	.233	.432
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.019
	N	644	615	29	632	603	29
Absences 4 th Qt	Pearson Correlation.	.326	.322	.444	.223	.218	.344
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.000	.016	.000	.000	.058
	N	632	603	29	634	603	31

Hypothesis 6: Unexcused absences and GPA are negatively correlated.

Using Pearson's Correlation the hypothesis that students with high GPAs will have fewer unexcused absences and that students with low GPAs will have greater unexcused absences was shown to be true (Table 6). This statement can be made with a high degree of confidence, $p < .000$, when talking about the unexcused absences for the entire year and 4th Quarter for the entire student body and the student population with the working student data pulled out. While still statistically significant, the correlation between working students' GPA and unexcused absences for the year, $p < .023$, and for the 4th Quarter, $p < .028$, is less strong.

TABLE 6		Unexcused Absences for Year			Unexcused Absences 4 th Qtr.		
		All	Non-W	Work	All	Non-W	Work
GPA	Pearson Correlation.	-.513	-.520	-.420	-.472	-.468	-.395
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.000	.023	.000	.000	.028
	N	644	615	29	634	603	31

Hypothesis 7: Student tardiness and GPA are not correlated.

The data disproved the hypothesis for most students but supported it for the working students. Data for the entire student body and the student population without the working students, show that a high GPA is highly correlated with a low number of class tardies (and a low GPA is highly correlated with a high number of class tardies), both for the entire year and for 4th Quarter, $p < .000$ (Table 7). However, this relationship was not true for working students when looking at their tardiness records for the entire year, $p < .079$, and was even less probable for 4th Quarter, $p < .127$. In general, students with high GPAs will tend to be punctual (and vice versa), but working students - who as a group are more punctual at school than their classmates (Table 1) - do not show this same pattern.

TABLE 7		Class Tardies for Year			Class Tardies 4 th Qtr.		
		All	Non-W	Work	All	Non-W	Work
GPA	Pearson Correlation.	-.439	-.439	-.332	-.387	-.387	-.280
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.000	.079	.000	.000	.127
	N	644	615	29	634	603	31

Hypothesis 8: School tardiness is evenly distributed over the course of a school year.

The data was not collected to directly analyze this question. However, school records of working and non-working students suggest that school tardiness is not evenly distributed over the course of a year. Tables 8 and 8A show that working and non-working students are not statistically different in their tardiness patterns during the 4th quarter at school, $p < .356$. If all student tardies were evenly distributed throughout the school year, one would expect a mean of 25 for each quarter for both working and non-working students. However, the mean number of tardies for working students was 23.9930, and the mean for non-working students was 28.1274.

This suggests that as a whole, students have a greater number of tardies during the 4th quarter of the school year. While working students have significantly less overall tardiness at school than non-working students, this data shows that they too are more likely to be tardy during the 4th quarter than during the rest of the year.

TABLE 8		Tardiness of Students for 4th Quarter of the School Year		
Student Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Working	29	23.9930	26.80438	
Non-working	604	28.1374	23.42924	
TABLE 8A		t-test for Equality of Means		
* Equal variances assumed		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
4th Quarter School Tardiness		-.924	631	.356

Hypothesis 9: School Unexcused absences are evenly distributed over the course of a school year.

Again, the data was not collected to directly analyze this question. However, school records of working and non-working students suggest that school absences are not evenly distributed over the course of a year. Tables 9 and 9A show that working and non-working students are not statistically different in their absences during the 4th quarter at school, $p < .193$. If all student absences were evenly distributed throughout the school year, one would expect a mean of 25 for each quarter for both working and non-working students. However, the mean number of absences for working students was 30.1840, and the mean for non-working students was 36.6565. This suggests that as a whole, students have a greater number of absences during the 4th quarter of the school year. While working students have significantly less overall absences at school than non-working students, this data shows that they too are more likely to be

absent during the 4th quarter than during the rest of the year.

TABLE 9		Absences of Students for 4th Quarter of the School Year		
Student Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Working	29	30.1840	24.61060	
Non-working	603	36.6565	26.20454	
TABLE 9A * Equal variances assumed		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
4th Quarter School Absences		-1.303	630	.193

Hypothesis 10: Gender does not make a difference in tardiness at school.

The results support the hypothesis that gender is not a factor in whether or not a student will be tardy at school. The mean number of class tardies for the male student population of 344 was 24.88 for the entire year, while the mean for 300 females was 24.97 tardies, $p < .970$ (Tables 10 and 10A). While female students had a higher mean than males for 4th Quarter, 7.14 versus 6.86, the result is still not statistically significant, $p < .696$, using Levene=s Test of Equality of Variances and a t-test for Equality of Means.

TABLE 10	# of School Classes Tardy					
	2001-2002 School Year			4th Quarter 2002		
Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	344	24.88	30.420	336	6.86	8.597
Female	300	24.97	29.311	298	7.14	9.310
TABLE 10A * Equal variances assumed		t-test for Equality of Means				
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Tardies at School for Year		-.038	642	.970		

Tardies at School for 4th Qtr.	-.391	632	.696
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Hypothesis 11: Gender does not make a difference in unexcused absences at school.

The results support the hypothesis that gender is not correlated with either a high or low number of unexcused absences at school. The mean number of class unexcused absences for the male student population of 344 was 62.81, or 7.85 full days for the entire year, while the mean for 300 females was 62.65 tardies, $p < .983$ (Tables 11 and 11A). While female students had a higher mean than males for 4th Quarter, 24.55 (3.06 full days) versus 22.40 (2.80 full days), the result was still not statistically significant, $p < .488$, using Levene=s Test of Equality of Variances and a t-test for Equality of Means.

TABLE 11	# of School Unexcused Absences					
	2001-2002 School Year			4th Quarter 2002		
Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	344	62.81	91.027	336	22.40	37.800
Female	300	62.65	92.793	298	24.55	40.565

TABLE 11A * Equal variances assumed	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Unexcused Absences for Year	.022	642	.983
Unexcused Absences for 4th Qtr.	-.693	632	.488

Hypothesis 12: Gender does not make a difference on GPA.

Using Levene=s Test of Equality of Variances and a t-test for Equality of Means this

hypothesis was not supported: gender and GPA are actually related. On a 4.0 scale the female student body had a higher mean GPA, 2.44, than the males with a mean GPA of 2.24 (Tables 12 and 12A). This difference was statistically significant, $p < .008$, in spite of the fact that the females had a greater standard deviation (0.965 versus 0.888 for female/males respectively).

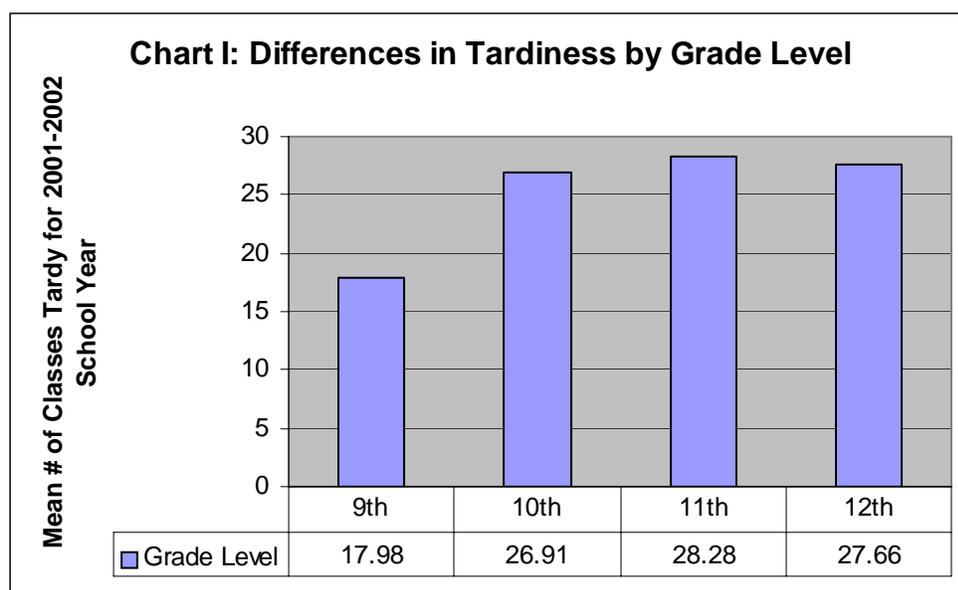
TABLE 12		GPA for 2001-2002 School Year		
Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Male	345	2.24203	.887754	
Female	301	2.43693	.965390	
TABLE 12A * Equal variances not assumed		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
GPA		-2.657	614	.008

Hypothesis 13: Grade level has no relationship to tardiness at school.

While not expecting to find that grade level and tardiness in school were tied together, in the general student body the mean number of classes tardy for the entire school year varied by grade level at a statistically significant rate, using a two factor analysis of variance, $F(3,640) = 4.665$, $p < .003$ (Tables 13 and 13A). The biggest difference was for the 9th graders with the lowest class tardy mean of 17.98 periods, compared to a mean of 26.91, 28.28 and 27.66 respectively for 10th, 11th and 12th graders. Chart 1 illustrates these findings. However, this statistically significant relationship did not hold up for the 4th Quarter using a two factor analysis of variance, $F(3,628) = 2.574$, $p < .053$. The punctuality pattern of 9th graders changes during the 4th Quarter. During this last portion of the year 9th graders obtain 31.8% of their tardies for the year (M of 5.71 for 4th Qtr. divided by M of 17.98 for the year - Table 13) while 10th, 11th, and 12th graders obtain 29.6%, 27.8% and 23.5% respectively.

TABLE 13	# of Classes Tardy					
	2001-2002 School Year			4 th Quarter 2002		
Grade Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
9 th	181	17.98	21.598	180	5.71	7.572
10 th	160	26.91	33.571	157	7.97	10.889
11 th	178	28.28	29.752	174	7.87	8.794
12 th	125	27.66	33.859	121	6.50	7.992
Total	644	24.93	29.885	632	7.02	8.938

TABLE 13A		ANOVA			
		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tardiness 2001-2002 School Year	Between Groups	3	4096.845	4.665	.003
	Within Groups	640	878.119		
	Total	643			
Tardiness 4 th Quarter 2002	Between Groups	3	204.114	2.574	.053
	Within Groups	628	79.302		
	Total	631			



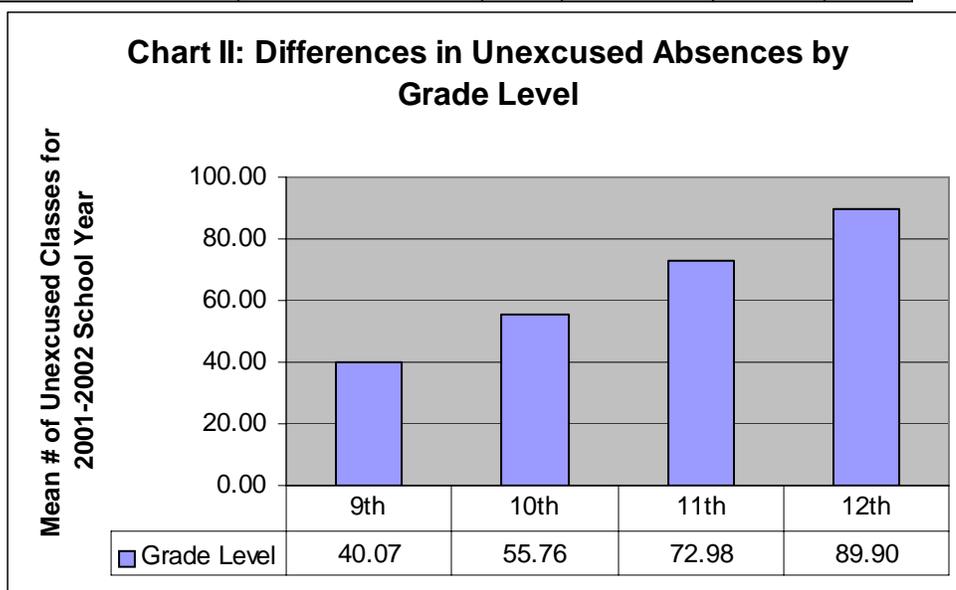
Hypothesis 14: Grade level has no effect on school unexcused absences.

While not expecting to find that grade level and unexcused absences in school were tied together, in the general student body the mean number of unexcused periods for the entire school year significantly varied by grade level, using a two factor analysis of variance, $F(3,640) = 8.678$, $p < .000$ (Tables 14 and 14A). This statistically significant relationship was also true for the 4th Quarter, $F(3,628) = 5.825$, $p < .001$. The trend was for increasing unexcused absences for every advancing grade level in high school. Freshmen had a mean of 40.07 periods of unexcused absences (5 days) for the year while seniors had more than double this rate with a mean of 89.80 of periods of unexcused absences (11.22 days). Chart 2 illustrates these findings.

TABLE 14	# of Unexcused Absences					
	2001-2002 School Year			4 th Quarter 2002		
Grade Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
9th	181	40.07	66.457	180	14.82	26.716
10th	160	55.76	99.025	157	21.64	41.988
11th	178	72.98	94.024	174	28.61	44.532
12th	125	89.90	101.838	121	31.39	40.308
Total	644	62.71	91.782	632	23.48	39.147

TABLE 14A	ANOVA			
	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

Unexcused Absences 2001-2002 School Year	Between Groups	3	70573.76 4	8.678	.000
	Within Groups	640	8132.633		
	Total	643			
Unexcused Absences 4 th Quarter 2002	Between Groups	3	8727.093	5.825	.001
	Within Groups	628	1498.131		
	Total	631			



Hypothesis 15: Grade level has no correlation with GPA

This research did not find any relationship between grade level and GPAs for the entire student body over the 2001-2002 school year, using a two factor analysis of variance, $F(3,640) = .845$, $p < .469$ (Tables 15 and 15A). This is somewhat surprising after finding a significant negative correlation between GPA and unexcused absences for all of the students (see Hypothesis 6) and a correlation between grade level and unexcused absences, with seniors having more than twice the rate of absenteeism as freshmen (see Hypothesis 14). While not statistically significant, seniors had the highest mean GPA of any class in spite of their absences. Seniors had a higher standard deviation for unexcused absences, $SD = 101.838$, than did

freshmen, $SD = 66.457$ (Table 14), but a lower standard deviation for GPA, $SD = .722088$ versus $SD = .954762$ for freshmen (Table 15). Perhaps a few seniors who were frequently absent substantially affected their class absenteeism rate but had a much smaller effect on GPA.

TABLE 15		GPA for 2001-2002 School Year			
Grade Level	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	
9th	181	2.36265		.954762	
10th	160	2.24248		1.026303	
11th	178	2.31588		.933262	
12th	125	2.40635		.722088	
Total	644	2.32826		.927006	

TABLE 15A		ANOVA			
		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GPA 2001-2002 School Year	Between Groups	3	.727	.845	.469
	Within Groups	640	.860		
	Total	643			

Hypothesis 16: Students working at local employers are similar to each other in terms of Grade Point Average.

The assumption was that all four businesses hired students who were similar to each other in terms of GPA, absences and punctuality. While close to statistically significant, $F(3,27) = 2.614$ $p < .072$ using a two factor analysis of variance, this research did not find any relationship between the place of employment and students' GPAs (Tables 16 and 16A).

TABLE 16		GPA of Working Students by Employer			
Employer	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	
Employer 1	5	2.96140		.546527	
Employer 2	14	3.27857		.695148	
Employer 3	6	2.71767		.736429	
Employer 4	6	3.67500		.332827	
Total	31	3.19558		.679764	

TABLE 16A		ANOVA			
Working Students		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
GPA 2001-2002 School Year	Between Groups	3	1.040	2.614	.072
	Within Groups	27	.398		
	Total	30			

Hypothesis 17: Students working at local employers are similar to each other in terms of tardiness at school.

As with the previous hypothesis, there does not seem to be any significant correlation between place of employment and the rate of tardiness at school. This was true for both the entire 2001-2002 school year, $F(3,25) = 2.800$, $p < .061$, and for the 4th Quarter of 2002, $F(3,27) = 1.233$, $p < .317$, using a two factor analysis of variance (Tables 17 and 17A). The large standard deviation of students working at Employer 3 and 4, $SD = 25.183$ and $SD = 31.452$ in Table 17, suggests that these businesses employ students with a larger range of differences in

school punctuality than do Employers 1 and 2. Interestingly, in the 4th Quarter the mean and standard deviation of students at Employer 3 were similar to those at Employers 1 and 2 (Table 17).

TABLE 17	Working Student School Tardiness					
	2001-2002 School Year			4 th Quarter 2002		
Employer	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employer 1	4	8.00	5.477	5	4.20	4.266
Employer 2	14	10.21	10.482	14	3.00	4.930
Employer 3	6	23.83	25.183	6	3.33	3.882
Employer 4	5	35.20	31.452	6	8.00	8.343
Total	29	17.03	20.311	31	4.23	5.548

TABLE 17A		ANOVA			
Working Students		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tardiness 2002-2002 School Year	Between Groups	3	968.325	2.800	.061
	Within Groups	25	345.840		
	Total	28			
Tardiness	Between Groups	3	37.095	1.233	.317

4 th Quarter 2002	Within Groups	27	30.079		
	Total	30			

Hypothesis 18: Students working at local employers are similar to each other in terms of unexcused absences at school.

Once again, the assumption was that place of employment had no correlation with school unexcused absences. However, unlike with the GPA and tardiness findings, the hypothesis appears to be false, using a two factor analysis of variance. There appears to be a relationship for both the entire 2001-2002 school year, $F(3,25) = 3.370$, $p < .034$, and for the 4th Quarter of 2002, $F(3,27) = 4.660$, $p < .009$ (Tables 18 and 18A). When looking at the data for the entire school year, the largest contrast is between Employer 2 ($M = 8.50$, $SD = 11.986$) and Employer 3 ($M = 44.00$, $SD = 31.975$). This contrast between Employers 2 and 3 is also true for 4th Quarter.

TABLE 18	Working Student School Unexcused Absences					
	2001-2002 School Year			4 th Quarter 2002		
Employer	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employer 1	4	24.25	16.560	5	8.60	7.092
Employer 2	14	8.50	11.986	14	2.36	3.478
Employer 3	6	44.00	31.975	6	18.83	15.600
Employer 4	5	27.80	39.124	6	6.83	11.356
Total	29	21.34	26.428	31	7.42	10.598

TABLE 18A		ANOVA			
Working Students		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Unexcused Absences 2002-2002 School Year	Between Groups	3	1877.167	3.370	.034
	Within Groups	25	557.002		
	Total	28			
Unexcused Absences 4 th Quarter 2002	Between Groups	3	383.156	4.660	.009
	Within Groups	27	82.225		
	Total	30			

Hypothesis 19: Students working at local employers are similar to each other in terms of tardiness at work.

Again the assumption was that working students are a homogeneous population and would have similar punctuality records no matter where they worked. The data showed that this was clearly not the case in regard to the number of days they were tardy at work during the nine week study period (Table 19). The result was highly significant using a two factor analysis of variance, $F(3,26) = 11.194$, $p < .000$ (Table 19A). However, when looking at the average number of minutes students were tardy at work, the results were almost - but not quite - significant

using a two factor analysis of variance, $F(3,26) = 2.739$, $p < .064$ (Table 19A). Both Employer 3 and Employer 4 had large standard deviations ($SD = 93.14015$ and $SD = 71.85786$ respectively) for the number of minutes tardy. A small number of students accounted for these results. At Employer 3, one student was late one day by $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours. At Employer 4 two students had several days on which they were late by half an hour and were frequently late by lesser amounts on other days.

TABLE 19	Student Work Tardiness from April - June 2002					
	# Days Tardy			# Minutes Tardy		
Employer	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Employer 1	5	2.20	3.271	5	9.2400	17.99300
Employer 2	13	1.69	2.250	13	6.9692	12.31228
Employer 3	6	8.33	2.338	6	61.0000	93.14015
Employer 4	6	8.33	4.590	6	66.6000	71.85786
Total	30	4.43	4.321	30	30.0800	57.28356

TABLE 19A	ANOVA				
Working Students		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Days Tardy at Work	Between Groups	3	101.710	11.194	.000
	Within Groups	26	9.06		

	Total	29			
Minutes Tardy at Work	Between Groups	3	7617.823	2.719	.064
	Within Groups	26	2781.050		
	Total	29			

Hypothesis 20: An employer intervention can improve the tardiness record of its student employees.

During the last nine weeks of school, or the 4th quarter, the experimental group members received letters from their employer commenting upon their most current school tardiness and absence record. In analyzing the data, the experimental and control groups were compared on three different measures: 1) school tardies during the 4th quarter, 2) days tardy at work, and 3) minutes tardy at work.

On the first measure, number of tardies at school, as seen in Tables 20 and 20A there was no difference between the experiment and control group, $p < .857$. The intervention had no effect on the students' punctuality at school.

TABLE 20	4th Quarter School Tardies		
Student Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	10	4.00	4.99
Control	18	4.39	6.06

TABLE 20A * Equal variances not assumed	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
# Tardies for 4th Qtr.	-0.18	21	0.857

On the second measure, number of days tardy at work, the employer intervention had the opposite effect than was expected. That is, the control group had significantly fewer days tardy at work than did the experimental group (Tables 21 and 21A). The experimental group mean number of tardiness at work for the nine week study period was 7.10 while the control group mean number of tardies was 3.44, $p < .023$. However, both groups showed a steady decline in their mean number of days tardy at work as the study period progressed. When comparing the 1st 3 week period to the 3rd 3 week period, both groups had decreased their mean number of days tardy at work by one ($M 2.80 - 1.80 = 1$ for the experimental group and $M 1.67 - 0.67 = 1$ for the control group).

TABLE 21	Days Tardy from Work					
	Experimental			Control		
Days Tardy	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1 st 3 Weeks	10	2.80	2.2	18	1.67	2.54
2 nd 3 Weeks	10	2.50	1.51	18	1.11	1.18
3 rd 3 Weeks	10	1.80	1.62	18	0.67	1.28
Total 9 Weeks	10	7.10	3.54	18	3.44	4.20

TABLE 21A	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1 st 3 Weeks	1.23	21	0.231
2 nd 3 Weeks	2.51	15	0.024
3 rd 3 Weeks	1.81	15	0.076
Total 9 Weeks	2.44	21	0.023

On the third measure, number of minutes tardy at work, the employer intervention had no statistical effect (Tables 22 and 22A). The mean number of minutes tardy dropped for both the experimental and control group over the nine weeks. Interestingly, the experimental group mean dropped from 0.560 in the 1st three week period to 0.131 in the final three week period, a difference of 0.429. The control group had fewer minutes tardy at work throughout the study but started with a lower mean number of minutes late, 0.182, in the first three week period and dropped to 0.065 minutes tardy in the last three weeks, a difference of 0.117, a change less than the experimental group.

TABLE 22	Minutes Tardy from Work					
	Experimental			Control		
Days Tardy	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1 st 3 Weeks	10	0.560	1.21	18	0.182	0.442
2 nd 3 Weeks	10	0.146	0.111	18	0.124	0.189
3 rd 3 Weeks	10	0.131	0.281	18	0.065	0.215
TABLE 22A			t-test for Equality of Means			
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
1st 3 Weeks			0.96	10	0.361	
2nd 3 Weeks			0.39	25	0.701	
3rd 3 Weeks			0.65	15	0.528	

These varying results and some unexpected results might indicate that the experimental and control groups were substantially different from each other. While initially selected through a random process, the experimental employees from one employer were moved into the control

group after some concerns were expressed by the parents. This may have altered the random composition of the groups. One final analysis was done to see if the experimental and control groups differed in their GPAs. As seen in Tables 23 and 23A, the mean GPAs were very similar for both groups and their differences were not statistically significant, $p < .966$.

TABLE 23	GPA		
Student Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	10	3.193	0.818
Control	18	3.206	0.677

TABLE 23A	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
GPA	-0.04	15	0.966

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

A basic employee requirement for most jobs is to show up on time every scheduled day ready to work. These “soft skills” of punctuality and attendance are not specifically taught in school and yet, if not learned in some manner, can easily lead to being fired from jobs. Welfare reform in 1996 increased the need for parents to be economically self-sufficient rather than relying on a monthly check from public assistance to raise their families. In today’s marketplace all workers, not just the best and the brightest, must have basic employability skills to obtain and remain employed at even entry level jobs. Are punctuality and attendance “habits” which are indirectly learned at home and at school? If “soft skills” are so important for job success, how can we ensure that all students possess good work habits before they enter the workforce? We need a better understanding of the development of “soft skills” so that all students will leave high school having these basic tools for future economic success.

Problem Statement

This research explores the relationship between school and work tardiness in high school students and examines whether school tardiness predicts work tardiness. School personnel, school boards, parents, and employers who examine this data will have a better understanding of school tardiness, related school deviant behaviors, and punctuality in a work setting.

Summary of Study Procedures

The study population was limited to students attending one rural, central Wisconsin high school over a two month period in 2002. The county’s two “twin cities” - Central (population 1,914) and Sands (population 698) are located in the heart of the school district which is also in the center of the county (population 18,643). The county and school are largely ethnically

homogenous: 94% of the students are Caucasian. All of the four participating business are located in Central Sands, as are most businesses in the county. These businesses collectively employ the majority of the school students during the winter months. Forty-four student workers from these four employers received letters inviting them to participate in the study. A total of thirty-one students returned signed consent forms, a 70% participation rate.

To determine whether or not school and work punctuality were related, data needed to be collected from both the school and the employers. All selected employers met the essential requirement of having a precise and accurate system for tracking the attendance of their employees. To recruit students for participation in the study and to obtain informed consent, the researcher took a number of steps. The employers started the process by sending out letters, customized by the researcher for their business, to working students encouraging them to participate in the study. Along with this letter the students received an information note titled, “??? Questions You Might Have About This Information???” a “Student Consent Form,” a letter to parents, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope deliverable to the researcher. Each student received \$10 for returning the “Student Consent Form” and participating in the study -- which simply meant that the researcher had permission to collect punctuality and attendance records from their workplace and school.

In early April the researcher informed each employer which students had returned “Consent Forms” and were therefore in the study. Employers began providing time records from this point through the end of the school year. The researcher picked up the time records from the businesses on weekly or bi-weekly trips, depending upon the individual employer’s pay period. The time records were hand-written by managers or an electronic print-out of the students’ clocked-in time along with a copy of the students’ scheduled time with all time recorded to the

nearest minute. The researcher keyed this data into Excel, converting all records to military time (one hour = 100 rather than 60) for ease in calculations.

Another aspect of this study was to determine if an employer intervention could change the punctuality of working students either at work or at school. The students with signed Consent Forms were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. Every other week during the study period the students in the experimental group received a customized, short letter written by the researcher commenting on the student's school tardiness and unexcused absence record for the previous two weeks. The letter was signed by the employer and given by the employer to the experimental group students. Depending upon their most immediate school records, the experimental students received letters of congratulations (Appendix G), praise for improvement (Appendix H), questioning (Appendix I), or disappointment (Appendix J). The experimental group received a total of four letters.

During the nine week study period the researcher worked with the school Guidance Office Assistant to collect school tardiness and unexcused absence information on the experimental group students every two weeks. The Guidance Office Assistant also ran school tardiness and unexcused absences reports by grade level for the entire student body for the 4th Quarter of the school year as well as for the entire school year. Using the school database at the end of the year, she also ran the cumulative GPAs report for each student. The researcher keyed all of this data into Excel, adding the appropriate gender for each student so that the completed file included an ID number for every high school student, their grade, gender, cumulative GPA, total number of class tardies in the 4th Quarter of the year (the study period), total number of class tardies for the entire year, total number of class unexcused absences for the 4th Quarter, and the total number of class unexcused absences for the year.

During the 4th Quarter of the 2001-2002 school year there were a total of 646 students at Central Sands High School. Initially forty-four (44) students were identified as working for the employers and were contacted by the researcher. Thirty-one (31) of these students signed “Consent Forms,” and they are included in the data analysis as “Working Students.” All working students for whom consent was not obtained - along with the rest of the student body - became “Non-Working” students for data analysis purposes. The known working students not participating in the study make up only 2% of the records in the “Non-Working” data file.

In the first week of the study, two working students with signed Consent Forms terminated employment with their study group employers to begin employment with businesses where they would work in the summer months. Another student stopped working because his mother felt he needed to spend more time on schoolwork. Work records were therefore impossible to collect on these three students, so the working student population was reduced to twenty-eight (28) for control/experimental group data analysis.

Conclusions and Implications

The primary purpose for this research was to determine if “soft skills,” like punctuality, are habits which carryover from a school setting into the workplace. The data presented in Hypothesis 4 shows that a student’s school tardiness record is closely tied to his/her work tardiness pattern. The correlation between school and work tardiness is strong for both the number of days tardy at work, $p < .000$, and the number of minutes tardy at work, $p < .004$ (Tables 4 and 4A). Based upon this study one could predict whether or not a student will be punctual at work based upon his/her tardiness record at school: students who are on-time for school classes are also likely to be on-time at work while students who are tardy frequently at school will probably also be tardy at work.

Hotchkiss and Dorsten (1985) hypothesized that deviance in high school - as measured by truancy and tardiness - would result in deviance on the job and subsequent lower wages and employment outcomes, but they did not find this to be true. Their study, however, did not directly link tardiness on the job to the same individual's tardiness records at school, nor did any other studies uncovered in this search of the literature. Furthermore, Hotchkiss and Dorsten tied student deviant behavior measures in school to employment outcomes after the students left high school. In contrast, this study shows that student behavior is consistent at school and work in the same time period.

Since employers want workers who are punctual, these results could influence who gets hired, especially at entry-level positions. It would be in the employers' best interest to choose individuals who have the best tardiness record at school.

The fact remains that not all students are punctual, so a second part of this study tried to determine if an employer intervention could improve students' tardiness behavior either at school or at work. In this case the experimental students received customized letters from the employer commenting on their school tardiness and unexcused absence record. This intervention had no effect on the students' punctuality at school, $p < .857$ (Tables 20 and 20A). Contrary to what was expected, the experimental students were tardy more frequently at work than their control group counterparts, $p < .023$ (Tables 21 and 21A). These significant results may indicate that working students really do pay attention to information received from their employers, but they react in ways that are not easily predictable.

On the larger question posed in this study of whether working students attending this rural high school are different from their fellow students in terms of tardiness, unexcused absences and GPA, the answer is clearly "Yes." Working students are less likely to be tardy at

school, $p < .05$ (Table 1A), less likely to have unexcused absences at school, $p < .001$ (Table 2A), and more likely to have higher GPAs, $p < .001$ (Table 3A). These findings support research by Lerman (2000), Stern and Briggs (2001), and Hotchkiss (1982) which found that working students fared as well or better than their counterparts when measured by school deviant behavior. In contrast, Price and Phelps (1996) found that rural Tennessee working high school students were more likely to be tardy or absent or have lower grades than their counterparts, but over half of these employed students worked more than twenty (20) hours per week. In this study at Central Sands High School the maximum number of hours students worked was 17.5 per week, and most students worked around twelve (12) hours per week.

The number of hours students work is critical as to whether or not working will help or hurt them. By working fewer hours per week, students have enough time to also participate in extracurricular activities. Shanahan and Flaherty (2001) found that students who were engaged in many domains of activities were more likely to be successful in school. As a group the Central Sands working students seem to be successfully balancing their work, school, leisure, and family time. They may be exerting a positive influence on each other, teaching each other how to manage their time so that they can “do it all.”

Another aspect of this study was to examine the relationship of school deviant behaviors and students' GPAs. Not surprisingly, for the student body as a whole student tardiness and unexcused absences are highly correlated, $p < .000$ (Table 5). Many researchers - Mizell (1987), Stradford (1993) and Ligon and Jackson (1988) - have found that excessive tardiness and absenteeism are characteristics of students who drop out of school. This study, too, found that students with many unexcused absences and tardies had lower GPAs and those with fewer absences and tardies had higher GPAs, $p < .000$ (Tables 6 and 7). During the course of the study

one employer asked if he could accurately predict if a student would show up for work on time by knowing that the student was on the honor roll (a listed published quarterly in the local newspaper). Based upon this study, it would be true that as a group honor roll students would tend to be punctual at school, and since school and work tardiness are highly correlated with each other, they would probably be punctual at work. However, every group - in this case honor roll students - is composed of individuals whose behavior varies from the group average. Not all honor roll students will be punctual.

This research also examined whether school tardiness and unexcused absences are affected by gender and grade level. Gender had no effect on tardiness and unexcused absences, but did influence GPA. Females had a mean GPA 0.20 higher than their male counterparts, $p < .008$ (Table 12). At Central Sands High School grade level causes some interesting changes in tardiness and unexcused absences. Freshmen were significantly the least tardy class, $p < .003$, while the remaining upper graders were very similar in their tardiness rates (Table 13). Freshmen had a greater percentage of their tardiness in the 4th quarter. The longer they remain in high school, the more they become like the rest of the older student body. A different pattern occurred for unexcused absences. Each grade showed a steady growth in unexcused absences so that the rate for seniors was more than double that of freshmen (Table 14 and 14A and Chart II). Interestingly, the tardiness rate for seniors was slightly lower than the tardiness rate for juniors. A possible explanation is that because seniors are absent from school more, they have less opportunity to be tardy in their classes.

Finally, the study assumed that students working at one local employer were similar to students working at other local employers, or conversely that local employers employed similar high school students. The results showed that students at all four employers were not

statistically different in their GPAs and tardiness rates at school (Tables 16 and 17). However, there was a significant difference in school unexcused absences among the students working for different employers, $p < 0.34$. The sharpest contrast was between Employer 2, whose student workers had a mean of 8.5 unexcused school absences and Employer 3, whose student workers had a mean of 44 unexcused absences (Table 18). These findings can be explained by two scenarios: 1) students with poorer attendance records apply for employment at certain employers and not others and 2) some employers do not hire students with poor school attendance records. Last, the study found that students working for different employers have significantly different rates of tardiness at work, $p < .000$ (Tables 19 and 19A). Students working for Employers 1 and 2 are rarely late for work while students working for Employer 3 and 4 are late almost four times as many days (Table 19). Considering that the working students are similar to each other in GPA and tardiness at school, some workplace factors and employers' expectations could account for these differences in work behavior.

Recommendation for Further Analysis

Four different portions of this study could benefit from further investigation and analysis. To obtain a complete picture of patterns of tardiness and unexcused absences for the student body as a whole, data should be collected and analyzed for each quarter, not just for the 4th Quarter and the entire school year. The various grade levels differed significantly in their tardiness and unexcused absence rates. As school staff and administration make various interventions, it would be helpful to have complete baseline data for each quarter by grade available to track subsequent changes.

Second, to gain a better understanding of students who are working, the data should be analyzed to determine if gender or grade level is correlated with school and work tardiness,

school unexcused absences, and school GPA. The sample population of 31 working students may not allow for any valid conclusions on grade level because of the small number of students in each subset, but gender differences might emerge.

Third, the unexpected results from the employer intervention, which did not increase punctuality more than the control group, deserves further examination. First, the data should be analyzed to see if the control and experimental groups differ in unexcused school absences, gender, and grade level. While students were initially divided by a valid random process, after the first letters were sent out to the experimental group one employer withdrew from this portion of the study. The researcher then moved all of this employer's experimental students into the control group. At that point the control and experimental groups were probably not random. A second approach to get around this difficulty would be to eliminate the data for the experimental group students from this particular employer from all analysis and rerun all correlations. It is also possible that nine weeks was simply not enough time and if the study had run longer, the outcome would have been different. The mean number of days tardy and the mean number of minutes tardy at work dropped steadily over the course of the nine weeks for both the experimental and control groups (Tables 21 and 22). There is no known reason for this overall drop. Perhaps the students discussed the letters (the intervention) among themselves and knew that their records were being examined. Knowing that they were simply part of a study on tardiness could have made them more cognizant of the need to be on time.

Finally, the study as initially proposed would have tracked students' absentee records at work to see if they corresponded with their school absentee records. Early on in the study the researcher discovered that working students substituted for each other when personal and school activities conflicted with their work schedules. The employers involved in the study were

generally pretty flexible as long as the time slot was covered. If student work absentee rates are worthy of subsequent followup, a more precise tracking of approved schedule modifications would need to be communicated by the employer to the researcher.

Recommendations

Considering that the employer intervention did not have the expected effect, the first recommendation is simply to proceed carefully when trying anything. The employers were very cooperative during the study and are a big source of support in this small community for school activities. They would probably participate again in a project aimed at helping them learn more about their employees and with the potential to create a more effective screening process of job applicants.

The main finding from this study - that students exhibit the same level of punctuality at school as at work - points out the need to mold good habits in our youth starting at an early age. One can argue over whether the parents or school should be responsible for teaching good life habits, like punctuality, but the reality is that both will need to do their part. New school courses are not needed, but rethinking about tardiness is.

1. Parents, students, and school staff need to understand that arriving for work on time is critical for work success at entry level jobs. Even if students are not fired because of their tardiness, they will not receive a good recommendation from the employer, which hurts them in obtaining subsequently better jobs.
2. Parents, students, school staff and employers need to understand that “soft skills,” like punctuality, are life habits and cannot be easily “switched on” simply by being hired. School tardiness is a good predictor of work tardiness.
3. Youth model what they see. If parents, teachers, support and administrative staff, co-

workers and work supervisors arrive for school, work or meetings late and leave early, students learn bad habits. Classes and meetings should start and end on time. Britt's (1998) interviews with at-risk students showed that they were quite aware of a double standard that allowed teachers to do many things students were not allowed to do.

4. Consistency counts. Ideally, school tardiness should be reported in exactly the same way by every middle and high school teacher for every student.
5. Effectively communicate expectations to students. Policies should be clearly written and discussed. The high school's internal TV system could broadcast the school's punctuality message. The one employer who had an employee handbook which was given to adult and student employees (and the researcher) had student workers with the lowest number of days tardy at work and the fewest minutes tardy at work (Table 19). Perhaps all employers should consider creating or distributing a handbook for their student employees.
6. Uniformly enforce school policies on tardiness and unexcused absences. Students' reputations, their degree of involvement in extracurricular and athletic activities, and their academic record should have no effect on how school staff enforce policies. Some of the working students with the highest GPAs had the worst tardiness records.
7. Reward students for school punctuality and attendance. Students who have perfect school attendance for a whole year justifiably receive recognition, but for most students this is an unrealistic goal. Consider recognition every quarter or for shorter time spans. If appropriate, write punctuality and attendance goals into Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) and recognize their achievement. The Chamber of Commerce might collaborate with the schools to create incentives to reward these habits, since it is in its long-term

best interest to build a good workforce.

While students' school tardiness and unexcused absence behavior are highly correlated with each other, they are two separate issues that require different approaches. This research found that students' GPA and unexcused absences are highly negatively correlated, $p < .000$ (Table 6). Students who do well in school come to school, and those who do poorly are frequently absent. Do students have low academic achievement because they miss school or do they miss school because they are not successful? Hotchkiss's and Dorsten's (1985) large, longitudinal study indicated that poor grades and time spent with friends increases the probability that students will misbehave in school, as indicated by tardiness or cutting classes. Misbehavior in school, low grades, and time spent with peers all increase the probability of truancy. Truancy itself is the best predictor of dropping out (see page 11).

While it is important to effectively communicate and enforce truancy policies, if Hotchkiss and Dorsten are right, communities which focus exclusively on compliance will not improve the academic achievement of their students or their truancy rate. The primary goal should be to increase students' academic success. Schools that have implemented large and small changes, such as creating interdisciplinary curriculum, block scheduling, using portfolios, and teaching time management skills have increased learning and decreased school deviant behavior.

The teaching techniques from Dimensions of Learning (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001) and Dr. Ruby Payne's poverty research help students learn. All school staff must understand the importance of basic principles, such as establishing a relationship with each student, so that the school culture is optimal for learning. Individual teachers must become proficient at using research-based teaching strategies such as identifying similarities and

differences, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning and setting objectives.

While these larger changes are occurring, small steps could be taken to improve the likelihood of most students reaching a high level of achievement.

1. Understand that no one wants to be in an environment where they are failing. Forcibly keeping students at school gets more difficult the older the students get.
2. Recognize tiny improvements in students. Some students have such poor academic and behavioral records that the effort to improve, participate, or change must be praised even if the outcome does not reach the level expected.
3. Reinforce practicing almost anything. We become good at what we do the most. Students need to learn that practicing is a great strategy for learning anything.

A final recommendation would be to change the report cards of middle and high school students so that behavioral and academic content components for each class are listed separately and then combined for an overall grade for the subject. Elementary schools have traditionally separated ratings for work and social skills, behavior, and academic achievement on report cards, and so should middle and high schools. Knowledge of academic subjects, regular attendance in class, and turning work in on time are important assets. Students should be graded on them and parents informed. By having a class grade which reflects an obvious combination of subject mastery and “soft skills,” schools would highlight the importance of both, while teachers would retain the right to weigh each category as seems most appropriate for the specific class.

While these ideas for increasing student achievement and decreasing unexcused absences and tardiness have focused primarily on what schools can do, parents and the community at large must be part of the solution. Children spend far more time out of school than in it. They learn life habits from the people and the media to which they are exposed. To give our children the

best opportunities for growth we must be active rather than passive. We are their role models whether we want to be or not.

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Appendix A

CENTRAL SANDS HIGH SCHOOL

Date: March 15, 2002

To: <Names of Employers>

From: Barb Weade, A-F Area Schools

Re: Work and School Tardiness Study

At long last I received approval from UW-Stout to start the work and school tardiness study I discussed with you. I've included a copy of the approval letter from Stout in your folder.

The folder contains the letter from your business to your high school student employees. Please make sure you sign it before including it with the other information to the students.

The students should receive a packet containing this information:

- o Employer letter to students
- o Yellow "Questions You Might Have About This Information"
- o "Student Consent Form"
- o Self-addressed, stamped envelope
- o Parent letter.

Please give these to your Adams-Friendship High School student employees as quickly as possible!

If you need more packets or have questions, let me know by calling me at home (339-3907) the week of March 18th. The best number to reach me from March 25th on is at work (339- 3213 Ext 208).

I will need a list of the names of your high school student employees so I can follow-up with them at school. Let me know when you have them pulled together and I can pick them up.

Last, if you don't already, please start running a report as of March 25th so that I can find out exactly what time your high school student employees punched/checked in. I will be requesting the information for only those students for whom I get informed consent. However, I don't yet know who these will be, although I'm hoping for all of them.

Thanks so very much for your help on this project. I really appreciate it.

Appendix B

<Inside Address>

March 15, 2002

Dear Student Employee,

Showing up on time every day is important in school and at work. <Name of store> wants to encourage all of its employees to develop this personal habit for success.

A local resident, Barb Weade, is conducting a study to further understand the relationship of work and school tardiness and attendance. **We hope you agree to participate. You will receive \$10 if you sign and return the attached "Consent Form." Your work hours will not be affected by your participation in this study.**

Barb will be happy to answer any questions you or your parents have. Just call her at 330-3907 in the evening or 339-3213 Ext. 208 during the day.

Sincerely,

<Name>

Manager or Store Team Leader

Appendix C

???Questions You Might Have About This Information. ???

Q. Where does the \$10 come from?

A. It comes my own (Barb Weade's) personal money, not the A-F School District or your employer.

Q. When, where and how can I get the \$10?

A. Monday, March 25th is the earliest. After you send me a properly signed "Student Consent Form" I will take \$10 in cash in your name to the A-F High School Guidance Office. You will pick up the money there and will need to sign a receipt saying that you got the money.

Q. Why are you doing this?

A. A lot of what we know in science, sociology and psychology comes from doing research like this. I am doing this project to complete my Masters Degree from UW-Stout. Your participation will help contribute to a better understanding about human behavior.

Appendix D

Student Consent Form

I understand that by signing and returning this “Student Consent Form” I will receive \$10 for participation in this study. I won’t be asked to do anything else except send in this completed form.

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and I may discontinue my participation at any time without any prejudice. The study will run through 2nd semester of 2002.

Participation in this study will have no effect on anything to do with my employment at <Name of Employer>

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between school punctuality and attendance and work punctuality and attendance. I further understand that any information collected about me during this study will be held in the strictest confidence. I understand that at the conclusion of this study all records which identify individual participants will be destroyed.

Signature of Student

Date

If Under 18 Years:

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Note: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher, Barbara Weade (339-3213 Ext. 208), second to the research advisor, Dr. Joe Benkowski, and last to Dr. Ted Knous, Chair, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subject in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

**Return to Barbara Weade
1766 Dixie Avenue
Friendship, Wisconsin 53934
Or
Use the attached, stamped envelope.**

Appendix E

CENTRAL SANDS HIGH SCHOOL

March 15, 2002

Dear Parent,

I'm hoping that you will agree to have your child participate in a study about the relationship between work and school punctuality and attendance. The study will run through 2nd semester of this school year. Your child will not be asked to do anything other than sign the "Student Consent Form" in order to participate and receive \$10. However, I cannot obtain your child's work and school attendance records without written permission from both of you, if your child is a minor.

Why am I doing this? Businesses need employees who show up on time every day they are scheduled. Punctuality is a habit, and good habits need to start early. Do students who work have better attendance and tardiness records at school than other students? I don't know, and the only way to find out is to do a formal study, which is what I am doing for my Masters Degree at UW Stout.

You may have heard of me because I am the Project Director for the Community Learning Centers here at Central Sands Schools. I would be very happy to answer any questions you or your child have. Just call me at home (000-0000) or at work (000-0000 Ext. 000).

Sincerely,

Barb Weade

Appendix F

Cash Receipt Verification

I received \$10 in cash for returning a signed "Student Consent Form."

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature:

(Leave this "Cash Receipt Verification Form" at the High School Guidance Office.)

Appendix G

CENTRAL SANDS HIGH SCHOOL

Date: April 6, 2002

To: <Name of Employer>

From: Barb Weade

Re: Work and School Tardiness Study

Thanks for passing out the information packets on the "Work and School Tardiness Study" to the students you employ. The response has been excellent. I've received 6 of the 8 (75%) back. Another may yet trickle in.

I've attached the signed "Student Consent Form" for these students who will be included in the study:

- Student A
- Student B
- Student C
- Student D
- Student E

Now that we know who will be included, I need to obtain the "punch/clock-in time" for every day these students work from now until June 7, 2002. You can start with the time they worked after April 2, 2002.

I'm assuming that students start working on the hour or half hour. If that is not true, let me know.

I'll talk with you to find out how I can get these "punch/clock-in time" records from you on a regular basis.

Thanks so very much for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Barbara Weade

Appendix H



May 23, 2002

Dear _____,

You have a perfect school attendance record for the first two weeks in May! The nice weather and the arrival of the “end-of-the-school-year” tempt some students to slack off, but you were punctual for all of your classes and had no unexcused absences.

_____ staff congratulate you for building a stellar attendance record. Keep it up!

Sincerely,

<Name>

Manager or Store Team Leader

Appendix I

Improvement!

April 28, 2002

Dear _____,

You were on time at school every class the week of April 15! Your unexcused absences also dropped down to one that week. Sometimes the school attendance record is inaccurate for a number of reasons. But ultimately it is up to the student to get any errors corrected. So if you really should have had an excused absence, contact the high school office to get this changed.

Businesses like _____ need employees who are punctual. Keep up this great habit.

Sincerely,

<Name>

Manager or Store Team Leader

Needs Improvement

May 10, 2002

Dear _____,

You had such a great school attendance record the first two weeks in April that I was disappointed to find that you were tardy twice during the last two weeks of the month. Student school records are important because they reflect attendance habits.

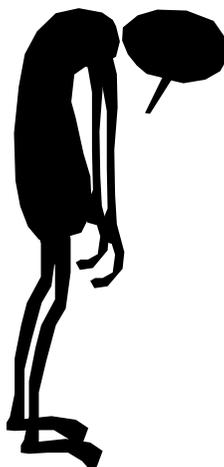
Businesses like _____ need employees who are punctual. Let's see if you can get back to your previous superb pattern.

Sincerely,

<Name>

Manager or Store Team Leader

Appendix K



April 17, 2002

Dear _____,

I was disappointed to learn that you were tardy at school for five classes the week of April 8.

The staff at _____ want you to succeed in school as well as at work. Please make an effort to be on time. You will be helping yourself.

Sincerely,

<Name>

Manager or Store Team Leader

Date: March 7, 2002

To: Barbara Weade

cc: Joe Benkowski
278A Tech Wing

From: Sue Foxwell, Research Administrator and Human
Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional
Review Board for the Protection of Human
Subjects in Research (IRB)

Subject: **Protection of Human Subjects–Expedited Review**

Your project, “The Relationship of School Tardiness and Absences to Work Tardiness and Absences in Adams-Friendship High School Students,” has been approved by the IRB through the expedited review process. The measures you have taken to protect human subjects are adequate to protect everyone involved, including subjects and researchers.

NOTE: Although the project is approved the researcher may want to omit the name of the school and businesses. It is a very small town and confidentiality problems could arise.

Research not completed within one year of the IRB approval date must be submitted again outlining changes, expansion, etc. to the research. Annual review and approval by the IRB is required.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and good luck with your project.

SF:sl: