

ABSTRACT

Pamela D. Chamblee, INCREASING TEACHER AVAILABILITY: RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF POLICY, INCENTIVES, AND MANAGEMENT TOOLS TO PRODUCE DISTRICT COST-SAVINGS. (Under the direction of Dr. Jim McDowelle) Department of Educational Leadership, April, 2015.

The impact the lack of teacher availability has on school budgets and the burden imposed on school finances resulted in one small school district paying in excess of \$500,000 per year for the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years for substitute teacher expenditures. As a result of fiscal exigencies, leaders in low economic school districts are more strategic than ever in managing scarce financial resources (Miller, Murnane, & Willet, 2008; Odden & Picus, 2014; Roza, 2007, 2009). This problem of practice was an effort to reduce the financial burden of teacher absenteeism by identifying and implementing effective strategies for increasing teacher availability found in the literature and vetted by stakeholders. Stakeholder opinions, perceptions, and experiences regarding the lack of teacher availability combined with best practices found in the literature provided the basis for a comprehensive policy on teacher attendance. After partially implementing several strategies found in the literature and vetted by stakeholders, district data showed a \$169,619.68 or a 28.2% savings during the 2013-2014 school year. From August 2014 until March 2015, the district spent \$295,603.92 in substitute costs with two months remaining in the school year. At this rate, projected substitute spending for school year 2015 is \$369,504.90. The difference in the \$601,131.93 costs for the 2012-2013 school year compared to the 2015 school year is a savings of \$231,627.03 or 38.5%. Adoption and implementation of the entire comprehensive attendance policy should result in even greater savings.

INCREASING TEACHER AVAILABILITY: RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF POLICY,
INCENTIVES, AND MANAGEMENT TOOLS TO PRODUCE DISTRICT COST-SAVINGS

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late father, Ronald F. Chamblee whose bold spirit taught me how to press on and how to look good doing it. To my wonderful cast of supportive family members: Delores, Angela, Cynthia, Ronald Jr., Itia, Rakeena, Taija, Amiyah, Ayden, and Peyton, I hope that I have somehow inspired each of you by modeling commitment, hard work, and perseverance. You are never too old to reinvent yourself and reach for your dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Teacher availability rates in the Halifax County School district are too low. The excessive lack of teacher availability and the high cost of paying for substitute teachers are expensive and problematic. For two previous school years, the district has spent roughly \$500,000 per year on costs associated with paying a teacher as well as paying a substitute teacher for instructional services. These substantial amounts impact all of the enrolled students who receive free breakfast and free lunch as the result of a school nutrition grant initiative. The school district faces wide-spread economic challenges and must be financially prudent with all district funding. Federal Title I funding entitles the district to receive additional financial resources to support reading and mathematics in all schools because of the district's socioeconomic status.

Support of School System for the Study

If Halifax County Schools employs an effective policy to increase the availability of teachers, then it offers the district an opportunity to increase financial savings from monies allotted for substitute wages. The approved problem of practice for the study district was not only endorsed, but also recommended for study by the school superintendent. The problem of practice for this district is supported by the superintendent of schools with a letter of endorsement granting permission to study the problem in anticipation of a proposed solution. This endorsement (see Appendix C) provides the researcher with the right to access and analyze the necessary data to conduct and complete the study. Teacher lack of availability rates for the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years will be obtained and analyzed based on the extended 184 instructional school days for the Halifax school district. The focus is on finding local success by addressing an organizational problem that is negatively impacting district finances.

The Halifax County School district has 221 teachers serving 2,965 students district-wide in 11 schools including: 2 high schools, 2 middle schools, and 7 elementary schools. The school district receives funding from the following sources: 2.4 million in funding from local revenues, 23 million in funding from state sources, and 14.6 million in funding from federal sources. These amounts comprise the total operating budget of 40 million dollars. Yearly costs associated with substitute pay total approximately 1.25% of the 40 million dollar budget.

The Human Resource Officer for Halifax County Schools, Linda Bulluck, stated the retention and recruitment of highly qualified teachers as required by the No Child Left Behind law represents two of the top three concerns facing the Human Resources Department. Time, money, and energy are invested in training substitute teachers who may eventually replace a current teacher as the result of a licensure or an attendance issue. The third concern for the Halifax County Schools' Human Resource department is that the county does not offer a local supplement which makes hiring quality teachers a challenge for the school district.

The Impact of the Problem

This problematic situation impacts numerous educational policy agendas as a source of concern for school systems across America and abroad (Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, & Muralidharan, 2006; Duflo & Hanna, 2005; Rosenblatt & Shirom, 2005, 2006). As a result of the consistent lack of teacher availability, hiring substitute teachers is a costly expenditure for most school districts (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2009; Kight, 2007; Miller, 2012; Miller, Murnane, & Willet, 2008). Understanding the conditions that affect teacher availability has important implications on school budgets, resources, climate, culture, and student learning outcomes. Although the research points to the negative effects of teacher absence on student achievement,

the causes or predictors of the negative effects have not appeared in the literature as conclusive evidence (Pitts, 2010).

Considerable direct and indirect expenses are associated with the lack of teacher availability. The literature reveals a mounting belief in the importance of finding a solution to the lack of teacher availability in many U.S. school districts and in many developing countries (Algozzine, Kerr, Schoeneberger, Tingle, & Wang, 2012; Banerjee & Duflo, 2006; Bruno, 2002; Carter, 2010; Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan, & Rogers, 2005; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Duflo, Hanna, & Stephen, 2012; Ejere, 2010; Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008; Roza, 2003, 2009; Scott, Vaughn, Wolf, & Wyatt, 2007; Smith, 2012). Duflo and Hanna (2005) reported the impact of teacher absentee rates in India in excess of 24%. Likewise, Alcazar, Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan, and Rogers (2006) found teacher absence rates in Peru's poorest communities were as high as 21%. This is consistent with findings in Ejere's 2010 report of 20% teacher absence in Uganda and 20% teacher absence in Nigeria.

In India, researchers used incentives in a randomized bonus program to combat teacher absences (Duflo & Hanna, 2005). They found an impersonal way to monitor teacher absences in 60 treatment schools. Teachers were given a camera with a tamper proof date and time mechanism and asked to have a student take pictures of the instructor with their students twice a day with a 5 hour span between the opening and closing of the school day. In return, teachers with documented attendance for at least 21 days for the month received additional pay. Teachers reporting less than 21 days in attendance received a financial penalty. In contrast to the 60 comparison schools, who received an unannounced monthly visit, the 60 treatment schools absence rate was cut by half from the 36% in the comparison schools to 18% in the treatment

schools. Teachers in the treatment schools responded favorably to the financial incentives used to promote their availability.

Although policy and cost-saving measures for countries abroad may be different from those found in the US, researchers who conducted the experiment showed concerns with the lack of teacher availability. This experiment utilized intense monitoring and incentives in innovative ways to eradicate high teacher absences. These same methods are suggested strategies found in the literature for U.S. schools (Banerjee & Duflo, 2006). In addition to monitoring teacher absences, using a measure of student performance to base rewards or penalties to counter a lack of teacher availability is also indicated in the literature for schools in the United States (Ahn & Vigdor, 2010). Although the absentee rates for U.S. teachers are not as significant as the rising rates in developing countries, Miller (2012) indicated that U.S. teachers' lack of availability from traditional public schools occurred more than 10 times per year based on the 56,837 schools reviewed. Public school teachers are absent more than 10 times per year at a rate that is 15.2 percentage points higher than the teacher absence rate found in charter schools.

Studies have revealed evidence concerning the lack of teacher availability in urban, rural, and suburban school districts (Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008; Tingle et al., 2012). Clotfelter et al. (2009) found similar results to Miller et al. (2008) as their research revealed the lack of teacher availability contributed to lower math achievement scores for students. Whereas Clotfelter et al. (2009) research extended to school districts across North Carolina, Miller et al. (2008) conducted research in one large urban school district who wished to remain anonymous. Using the pseudonym of Ormondale School District, the district was identified by location only which is in the northern half of the United States. Like Clotfelter et al. (2009) and Miller et al. (2008), Duflo and Hanna (2006) found causal evidence that teacher

availability negatively affects student achievement. Using 285 teachers from the Ormondale School District, Miller et al. (2008) estimated the impact of absences on productivity. A larger sample group from that same district was used to document absence patterns. Research suggested Ormondale teachers took discretionary days from work while personal illness days were observed as 57% of the absences taken from work. Their research on 4th grade teachers implied elementary students, who had teachers missing 10 or more days, performed worst on the mathematics assessment by a reduction of 3.3% of a standard deviation. After conducting their research, Miller et al. (2008) suggested policy makers should be concerned with high rates of teacher absences as a result of the interruption that occurs within the student's learning environment.

Clotfelter et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study over 9 years using data from school districts across North Carolina. They recorded over 492,000 observations for 4th and 5th grade mathematics and English teachers. The researchers analyzed the number of sick and personal leave days taken and compared the student results on the state's End-of-Grade assessments. They found teachers who were out 10 or more days posted student scores 2.3 standard deviations lower in mathematics. Consequently, teacher absences were not as profound in reading with the coefficient less than half as large indicating the same 10 day teacher absence pattern would be associated with a lower standard deviation of 1% in reading.

Data reported by the Office of Civil Rights in 2012 showed a range of absence data from 20.9% in Utah to 50.2% in Rhode Island with some Rhode Island district teachers missing as many as 19 days. For the 2009-2010 school year, two studies were conducted on teacher absence for the Providence, Rhode Island School System. An analysis by the Urban Education and Policy Program at Brown University found 1,321 teacher files revealing 67% of the teachers absent 10

or more days with a 20.96 average number of days missed (Jones & Contreras, 2011). Sickness, personal, and professional development were provided as the top three reasons contributing to teacher absences. The research also indicated teacher exposure to sick students carrying various diseases as contributing to increased teacher absences.

Lack of Teacher Availability and Student Achievement

Clay (2007) investigated the relationship between teacher absences and the achievement level of elementary students in a suburban school district in Saint Louis County, Missouri. The study population of 5,000 kindergarten through twelfth grade students is comprised of 75% Caucasian, 22% African American, and the remaining 3% Hispanic and Asian. The district's free or reduced priced lunch composite is 17%. The instruments used to perform the basis of the test were the state mandatory standardized communication arts and mathematics tests and the Terra Nova reading and mathematics standardized tests. The results from third and fourth grade standardized test scores revealed no significant correlation between teacher availability and student achievement. However, findings did show a significant correlation based on gender and residency scores. Like Clotfelter et al. (2009), there was no evidence, however, that teacher absences significantly affected student reading scores. For the purposes of this study, lack of teacher availability and teacher absences will be used interchangeably.

Other researchers, studying disadvantaged students from the urban Ormondale School District in the northern United States, found teacher discretionary absences reduced productivity (Miller et al., 2008). Bruno (2002) studied data from a district identified only as an urban district found equity issues present as a result of disparity in the delivery of resources stemming from teachers not being available in the classroom. Lack of teacher availability was identified as an equity issue because a risk is created for the students who need their teachers the most and the

lack of teacher availability reduced district resources. Moreover, equity issues may be addressed by finding ways to increase teacher availability (Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2009). For example, students need access to a teacher on a consistent basis. Lack of consistent contact with the teacher as a human resource presents an equity issue for students in poverty. Low test scores and reading below grade level present an equity dilemma because families lack resources to compensate for poor instruction when teachers are not available. Interruption to the flow of learning is an outcome that often results when teachers are consistently unavailable to students (Brown & Arnell, 2012; Smith, 2012; Steven, 2008).

Tingle et al. (2012) revealed mixed results in a study conducted in and identified only as a large urban district. School and teacher level absences were used to predict student achievement. In schools where average teacher absences were reported as low, individual teacher absence was negatively linked with student achievement. On the other hand, where there were reports of average teacher absences as being high, individual teacher absence was not linked with having a negative association with student achievement.

The Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS), which follows historical progress on students and assesses and predicts student performance, is available to North Carolina educators. A National Council on Teacher Quality issued a 2010 report emphasizing the most important function of a school district is to staff each classroom with the presence of a quality teacher. Effective and available teachers have specific, observable behaviors benefitting student learners. Jacobs (2007) reported intensifying interpersonal relationships between student and teacher as an effective strategy for student success.

Educational leaders feel some anxiety in this high stakes era when excessive teacher absences begin to accumulate. Leaders recognize the importance of finding ways to increase

teacher availability. Educators are faced with the pressures for students under their leadership to perform successfully on standardized tests. After all, responsibility given to leaders is to ensure student learning is occurring at high levels. Snell (2005) reported it is the role and responsibility of the school-based principal to ensure that a school environment exist whereby teachers can aspire to provide education to all students.

Workplace Culture

Lack of teacher availability has more than a fiscal impact (Smith, 2012). Studies, however, have shown a negative impact on student achievement and colleague morale when teachers are consistently not at work (Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Kronholz, 2013; Miller et al., 2008). Poor teacher work ethic impacts the climate of the school and places unnecessary stress on teachers who are on site (Bruno, 2002). Teachers are expected to demonstrate the same attendance efficacy that they expect to see from students. School working conditions matter to most teachers and some districts have responded by offering higher wages in an effort to attract quality teachers (Murnane & Steele, 2007). The Teachers' Working Conditions Survey, issued every two years in North Carolina, is an important tool in providing the constructs necessary for a positive, inviting climate that can improve working conditions for teachers. The building level administrator is responsible for ensuring positive working conditions and for creating the climate conducive to effective teaching and to learning (Snell, 2005).

Shapira-Lishchinsky and Rosenblatt (2008) reported high rates of teacher absenteeism as an indication of negative work perceptions. Research by Shapira-Lishchinsky and Rosenblatt (2008), focused on perceptions found in the school environment of organizational ethics as a predictor of absences from the workplace. The researchers studied the frequency and the duration of voluntary and non-voluntary absences in relation to organizational ethics and perceptions of

teacher productivity. They studied 1,016 teachers from 35 Israeli schools and found low correlational measures between teachers' perceptions of school ethics and absence measures. Moderate final results showed a relation to absence frequency, but not to absence duration. Measured organizational factors included the following variables: formal climate, procedural justice, and misbehavior tendencies. A low relationship existed for the variables of a caring climate and misbehavior tendencies to absence frequency, but not to duration.

Miller (2008) defined the professional culture of a school by the formal and informal norms that guide teacher behavior. The absence norm that is permitted in a school creates the accepted absence culture that is found within the school environment. He also found teachers were absent on average between nine to ten days. These absence patterns may be indicative of what is happening in the school culture and may contribute to high teacher absences. Furthermore, Miller (2008) stated that it is possible for a student to have been taught approximately two-thirds of a school year between kindergarten and twelfth grade by someone who was not the regular assigned teacher for that classroom. Like Miller, Bruno (2002) and Clotfelter et al. (2009) reported absent teachers contribute to resource disparity for economically challenged students. Poor, minority students are deprived of the human resource commodity and of opportunity (Bruno, 2002).

Carlsen (2012) reported committed teachers have a high threshold for coming to work because of the students they serve. Teachers, who are allowed to participate in school-based decisions, help to build school morale (Dee, Henkin, & Duemer, 2003). Students thrive in strong learning environments where it is expected that they will do well (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). Therefore, when teachers consistently report to work, they help build strong academic cultures (Clay, 2007).

According to Muhammad (2009), transforming a school culture requires a skilled diplomatic leader who understands how to build the school culture through cooperation and collaboration. Building level administrators must focus on the human factors within the building to ensure a healthy, cohesive learning environment exists. The organization must be clear with its mission and stay focused on student learning; therefore, eliminating any distracting human behaviors that may be linked to creating a toxic environment. Staff division and excessive teacher absences do not lend itself to transforming a culture from negative to positive. Muhammad further states transformational leaders inspire others and understand how to accomplish goals through people within the organization through a continuous school improvement process. Teachers should be committed to a high level of efficacy and must be present to deliver quality instruction and maximize organizational effectiveness.

Student learning is adversely affected when teachers consistently display high absenteeism (Banerjee et al., 2006; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller, 2008). According to Harris and Thomas (2003), lower student attendance rates correlate with a decrease in teacher attendance rates, which is another reason why each district must address teacher availability within the context of their district. Excessive teacher absences contribute to the negative impact on the school climate. Research showed lower teacher morale in schools with teachers who come to work on a regular basis because they felt the pressure of their colleagues' absence (Brown et al., 2012; Bruno, 2002).

Contextual Setting for Halifax County

The county has a population of 57,523 residents with population growing faster in the northwest section of the county. The county demographics are 52% African Americans, 43% Caucasians, and 5% other. Sixty-five percent of the residents 25 and older have high school

diplomas, while 11% of the residents have a bachelor degree. The county is regarded as economically disadvantaged with 26% of the residents living below poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The Halifax County School District serves a population that is eligible to receive 100 percent free breakfast and free lunch. This rate of eligibility demonstrates the socioeconomic level in the district for students who qualify as disadvantaged students. Currently, Halifax County Schools is ranked 115 out of 115 for its student academic achievement on the North Carolina End-of-Grade and End-of-Course state assessments. This statistic provides some evidence to support the theory that the consistent lack of teacher availability affects what students are able to achieve in the classroom academically.

Perspectives of the Problem

In 2009, the federal government collected teacher absentee data for the first time. U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan included in the federal government's collection of data the number of days teachers miss class each year. One reason for this addition to the data collection was because of a decline in student academic performance. The research of Clotfelter et al. (2009) provided four major observations about teacher absenteeism. First, hiring substitute teachers detract from the budget and absenteeism requires time for someone to make calls to find substitutes. Second, the prolonged absence of the regular teacher affects the equitable opportunities for students to learn and achieve. Third, the frequency of teacher absences increases in low socio-economic schools. Finally, teachers may evaluate the cost of taking a sick day as worth more than \$50.00. Therefore, \$50.00 may be seen as a small price to pay for taking a sick day. From the teachers' perspective, the benefit of taking a sick day is worth having the \$50.00 deducted from their pay.

Possible Costs of the Problem

The Halifax County School district has paid over \$500,000 in total costs for expenses associated with the lack of teacher availability for two of the past consecutive school years. Included in these costs were amounts paid only to short term substitute teachers. It is the superintendent's expectation for every certified teacher in the Halifax County School district to report to work with fidelity and to not abuse the privilege with which leave is granted. In addition to reported lack of teacher availability in education, the rise of worker absenteeism is occurring in the general workforce as well (Ejere, 2010). Costs associated with paying substitute teachers cause school districts to incur mounting, heavy financial burdens (Roza, 2007). Teacher compensation consumes more than half of district budgets with teacher absences costing a reported \$4 billion annually (Miller et al., 2008). Districts are struggling to find ways to positively deal with the economic impact of the lack of teacher availability (Miller et al., 2008).

Absence Patterns

Carter (2010) characterized teacher absenteeism as a growing concern. In his research, he studied data from four schools in Georgia using Douglas McGregor's theory X and theory Y as forming a composite to explain variation in teacher absentee pattern. He used the Managerial Philosophies Scale to determine the leadership style of participating principals in his study (Carter, 2010). Carter's study resulted in no statistical significance in determining age or experience that resulted in variations of teacher absence regardless of teacher grade level. He determined that as the leadership X score increased, absences increased, and as the leadership Y score increased, absences decreased. Principal leadership style is important because building level leadership and organizational factors affect the absentee culture found in the school environment (Smith, 2012).

Researchers reported the degree level obtained by teachers is a predictor of teacher absence patterns (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Rosenblatt et al., 2005). The higher the degree obtained by the teacher, the less likely they were to be absent. The research of (Brown & Arnell, 2012) suggested looking for possible variations in teacher absences occurring in the culture by looking for the following differences:

- Day of the week absences occur
- Whether the absence occurs before or after a holiday
- Teacher Gender
- Teacher years of experience
- Teacher specific teaching assignment (Coach, Math, Science, etc.)
- Organizational factors (factors within the organization that affects the environment)

Conflicting research was identified on which gender was absent the most, males or females. For example, studies showed female teachers were absent more days than male teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller, 2012; Pitts, 2010), while other studies indicate males are absent more than females (Chaudhury et al., 2006). Pitts stated that high school teachers were absent less than any other teachers and women missed more days than men. One reason for the discrepancies Pitts (2010) suggested is that “teacher absenteeism is contextual in nature and may be conclusive for the environs in which they were conducted” (p. 12), indicating the need to closely consider environmental factors. Pitts’ findings were, however, consistent with Miller’s (2012) study which reported high school teachers missed an average of 33.3% days; elementary teachers missed an average of 36.7 days; while middle school teachers missed an averaged 37.8 days. Absentee data associated with gender was not found in the Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005) study. Because females generally are responsible for caring for their own sick children and other

household responsibilities, disproportionate higher rates of female absences might be reported in the research (Kallio, 2010). As absence patterns emerge, a disconnect occurs in the teaching environment and a disconnect occurs for students in the expected learning environment.

Conflicting evidence also exists on which days of the week teachers were absent the most. Miller et al. (2008) indicated that teachers were most often absent from work on Mondays 5.7% and Fridays with 6.6%. Miller associated these high absence patterns with the fact that, when teachers extend their weekends, documentation is often not required for these absences because of the abbreviated leave time for the illness which is one reason for increased sick leave usage. Furthermore, teachers have the benefit of using a certain number of days at their discretion, which may prove to be a contributor to the absence culture as well (Miller et al., 2008). Although Miller found Mondays and Fridays as the most missed days, Alcazar et al. (2006) found higher teacher absence rates on Mondays and Tuesdays. Pitts (2010) revealed more absences occurring on Fridays with sick leave provided as the reason for the absences. The Unicomb et al. (1992) study (as cited in Brown & Arnell, 2012) reported Wednesday as the most frequently missed day. This same study reported that female teachers were absent more as they increased in age and males were absent more in their thirties than any other time in their career.

There was also mixed research on who was absent more, the younger teacher with no tenure, or the veteran teachers who had tenure. Miller et al. (2007) reported tenured teachers absent more than non-tenured teachers. On the other hand, Rosenblatt and Shirom (2005) reported age as a contributing factor and younger teachers were absent more frequently than older teachers. There was also evidence that suggested time was taken to extend either holiday vacation or weekend relaxation time (Chaudhury et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2008; Pitts, 2010).

Importance of the Problem

This primary purpose of this study is to reduce the financial impact caused by lack of teacher availability for the Halifax County School District. This study seeks to find ways to increase the presence of the teacher in the workplace in a small, rural North Carolina school district while producing cost savings for the district. Plaguing the district is the high cost of the lack of teacher availability and paying high amounts in substitute wages. Ultimately, the key is to promote more teacher availability which will help reduce the strain on the budget and increase the likelihood of more available funds to redirect in the classrooms and enhance additional financial efforts in the district.

Definition of Terms

Absentee – (as cited in Ejere, 2010) Casio (2003) defines absentee as “any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason.” This will include 184 instructional days for Halifax County Schools.

Absenteeism – absences accumulated by a teacher regardless of reason; accumulated missed days from work.

Availability – characteristic of a resource that is committable, operable, or usable upon demand to perform its designated or required function. It is the aggregate of the resource’s accessibility, reliability, maintainability, serviceability, and securability.

Cost savings – the amount of money retained by a district on factors attributed to lack of or increased funding from higher rates of teacher availability.

Discretionary absences – absences reported as personal or short-term illness (Miller, 2008). Short term is defined as 2 or less days.

Excellent attendance- 4 or less absences per semester or less than 8 yearly absences

Frequent short absences – absences that occur 3 or more times per month.

Lack of Teacher Availability – the absence of a teacher from the regular classroom assignment for non-professional reasons.

Non-discretionary absences – involuntary absences that the teacher cannot control (Miller, 2008).

Pattern of Absence – 10 or more instructional days missed in one academic school year

Teacher absence – documented leave from instructional duties for a reason specified as acceptable by the district policy (e.g., sick leave, leave of absence, personal leave, professional leave).

Teacher Absenteeism Rate – the fraction of working days a teacher is absent from the classroom using one half and whole day increment.

Teacher Leave Policy – guidelines accepted by a district as acceptable, legal reasons that a teacher can provide for being out of work.

Title I Funding – federal funding provided to high poverty school districts to increase student achievement in reading and in mathematics.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Lack of teacher availability is a concern for K-12 administrators (Brown & Arnell, 2012). With the increasing lack of teacher availability, clear standards and expectations have been outlined for the role and responsibilities of the teacher who is expected to be present in the classroom delivering quality instruction on a regular basis. According to Podgursky (2003), U.S. public school teachers miss five to six percent of instructional days. This figure means that if you used a 180 day school calendar, teachers would have missed 9.4 days (Podgursky, 2003). Further research by Podgursky (2003) indicated only 3.6 days would be taken by teachers if teachers took leave at the same rate as other professionals. If substitute teachers receive compensation of \$100.00 per day, the difference in sick days would be an approximate annual cost of 0.52% of school budgets.

North Carolina is one of several states that have joined a consortium of states and are unified on standards of learning in order to provide quality common standards to its learners. One of the most important tasks that a district has is to ensure that students have access to quality teachers and to quality teaching (Scott et al., 2007). The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law enacted January 8, 2002, expressed the need for highly qualified teachers in core academic areas. In order to help bring this law to fruition, a quality teacher must be present in the learning environment to deliver instruction with continuity. Every student is expected to meet proficiency levels in mathematics, science, and reading. As the importance of teacher availability surfaces in the research, Miller et al. (2008) indicated that “teachers cannot instruct, if they are not in school” (p. 72), highlighting the need for the consistent presence of the teacher. Therefore, teacher availability and the impact and sense of urgency generated by teacher availability are paramount (Miller, 2012).

Kallio (2006) referred to student performance as a leading issue on educational agendas. More and more, teachers are asked to teach with rigor and to create engaging classrooms to enhance student academic success. Therefore, policy boards must look at how teacher leave policies are carried out and at the stated expectations outlined in the policy itself in order to increase teacher availability (Scott et al., 2007).

Grant (2001) called excessive absence among school personnel one of the most neglected problems in public education. Without the consistent presence of a stable teacher, students may begin to feel disconnected from the work and from the learning environment. Clotfelter et al. (2009) agreed when they stated, “persistently high absenteeism appears to be one hallmark of troubled schools” (p. 16), as a contributing factor to the low achievement of students in schools where high teacher absenteeism exists. Teachers, who are present in the classroom, can respond to the needs and interest of the students they serve. The quality of classroom management is a key to high student achievement, therefore, requiring teacher availability on a consistent basis (Marzano, 2003).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that on an average day families of low income as defined by the number of students receiving free and reduced priced lunch have more teachers that are likely to be absent from school (Barton & Coley, 2009). New accountability mandates are holding teachers more responsible for differentiating instruction, understanding how students learn, interpreting student data results, and providing remediation and enrichment as a fraction of their work responsibilities. Teachers must react and respond to the needs of students with varying abilities and understand how students learn best. Good teacher attendance is critical to the realized success of the students and to the success of the school environment (Brown & Arnell, 2012; Scott et al., 2007)

Theoretical Framework

A theory simply explains what a phenomenon is and how it works. Questions surrounding the lack of teacher availability phenomenon may be answered or understood by framing questions around motivation, behavior, or incentive theories. Incentives are objects that leaders use to encourage, rouse, or motivate employees to perform a desired job. Incentives may work if the incentive is something the employee desires to achieve.

Motivational theories attempt to explain what motivates individual behavior. Motivation is defined as the force that guides and sustains goal-oriented people. In addition to the theory of motivation, incentive theory is the belief that motivation is driven by the anticipation of an external reward or incentive. The external reward is the main motivator; however, the incentive theory supports the role of intrinsic motivation by propelling the individual towards the incentive. The positive association of the goal to the behavior increases the chances of repeating the behavior.

Herzberg's motivator/hygiene theory differentiated between tangible and intangible factors that promote job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Unfavorable working conditions, unfair organizational policies, low salary, and poor interpersonal relations among workers are some of the dissatisfiers associated with high turnover and employee absenteeism. A functional application of this theory in the work environment is to recognize employee achievements and growth opportunities once the hygiene factors have been met, thus giving impetus to the North Carolina Working Conditions survey which focuses on organizational factors. Similarly, Maslow's motivational theory emphasizes meeting basic human needs before attempting to motivate employees at a higher level such as increasing employee attendance rates.

Maslow expressed human needs in the form of a hierarchy with the most basic needs being physiological. A functional application of this theory in the workplace is to meet employee basic needs before attempting to motivate individuals at a higher level. Therefore, it is necessary to foster job security, a good working climate, and a sense of teamwork before expecting higher levels of performance.

Vroom's expectancy motivation theory assumes behavior results from conscious choices and for each specific task. Individuals will select the behavior option with the greatest motivational force. The motivational force is the product of the three perceptions: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Expectancy is the belief that increased effort will lead to increase performance. Instrumentality is the belief that if you meet performance expectation, then you will receive a greater reward. Valence refers to the value one places on the reward. Administrators must discover what an employee values. Innovative compensation strategies such as the ones suggested in the literature can be used to leverage expectancy theory. Whereas Maslow and Herzberg looked at the relationship between internal needs Vroom's expectancy theory separates effort, performance, and outcomes.

Human Resource Development (HRD) theorists support human aptitude, improvement goals, problem-solving coordination, and systems thinking. Relationships are analyzed in order to understand what works or why something does not work. An example of this theory is Elton Mayo's Hawthorne experiments which analyzed workers as an explanation of human behavior. Individuals in an organization are subjected to many factors that will influence their behavior such as rewards and incentives. As noted by Watson, Pavlov, and Thorndike (Holton et al., 2009), behaviorism is a psychological theory that helps shape human learning and performance.

Kurt Lewin helped us understand individuals by describing human behavior and organizational theory. He believed the context in which an object is embedded determines the relationship between the parts and is more important than the features of those distinct parts. Likewise, Bruno (2012) describes the context in which a teacher works as having influence on the rate of teacher absenteeism because of the often cited needed mental health days. Understanding how theories interrelate is important for organizational improvement and how people will react to change.

Rensis Likert and David Bowers analyzed numerous studies to find a 0.42 correlation between employee satisfaction and productive efficiency and a 0.67 correlation between organizational climate and employee satisfaction. A study cited in Smith, 2012 employees ranked ten aspects they wanted from their jobs. Interesting work was ranked number one, while appreciation and recognition were ranked number two. Applying this concept to the workplace can lead administrators to understand how employee satisfaction can improve the organizational climate and increase teacher work place availability.

Effect on Low Income Students

In disadvantaged areas where students are the poorest and failing, more teachers are absent than teachers working in wealthier school districts (Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2009). Low wealth districts and families have the propensity to experience high teacher absences (Bruno, 2002; Chaudhury et al., 2006; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Murnane et al., 2007). Students in poor districts are the students who need continuity in their education the most; therefore, low wealth districts demonstrate a critical need for change in how excessive teacher leave is perceived and accepted. Schools with excessive teacher absences are more likely to serve low income children (Bruno, 2002; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Kronholz, 2013; Miller, 2012; Miller et al.,

2008; Smith, 2012). Unlike their low-income peers, only 16% of higher income students have teachers who are absent on an average day (Barton & Coley, 2009).

Using data from North Carolina schools, Clotfelter et al. (2009) showed the pattern of absence-taking as having a disproportionate impact on low-income students. Students attending the poorest economic schools had teachers who missed an extra day of work versus students attending higher economic schools. This study also reported standardized test scores were lower for elementary students who had teachers with high absences from the classroom. Conversely, teachers with high test scores requested fewer leave days and therefore were present in the classroom. Harris and Thomas (2003) reported classrooms and schools who have high risk problems such as poverty create an increased disadvantage for students who are academically challenged. Pitts (2010) stated that teacher absences in low income schools contribute to the academic achievement gap of students.

Advanced classroom preparation must take place before a substitute teacher can deliver any amount of valuable instruction (Miller, 2012). Students exposed to substitute teachers, who in many cases, do not have teacher certification may end the student's day without any quality instruction. Halifax County Schools requires a one day orientation and a high school diploma to substitute teach for the district. Substitute teaching requires neither a college degree nor a teaching license to maintain the substitute teaching status for the school district. According to Pitts (2010), thirty-seven states do not require a bachelor's degree for some substitute teachers. Researchers raised concerns about the pedagogical quality implemented in the classroom by substitute teachers (Miller et al., 2008). Similar to urban school districts, rural Halifax County Schools finds it difficult to attract quality substitute teachers. Unqualified substitute teachers contribute to a disruption of student learning processes and achievement (Miller et al., 2008).

Bruno (2002) found students, who have instruction delivered by numerous substitute teachers, become disinterested in the learning process. Clotfelter et al. (2009) stated student learning diminishes when a substitute teacher is present whose qualifications may not be of quality. In her letter of endorsement for this research (see Appendix C), the Superintendent of Halifax County Schools stated, “Substitutes just cannot do the job of teachers.” Therefore, it is imperative that a solution is provided increasing teacher availability for work on a consistent basis and reducing the costs of paying for the substitute teacher.

Teacher Leave and State Regulations

As a result of lack of teacher availability, we must consider if students’ rights to a free quality public education are infringed upon when teachers are not present in the classroom to provide the education guaranteed by the state (Bruno, 2002). North Carolina Public Schools are lawfully bound and obligated to deliver a sound basic education to students. Legally and morally we have a duty to ensure that every student is educated using taxpayer’s funds. We have to eradicate learning challenges and overcome obstacles to student learning. The case of Leandro v. North Carolina stated teachers must be competent and present in order to provide quality instruction for students in a viable learning environment (Scott et al., 2007).

North Carolina General Statutes 115C-302.1 states that teachers accumulate personal leave rates at .20 days for each full month of employment. On June 30th, personal leave in excess of 5 days is converted to sick days. Personal leave is usually not granted on the first day of school, required teacher workday, the day before or after a holiday, or scheduled vacation day. Annual leave can be taken on days when students are not in school. Vacation leave is granted under state regulations and local board policies with immediate supervisor approval. Unused leave can be accumulated with 30 days carried to the next fiscal year of July 1. State regulations

grant sick days at a rate of one day per month and can accrue indefinitely. Upon retirement, sick leave days can apply towards creditable state service. Sick leave is granted for the following reasons:

1. Personal illness, injury, or temporary disability, or
2. Illness in immediate family requiring employee presence, or
3. Death in immediate family, or
4. Medical appointments

Extended sick leave is provided up to 20 days per year for classroom teachers minus a \$50 per day deduction for the cost of a substitute. Teachers can use this leave in the event of personal illness, personal injury, or other temporary disability after they have exhausted all their sick and vacation leave days. Unused extended leave does not carry over to the next year.

Halifax County Schools' current leave policy code 7510 applies to leave request. The superintendent may require a medical leave notice from a doctor supporting the fact that an employee is out for an illness. Employees are required to contact their principal or immediate supervisor if they are absent for even a single day, but the policy does not state the method of contact. Personal leave rates are accumulated at .20 days for each month in accordance with state statutes. Unused personal leave is carried forward from one year to another accumulating without limitation until June 30th of each year just as state law requires. Also in accordance with state regulations, on June 30th, personal leave in excess of 5 days shall be converted to sick leave. The local policy dictates the superintendent designates a timeframe when vacation leave can be taken. All vacation days over 30 are carried forward so that the year never begins with more than 30 days. Family Medical and Leave Act (FMLA) is an option for employees with the documented verification. This time is for employees who need to be absent for a continuous 10 day period. It

is suggested in the literature that fiscally responsible districts should consider not granting extended medical leave requests beyond the 20 days or the number of state statute designated days for additional sick leave bank days (Pitkoff, 2003). Halifax County currently allows 20 days of extended sick leave for specified reasons once personal and sick days have been exhausted.

Teacher quality has been identified as a major element that impacts student academic outcomes (Leuven, n.d.). Educational cynics cannot fault impoverished families or a student's demographics on a student's capacity to succeed in school. A link exists between teacher leadership and availability and student achievement (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Duflo & Hanna, 2006; Kight, 2007; Marzano, 2003; Miller et al., 2007). One quality associated with a good teacher is to consistently report to work (Kight, 2007). Teacher professionalism has been connected with the impact on what occurs in the classroom. Most districts are considering measures of teacher effectiveness as a tool to increase accountability and responsible teacher attendance.

Teacher Availability and Fiscal Impact

Mounting spending on substitute teachers from state, federal, and local budgets is receiving attention from researchers and educators who are concerned with the lack of teacher availability (Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008). Economically depressed districts find it difficult to absorb the rising cost of paying substitute teachers. This phenomenon itself has placed an undue burden on already depleted budgets. Arguably, high teacher absenteeism does matter to financially depleted districts finding it difficult to meet the day-to-day demands of operational costs and meeting the demands of a citizenry that expect accountable responses from district leaders. Roza (2009) stated, "As the economic outlook continues to darken, school districts will

be looking for ways to cut costs, and they will no doubt wrestle with some difficult issues.” (p. 29), as threats of future budget cuts continue to surface in many districts.

According to Shockley (2012), many yearly budgets reflect an amount of funding intended for developing teachers with their professional growth. Hence, indicating the importance of teachers in the classroom setting and to the teaching profession. A substantial amount of the district’s budget is expended on salary and benefits for teachers; therefore, linking the rising cost of paying substitutes and other contractual costs to teacher absences (Bruno, 2002; Miller, 2012). The National Education Association asserted that teachers’ salaries make up one-third of district budgets. The expense of paying the salaries of substitute teachers as well as the regular teacher adds to the expense of per pupil cost (Bruno, 2002). Roza (2009) concluded a \$43 per pupil savings could be realized if teachers took leave at the same rate as other professionals.

Hiring substitute teachers is a monumental task affecting budgets as a result of teacher lack of availability to students (Clay, 2007). Studies cited the importance and value of the classroom teacher rather than the use of a substitute teacher who may possess minimum skills and may add to minimizing the instructional focus in the classroom setting (Brown & Arnell, 2012; Bruno, 2002; Clay, 2007; Miller et al., 2008). Most substitute teachers are not aware of the varying learning styles and abilities of the students; therefore, cannot individualize the lessons according to what the student need or how the student learn best. With many school budgets already reduced, the cost of hiring substitute teachers can strain a district’s already shrinking financial resources. Halifax County Schools’ qualifications for employing a substitute teacher include teachers completing an Effective Teacher Training course provided by the district and possessing at least a high school diploma.

There are consequences for not addressing such a growing concern about the lack of teacher availability considering the budgetary constraints and impact. Many schools have physical plants in need of repair along with textbook needs. With the potential savings garnered from increasing teacher availability, additional funds can help with needed capital outlay projects and school-based resources. Halifax County Schools has requests from schools requiring new roofs and student bathrooms that are in need of repair or replacement in addition to more school resources needed in the classrooms.

Teacher Entitlement

According to Mrs. Bulluck, Halifax Human Resource Director, some teachers feel they are entitled to take days off because they have the accumulated days. In helping to develop a policy that addresses teacher availability, teachers should not feel a sense of entitlement in freely using leave days. Cognizant teachers are aware of the mounting cost of taxpayer's dollars used to pay wages associated with teacher absenteeism. The research of Kronholz (2013) and Miller et al. (2008) suggested that a lot of absences taken are deemed discretionary days and could be avoided.

Teacher perceptions of an entitlement to sick days were changed in one Kansas City, Missouri Public School System. Similar to the view taken by some of the Halifax County Schools' teachers on entitlement, the Missouri district took action to eliminate the 15 day allotment for teacher sick leave and replaced it with a sick leave benefit that had no limit on the number of sick days a teacher could take. Kallio (2006) described this teacher view of absence entitlement as a troubling issue for policymakers. Subsequently, teachers were required to report sick leave absences to the building level principal. This requirement lowered the number of absences taken by teachers (Kallio, 2006). Combining the direct reporting feature with the

allowable number of unlimited sick leave days reduced teacher absences within two years. Sick leave was no longer viewed as a sense of entitlement that the district owed to teachers, but as an available resource that is there for teachers when they needed it (Kallio, 2006).

Teacher Evaluation and Absentee Culture

Educational leaders must figure out best practices to navigate in a complex system where change is constant and information is abundant. Leaders must know and understand how to avoid budgetary pitfalls associated with the absentee culture. Districts are following models from the business world as they investigate ways to reduce rising teacher absences (Keller, 2008). Leaders need an understanding of the variables they are trying to alleviate that are associated with increased lack of teacher availability. It is difficult for leaders to solve problems caused when teachers are not present to deliver instruction. Some leaders in education are seeking help from the business world to combat absences (Keller, 2008). Collins (2001) paralleled the business world and its challenges with what educators face today. Furthermore, Collins stated astute leaders find the truth and use the truth to reform the efforts of the organization.

Teachers should be held accountable for their job performance; hence the importance of teacher evaluations. The feedback that teachers receive from their evaluations should be explicit enough for teachers to make corrections and adjustments in their performance and in their availability behavior. Furthermore, Standard VI of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process reflects the impact that teachers have on student academic performance. The goal setting process is helpful and enables teachers to establish where students need assistance. Teacher level factors are primarily under the control of individual teachers (Marzano, 2003). The relationship between policies and school district absences are documented in early studies (Clotfelter et al., 2007; Educational Research Service, 1980; Miller et al., 2008).

Teachers must assume responsibility for tasks that promote teaching and learning at high levels in their classroom environment. As internal stakeholders themselves, teachers need to exemplify accountable talk and accountable actions for what takes place in their classrooms and for their professional behaviors. Rosenblatt and Shirom (2004) identified an absence culture as existing when it is an acceptable practice to be absent from the school environment. Teachers have an important role to play by ensuring they are delivering a quality education to every student every day. High teacher turnover rates are causing schools and communities to face a greater threat to the education of students. Therefore, it is imperative to research the factors preventing teachers from reporting to work on a consistent basis. Because the focus is on high stakes testing, teachers cannot afford to linger out of work with hopes that students master enough of the curriculum to show a year's worth of growth for a year's worth of education. A point made in the research is that teachers have the responsibility of modeling for students the discipline of coming to work every day (Marzano, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal law of January 8, 2002, expanded choices for parents, focused resources on proven educational methods, and provided accountability results. In addition, the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) holds schools accountable for the performance of subgroups as well as individual students. There is a level of accountability and expectations for teachers to perform at high levels during their presence in the classroom. Teachers, who have a history of missing days, will be impacted by the yearly rate of student progress. Consequently, classroom practices should be instructionally sound and aligned to best practices for that content area.

North Carolina teachers are expected to be accountable in the classroom and effective in getting students to grow academically and to reach proficiency on the state's EOC and EOG

assessments. Accountable teachers must support the teaching learning process by making themselves available to address the learning needs of students. Annual yearly testing is a major investment of time and resources. Formative tests are given to inform instruction and correct student learning errors. Without the quick, explicit turnaround of the feedback from teachers, student understanding of concepts is most likely to suffer.

Availability and an Orderly Environment

A safe and orderly learning environment is a needed aspect of the school culture to foster student success. General rules and procedures are created to maintain conducive environments for learning. Inappropriate student behavior requires the administration to allot more resources when the teacher is frequently absent (Scott et al., 2007). Classroom management is another cornerstone to student achievement. “A classroom that is chaotic as a result of poor management not only doesn’t enhance achievement, it might even inhibit it” (Marzano, 2003, p. 9). Therefore, to build positive relationships and to consistently enforce good citizenship a teacher must be present in the environment to carry out instruction and discipline. Bruno (2002) examined the issue of teacher absenteeism and the availability of substitute teachers. He found an average teacher absent rate of 8.27 per teacher per year, and that substitutes were not available to fill 9 to 306 classrooms. He also warned that low morale caused by teacher absences eventually led to high teacher turnover which is an expensive problem.

Substitute Teaching

Substitute Teaching Institute (2006) published the number of hours that a student spends in class with a substitute teacher is the equivalent of one year or 1,260 hours. Geoffrey Smith, founder of the Substitute Teaching Institute in Utah, reported between 8% to 10 % of teachers are absent on any given day. The Halifax County School district spent an approximately

\$500,000 or roughly 1.25% of its total operating budget for substitute teachers during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 past two academic school years. Having that amount of expenditure in substitute pay with only 11 schools and 221 teachers, makes the need to take a look at the variants creating the lack of teacher availability phenomenon and its impact on school operations and district budgets feasible. Substitute teachers cannot effectively participate in common planning meetings with other teachers; therefore, negatively impacting student learning in a less direct way (Miller et al., 2008). Less qualified substitute teachers may not have the skills needed to make significant contributions about student learning in professional learning communities.

Operational Strategies to Increase Teacher Availability

Brown and Arnell (2012) suggested assessing the problem that absenteeism creates in the particular school district before deciding on a plan of action. Internal processes and procedures should be reviewed to ascertain if any unnecessary district occurrences are taking teachers out of the classroom and then a plan should be devised for eliminating those factors creating teacher absenteeism. Furthermore, it was suggested reviewing the extent of teacher absences to include such factors as:

- Job dissatisfaction
- Teacher burnout
- Decrease in teacher morale

Because of their cost effectiveness, incentives are reported in the literature as a way to get teachers to come to work (Miller, 2012). According to Ahn and Vigdor (2011), per dollar spent, incentives provide over 4 times the amount in student improvement; thereby, minimizing the amount of money spent. Policies should be reviewed and adapted as well to help increase

opportunities for teacher availability (Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2008; Vixaysack, 2011).

There are strategies and incentives suggested in the literature that districts found effective as well as ineffective in increasing teacher availability and producing cost savings. Fryer (2011) found no evidence that teacher incentives affected teacher absences. His research was conducted in more than two hundred schools in New York to understand the impact incentives have on attendance, student performance, and graduation. Like Fryer, Glewwe et al. (2004) found the effects of incentives positively impacting student scores on some tests, but found that teacher attendance did not increase with using incentives. Albeit his research was conducted in a developing country such as Kenya, evidence still revealed the growing need to be conscientious of teacher absence ratings as high as 20%.

According to the following researchers, district leave policies impact the amount of leave used by teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Kallio, 2006; Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008; Pitts, 2010). Leave policies need analyses to address cultural and professional environments. While no two districts are alike, the teacher leave policy must be adjusted to reflect the district it serves. Policy adjustments are achieved by involving teachers in the decision making process as it relates to policy development to help teachers feel better about their work and develop their own solutions to increase teacher availability. Vixaysack (2011) encouraged administrators to hire people with strong work ethics characterized by dependability and work schedule adherence. With the financial challenges faced by many districts, it is a wise and prudent stance for leaders to hire candidates who are most likely to have the needed work stamina to deliver a quality instruction. The leave policy should serve to make educators aware of the importance of having a good work ethic by reporting to work with fidelity. Districts should set reasonable standards for

granting sick, annual, and personal leave days taken off by teachers. Efficient fiscal practices should be aligned with district goals and academic objectives (Varlas, 2010).

A minimum amount of research exists to communicate sustained effective strategies for increasing teacher availability (Miller, 2012). Nonetheless, teacher advocate groups and teacher unions argue that generous leave is necessary to attract the best teachers and demand that leave abuse occur on rare occasions (Keller, 2008). Monetary incentives and recognition programs for perfect attendance can also encourage good teacher attendance. This is a choice for consideration that would be less expensive than using large amounts of funding to pay for substitute teachers. To help promote good teacher attendance, it is suggested in the literature that districts develop business partnerships and solicit help from advocates of education to recognize and feature teachers with good attendance on business flyers, faith-based bulletins, radio releases, and public marquees. Miller (2012) suggested using the savings from implementing a smart incentive plan to start incentive policies created to increase teacher availability. Miller (2012) reported that people respond to incentives, but that no one has a definitive handle on the details required to sustain such incentives.

Ahn and Vigdor (2011) looked at lessons learned about teacher incentives from North Carolina's Teacher Bonus Program. They asserted that if teachers view incentives as impossible to obtain then nothing is accomplished by instituting the incentive plan. They further stated that it is financially more feasible to design a well thought out group incentive plan than to spend time constructing an incentive plan that caters to individuals. With the monies saved as a collective group from substitute spending, individual teachers can be rewarded for missing 4 or less days or the principal can use their discretion and divide the savings equally among the staff. Clotfelter et al. (2009) suggested increasing teacher salaries by \$400 dollars yearly. For each sick

day taken, deduct \$50 dollars from their salary. These researchers estimate that the reduction would be one teacher day per year and the expense would pay for itself in savings.

According to the Public Education Network (2004), certain districts paid as much as 6% of their total operating budget on professional development, which resulted in millions of dollars spent. Districts have invested heavily into the professional education and growth of its teachers and should look at resolving the increasing teacher availability phenomenon as an investment worthy of its time. Several districts offer new teacher training programs designed to complement teacher skills and enhance their repertoire of teaching and learning. In some states, it is part of the law to obtain, retain, and attract the best and brightest teachers. The district can pay college tuition and for college textbooks as an incentive to teachers with great work attendance. Faculty members can be granted duty free opportunities from the cafeteria, hallways, and buses in order to spend more time tutoring students. Paraprofessionals can be hired to relieve teachers at a fraction of the cost needed to pay substitute teachers and the indirect costs associated with substitute teachers. The district can restrict professional development until the summer or only on days in which the district calendar does not indicate students are reporting to school for instruction.

In house mentors also play a major role in providing support and services for beginning teachers in hopes that they will have longevity in the teaching profession. The Halifax County School district provides a district-wide mentoring program for first, second, and third year teachers. The district also provides contracted services with North Carolina's New Teacher Consortium to service new teachers with the exception of Teach for America teachers. Mentors are on site and make classroom visits to support beginning teachers in an effort to retain teachers in the district and to keep teachers consistently coming to work. Mentors assist new teachers with

planning lessons, finding resources, and managing inappropriate student behavior to help build teacher confidence and readiness for classroom tasks. The mentoring support is designed to help prevent teacher burn out and reduce the need for teachers to take mental health days and to be absent from work on days in which they otherwise would be in attendance.

Workplace stressors are cited in the literature as a contributor to absence. The higher the workplace stress the higher the absenteeism rate (Bruno, 2002; Jordan, 2006; Kight, 2007). The changing expectations of the job include teaching to varying student abilities and moving students to proficient levels. The demands of personal lives are also linked to the lack of consistent teacher availability. An anonymous author contributed an article in *Occupational Health*, December 2002 describing a pilot project in New York, which reduced teacher absences from 10.5 days to 8.9 days. Teachers were given personal stress profiles on physical and mental health which lead to the identification of 10% of the staff as sufferers of stress. The major causes of stress were identified resulting in on-site counselors mentoring and training on how to manage stress and pressure and on how to delegate job-related tasks.

It was suggested in the literature to offer free flu shots to district employees each year in order to combat illness (Scott et al., 2007). Hand sanitizers can be placed in strategic locations within the school to cut down on the spread of germs and serve as a contribution to the well-being of teachers. Bruno (2002) cited stressors such as a high number of student disciplinary infractions, high numbers of students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and high numbers of non-proficient students as reasons for high teacher absences. Bruno stated teachers working in poor urban schools often work in high crime areas and they work under much stress. Therefore, stress causes teachers in poor urban areas to take what they call mental health days off

from work. The environmental context of where teachers are located can also be a contributor to the lack of teacher availability.

An Employee Recognition Program can boost self-esteem and feelings of achievement. Grant, 2011 explained the Meritorious Attendance Recognition Program implemented in DeKalb County School System in Georgia. Recognition was provided to staff absent 4 or less days during the school year. The program exceeded the goal of reducing staff absenteeism by 1 day per school year. The program was so successful that teacher absences were reduced by 916 days or 1.23 days per employee resulting in substitute savings of \$156,000 in its first year of implementation. Several steps were taken to increase teacher attendance. The board of education adopted a policy of high attendance expectations for every employee, teachers received savings bonds, and sick leave day accrual increased. Employees with perfect staff attendance increased 175%. Grant stated that there is popular belief that productivity is increased by praises and raises.

In districts where incentives were successful as a tool to increase teacher availability, parties were hosted for teachers where prizes such as laptops, digital cameras, or iPads, were given away in support of good attendance. Semester recognition dinners also became part of a plan to encourage good teacher attendance. Teachers, who represent their school or district as teacher of the year, could not exceed a specified number of absences according to district criteria established in advance to promote good attendance.

Another strategy to solve the dilemma of increasing teacher availability and producing cost savings is to begin a district-wide awareness campaign. Goal setting, awareness, and carefully monitoring individual teachers for availability were cited from a study in Brown and Arnell (2012) in the Long Island Merrick, New York school district as having cut their absentee

rate in half. Principals must be held accountable for enforcing attendance policies and for closely monitoring teacher attendance patterns in their school. Teachers should be provided with a monthly printout of their absences followed by a conference with the school principal for anyone suspected of sick leave abuse. An effective data collection and reporting system can be utilized by the principal for quarterly review. Teacher sign-in forms should be analyzed and excessive time out of the classroom scrutinized. A written final summation of the number of days absent and the reasons given for all absences should be provided to the teacher during their exit year-end conference with the principal.

Boards of Education should receive monthly reports of teacher absences in addition to a printout of what has been paid from the substitute line for the month. A district newsletter can be used to feature teachers who are consistently coming to work. To help operationalize some of the suggested strategies, principals can write letters of commendation for teachers with good attendance. The issue of teacher availability cannot be kept silent in the district if the expectation is that teachers are needed at work. Clear expectations and parameters must be established in order for everyone to share a common understanding of the importance of reporting to work.

An additional viable solution to increase teacher availability is district review of its own internal processes and procedures. Any activities or events that can be rescheduled for a time outside the presence of students can be eliminated in order to increase the availability of teachers in the district. For example, Halifax County Schools' exceptional children's teachers participate in an internal event called Modifications Day. All teachers of exceptional children are pulled from the classroom and provided a substitute for the day. The teachers use that day to share with general education teachers the modifications of students who are on their caseload and who will be taught by the general education teacher. The Exceptional Children's Department can

accomplish this same objective by remaining after work for an afternoon to meet with all general teachers and share this same information or establish increments of time during their allotted planning time, thereby, eliminating the need to hire over 20 substitute teachers in the district during this process. The building level principal can work with the staff in terms of trade-offs for the time spent after school sharing this information. Train the trainer models can be implemented rather than sending several teachers to participate in the same conference. Teachers used as chaperones on field trips should be reduced as well as any sponsorship of student activities that remove teachers from the classroom (Smith, 2012).

Every two years, the state of North Carolina provides a state-wide Teachers' Working Conditions survey. The working conditions survey includes constructs where teachers can anonymously give feedback on the working conditions that exist in their building. To uncover any organizational factors preventing teachers from reporting to work, principals and teachers can unpack the results of the survey together. Using a T-chart, existing problems can be stated on one side of the chart while solutions can be captured on the other side of the chart. Having open conversations about organizational factors can build workplace morale and increase the desire of teachers to come to work. Removing job dissatisfiers and highlighting attendance in a positive manner is another strategy to promote good attendance. Districts can use this procedure to help teachers feel valued about the input they have in creating a better working environment.

It is suggested in the literature that districts consider buying back unused sick and personal leave days as an incentive to reduce the number of days taken off by teachers. The district can consider partial or full payment of accumulated sick leave as severance pay; or conversion of sick leave to personal leave or vacation days (Smith, 2012). Teachers can bank unused sick leave days to cash in when they leave the district or when they retire. Upon

retirement, unused sick days are bought back resulting in lower leave usage. Districts should consider placing a cap on the number of days that can be cashed in so that the district will not be overwhelmed with paying major cash outs.

Districts are optimistic that they can increase teacher availability by combining management tools with policies in order to eliminate unscrupulous use of paid leave time. Miller (2012) encouraged districts to combine policies and management tools to produce potential cost savings in the district. Principals must step up and assist in holding teachers accountable. It is easy for teachers to use the automated call system because the automated system cannot ask questions or seek reasons as to why the absence is necessary. It is suggested in the literature that one way of increasing teacher availability is to have teachers speak to a human rather than using an automated call in system (Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2007). Principals have the ability to ask relevant questions that pertain to any untimely absence. Throughout the absence, principals can maintain contact with absent staff member by speaking to them personally until they are back on the job. A principle management tool is the requirement for using various forms of leave is to contact the principal in advance of any needed leave.

Teachers, in North Carolina, are able to accumulate one sick day per month amounting to 10 sick days per year for 10 month employees. The Family and Medical Leave Act provides up to 12 weeks of job protected leave to care for a new child, an ill family member, or a teacher's own illness. If districts could find a way to give equal attention to paid short term leave privileges with income insurance for unpaid leave associated with absences covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act, perhaps benefits could be realized (Miller, 2012).

Conclusion

Solutions to solving the teacher availability dilemma in Halifax County based upon the literature will include the following key strategies:

1. Increase teacher accountability by having absent teachers call principals as a management tool (Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008; Pitkoff, 2003)
2. Link teacher attendance to their summative evaluation (Pitkoff, 2003)
3. Increase teacher awareness of absentee problem with a public campaign (Grant, 2011; Pitkoff, 2003)
4. Host recognition banquet for teachers with 4 or less yearly absences (Grant, 2011)
5. Do not extend sick leave bank beyond state statute of 20 days (Pitkoff, 2003)
6. Utilize volunteers on field trips rather than using additional teachers (Smith, 2012)
7. Provide incentives for excellent teacher attendance (Ahn & Vigdor, 2011; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller, 2012)
8. Schedule district professional development during non-instructional times (Pitkoff, 2003)
9. Combine management tools with policy to make expectations of the board of education known to all district teachers. Board adopts and implements a policy of high attendance expectations (Kallio, 2006; Miller, 2008; Miller, 2012; Pitts, 2010)
10. Have teachers establish attendance goals at the beginning of the year (Brown & Arnell, 2012)
11. Principal participation should include the review of the monthly attendance printout listing teachers who take frequent short absences from work; the principal should

conduct monthly conferences with teachers who take excessive Mondays and Fridays and provide an attendance warning letter during conferences.

Principals should receive calls directly for all absences (no email, text, or voicemail); and principals should write letters of commendation to staff with excellent attendance (Brown & Arnell, 2012; Grant, 2011)

12. The district should provide a \$400 bonus for each teacher at the beginning of the year and reduce it by \$50.00 for every sick day taken (Clotfelter et al., 2009)
13. The district should enforce NC General Statute 115 C- 301.1 requiring principal approval for teacher absence just before and just after holidays

The focus of sustaining increased teacher availability and increased district savings are areas in need of continued research. While the rising cost of teacher absenteeism continues to plague many districts, research indicates districts with effective incentive plans have improved teacher availability. As most of the research suggests, teacher absenteeism affects employers, leaders, and individuals who receive services from the teachers who post a high number of absences. Lack of teacher availability not only affects district budgets, but also affects school operations in general.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As indicated in chapter one, the localized problem for Halifax County Schools revealed the lack of teacher availability has an impact on district finances. This chapter describes the methodology for proposed solutions to this issue and the involvement of multiple stakeholders through the investigative process. The participants, the evidence collected, and the analyzed district data is described. Policy recommendations for Halifax County Schools developed in consonance with recommendations in the literature, local evidence from data collected, and suggestions provided by the board of education members, the superintendent, the principals, and the teachers. Policy recommendations developed from several components. The first component consisted of policy analysis; the second component, analysis of district data; the third component, meeting with various district stakeholder groups; and the fourth component, teacher focus group interviews. Parent involvement demonstrated how parents conceptualize the lack of teacher availability. The development of these components resulted in a comprehensive teacher attendance policy that will be presented to the board of education for first reading and eventually for adoption and implementation.

Study Problem

The purpose of this study was to increase teacher availability rates through incentives, management tools, and policy investigation which were used to develop the teacher attendance expectation policy, while producing cost savings for the Halifax County School District. Improving the fiscal impact that the lack of teacher availability had on the organization was a dilemma that warranted finding a solution. A recommendation to guide change has been made as a result of the evidence, arguments, and values that surfaced while investigating multiple causes of excessive teacher absences.

Study Participants

The Halifax County School District is a small, rural, low economic district situated in Northeastern North Carolina. One hundred percent of the students in the school district receive free breakfast and free lunch. Therefore, the high level of poverty makes the entire school district a Title I district. The teacher focus group interview participants were current full-time certified K-12 teachers from the district's elementary, middle, and high schools who were employed full time during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. There are 7 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 high schools that had teachers participating in the teacher focus group interviews.

The policy developer reviewed the district's leave policy for statements indicating how and when leave should be approved. Recommended literature findings suggested leave policies include statements on the expectation of the leave policy such as specific arrival and departure times. According to Scott et al. (2007), a leave policy could allow more flexible use of leave time or require more stringent use of sick leave time. If adjustments or changes are needed in the policy, school board members should help create conditions that increase teacher availability. It is recommended that excellent attendance, 8 or less days per year, is included in the district's attendance policy as a requisite for continuous employment and job tenure. Studies documented the numbers and types of policies of teacher absence and relationships between policies and the school district (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008). It is suggested that policies, that govern types of teacher leave, need to be examined with precision. Some policies have been noted as excessively generous with allowing teachers to use sick days for many reasons other than being sick (Miller, 2008).

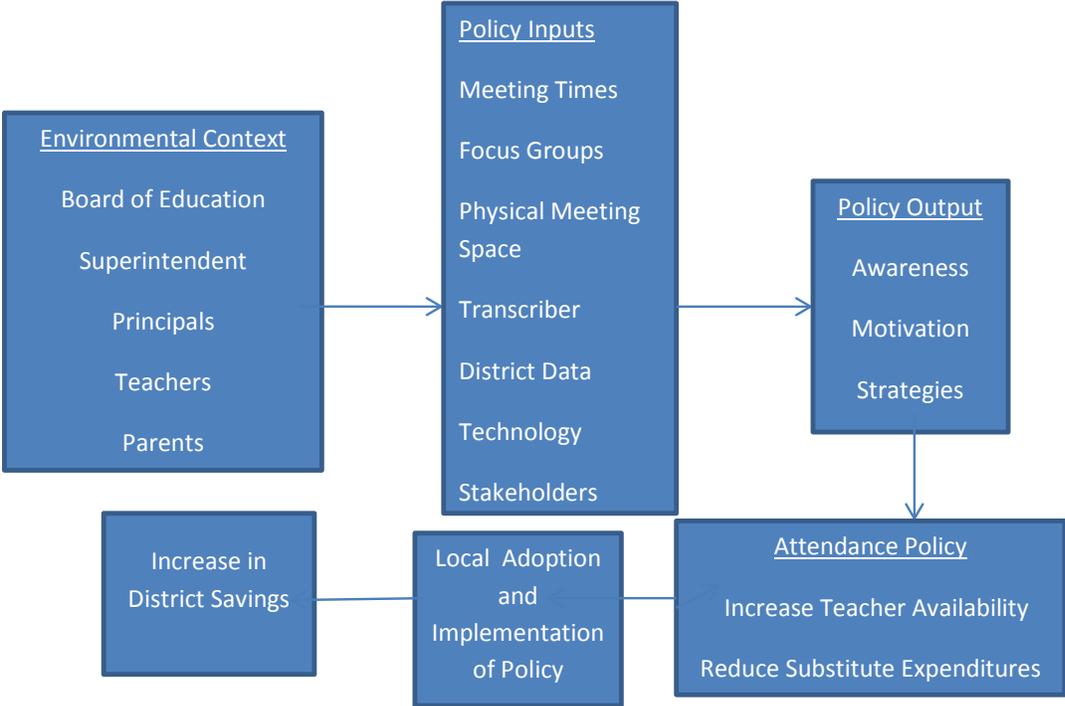
Problem of Practice Study

The logic model included in this study shows how participants collaborated to achieve the objective of producing cost savings by increasing teacher availability through the development of a comprehensive policy. The inputs included pertinent district stakeholders, who were impacted by the strategies used to develop a teacher attendance policy, based on the literature and based on the evidence from various data sources and stakeholder involvement. The output shows the steps leading up to the activities necessary to collaborate on increasing teacher availability. The outcome stage culminated with the iterative process of developing a policy to reach the long-term goals of increasing teacher availability and creating district cost savings. The logic model filled in the steps from analyzing the organizational problem to adopting and implementing an attendance policy (see Figure 1).

The context in which the problem of practice was applied was given full consideration in addition to theories of motivation and human resource development. Various types of evidence were collected to see if incentives were effective in reducing teacher absenteeism. Information was received from select participant responses to questions to reflect attitudes, perceptions, and opinions. Stakeholders discussed perceived factors causing the lack of teacher availability and they discussed how to address this important topic.

The proposed methodology for this problem of practice consisted of synthesizing from the literature 13 recommended strategies to increase teacher availability. The first study question for the policy developer was to determine which of the 13 strategies, if any, were deemed effective for increasing teacher availability in Halifax County Schools as determined by the board of education, superintendent, principals, and teachers.

INCREASING TEACHER AVAILABILITY - LOGIC MODEL



Note. Adapted from Richardson and Martinez (2009).

Figure 1. Illustrates logic model for methodology.

The second study question was to determine whether or not prior to the adoption of the overall teacher comprehensive attendance policy, were any of the implemented strategies effective in increasing the availability of teachers in the workplace? The third study question was to determine whether or not any amount of savings was realized from the strategies that were implemented prior to the overall adoption of the attendance policy? Interactions with stakeholders determined several of the most appropriate literature-based strategies. This original research culminated in developing a comprehensive teacher attendance policy to address increasing teacher availability and in producing district cost savings.

A parent survey asked a series of yes or no questions to ascertain parent feelings on the lack of teacher availability topic. Students were given a written copy of the 5 question survey to take home to parents. Principals or their designee collected the hard copies of the parent surveys once they were completed and returned to the school. No personal identifying information was asked on the survey and each survey indicated whether the student attended an elementary, middle, or high school in the district. Parent response perception data will be presented to the board of education to demonstrate how parents conceptualize the lack of teacher availability. The following yes or no parent responses were recorded in a table:

1. Do you think it is important for a teacher to be available for work on a consistent basis?
2. Do you believe the prolonged absence of a teacher has an effect on a child's academic performance?
3. Do you feel substitute teachers can deliver a quality education to your child equal to that of the certified teacher?

4. Has your child ever been taught by a substitute teacher for an extended period of time?
5. Can your child be academically successful in school if the teacher is consistently absent?

In order to gather reliable data, input from diverse perspectives were analyzed and reviewed. It is appropriate to involve multiple members from various stakeholder groups in order to ascertain several points of view and understand the values that surfaced when presented with an opportunity to collaborate on increasing teacher attendance rates. These diverse groups were persuaded of the problem based upon the evidence, data, and input from different perspectives.

Focus Group Dynamics

Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2012) stated a focus group is a face-to-face process involving a group of individuals raising ideas and issues pertinent to the subject presented which makes a focus group similar to an interview. The focus group process can help prove or disprove beliefs about a phenomenon and is usually comprised of six to ten homogeneous people in order to stimulate conversation and obtain in-depth information. Homogeneity increases the chances for the participants to have congenial behaviors and by having small numbers the participants are motivated to interact and express themselves and respond to members of the group by being open and exploring the topic. The teacher focus groups provided clear, cost saving answers and were an appropriate data source for gaining social understanding and knowledge. The focus was on a single phenomenon in order to explore the topic in great detail.

Influential teachers with two or more years of employment in Halifax County Schools were invited to reveal underlying causes of absenteeism and to identify suitable incentives that motivated them to increase their workplace attendance and to change their attendance behavior.

Because influential is a subjective trait, influential teachers were identified by co-workers, administrators, and the superintendent. It was feasible to interview multiple teacher focus groups based upon teachers who share similar characteristics since the district only employs approximately 221 teachers. It was not uncommon to conduct three or four focus groups on the same topic to ascertain evolving information surrounding the topic (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012). Three separate teacher focus group interviews were conducted throughout the course of this study. One group was comprised of teachers who were considered influential teachers within the district. The superintendent, principals, and teachers provided the names of the teachers in this group. The next group of teacher focus group participants shared the characteristic of being novice teachers with more than two years, but less than five years of teaching from across the district. These teachers were randomly selected by every fifth teacher's name from the list provided by the district human resource department. The final teacher focus group interviews consisted of a combination of teachers who were elementary, middle, and high school teachers. This group shared the commonality of being a member of their school's improvement team. Neither focus group exceeded 10 participants. Each group interview was held in the district at an inviting, central site conducive to accommodate participants, policy developer, scribe, and resources.

Focus Group Facilitator

The focus groups were constructed to help reveal any underlying causes related to the Halifax County Schools lack of teacher availability dilemma. The policy developer facilitated discussions during each focus group meeting by introducing and describing the process. Participants were encouraged to arrive early to partake in a light dinner. Each participant was offered a five dollar monetary thank you as a result of their participation. Questions were posed

to the group that informed the topic while the facilitator moderated the interview to ensure equal voice of the respondents and to ensure all pertinent questions were asked. All group participants were given a letter of the alphabet to place in a visible location near their chair in order for the facilitator to hear from that person whose alphabet was called to encourage a response if they are not as vocal as some of the other members. The alphabet process helped to ensure anonymity among focus group members. Participants were made to feel relaxed and to feel that they were having a conversation about the topic and to respond freely without raising hands or waiting to be called upon. The facilitator kept track of time and asked questions that had the participants engaged in conversation. Participants were asked to provide relevant examples to clarify any statements they made during the interview process.

Focus group results added useful teacher input data to the validity of the recommendations or adjustments made on the attendance policy before presenting the policy to the board of education. Different teacher focus groups comprised of teachers with similar characteristics in each group were interviewed and recorded to extend their thoughts and perceptions of the existing lack of teacher availability in the district. Teachers received an opportunity to describe their reactions to proposed solutions and describe the changes they would make. They were given an opportunity to share any concerns, solutions, and feedback. The policy developer communicated with teachers prior to the focus group interviews to answer any clarifying questions about the interview expectations, process, or procedures. Teachers were made aware of the interview in advance by the school level principal who was asked to collect a consent form from each participant to have the session audio taped. Participant consent forms were collected prior to the policy developer facilitating any of the interview sessions (see Appendix B).

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed to extract meaning of the data. A compensated scribe transcribed the recordings of the interviews as an additional measure of accuracy to reduce researcher bias.

The following questions were asked during each teacher focus group interview session:

1. What is it that you love about teaching?
2. How aware are you of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon in the district?
3. How important do you think it is to increase teacher awareness of the absentee problem?
4. What types of incentives, if any, could the district provide for great teacher attendance?
5. Do you believe, teachers with four or less yearly absences, is a reasonable number of absences to have in order for the district to host a recognition banquet in honor of these teachers?
6. Just as we establish professional school goals at the beginning of the year to determine our preferred state, should teachers establish attendance goals as well as a part of this preferred state?
7. When should principals begin conferencing with teachers whose lack of availability occurs frequently on Mondays and/or Fridays?
8. What is your response to the district providing a \$400 bonus for each teacher and reduce it by \$50.00 for every sick day taken?
9. What would you do to increase teacher attendance?
10. What do you think is happening with teachers who take leave without pay and what would you do about it?

The first two questions served as ice breaker questions in order to start the group talking and getting comfortable with one another. Responses to these questions were not transcribed as part of the evidence contributing to the topic. All group participants were thanked for their participation and assured of anonymity in all written correspondence. No individual identifiable information was transcribed in the report. The results from the interviews informed the outcomes recommended in the teacher attendance expectation policy. The focus group questions were developed to assess teacher perception of incentives, organizational factors, and absentee culture. The incentives from the literature were included in the questions asked of the interview participants. Respondents were invited to include comments and questions to help uncover any thoughts on the lack of teacher availability

Study Participants

Superintendent Component

The first meeting between the superintendent and the policy developer provided the superintendent an opportunity to express her concerns and thoughts on the lack of teacher availability within the district. Because the problem impacts the district finances in a major way, the policy developer received the superintendent's written endorsement to find a solution to reduce the burden on the scarce financial resources by having the superintendent grant complete access to district data sources.

During the second meeting with the school superintendent, the policy developer shared literature-based strategies used by other districts to reduce the high cost of teacher absences in their district. The superintendent agreed to increase staff awareness of the problem by having the board chairperson campaign for teacher availability during a district-wide convocation event with all Halifax County employees. The superintendent also agreed to eradicate the district call-

in system to increase the opportunities for principal and teacher communication regarding impending absences.

Further meetings with the superintendent occurred once the researcher was granted permission to conduct the research by the International Review Board (IRB) and by the Department of Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. The superintendent participated in meetings to have discussions to produce cost savings for the district and increase teacher attendance rates. A data notebook was used to capture the suggestions and concerns of the superintendent. This information was reviewed with the superintendent to ensure her perceptions were recorded correctly. Planned meetings were conducted with the superintendent as new evidence surfaced to underpin more on the lack of teacher availability problem within the district.

Teacher Component

The policy developer gathered evidence through focus group interviews with district teachers who shared specific commonalities. The purpose of the interviews was to learn the meaning that teachers hold about the lack of teacher availability phenomenon and possible solutions. Through conversation, teachers explored their experiences and understanding of the lack of teacher availability within the district.

Full time certified teachers with two or more years of employment in the district were asked to respond to a series of specific questions that were related to organizational factors, absentee culture, and incentives surrounding teacher availability. Teacher focus group interview data was transcribed and analyzed to determine if any themes or patterns existed that will help to determine reasons as to why teachers are not available for work as well as any suggestions to address increasing teacher availability. The Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet program was

used as a tool to detect themes and patterns in coding participant responses related to organizational factors, absentee culture, and incentives. The feedback from the study participants' perceptions were analyzed for trends and used to help develop a comprehensive attendance expectation policy based on specific steps from the logic model to increase teacher availability and produce cost savings.

The interview process helped the policy developer gain the most insight by listening to teacher responses and by understanding the most about the lack of teacher availability that could be ascertained. Handwritten notes from the focus group sessions also became part of the study. Interview questions were prepared in advance with space in the data notebook to include note taking. Data was recorded and a scribe included handwritten notes to capture the meaning of the data during the two hour allotted focus group sessions. What teachers believed to be the underlying causes of this phenomenon was captured in the notebook as well. Topics that were addressed in the literature were the same topics found in the teacher focus group interview questions. However, the interview respondents controlled the flow of the conversation. The interview was designed to have the participant's perceptions of the challenges and complexities of the lack of teacher availability flow in a conversational manner. Each data set topic was organized according to segments of the data that were similar. Major themes and subthemes were identified in the data in order to transform the data into meaningful information.

Principal Component

Communicating with multiple, diverse audiences included the school principals who were informally collaborated with through emails and through face-to-face discussions on the issue of the lack of teacher availability and to discuss the characteristics of various teacher focus groups. Each building level administrator had the opportunity to express their feelings on their

role on impacting teacher absences and provide solutions to increase teacher availability and to comment on the 13 strategies presented to include as policy recommendation. Principal involvement was paramount to ensure adequate feedback was given and substantive questions were asked to get to the root cause of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon which yielded meaningful information. In addition to the following questions, it was recommended to the principals to conduct follow-up on the lack of teacher availability awareness at the building level during faculty events.

1. How important do you think it is to increase teacher awareness of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon?
2. What types of incentives should the district provide for great teacher attendance?
3. Do you believe, missing four or less days per year, is a reasonable number of absences to have in order for the district to host a recognition banquet in honor of these teachers?
4. Just as we establish professional school goals at the beginning of the year to determine our preferred state, should teachers establish attendance goals as well as a part of this preferred state?
5. When should principals begin conferencing with teachers who show patterns of sick leave abuse by excessively missing Mondays or Fridays?
6. What is your response to the district providing a \$400 bonus for each teacher and reduce the bonus by \$50.00 for every sick day taken?
7. What strategies would you include in a teacher attendance policy to increase attendance?

8. What do you think is happening with teachers who take leave without pay and what would you do about it?

These open-ended direct questions were revealed to ensure they were organized and phrased correctly to get to the root cause of the problem and they were oriented towards a solution. Based on a review of the literature and stakeholder input, these questions helped determine if they were providing the kind of information that was required to identify suitable incentives to motivate teachers to change their attendance behavior and help uncover root causes of the lack of teacher availability. Recommendations, found in the literature, were made to principals to hold teachers accountable by reporting impending teacher absences directly to the principal. Principals received suggestions to conduct monthly conferences with teachers who were frequently not available for work and to provide a record of cumulative yearly absences in addition to a letter of warning which included signatures from both the principal and the teacher indicating the conference was held. Principals was encouraged to enhance school climate and morale in order to increase teacher availability by using such tools as writing letters of commendation for those teachers with excellent attendance rates and by providing teachers with autonomy in their job responsibilities. Principals were also encouraged to use trade-off days where it was feasible, whereby the principal covers a certain amount of time the teacher needs to be off, while the teacher performs some agreed upon service or extended time on another day (Roza, 2009). Principals were encouraged to share with teachers the responsibility of knowing how many days teachers have been absent by closely paying attention to cumulative absences located on their pay stubs.

Principal feedback on the direct questions was used to validate the recommendations that were made to the board of education. The purpose of the agreed upon principal recommendations

by the group during the collaborative session was to receive the most reliable responses related to the lack of teacher availability. Principals determined the role they play in increasing teacher availability and had their responses recorded in a data notebook which was used to influence the attendance expectation policy. All principal stakeholders were given an opportunity to have input on underpinning underlying causes on the lack of teacher availability and on finding solutions to this dilemma. As an incentive to encourage teacher participation in the focus group interviews, principals were asked to cover teacher release with on-site staff and allow all participants to leave school at 2:00pm for a 3:00pm start time for each focus group.

Board of Education Component

The initial meeting with the Halifax County Board of Education members was to present the district statistics on teacher absences. The policy developer discussed the data presented in a prepared power-point that revealed teacher Monday through Friday absentee patterns for the previous two years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. The visual presentation also included data for the past two school years on the amount of the total operating budget, the amount spent on substitute pay, and the amount spent on teachers who take leave without pay. This information was analyzed and shared with the Halifax Board of Education to show a persistent problem with the fiscal impact on the budget created by the costs of paying for both the regular teacher and the substitute teacher. Furthermore, the board of education also viewed the causes of the lack of teacher availability with the top three reason codes used for absences.

A discussion with the board of education members helped determine how they view the magnitude of the problem and how they viewed directions for next steps in reaching a solution. During the discussion, the policy developer informed the board of solutions found in the literature and suggested strategies that include the district stakeholders in problem solving. There

were two planned meetings with the board of education to reveal the teacher absentee statistics and the solutions from the stakeholders and the literature to help address the lack of teacher availability issue. School board member feedback was used for modifications to the attendance policy and a draft copy of the comprehensive teacher attendance policy will be presented to the board of education in April 2015 for the first reading and later for adoption and implementation.

The policy developer used Microsoft word to note all meetings with the board of education members. Dates and times were recorded to ensure details of the meetings are in order before making any adjustments to the policy. The policy developer reviewed data notes with the full board of education before any changes are recommended in the attendance expectation policy. The policy developer used six data sources of evidence for this study: local policy analysis, district data, teacher focus group interviews, principal input, superintendent input, and board of education input.

Local and State Policies

The local district policy was accessed online using the district's webpage to compare local policy to recommended practices. North Carolina general statutes were reviewed using the Public Laws of North Carolina Annotated 2013 edition. Policy analysis included a review of sick leave, leave without pay, and annual leave. Data was recorded in a data notebook and cross referenced with state statutes to ensure non-conflicting recommendations are given. Policy analysis is an attempt to capture gaps in current policy practices that attribute to more days taken off by teachers. Therefore, policy development is an iterative process with multiple links and collaborative opportunities for input. Analysis of the data, stakeholder collaboration, and synthesis of information occurred before recommendations were given to either the school superintendent or the board of education for policy approval. In addition to these data sources,

the district's leave policy was analyzed for alignment with research suggestions along with the feedback and contributions on lack of teacher availability from study participants.

Researchers have demonstrated that leave policies can affect the number of days used by teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008). It is recommended that leave policies be consistent with current practices and research in view of the fact that the lack of teacher availability is of growing concern to many school districts. The district participants' perceptions and values about the leave policy and what should be included to increase teacher availability were disaggregated for themes and patterns.

Miller (2012) and Miller et al. (2008) suggested teachers are likely motivated to increase their attendance behavior by receiving incentives. The incentives recommended in chapter two were selected based on suggestions found in the literature on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Swanson & Holton, 2009). Additional factors that may influence lack of teacher availability were also included from findings in the literature. Participants had an opportunity to give their opinion on incentives they found appealing and motivating to increase attendance behavior.

Analyzing district data was important because it demonstrated the persistent problem of the lack of teacher availability in the district and the impact that it had on depleting the district budget. It was important to the communication process in order to frame the discussion of lack of teacher availability with the board of education. The analyzed district data was used to make recommendations for a teacher attendance policy and it provided the justification for a district attendance policy. The attendance policy was crafted from evidence provided by district data, teacher perspective, policy analysis, stakeholder perspective, and literature recommendations. Data was collected, analyzed, synthesized, and reported as the findings were validated from the diverse data sources. The policy was vetted with the school board attorney and vetted through the

North Carolina School Board Association to ensure legal requirements have been met. The assistance was to ensure that the appropriate terminology and legal references were consistent with North Carolina State Statutes.

Lack of teacher availability impacted the district's strained budget and had the potential to interrupt the continuity of the flow in the school environment (Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller, 2012; Millet et al., 2008). For two of the past consecutive school years, Halifax County Schools paid in excess of \$500,000 in substitute wages and indirect cost. This was a substantial amount for an impoverished school district that does not receive low wealth funds and has difficulty attracting highly qualified teachers by not offering a local supplement. This investigation focused on lack of teacher availability, local and state policy, collaboration with teacher focus group interviews, with the superintendent, with principals, and with school board members in order to recommend a teacher attendance policy to increase the number of days teachers are available for work. Thereby, decreasing substitute expenditures and realizing financial savings for the district. Feedback was also analyzed from study participants to uncover any underlying district processes or procedures that may affect teacher availability.

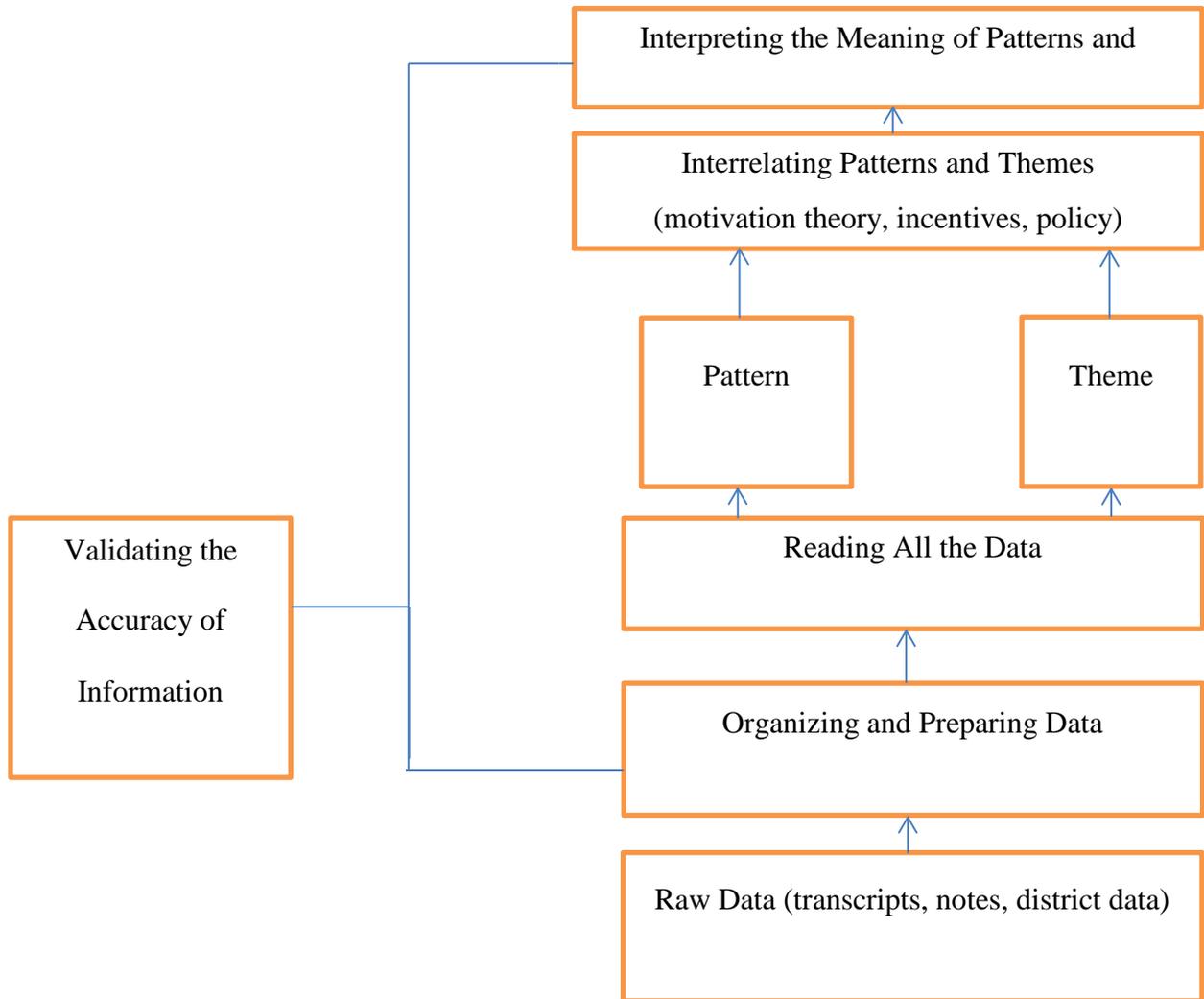
Triangulation uses multiple sources to test and modify one's understanding of a concept or theory (Thomas & Mohan, 2007). Various methods of inquiry and usage of different people to verify that the ideas generated can be accounted for by investigating the researched concept. Creswell (2009) suggested triangulation of data as valid and reliable research as the researcher compares and cross-check data collected at different times in different places, or from data collected from different people with different perspectives, or from follow-up interviews with the same people. Data gathered from the interviews, from the stakeholders, and from the district were triangulated to substantiate the lack of teacher availability phenomenon under that was

under investigation. Findings were validated by ensuring the information from multiple data points lead to the same conclusion (see Figure 2). Sufficient evidence was collected to ensure all points of view have been obtained and to see if any new or emerging data surfaced during this process. Variations and different explanations of the phenomenon were apparent during the collection and analysis of evidence. All information was examined for clarity and specificity to determine if the information explained the lack of teacher availability.

Summary

Permission to conduct the investigation on the lack of teacher availability was granted in writing by the superintendent of Halifax County Schools. The results derived from investigation of the data sources was used to develop a teacher attendance expectation policy specifically for Halifax County Schools. The desired policy utilized steps found in a logic model to increase teacher availability and produce cost savings. The policy recommendations were formulated as a result of the multiple causes and solutions of the localized problem presented in this investigation.

This chapter presented the methodology that was employed by using the culminating sources of evidence as input to policy. These sources were: literature solutions, teacher focus group interviews, district data, district policy, board of education input, principal input, and superintendent input. Policy recommendations were made to the superintendent and to board of education members based upon district data and the four components of stakeholder input: board of education members, superintendent, principals, and teachers. The teacher attendance policy will serve to increase lack of availability awareness, increase teacher availability, and produce district cost savings. The investigation conformed to the context found in one small, rural public school system.



Note. Adapted from Creswell (2009).

Figure 2. Triangulating data points for validation.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This problem of practice study was used in Halifax County to collaborate with and gather solutions from stakeholders to increase teacher availability while producing cost savings for the district. This chapter presents the results of the collaborative problem solving process and the resulting attendance policy. The previous chapter described the components and procedures used to create a comprehensive teacher attendance policy in order to address increasing teacher availability and produce cost savings for the study district. Understanding the emerging lack of teacher availability phenomenon resulted in a restatement of the three study questions to explore the challenges and possible solutions to information focused on addressing this localized problem. The following is the restatement of the study questions:

Study Questions

1. The first study question for the policy developer was to determine which of the 13 strategies, if any, would be deemed effective for increasing teacher availability in Halifax County Schools as determined by the board of education, superintendent, principals, and teachers.
2. The second study question was to determine whether or not prior to the adoption of the overall teacher comprehensive attendance policy, would any of the implemented strategies prove effective in increasing the availability of teachers in the workplace?
3. The third study question was to determine whether or not any amount of savings would be realized from the strategies that were implemented prior to the overall adoption of the attendance policy?

Study Participants

Parent Participants

Parent surveys were distributed to the 7 elementary, 2 middle, and 2 high schools. Parents were given a 5 question survey to obtain their feelings on a lack of teacher availability and their perception of the impact of this phenomenon. Two thousand nine hundred and sixty-five surveys were distributed across the district and 459 surveys were return for a rate of 15.4%. Five returned surveys were discarded because they were not answered with a “yes” or “no” response. All questions, with a “yes” or “no” response were included in the survey data even if the survey was partially completed. Although the deadline was extended twice, the low parent survey return rate may be attributed to cancelling school several days each week for 2 weeks due to adverse weather conditions.

Survey question1 stated: Do you think it is important for a teacher to be available for work on a consistent basis? 412 or 96.9% of parents stated yes while 13 or 3.1% of parents stated no. Question 1 had 425 responses. Parent response to this question was not surprising. A majority of the participants agreed that it is important for the teacher to be available for work on a consistent basis.

Survey question 2 stated: Do you believe the prolonged absence of a teacher has an effect on a child’s academic performance? The results revealed that 379 or 90.2% of the parent participants agreed that the prolonged absence of a teacher has an effect on a child’s academic performance. Parent disagreement with the prolonged absence of the teacher affecting student academic performance was 9.8%. Question 2 had 420 responses.

Survey question 3 stated: Do you feel a substitute teacher can deliver a quality education to your child equal to that of the certified teacher? The result of this question showed 132 or

31.7% of the parents agreed, while 284 or 68.3% of parents stated no. Question 3 had 416 responses.

Survey question 4 stated: Has your child ever been taught by a substitute teacher for an extended period of time? The survey showed 177 or 42.1% of the parents stated their child has not been taught by a substitute teacher for an extended period of time, while 243 or 57.9% of the parents stated yes their child has been taught by a substitute teacher for an extended period of time. An extended period of time for the purposes of this study is defined as 2 weeks or longer. Question 4 had 420 responses.

Survey question 5 stated: Can your child be academically successful in school if the teacher is consistently absent? The results showed 334 or 81% of parents agreed their child cannot be academically successful in school if the teacher is consistently absent, while 78 or 19% of parents do believe their child can be academically successful in school if the teacher is consistently absent. Question 5 had 412 responses.

An analysis of the parent survey data indicates the lack of teacher availability is important to the majority of the parents surveyed. Parents believe that it is important for teachers to consistently report to work and they believe their child will be more successful academically with the presence of a teacher reporting to work consistently. The parent data reflected that parents are concerned about consistent teacher availability in the classroom and they care about having a quality education delivered to their child by a certified teacher. Table 1 reflects the number of district parent response on each question asked in the study.

Teacher Focus Group Participants

The selection of the teacher focus group participants was purposeful and representative in order to have conversations with diverse, knowledgeable stakeholders. Rich information was

Table 1

District Parent Survey Perception

| Parent Responses | Yes | No |
|------------------|-------|-----|
| Q1 | 412 | 13 |
| Q2 | 379 | 41 |
| Q3 | 132 | 284 |
| Q4 | 243 | 177 |
| Q5 | 78 | 334 |
| Total | 1,244 | 849 |

gathered to explore the experiences and understanding of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon in order for the policy developer to obtain a good understanding of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon. Teachers, principals, and the school superintendent recommended teachers for the school improvement and influential focus group sessions. The participants included teachers from the following categories: school improvement team, influential teachers, and teachers with 2- 5 years of teaching experience in Halifax County. Data gathered from the district's human resource department randomly selected every fifth teacher's name who had between 2-5 years of teaching experience in the district. Elementary, middle, and high school teachers were involved in the focus groups. The teacher focus group sessions occurred within the district over a 3 day period. The demographic characteristics were representative of the district population to inform the synthesized analysis of the evidence collected. Table 2 displays the similar characteristic of each focus group member and of the number of participants from each group.

The following questions were presented to each focus group in order to understand perceptions on the investigation of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon within its context and yield possible solutions during each of the three focus group sessions:

1. What is it that you love about teaching?
2. How aware are you of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon in the district?
3. How important do you think it is to increase teacher awareness of the absentee problem?
4. What types of incentives should the district provide for great teacher attendance?
5. Do you believe, teachers with four or less yearly absences should be honored in a recognition banquet?

Table 2

Teacher Focus Group Characteristics

| Focus Group Characteristics | # Participants |
|---|----------------|
| School Improvement Team Members | 9 |
| Influential District Teachers | 9 |
| Teachers with 2-5 years teaching experience in district | 8 |
| Total Participants | 26 |

6. Just as we establish professional school goals at the beginning of the year to determine our preferred state, should teachers establish attendance goals as well as a part of this preferred state?
7. When should principals begin conferencing with teachers who show patterns of sick leave abuse by excessively missing Mondays and/or Fridays?
8. What is your response to the district providing a \$400 bonus for each teacher and reduce it by \$50.00 for every sick day taken?
9. What would you do to increase teacher attendance?
10. What do you think is happening with teachers who take leave without pay and what would you do about it?

The school improvement teacher focus group session was held Tuesday, March 3, 2015 in the central services conference room. The influential teacher focus group was held on Wednesday, March 4, 2015 while the novice teacher group was held on Friday, March 6, 2015. Both sessions were held in the centrally located district curriculum unit. This location was selected because it was the most centralize area as a result of the two furthest schools on each end of the district that cover a distance of a 35 mile span. Questions one and two served as ice breaker questions and were not transcribed as part of the data on increasing teacher availability. Some of the focus group questions were rephrased during the audio-taped sessions to clarify either participant questions or to clarify participant understanding of what the question was asking. There were variations in the interpretation of teacher availability based on participant experiences and the culture of the school environment along with the values and beliefs of the participants. The following information was extracted from the focus group sessions:

The underlying issues with teacher availability from the teacher focus group perspectives were multifaceted and profound. The importance of increasing teacher awareness of the absentee problem was reported with an overwhelming yes by all 26 focus group members that teachers should be made aware of the lack of teacher availability in fairness to all teachers, especially if they are the ones creating the phenomenon in the district. Even though all teachers cited awareness as being important, 11 out of the 26 or 42.3% of the teacher participants did not agree with the strategy of having the district engage in a public campaign to help create awareness of the lack of teacher availability dilemma (see Appendix E). Subsequently, 20 out of the 26 teachers or 77% of the teachers agreed that the board should increase awareness through the adoption and implementation of a teacher attendance expectation policy (see Appendices D, F).

The perception was also evident in the data from where there was agreement on improving the climate and morale in some of the schools as an incentive to get teachers to consistently report to work. Several participants discussed building relationships, respecting each other as adults, and making the workplace an inviting environment (see Appendices D, E, F). Participants provided examples of ways to improve the climate such as not having the same teachers hold classes for their absent colleagues. Moreover, 88.5 % or 23 out of the 26 focus group teachers stated that teachers, who are frequently unavailable for work, should be the teachers required to create attendance goals in their professional growth plans.

Further, to determine factors that impede teacher availability, an interesting excerpt was taken from one of the participants as a reason why some teachers may not be available for work on Mondays and/or Fridays.

“What can we do to do this, what can we do to do that? It's always a whipping. People can sugar coat it however they want it. You're constantly being whipped. That's why people take

Fridays and Mondays because something may be due that Tuesday. If you have your PEPs that's due, it's kind of a whipping put on you to get the PEPs done, first of all” (see Appendix F).

The participant indicated that the district calendar does not offer enough workdays and teachers find themselves having to take work home just to stay ahead of the many demands that are asked of teachers. Having additional workdays placed in the school calendar was cited by 17 out of the 26 participants or 65.4% as an incentive to increase teacher workplace availability as well as citing the need to create a positive culture and a positive climate within the workplace (see Appendices D, E, and F).

Evidence for this study was gathered from a diverse group of participants to ensure varying perceptions were collected and several data points used to examine sources such as focus groups, policy analysis, meeting observations, and district data. Each focus group participant, principal, superintendent, and board of education member were provided 13 literature-based strategies in order to give feedback on their perception as to whether they deem any of the following strategies would be effective in Halifax County:

1. Increase teacher accountability by having absent teachers call principals as a management tool (Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008; Pitkoff, 2003)
2. Link teacher attendance to their summative evaluation (Pitkoff, 2003)
3. Increase teacher awareness of absentee problem with a public campaign (Grant, 2011; Pitkoff, 2003)
4. Host recognition banquet for teachers with 4 or less yearly absences (Grant, 2011)
5. Do not extend sick leave bank beyond state statute of 20 days (Pitkoff, 2003)
6. Utilize volunteers on field trips rather than using additional teachers (Smith, 2012)

7. Provide incentives for great teacher attendance (Ahn & Vigdor, 2011; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Miller 2012)
8. Schedule district professional development during non-instructional times (Pitkoff, 2003)
9. Combine management tools with policy to make expectations of the board of education known to all district teachers. Board adopts and implements a policy of high attendance expectations (Kallio, 2006; Miller, 2008; Miller, 2012; Pitts, 2010)
10. Have teachers establish attendance goals at the beginning of the year (Brown & Arnell, 2012)
11. Principal participation includes reviewing monthly attendance printout with violators who take frequent short absences from work; conduct monthly conference with violators who take excessive Mondays and Fridays; provide attendance warning letter during conference indicating the conference was held; principals should receive calls directly for all absences (no email, text, or voicemail); and principal write letters of commendation to staff with excellent attendance (Brown & Arnell, 2012; Grant 2011)
12. Provide a \$400 bonus for each teacher and reduce it by \$50.00 for every sick day taken (Clotfelter et al., 2009)
13. Enforce NC General Statute 115 C- 301.1 indicating principal approval for teacher absence just before and just after holidays

A majority of the teacher participants or 85% opposed linking teacher attendance to their summative evaluation. However, 8 of the 11 principals viewed linking teacher attendance to the teacher's summative evaluation as a strategy that would be effective in increasing teacher availability. Several teachers were not sure about what was happening with teachers who take

leave without pay, but felt accountable measures should be taken in those extreme cases of a lack of teacher availability. Varying opinions were prevalent as to when teachers thought principals should begin conferencing with teachers who excessively miss Mondays and/or Fridays. Teacher responses ranged from the second occurrence until waiting the third month of school. A majority of the teachers or 62% did not agree with principals enforcing NC 115 C-301.1 whereby principals approve teacher leave just before and just after a holiday (see Appendixes D, E, and F).

The following are the most cited incentives, listed in no particular order of importance, teachers stated they would respond favorable to in order to increase teacher availability (see Appendixes D, E, and F):

1. Monetary incentives, bonuses, stipends
2. Additional workdays
3. Gift cards
4. Recognition-certificates, webpage, board meeting recognition, shout-outs
5. Yearly banquet
6. Celebrations-flowers
7. Food-Luncheon, dinner, food coupon

During the interview process, teachers encouraged administrators to not wait until the end of the year to celebrate attendance. In addition to the cited incentives, all 26 teachers strongly advocated for principal involvement as a way to increase teacher availability. This group viewed the principal's role as the initial contact to begin conferencing with teachers who are frequently not available for work and who show a pattern of absence (see Appendixes D, E, and F). They

also shared thoughts about the appropriateness of principals documenting this issue as a problem if legitimate reasons are not being shared as to why the lack of availability is occurring.

Principal Participants

Each of the eleven principals from the district's 7 elementary, 2 middle, and 2 high schools participated in the study to address the lack of teacher availability phenomenon in the district. Principals provided input during an open administrative meeting. Principals received district data and strategies found in the literature. A discussion ensued with the policy developer regarding the principal's role in increasing teacher availability. Principals responded to the principal questions, provided feedback on the focus group questions, and identified which of the 13 literature strategies they deem effective in addressing the lack of teacher availability phenomenon. Eleven principals responded to the principal questions and to the 13 literature strategies, while nine principals responded to the focus group questions. There were no suggestions or recommendations for changes to the focus group questions.

It was noted by several of the principals that all the strategies could work if consistently enforced by the principals. They all agreed with the statement that it is important to increase teacher awareness of the absentee culture. Likewise, each principal agreed that teachers should establish attendance goals to help determine the preferred state of the school. Principals also noted that incentives should be used as a measure to help increase teacher availability. The most commonly cited incentives included money, recognition, celebrations, resources for classrooms, banquets, and certificates as types of incentives they found most appropriate for teachers.

Moreover, new data surfaced during the principal responses which revealed that a number of doctor appointments are scheduled as far away as Greenville, Chapel Hill, and Virginia due to the geographic location of Halifax County resulting in teachers taking the entire

day off when they would otherwise be at work. The literature suggested principals use tradeoffs as a strategy and a way of having qualified teachers in their building at least for a portion of the day (Roza, 2009; Smith, 2012). Seven of the principals thought that it was reasonable for the district to give teachers a \$400 bonus and reduce it by \$50.00 for every sick day taken. Two of the seven principals suggested varying the bonus amount from \$300 to \$500 as an incentive.

Nine principals agreed they should maintain a monthly attendance printout for teachers who take frequent short absences, which is defined as 3 or more days per month. These principals contended the principal should conduct monthly conferences with teachers who take excessive Monday and Friday leave. They also stated the principal should provide attendance warning letters; receive calls directly for impending absences; and write letters of commendation to staff with excellent attendance. Principals were very willing to be accountable for what takes place in their building. Therefore, after collaborating with the superintendent, many principals coordinated activities in their school specifically designed to enhance morale and build their school climate. The principals also stressed that teachers should be accountable for their absence by calling the principal directly when anticipating an absence.

Superintendent Participant

The superintendent of schools participated in the study through various meetings and conversations with the policy developer. Meeting notes were taken during each meeting opportunity. Comments by the superintendent indicated full endorsement of the policy initiative. Also, evident in the meeting notes is the superintendent's intent to address the lack of teacher availability because of the high costs paid in substitute pay. The superintendent stated that redirecting funds from savings from the substitute line would result in much needed items to support academics.

Public school institutions must manage unfavorable fiscal conditions as a part of the changing economic climate. Similar to the process and procedures used in Halifax County, Odden and Picus (2014) stated provisions for substitute teachers are not included in the state's finance formula; therefore, districts have to include substitute resources by making an approximation of the costs from district funding sources. Each year, the school superintendent engages in a process in which she estimates the yearly costs of substitute teachers to the district. With the rising costs of substitute expenditures, it is increasingly more difficult to approximate how much funding is needed from year to year.

The superintendent responded favorably to literature strategies 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 as strategies she deems effective in increasing teacher availability in Halifax County. However, she was especially favorable to strategies 1, 9, 10, and 11. In addition to the suggested literature strategies, the superintendent recommended several strategies that may work as well in Halifax County. The superintendent stated that she could send letters to teachers with perfect attendance at the end of each month. Furthermore, teachers could be recognized during monthly board meetings and schools with excellent teacher attendance would also be recognized during leadership academy meetings.

Board Member Participants

Board members were provided an overview of the costs of substitute teachers in the district for the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. The seven member board was surprised to see the actual figures spent on direct and indirect costs for substitute teachers. Notes were taken in Microsoft Word with board member remarks about the costs. One board member stated that she was glad to finally see this problem addressed because the lack of teacher availability has been a problem for many years. Another board member thanked the policy developer for

taking on the task of addressing the lack of teacher availability and wished her well in her endeavors to address the issue and stated she eagerly awaited a solution to address the problem.

Six of the seven board members responded to the 13 literature strategies to help determine which strategies they deem may be effective in Halifax County. Of the board members who responded, all agreed that teachers should call principals directly for any impending absences. There was also complete agreement on providing teacher incentives for excellent teacher attendance and complete agreement on teachers having to establish attendance goals.

There were 6 common strategies selected by the board and by the superintendent. They agreed teachers should call principals directly for any absences that may occur. Volunteers should be utilized on field trips rather than use additional teachers in the building whose instructional activities may not correlate to the field trip objectives. Professional development, in as much as possible, should be scheduled during non-instructional time. The board should make expectations of the board known to all district teachers by adopting and implementing a policy of high attendance expectations and teachers should establish attendance goals at the beginning of the year. Finally, principals should participate in increasing teacher availability by conferencing with teachers who take frequent short absences and show patterns of excessive Monday and/or Friday absences. Principals should also receive all calls directly for impending teacher absences and write letters of commendation to staff with excellent attendance.

Study Findings

1. *Findings to determine if any of the 13 literature-based strategies will prove effective in Halifax County have yielded the following information:*

Focus group questions were presented to all eleven principals for modifications and guiding feedback on finding a possible solution to increase teacher availability. Principals did not

recommend changes to the teacher focus group questions. Each session was audio recorded with participant permission and with having participants identified only by an assigned letter of the alphabet. A reasonable amount of anonymity could be assured without using personal identifying information. To help reduce researcher bias, the services of a scribe transcribed each focus group data into three Microsoft Word documents. Themes and patterns for focus group questions 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 were assigned for coding purposes and entered into the Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet for quantifying and detecting themes and patterns among the focus group responses. Altogether, twenty-six of the district's teachers participated in the three focus group sessions with each session divided by specific common characteristics of the group members.

2. *Findings for prior to the adoption of the attendance policy, did any of the implemented 13 literature strategies prove effective?*

Synthesized literature strategies implemented prior to the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive teacher attendance policy included eradicating the teacher call in system which offered little accountability for teachers missing excessive days. The superintendent used her discretion at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year to implement several of the strategies from the literature in which the policy developer provided to her in order to realize a decrease in teacher absence and produce district savings after implementation of the strategies. First, with the former call-in system, teachers did not have to speak directly to the lead school administrator; therefore, the teacher did not have to provide a reason for the absence even when a Monday/Friday pattern was emerging. During the 2013-2014 school year, the superintendent removed all school-level call in systems to ensure more accountable communications between the teacher and the school administrator.

The second strategy the superintendent deployed was the use of a district-wide awareness campaign strategy on increasing teacher availability. The Halifax Board of Education's chairperson delivered a speech and issued an appeal for teachers to consistently report to work during the annual 2013-2014 convocation event. The chairperson reminded all teachers of the important work they do and why it is imperative in Halifax County for each teacher to make an effort to report to work on a regular basis. All district level teachers, principals, and other school staff members joined together for this event in the auditorium of one of the district schools prior to the start of school to receive district expectations and other pertinent information.

The third literature-based strategy implemented were conversations held between the superintendent and principals during several administrative cabinet meetings to look at the culture and morale and what is happening at each principal's respective school. The superintendent emphasized deploying school-based strategies to build morale and team building activities to create an environment that entices teachers to come to work. Principals were reminded of the rate of attrition at their schools and were being held accountable to address the frequent absences occurring in their building. The literature speaks to organizational factors that may impede a teacher's willingness to report to work with consistency (Bruno, 2012).

Principals discussed the methods employed to build school culture and morale. Strategies were deployed in the schools such as a relaxation station with hot coffee, chocolate, tea, water, and juice for staff. Teachers were awarded monetary bonuses from the School Improvement Grant for meeting school-selected criteria. Baskets of goodies with messages on the treats and certificates were issued entitling teachers to an extended lunch period. Teachers also received the privilege of using a delayed schedule by one hour and an early release by one hour when they were caught doing something extraordinary for the school. They are also eligible to receive a

Student or Teacher taking Academic, Attitude, Athletic Responsibility (STAAAR) certificate. Students and staff place compliments on a highly visible board appreciating each other by writing thank you post it notes. A teacher's spouse or love one receives mailings informing them of something special the teacher has done. Teachers are often featured in a school newsletter highlighting exciting accomplishments.

The final literature based strategy used during the 2013-2014 school year, involved the superintendent holding principals accountable for their role in increasing teacher availability in their building by having the principal address the teacher. Principals were asked to monitor teacher absences and to begin conversations with those teachers who may be showing signs of using excessive discretionary days such as a pattern of taking Mondays and Fridays.

In 2013-2014, Halifax County paid \$431,512.25 from its budget for costs associated with paying substitute teachers. The strategies implemented by the superintendent during the 2013-2014 implementation year financially impacted the district's budget as a result of the amount of funding spent has been less than it has in the previous 2 years. It seems plausible that the partially implemented strategies had an impact on district finances since there were no other additional changes or strategies implemented in the district to address the lack of teacher availability and teacher availability increased during the implementation year.

3. *Findings to determine if any amount of savings was realized during the 2013-2014 school year during implementation of literature strategies.*

Data on funding spent on substitute teacher expenditures were gathered from the district's finance department for the 2013-2014 school year after partially implementing 4 of the 13 literature based-strategies. Financial records show the district spent \$431,512.25 on direct and indirect substitute teacher costs in 2013-2014 compared to \$539,910.40 spent in 2011-2012 and

\$601,131.93 spent in the 2012-2013 school year. Substitute costs show a 28.2% decrease between 2012- 2013 to 2013-2014. The total amount of savings at the end of partial implementation year was \$169,619.68. With the savings that have occurred thus far with the substitute line item, it is projected that district will realize an even greater savings in the upcoming school year. The four literature-based strategies will have continual application during the upcoming year in Halifax County. These strategies will also be included in the Halifax Board of Education's Teacher Attendance Expectations Policy.

Themes and Patterns

The logic model in chapter 3 displayed the intent for stakeholder collaboration to produce district cost savings and increase teacher availability by developing a teacher attendance expectation policy. Data gathered from the various sources were triangulated to identify common themes and patterns. Triangulation occurs when the facts have been supported by more than a single source. All data was read and organized in a manner in which the policy developer could make meaning of the data and prepare data notes in addition to using transcripts and the Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet.

The policy developer recorded and interpreted themes and patterns and interrelated themes and patterns in 3 areas: organizational factors, absentee culture, and incentives to motivate teachers. In focus group question 3, participants shared a common pattern of stating, "very important" as captured 23 times out of the 26 times participants responded regarding the importance of teacher awareness of the absentee problem. Question 4 asked participants to respond to the types of incentives the district should provide for great teacher attendance. "Monetary incentives, stipends, and additional workdays" were echoed as themes to addressing the lack of teacher availability over 22 times throughout the focus group interviews and most

impacted the 3 focus group sessions. The theme and pattern of teachers receiving monetary stipends and receiving more workdays continued resonating in question 9 with participant agreement over 19 additional times. Many of the participants identified in question 10 climate, culture, morale, relationships, respect, and support 18 times through agreement as to why teachers may be willing to take leave without pay. Since common themes and patterns were reflective from multiple focus group sources, this replication helped validate the accuracy of the data to develop a comprehensive teacher attendance expectation policy.

The logic model construct for the collaborative development, adoption, and implementation of a comprehensive teacher attendance policy shows multiple points where data would be gathered. To increase teacher availability in Halifax County, the board of education members decisively committed to pursue increasing teacher availability within the county. District statistics shared with the board of education showed an excess of \$500,000 spent during 2011-2012 and in excess of \$601,000 spent during the 2012-2013 school year. Therefore, leading one board member to encourage the policy developer to return to the board with the problem addressed. Another board member thanked the policy developer for taking on the challenge of increasing teacher availability in Halifax County as she looked forward to the outcome. All board member responses were captured using Microsoft word.

District Data

Accessible to the policy developer was Monday/Friday teacher absentee data from the district finance office. In many cases, this data reflected several repeated names throughout the numerous pages of the document. Furthermore, the total operating budget and the total yearly amount spent on expenditures related to the direct and indirect cost of substitute expenditures were analyzed for the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years. From 2011 until the

beginning of the 2013 school year, the district exceeded paying a half million dollars for substitute costs in addition to paying the regular teacher; therefore, increasing per pupil expenditure. For a district struggling financially, the superintendent determined that these figures were too costly to absorb and immediately began implementation of 4 of the literature strategies.

After implementing four of the 13 strategies prior to the overall adoption of the comprehensive teacher attendance policy during the 2013-2014 school year, data from the district finance department showed substitute expenditures for that year amounted to \$431,512.25 of the total operating budget. This is a savings of \$169,619 over the previous year with partial implementation of the recommended strategies. In fact, full implementation of the strategies is expected to save even more funds during the upcoming school year that can be redirected into the classrooms for needed supplies and materials as indicated by some participants as an incentive for increasing teacher availability.

Local Leave Policy Analysis

The local leave policy grants teachers leave time that is aligned to the state's leave policy and benefits manual. Most of the recommended literature findings were not present in the current leave policy language and procedures. The literature recommends that inclusive language such as specific arrival and departure times are included in the policy along with the board of education making known its expectation for teacher attendance in the district (Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2008; Pitts, 2010; Scott et al., 2007). Majority of the district stakeholders believe the local leave policy has implications for increasing teacher availability and should be used as a tool for teacher workplace accountability.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study after collaborating with various stakeholders, analyzing data, and synthesizing literature findings. Stakeholder buy-in to address the lack of teacher availability was evident from parent, teacher, principal, superintendent, and board member input. In order to understand the lack of teacher availability phenomenon, data was corroborated, analyzed, and compared before providing a comprehensive teacher attendance expectation policy to address this problematic issue. Three study questions were used to guide this presentation. Study question 1 provided 13 recommended literature strategies for the diverse groups of stakeholders to determine if any of the strategies would be effective in Halifax County. Stakeholders selected multiple strategies from the literature that will be implemented fully once the board of education adopts the teacher attendance expectation policy.

Study Question 2 sought to determine if any of the implemented strategies would prove effective in Halifax County after partial implementation of the strategies during the 2013-2014 school year. The superintendent implemented 4 of the strategies which yielded a 28.2% savings after no other changes were made in the district to address the lack of teacher availability.

Study Question 3 sought to confirm if any district savings resulted in the 2013-2014 school year with partial implementation of the 13 strategies. In comparison to the previous school year which spent \$601,131.93 in substitute expenditures, the 2013-2014 school had a savings of \$169,619.68 by spending \$431,512.25 in substitute costs.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter Five includes a summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the findings. The existing literature and research reported ineffective as well as effective strategies that have improved district finances and increased teacher availability. How the lack of teacher availability impacts districts has been noted in the research on culture, climate, relationships, morale, and student achievement. The policy developer worked with both meaning and evidence to exact outcomes to increase teacher availability and produce district cost savings. Therefore, the 13 selected strategies were extracted from the literature as possible solutions to addressing the lack of teacher availability in Halifax County.

Research Design and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to address the lack of teacher availability and to produce district cost savings. This issue required input from multiple, diverse district stakeholders to share their opinions, perspectives, and experiences with this topic. Participants helped discover the known and unknown about the lack of teacher availability in the district. The policy developer could neither determine strategies nor incentives that would be deemed effective in Halifax County by working in isolation to address the issue of a lack of teacher availability. The incentives described in this chapter were selected from the literature findings on this problematic issue.

Three study questions were used to guide the findings in this investigation:

1. Which of the 13 strategies, if any, will be deemed effective for increasing teacher availability in Halifax County Schools as determined by the board of education, superintendent, principals, and teachers?

2. Prior to the adoption of the overall teacher comprehensive attendance policy, will any of the implemented strategies prove effective in increasing the availability of teachers in the workplace?
3. Will any amount of savings be realized from the strategies that were partially implemented prior to the overall adoption of the attendance policy?

Exploring and investigating these questions provided the policy developer with a better understanding of strategies that work within the context in which they were applied. Three teacher focus groups were held with the participants grouped by homogeneous characteristics in order to have compatibility to keep the group talking and feeling comfortable with the respondents. Teachers identified strategies based on the literature selection which they feel will be effective in the district. Parents responded to a 5 question survey to give them voice on the topic of teacher availability. The superintendent endorsed the study from the beginning and participated in meetings and conversations about the topic in the district. She also identified 8 of the 13 literature strategies as effective for use in the school system 6 of which were identified by board members.

The policy developer received support and responses from a majority of the school board members on the lack of teacher availability which impacts all 3 of the board goals. All board member participants agreed unanimously on 3 of the 13 literature strategies and 5 of the 6 participating members agreed on 4 of the 13 strategies. Overall, a majority of the board members identified 7 of the 13 strategies in which they feel will work in Halifax County.

Eleven elementary, middle, and high school principals provided feedback on several aspects of the data. None of the principals changed the structure of the focus group questions when given an opportunity. Interestingly, all 11 principals indicated they played a strong role in

increasing teacher availability by holding teachers accountable. They also indicated as principals they should be conferencing with teachers who take frequent days off and who miss mainly Mondays and Fridays from work. They are also willing to write letters of commendations for teachers who maintain excellent attendance. To elevate the level of professionalism and help build positive relationships, principals were encouraged to communicate with absent teachers by asking if they can help the teacher while the teacher is away from school.

District data was analyzed from the finance office that revealed the amounts paid in substitute pay for the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years. Substitute expenditure in 2011-2012 was \$539,910.40 and in 2012-2013 it was \$601,131.93. The school superintendent partially implemented 4 of the 13 literature strategies in 2013-2014. Expenditures for substitute pay for the partial implementation year was \$431,512.25. The savings difference for the two previous years amounted to \$169,619.68. Although the district has received a \$40,000 dollar grant to support teacher attendance, the grant has neither been utilized thus far nor has it been used in conjunction with the partially implemented strategies. There have been no additional efforts in the district to produce cost savings by increasing teacher availability. Thus far, substitute costs from August 2014 until March 2015 has reached \$295,603.92. This is an average of \$39,950.49 spent per month on substitute costs. The remaining two months in the school year, is estimated to cost \$73,900.98. Therefore, the total projected substitute costs for the year is \$369,504.90. Compared to the \$601,131.93 costs for the 2012-2013 school year to the \$369,504.90 costs of the 2014-2015 school year, this is a \$231,627.03 or 38.5% savings.

Conclusions

Conclusions were drawn from the findings and from the literature according to stakeholder perception and support for a policy to address the lack of teacher availability. This

study was designed to make a difference in district finances for Halifax County. Financial savings were found for study question 3 which makes it plausible that the partially implemented strategies were effective as sought to be answered by study question 2. The district realized a savings of \$169,619.68 after the partial implementation year in 2013-2014. A synthesis of collaborative work and evidence has demonstrated not only a need, but also a desire to address an issue that has plagued the district for several years. Participants considered what strategies worked in the past and what strategies did not work in the past.

Odden and Picus (2014) communicated that school finances must be linked to the goal of educating all students and teaching rigorous standards. For this reason, cost implications are associated with underperforming schools that consistently lack teacher availability. Although funding is allotted for the purposes of providing a quality education to all students, school leaders must engage in the process of reallocating resources in order to provide educational services and equity in how those services are delivered. Funding that is distributed to school districts may not always be adequate to provide all the resources needed. Therefore, when resources are scarce districts have to realize savings wherever they can in the budget line items including looking for ways to make teachers more available for work.

This study has presented data to continue to develop and shape our educational practices. The teacher study participants determined that attendance should be viewed in such a way that we remember life happens such as tragedies; illness, etc. (see Appendix F). We must ensure that we are addressing the real attendance violators and not cast everyone into the same shadow, but remember our excellent teachers who come early, stay late, and support after school events. The literature indicated that excessive absences could be defined as undocumented absences that exceed 10 absences per year (Miller et al. 2008; Miller, 2012).

Educational leaders must recognize factors that possibly cause teachers to consistently not be available for work. They should make the extra effort to promote collaboration, build positive relationships, and build trust in order to move the goals of the school forward. As stated several times in the focus group sessions, mutual respect and team building can carry a school a long way towards achieving its mission. Teachers need autonomy and the occasional pat on the back to keep them inspired and to provide them with a reason to go that extra mile.

Recommendations

The careful recommendations for practice correlate to the multiple data points used in this study to obtain perceptions, feelings, experiences, and opinions on increasing teacher availability in a small rural public school setting. The results of this investigation have shown the importance of increasing teacher availability and producing district cost savings through evidence-based actions. Policy makers need to be aware of the impact that policy has on increasing teacher availability and the impact on district finances (Scott et al., 2007). Increasing teacher awareness, having board expectations for employee attendance, and holding teachers accountable for workplace availability affect the desired outcomes of producing district savings. Majchrzak and Markus (2014) described research conducted on policy as having both meaning and manageability. The teacher attendance expectation policy should make a difference within the context of Halifax County in order to demonstrate meaning. Meaningfulness has also been formed as a result of the policy developer's improved understanding of the lack of teacher availability within the context of the study district leading to an informed recommendation. This difference has already been documented by the suggested implementation strategies found in the recommendations for the policy which can be carried out within the financial means of the district making the policy also manageable.

The findings of this study revealed the perceptions of district stakeholders to include: superintendent, board members, principals, teachers, and parents. The district has demonstrated reasonable success with implementing 4 of the 13 literature-based strategies and realizing a savings in 2013-2014 of 28.29% or \$169,619.00 from the allotted substitute budget. Furthermore, the teacher attendance expectation policy has identified 5 additional strategies to add to the 4 partially implemented strategies. With adoption and implementation of the attendance policy, more of an increase in savings is projected for the 2015-2016 school year. However, the final decision to adopt and implement the teacher attendance expectation policy lies with the Halifax Board of Education and the district superintendent. In April 2015, the board will receive the first reading on the adoption of the comprehensive teacher attendance policy.

The gathered data collected from the representative stakeholder groups is credible because it was informed by evidence used to develop a comprehensive teacher attendance expectation policy. All data was read, analyzed, and crossed reference for commonalities in opinions, experiences, and perceptions. A draft copy of the comprehensive teacher attendance expectation policy was developed and adjustments were made to the policy as a result of the input from the various stakeholder groups (see Appendix G). The resounding cost of the lack of teacher availability problem in 2011-2012 was \$539,910.40 and continued trending upward in 2012-2013 at a cost of \$601,131.93. Extracted from the evidence is a set of strategies encompassed in a draft policy that a majority of the participants stated was needed.

The evidence supports the recommendation for a teacher attendance expectation policy by using the data from various stakeholder groups. Literature strategy number 9 asked participants if the district should combine management tools with policy to make expectations of the board known to all district teachers by having the board adopt and implement a policy of

high attendance expectations. The teacher focus group responded with 77% affirmative; the principal group 100% affirmative, the superintendent was affirmative, and 6 of the 7 board members responded affirmatively as well. Therefore, these affirmations lead to the development and recommendation of a comprehensive teacher attendance expectation policy which will be presented to the Halifax Board of Education on April 13, 2015.

Each module of the policy includes literature-based strategies or stakeholder input data to address the lack of teacher availability. The recommended comprehensive teacher attendance policy is also crossed reference with district policy 7510 on employee leave in which the board acknowledges teacher leave time in sync with effective student programs. For this reason, teacher leave time should not be egregious or excessively used as discretionary days. Therefore, a majority of the board members agreed that teachers should be made aware of the lack of teacher availability phenomenon in Halifax County. The policy is designed to create positive organizational change within Halifax County Schools. The following recommendations will be made within a policy:

Recommendation 1: To adopt and implement a policy of high attendance expectation.

Recommendation 2: To include arrival and departure times for teachers in the policy.

Recommendation 3: To communicate all impending teacher absences directly to school level administrators.

Recommendation 4: To initiate an awareness campaign for attendance expectations.

Recommendation 5: To utilize volunteers on field trips rather than use additional teachers.

Recommendation 6: To establish attendance goals at the beginning of the year for teachers with frequent, undocumented absences from the previous school year.

Recommendation 7: To provide district incentives for teachers with excellent attendance such as

stipends, gift cards, recognition, or additional workdays.

Recommendation 8: To conference with frequently absent teachers who do not provide documentation for the absence.

The district superintendent implemented 4 of the 13 effective strategies found in the literature during the 2013-2014 school year. This current year the district superintendent continued conferencing with principals to hold teachers accountable; communicated expectations for building the climate and morale in the building; increased attendance awareness with a public campaign; and required the reporting of impending absences directly to the building level administrator rather than using a call-in system. In moving forward with the district plan of action, the board of education will be presented with a comprehensive policy of attendance expectation in order to adopt for the 2015-2016 school year. Once the draft copy of the policy has been approved by the board of education, the policy developer will come back and monitor substitute expenditures for the next 12 months to determine cost savings from substitute expenditures after the adoption and implementation of the policy. Furthermore, the teacher attendance expectation policy will be vetted through the school board attorney as well as the North Carolina School Board Association prior to full policy implementation in the district. In addition to using the policy for the upcoming school year, the district has secured a \$40,000 dollar grant to help increase teacher availability. With the combination of the policy and the grant, an increase in teacher availability and in district cost savings is projected.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · www.ecu.edu/irb

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Pamela Chamblee](#)

CC: [Jim McDowelle](#)

Date: 2/10/2015

Re: [UMCIRB 14-001948](#)

Increasing Teacher Availability

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 2/9/2015 to 2/8/2016. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

| Name | Description |
|---|---|
| Consent Form | Consent Forms |
| Focus Group Questions | Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions |
| Increasing Teacher Availability: Reconceptualization of Policy, Incentives, and Management Tools to Produce District Cost Savings | Study Protocol or Grant Application |
| Principal Questions.docx | Additional Items |
| Questions For Attendance Policy.docx | Additional Items |
| Questions for Parent Survey.docx | Surveys and Questionnaires |
| Superintendent Letter.docx | Dataset Use Approval/Permission |

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Study ID: UMCIRB 14-001948 Date Approved 2/9/2015 Expiration Date 2/8/2016

East Carolina University



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Increasing Teacher Availability: Reconceptualization of Policy, Incentives, and Management Tools to Produce District Cost Savings
Principal Investigator: Pamela D. Chamblee
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University
Address: 1001 East 5th Street, Greenville, NC 27858
Telephone #:252-328-6131

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study problems in society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. Our goal is to try to find ways to improve the lives of you and others. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to increase teacher availability and produce cost savings for Halifax County Schools. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a teacher in the Halifax County School system. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn the types of incentives and solutions that will increase teacher availability. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are an integral stakeholder in Halifax County Schools. You will either participate as a focus group member, principal, superintendent, parent, or board of education member.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 375 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

You should not volunteer if you have been a teacher with less than two years of teaching experience in the district.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research procedures will be conducted in the Halifax County School district in a building conducive to accommodate all participants. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is one time for approximately two hours.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following:

- Join a group of your peers who possesses a professional commonality with you.
- Discuss through your lens the topic: the lack of teacher availability in the district. This discussion will include causes and solutions using the knowledge and experience of each participant.
- The focus group session will be audio taped. The researcher and the scribe will be the only persons with access to the audio tape. The audios will be destroyed after five years.

Page 1 of 3

Consent Version # or Date: _____

Participant's Initials

Title of Study: Increasing Teacher Availability: Reconceptualization of Policy, Incentives, and Management Tools to Produce District Cost Savings

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

We will be able to offer you a small five dollar cash monetary token for the time you volunteer while participating in the focus group session in addition to a light meal.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research. There is no cost associated with the collection of this data.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

To conduct this research, participants in your focus group will know that you took part in this research and will hear your responses to the lack of teacher availability. The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you. Otherwise, there will be no personal identifying information about you in which others will have that will appear in published communications.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

All data collected (physical and electronic) will be stored in a secure location in the researcher's office during the study. The data collected will not be used for purposes other than this research, e.g., teaching, presentations. The information collected will be stripped of identifiers and will describe individuals by using a letter of the alphabet in the reporting by the researcher. The data will be destroyed after five years following the completion of the research to ensure confidentiality.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 252-583-5111 ext.270 Monday- Friday 8:00-5:00. If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC, at 252-744-1971.

Title of Study: Increasing Teacher Availability: Reconceptualization of Policy, Incentives, and Management Tools to Produce District Cost Savings

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Participant's Name (PRINT) | Signature | Date |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-------------|

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

| | | |
|---|------------------|-------------|
| Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) | Signature | Date |
|---|------------------|-------------|

Consent Version # or Date: _____

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Participant's Initials

APPENDIX C: SUPERINTENDENT'S LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE STUDY



Office of the Superintendent

Telephone: (252) 583-5111
Fax: (252) 583-1474

January 27, 2015

Dear East Carolina Educational Leadership Department:

Halifax County Schools has strategically planned three aggressive goals for the district in order to support student achievement, parent involvement, and fiscal responsibility. These goals were established with the collaboration of district leadership and the board of education members. I am delighted to have a problematic issue researched that may produce cost savings in our district as well as increase the presence of the teachers in the classroom. Therefore, I give Ms. Pamela D. Chamblee permission to conduct research in the district on increasing teacher availability. Ms. Chamblee will have access to records, data, resources, and statistical information in our district in order to fulfill any research need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elease Frederick".

Dr. Elease Frederick, Superintendent

P.O. Box 468 • 9525 Hwy. 301 South • Halifax, North Carolina 27839

- Equal Opportunity Employer -

APPENDIX: D SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TRANSCRIPTION

School Improvement Focus Group

Tuesday, March 3, 2015

PD=Policy Developer

P- = Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant E, Participant F,
Participant G, Participant H, Participant I, Participant J

PD- What about your current teachers who are on staff and their availability for work? Speak to me about that.

P-B: I notice that there's a lot of teachers at my school who have frequent absences and you can tell the difference in their students behaviors when they're there and when they're not there.

They're some classes that are more well behaved for the substitutes that come in. If they tend to get the same substitute because they're more comfortable with the substitutes than the classroom teacher and you also notice that tends to leave a lot of gaps in the students' education because I'm getting actual instruction this day. But, then the next day we're doing something that has no connection with what we did the day before because it's a worksheet or whatever or we're being sent to other teachers' classrooms that sort of thing and it's a frequent problem. I think almost on a daily basis there's someone that's not there and they think "Oh well today, I'm not here. It's not a big deal", but then tomorrow somebody else isn't there so it's affecting the children and I think sometimes we don't think about what us not being there does to the students.

PD -And like I said you don't have to raise your hands just feel free to jump in. C did you have a comment on that?

P-C: Not at this time. I understand what's being said and that's a major problem. It really is and I got to go right straight back to the students' achievement and I thought about something because a lot of times when you have a substitute in the classroom, speaking from experience, I can leave detailed lesson plans and follow my pacing guide and I come back and the substitute has done something totally opposite. The children sometimes would tell me " Oh, we watched videos" and so I find that being a concern also and I don't miss a lot of days but it was sometimes I do have to take care of a lot of business but I'm usually at work

PD- D do you have a comment on that?

P-D: Teacher availability is really a problem because, like E was saying, I've been here in the system for quite a while and was supposed to retire last year, but I chose to stay in the system because other teachers are not available and it was stated that so many young teachers are coming in and they're not staying no more than 1 or 2 years. It makes it tougher on us because we are the seasoned ones and we're the ones that where I go that extra mile because we're so used to it and like another comment was said that when we're out and subs come in you have the best laid plans following the curriculum guide and nothing has been done on that plan and you've lost a day and you've got to go back and teach what you had planned and try to make up for the day you came back also. It's really tough.

PD- I, What are your feelings on that?

P-I: I agree. We do have a lack of teacher availability as well especially at the high school level and at that level it's very, very valuable because we're trying to prepare them to go out into the real world and it's very hard to do that when you don't have a teacher there or a certified teacher there in that particular position. Also, it affects our testing profusely if we don't have a teacher there in those positions that are not filled because those students have a disrespect for that class

you know. Once there's no one there and they just lose interest in it, you know, they may be bad but once the teacher comes back or somebody actually comes to fill the position, you know they have already lost the interest in that class. So, whoever comes in to fill that position has to fight hard or work two times harder just to make sure those students are proficient in their testing.

PD- What about your current colleagues that are there? What about their current availability?

P-I: That also , you know cause we do have a lot of teacher absences, so that affects our students as well because, you know as mentioned before, the students get used to seeing the same subs in the classroom and at that point, you know they've already lost respect for the teacher. They feel like, they , the students, you know, will admit to you " My teacher doesn't have basic interest in my learning", you know. I've actually had a workshop that we went to. I was actually talking to the students about what are some of the frustrations that they have and that was actually one of the things they said that the teachers, you know, don't seem like they are interested in actually preparing them for the real world. So, the teachers that are not there, the students realize it and it affects their learning process as well.

PD- F?

P-F: As I listen to I, she said that, "At the high school level is preparation for the real world" and I'm thinking that perhaps she was talking about skills but it's also about work ethic. Okay, well, I'm going into the workforce. I can miss days if I have something to do. I just won't go to work, so we're modeling more than, you know, manners, "say excuse me" and "Thank you". My teacher is not at work so when I leave school and I go into the workforce, I'm just going to miss days, you know, it's no problem I'll take a day. So, I think a lot of students are actually possibly picking up bad habits because the teachers aren't available.

PD- G, did you have a comment on that?

P-G: Not Really.

PD- Okay and that's fine, Okay? **How important do you think it is to increase teacher awareness of the absentee problem and why do you think it is important to increase teacher awareness?**

P-H: It's important to increase teacher awareness because it's a problem and the problem is going to trickle on down to the children, the students, and their performance so that's the larger problem. I think we need to find out why teachers aren't being as available throughout the year. What's the direct correlation? Is it morale? Are they just so stressed out from discipline that they've taken off more days? Are they? Is it sickness? You know what is it? Why aren't they being as available as they should be? And we have to look at the policies, the district policies. Is it too flexible or, you know, are teachers not just being accountable, held accountable for the days? So there's a lot of variables to look at so it's just hard to say right now, you know, why in my opinion.

P-C: I must agree with you that thought did come to my mind. As professionals, we know that we ought to be at work but still there is a high absentee rate of our teachers and like you said, it's best if we look at the underlying reasons why teachers are not available and you're interested in Halifax County. That's a conversation that we really need to be honest about and you did touch on a little bit of it because we have to look at the statistics and I don't have it all before me but I do know enough to know that we have a lot of discipline problems and sometimes you can take it to all the channels and you still have to work with the child and that's why we're there, but sometimes it should be a remedy if you're trying to teach and you have someone that constantly disrupting the class with just nonsense and so I guess I'm old school because I know that I have to have the attention of my students before they're going to learn anything so I like to have peace

and order in the classrooms before I really start introducing a skill or teaching anything so discipline is a factor. It's a major factor and so in the old days, they used to call it mental health days.

PD- Alright, Is there anyone else that want to chime in about why do you think it's important to increase teacher awareness?

P-B: I feel like every year we kind of get the informative speech about this much money was spent on substitutes and absenteeism is a problem I feel like maybe we need to go a step further and sometimes we don't think about oh if I leave 30 minutes early it's not going to make a big deal but if you leave 30 minutes early two, three, days a week, that is a big deal it does make a difference. I feel like maybe those teachers need to be approached directly instead of it being like a blanket statement to everybody so that they understand that you need to be here for your students instead of just kind of saying it and seeing whose ears it falls on. I feel like it need to be more individualize so that they can realize that what they do is important and even if they think 30 minutes doesn't matter to one student that maybe what they need is that 30 minutes before they go home.

P-E: I feel like teachers should be aware of what great impact they make upon the children and it is their duty once they sign that paper and say I'm going to work in that system. They should be dedicated, and maybe we should look at so many of these absenteeism out here is it really because they just want to do it. I'm not saying it because of a young teacher, but a lot of times I feel like it's more so the younger teachers than the older teachers and they'll use almost any kind of excuse out there just not to come to school and if that's the case then maybe they are in the wrong field. And we have to realize this is not a get rich scheme, but teaching you have to have

some dedication here and you're going to have to give it 110% because these children need us more than they've ever needed us before.

PD- What types of incentives should the district provide for teachers who show excellent attendance and I know that has to be defined what great looks like, but for the most part let's just say to define it five days less a year? What type of incentives do you think the district should provide for teachers who do come to work with fidelity?

P-I: This is one of the things we did discuss in one of our school improvement team meeting, you know because we were having the issue with our teacher attendance as well. And we were trying to figure out something to do at the school level. What could we do? It came up about the district level of the incentives could be for staff members who miss 5 days, and maybe just even a little small bonus or something in that nature because of course you know it makes teachers think about ok yeah I'm going to get this little bonus at the end if I missed so many days. Even if just some special recognition might do some well because sometimes teachers don't feel like we're recognized for the good things that we do. We're recognized for some of the negative things that are said and done so maybe just some recognition might help out some teachers, so just those little small things could be some possible incentives for a teacher.

P-F: I know that recognition goes a long ways people want to be recognized for what they've done instead of always been reprimanded. A lot of times the people at the district level only come to the schools when there is a problem but showing up for a staff meeting saying we are here to celebrate you, you all that have been here, here's a certificate, here is juice, and cake but something saying that I appreciate you, on the webpage, at the board meeting, something, these employees were present every day the month of September, call their names, put it on a flyer, put it on the webpage get the message out there that these people are doing something. The next time

I'm going to want to hear my name. You know and of course, money works at the end of the year. Money or a gift card but there are things that can be done on a regular basis to recognize the teachers.

P-E: Of course monetary always goes a long ways but I don't think you necessarily need to wait all the way to the end of school year before you decide well I'm going to honor that person with a monetary value if you don't give them anything but a \$10 gift card from Walmart in between at least at the end of the semester. I think that would go farther than waiting to the end because they have an incentive to work towards.

P-H: I think we could maybe get some extra sick leave days, or annual leave days or something like that the people that haven't missed any days during the year maybe they get an extended day to their spring break or Christmas break. Something different than what other people are getting.

P-D: Money is really important, but so is time and I've always thought that you know I put a lot extra time in and I would like to have some comp time for that time because a lot of the other employees have comp time and if I've got a project that I'm working on and it's taking two or three hours after my day ends. Yeah, I need to get off at 2:30-3:00, hey I've got some comp time. I won't be docked. I won't be asked to well you need to take a half of day. You know, you've got some comp time in.

P-J: That's another issue that I have a personal issue, that if I have an appointment at 8:00 why do I have to wait until a half a day? Why do I have to take a half day off? Why can't we sometimes be able to come in after our appointment and not be charged for that half a day? If I have an appointment at 3:00 and leave work at 2:15 or 2:00 to get there, why do I have to take a half of a day? So I'm, that would be something that I would like to see done that we can take a hour by hour time off. Whether it's comp time or we are going to make it up somewhere

somehow, in a meeting, go to a basketball game to be there for the students and we're gonna make that, we're going to make it back up.

P-C: We are asked to work over a whole lot. I agree with comp time. If I had my choice, that's what I'd want. Rather than have the extra money, I going to for the comp time.

P-G: I think we ought to do, what the comp time as well because sometimes we are at school a long time with different meetings, with different things we are doing. They should give us comp time for that, not necessary money just maybe some comp time cause sometimes you know it's hard sometimes to get appointments in the afternoon or you have to take a half of day off in order to go to a doctor' appointment. And maybe by you coming in after your appointment or leaving a little early to get to your appointments, cause a lot of doctors just don't give those appointments like that, you have to take them when you can get them.

PD- And so my next question is: **Do you believe, teachers with four or less yearly absences, is a reasonable number of absences to have in order for the district to host a recognition banquet in honor of these teachers and if so, how many absences would you suggest in order to host a recognition banquet?** What would you say, what would you consider to be reasonable?

P- F: I would say five or less. Five or less is a reasonable number. We do know that staff members have families and they also have to take care of their personal health and just whatever else may come up. But, unless it's something out of the ordinary, 5 or less days for the year for the entire year.

P-J: I agree with her.

P- G: I agree with her too.

P- I,E,C: agree

P- H: 1-3 days

P- B: Maybe as an extension of that you could celebrate the ones that have 5 or less, but perhaps the ones who miss, the least amount or even fewer than that maybe they can get something a little extra, maybe a plaque or something showing their dedication.

PD- Just as we establish professional goals at the beginning of the year to determine our preferred state, should teachers establish attendance goals as well as part of this preferred state? And if so, why should teachers establish attendance goals?

P- F: We have to complete a PDP each year and I think that setting an attendance goal holds the teacher accountable. You know you set the goal based on your needs and what you have going on and it will hold the teacher accountable. You set this goal so, what are you doing to ensure that you're meeting the goal and in addition to that you'll have to revisit that during the school year, so mid-year review okay. You said you would miss five of your days, you've already missed four what do we need to do to remedy this situation?

P-B: Part of the portfolio that the teachers are required to keep at our school does have an attendance piece in it. There is a part where you are supposed to set an attendance goal and track your attendance goal and it is shared with the principal as well. They do see the portfolio, so it kind of helps people who are intrinsically motivated to make sure they meet their goals and want to be able to say okay I got that check on my paper. That helps them kind of keep track of it. I think.

PD- Anyone else? When should principals begin conferencing with teachers who show patterns of sick leave abuse by obsessively missing Mondays and/or Fridays? Why should principals conference with teachers who missed, who has a pattern of missing Mondays and Fridays?

P-J: I think they need to conference with them first to find out what is going on, it could be valid, it could not be valid. But I think if they meet with them instead of making a broad statement at a meeting that some people that are missing Monday and Friday. I think they need to go directly to that person and find out why. And let them know that it is a concern of theirs.

P-G: I agree with what J was saying because a lot of the teachers, when they make broad statements, like that, its making other people feel like they are in this group and they are not in that group. I think it should be more individualized to the person that really does that.

P- F: I think that Mondays and Fridays, are probably for the students the most vital days. Monday you set the tone for the week and on Friday you're closing it out to ensure you may assess students. Which we know we assess daily and throughout each class period, but you may have some type of summative assessment on Fridays and you're also preparing for the following week. So it may be a teacher that's trying to get, three day weekends or if they take a Friday and a Monday a four day weekend. And in that case, the teacher needs to be held accountable and more responsible because students and their success are at hand.

P-E: They should be held accountable and to realize are they really giving the children those contact hours that they really need. It's a difference between a sub being in that position, versus that actual teacher actually dealing with those children.

P-H: I don't think that the days whether it's a Monday or Friday is relevant. I think that you know if someone is taking every Tuesday and Wednesday off, I think there should be a blanket policy or if you are going to address the people that doing it on Monday and Friday, you should address the people that are doing it on Tuesday and Wednesday. I don't think you should identify anyone or point anyone out. Everybody should be treated as professionals and if you're going to institute some type of rule or something then it should be used straight across the board.

PD- What is your response to the districts providing a \$400 bonus for teachers and reduce it by \$50 for every sick day taken?

P-F: I think that it would motivate a lot of teachers to come to school and they're going to count that money. On the flip side, if there's someone that has already gotten to zero, then they just might say, well I'm not going to get it anyway, so I'll just continue to take days. But for the person that is motivated by money, I think they'll try their hardest to be there every day or as much as possible.

P-C: Personally, I think that is a little bit discriminatory and punitive because what are you going to do if you have a veteran teacher who gets sick one day and they have worked hard for years. It could happen. I would hate to think that someone would take something from me simply because I got sick. Now if you think someone is just staying out and they're really not sick then, there are avenues to get around that too. Those are just my feelings.

PD- That's what this is about your perceptions, your experiences and your opinions, there's no right or wrong answer. It really is a conversation, so thank you for sharing.

P-B: I agree with what F was saying sometimes when you get to a certain point when you don't, you no longer meet the criteria, you just don't really care what happens. I feel like some of us are. I think most people in education are motivated by every little extra money we can get, but then you also have some people that yeah they want the money but then they want to do what they want to do even more. So I feel like that would motivate me to say yeah that's going to be extra money I get to put into my pocket. Other teachers will be like yeah get the extra money and then this happens and then oh I don't feel like going today. So sometimes I think maybe they might lose sight of it because I have to wait all the way until the end of the year to receive it. Maybe if

they could split it and do \$200 a semester because that makes it a little more obtainable and I only got a couple of more months and I can get it.

PD-What would you do to increase teacher attendance?

P-F: I know that a lot of the incentives we talked about on the district level could actually be applied at the school level. We could have monthly celebrations to recognize staff members who are in attendance. We often time have awards day celebrations for the students and we could include the teachers as a part of that awards day. We have announcements in the morning. We could announce it on the intercom. You could actually enter teachers into a raffle for something based on the number of days say for example, if you had zero days your name goes in 3 times, if you had one day it goes in twice, and three you know however, you want to figure it out, but, a raffle would work. We have bulletin boards posted and parents are always out. Send out newsletters; something to recognize the teachers. ConnectEd or whatever it's called now but those notifications you can have those to go out as well. So recognize the teachers just as we do the students.

P-C: I would also as a building representative and as a person who's been around a long time, for the new teachers, I would offer moral support, have a buddy teacher or a mentor. Because, sometimes the new teachers are really overwhelmed. Sometimes you have to give them a little extra encouragement to persuade them. "Well it will be okay, we'll work together, please come to work tomorrow." I've had teachers to say, "I just may not be here tomorrow." You just have to encourage them because sometimes the work does get overwhelming.

P-E: The mentor part that she was talking about, I think it's very critical too. I realize your young teachers have system wide mentors but, they really need somebody very, very, close to work with them at the school. And not somebody that's coming in once or twice a week or something

like that. And that person that's working side-by-side with them, a very dedicated person, not somebody that's way down the hall in another grade level, but as close as possible in the same grade level so that they can become very close tight knit and they can buddy up and help each other and make life a little bit easier. Because I think sometimes maybe one or the other, it can be the young or older teacher might be getting burned out. But they need that buddy to keep them going.

P-B: I agree with what F was saying about the recognition. We spend so much time trying to find a way to make the students feel good and here's a sticker, here's a certificate, I'm going to call your name out cause you did so well, and I feel like a lot of times we kind of overlook the teachers. We get a lot of reprimands about this and that or the other. And it's nice when the principal sends out the principal's post and they are given you a shout out or they announce your name over the intercom. It may not last long as far as something you could put your hands on, but it makes you feel good and it kinda re-energize you to get to that certificate or to be recognized in front of the school. Because so often, when we are recognized it's just one on one. So my co-workers don't know that I'm coming to school every day because they're not coming. I think recognition would go a long way to get it started to get teachers to come to school.

P-H: I think if you make the work environment sooo nice that no one wants to miss a day, you know catered meals every Wednesday or so TVs in the lounge, give you a few extra minutes to sit back and take a breath or just make it so nice, that you just want to come to work. Keep the building warm because you want to go home because its cold. Make it so irresistible.

PD- So you would work on the environment.

P-H: Yeah the environment.

P-J: I would like to say I agree with H. You know you have your environment Improve your environment and have some things in your environment that you enjoy doing like at Southeast. We did a coffee/hot chocolate bar and that went really well with the staff. You could go in and other staff members were coming in and you would have a little few minutes to talk and you would laugh and share a story and move on. I think some of those things like that are good incentives for your school.

P-F: I just want to add, I taught at Eastman Middle for six years before I went to Enfield Middle and there was not a day that I could remember rushing to go home. The kids would go to the bus and we would stay, it was a family affair. Everyone would congregate afterwards. We would have our own impromptu staff meetings. Let's talk about the next celebration, what are we going to do. I remember going into the media center and "We Are Family" is blasting and everyone is walking into the meeting dancing. We were happy and saying how did your day go? We genuinely cared about each other because we knew each other. We knew each other. There's so much isolation now. Its 6th grade team, 7th grade team, 8th grade team, Exploratory team, and it's sort of yall kids, your kids, instead of, the kids belong to all of us. It doesn't matter what grade you're in or which subject you teach. So, I agree environment is important. You shouldn't make a B line to the car, "I've survived another day." Create an atmosphere of family and love.

P-E: And adding something like a gym type set-up after school because I'm sure a lot of the teachers go to the gym, but if we had the equipment right there, I think we would stay after school and exercise and things like that.

P-I: I agree pretty much with what everybody is saying. The special recognition, having some type of monthly special recognition, as I was listening at them talk even like you said boosting the morale of the school, whatever it takes to boost the morale of the school not just for the

students because a lot of times our administrators don't realize it's not just for kids, we need that morale booster in school as well. So, maybe like a monthly or bi-weekly social or something that we do as a staff and then that might make us to want to stay after school. Make us want to come to school because like you said, it's like a family environment, so maybe monthly socials, where of course you do, recognize your staff members but it's not all about recognizing it's just about building that morale. And just building that family environment so to make us want to be there with our kids and want to be there with our staff members as well. Special recognition and boost the morale of our staff.

P-D: I would agree with everybody as far as increasing or improving the environment and I agree especially with the incentives. Because children need to be praised for what they do and it makes them feel good and makes them work harder. When we are praised or patted on the back or get some type of recognition our children feel good about us and if we can get them to feel better about us, they're are going to harder for us. So it's getting them motivated while motivating us.

PD- Would you name the specific incentives that you were referring to that you agree with?

P-D: The incentives, the shout outs, the certificates, the extra 10 minutes of down time, or money. Everybody loves money.

PD- Tell me what do you think is happening with those teachers who take leave without pay? And what would you do about it?

P- F: I think that a teacher that takes leave without pay, in most cases, that teacher has something going on, something major going on, because as stated everyone needs money and if you're going to miss work and not receive pay then you probably have something that your principal is going to want to have a discussion with you about. I know that in the past, there have been teachers that have taken leave at certain times of the year without pay because they may have

another job. Let's say completing income taxes or something. Then you need to look at those instances and you know to do something about it. You signed a contract and you're at H&R Block or Jackson Hewitt, or wherever you go. But having a conversation to figure out why the teachers are not there would be essential before actually making a decision. Because they may just be really ill or have a parent that or love one that they can't afford to have someone to take care of and they have to be there. You just never know what the case is unless you talk to them.

P-J: I'm going to put this on record. If I take a day without pay, there's something really serious going on and I would think that my administrator would approach me and ask me. Then I would hope that my administrator would help me to figure out some way that I would not have to take that day or any other days without pay.

PD- In the literature, these are actual strategies that were implemented in other districts, I'm going to name some of the strategies and I want your feelings about these strategies tell me what you think if they will work in Halifax County? The first strategy **is increase teacher accountability by having absent teachers call principals as a management tool?**

P-F: I think the strategy would work if it's a strong principal and follows through and follows policies. You always run the risk of having a principal that does not stick to what the policies are or that may grant this teacher, okay that's fine and ride the back of another, so as long as you have a strong fair leader, I think that that policy would work.

P-C: Some of the schools are already doing that.

P-B: I already call my principal and the bookkeeper when I need a day off. If something has happened, I always let both of them know, but usually the principal first before anything. I feel like that's just showing respect to the person that you work for and you have a job and you are

there for a reason. Respect them by letting them know, "I can't be here today and I don't want to let you down, but this happened."

P-G: When we take a day off we have to fill out a paper and our principal approves our paper for us staying out, so he knows in advance whether it's the teacher or anyone that is employed at our school. He knows before-hand that we have to stay out. Not unless an emergency comes up and then we do contact him because everyone does have his cell phone to contact him.

PD- Am I hearing you say instead using a call in system you would call your principal?

P-C: I've forgotten the name of it but Halifax County has implemented a procedure where you can call some type of number and leave the message you want. Call Plus, I saw it and I elected not to do it. I said I know I need to call my principal, but Halifax County does have that.

P-H: I don't think that strategy is going to make a difference one way or another. I don't think it is going to make a difference, I think it's being done in some cases and so as a management tool, it may manage somewhat but I don't think it's going to be that effective.

PD- Are you talking about calling the principal?

P-H: Calling the principal, I don't think it's going to make that much of a difference.

P-J: I agree because if I need to be off, I need to be off.

PD-Link teacher attendance to their summative evaluation?

P-F: I think that again it could work both ways, as C said earlier, this year I may just get really sick. I got the flu every other week and something else happen, so it would be unfair to a teacher that comes every day and when they're there, they work really hard. But because they were ill or they had family issues, they weren't able to be there as much as they wanted to or needed to be and I don't really know how you can tell that someone is really sick or not unless you have proof

that they were just somewhere else doing something. So in theory, it would work; however it does seem that in that it may be unfair to someone who was genuinely sick that year.

PD-Do you think your principals would provide consideration for that, knowing that this person is always here and so, when thinking about absences, I would like to think that principals may provide consideration? But how do you all feel about that?

P-B: I feel like if you are there every day or as much as can be and you're giving 100% of yourself to your students, I feel like it's going to show throughout the rest of the evaluation so, even if you do have an instance where you get the flu or you know you get flu and you think you are over it and it hits you again for whatever reason and your absences start to grow, I feel like it's going to show that you are dedicated and the principal should be able to see that in your classroom, to be able to make that decision in that instance, if your principal knows you and knows what, they have evidence that you are doing what you need to do in your classroom.

P-J: I want to say that I think if that is happening then should be nipped in the bud early and not wait for your summative, your end of the year. I think that should be something talked to that person about, address that person, to find out what's going on and nipped in the bud not necessarily have to tie up with the summative that has already been address and is taken care of.

P-E: I would like to say I know it doesn't sound humane probably to think this way, but if a person does have a prolonged sickness are they really being fair to the kids that they are supposed to serve? Are they really giving them the time that they should be? Were they really effective teachers if they were out? I know it doesn't sound great and none of us want to be sick, but if they are not there to meet the children, how effective are they? The children didn't ever get what they needed from the teacher.

P-F: I want to know that you have defined excessive. I would like to retract my earlier statement, but definitely if you're are missing 30,40,50 days then it should be not only tied to the summative, but as J said you know maybe the district needs to come up with a policy that teachers have to sign that something can be done before the end of the year. Because if you are probably not missing 5 in the first semester and 45 in the second semester. So whenever you reach the number of people without the medical documentation and there is a pattern that's going on it needs to be addressed earlier because if you wait to the end of the year that person may opt not to return, but the students that they serve have already missed 50 days of instruction.

P-C: Yes ma'am

P-H: Maybe the county could on the onset of hiring someone revise the contract where it says if you miss one to ten days because student performance is linked directly to teacher availability, could put something so if a person know a head of time. If you miss so many days throughout your school year, then you know you could be terminated. I think that will scare people enough to curve some of their absences, but let them know up front that this is what could actually happen and you know let it be a signed thing.

PD- Increase teacher awareness of the absentee problem with a public campaign?

P-C: I think that's a good idea and the reason being, I use to pay attention and I have heard these figures before but I never really thought of the fact that we are talking about individuals that may take Mondays and Fridays. Or just take days here and there 30, 40, that's a lot of time. So, yes I will agree with that awareness campaign.

P-F: I know that we do hear the figures at convocation, but I think we should hear more. I really think that a lot of teachers would be surprise to know that there are individuals missing 30,40,50 days and that it does not include the long term subs. I've always thought that long term sub pay

was included in that figure, so we need an analysis, we need to say, I'm sorry maybe school-wide. Enfield Middle we paid for 250 sub days that's going to be pretty embarrassing. In this school you had this many days and again that increases the accountability because everybody is going to pretty much know who help racked up the days. Well you can at least say, oh I only had two of that 350 or two or zero. But we need to know that there are individuals that are missing not names, but this many days. And we should know by school as well. I just think it needs to be more detailed.

P-B: I agree with that because we do hear the figures, but like F was saying, we didn't know that that didn't include long term subs and that it's people missing this great excessive number of days and I feel like perhaps that could be made when we all in the auditorium together and then when we have that session with our individual schools where we talk about the data. That's when we could get into the individual school attendance so that we can see we are contributing to this problem because a lot of time we sit there and be like oh well that's not me. But it might be the person sitting beside me. So I feel like that's a really good idea for us to deep into that as well as our data because that directly impact the data.

PD- If the district does not extend the sick leave bank beyond the state statue of 20 days?

P-H: I think it would have to be a case by case basis depending on why the person is out sick. Put some clause in there as to who can get that extra 20 days. So, I think it will be a good strategy.

P-F: I think it would be a good strategy if we could extend it if you have documentation. Because I would not dare say no stop it at 20, because we are all in here and we never know what's going to happen, so to just say okay after 20 that's it. As H said, there could be a clause and just say if you could provide, not why or what's going on with you, your medical condition. But some documentation saying that you are under treatment or you know your doctor, something violate

then saying, "Oh, I'm going through something I'm sick." Something to document that you have medical issues.

P-E: You have a lot of women and we have maternity leave, so you really need to look at the different situations. You wouldn't want to tell a pregnant woman that after the 20 days you might lose your contract. That would be kind of hard when most of us are women in this field.

PD- Utilize volunteers on field trips rather than using additional teachers?

P-F: Ok, I agree with that.

P-J: I would think that you would ask your non-teachers or staff to go; even though I would love to go on a field trip. Yeah I would think that, support staff and then maybe some parents. I wouldn't want my volunteers to be more volunteers than the staff because of what F said you know we know our students. So I wouldn't overload with volunteers.

P-I: I would definitely agree you don't want to pull too many teachers. It bothers me when I do have to leave because my students are losing instruction. I'm leaving especially my class of three hours, so which means I have to plan for double that because they are sitting in that class for three hours every day so I have to make sure that they are getting everything that they need. So, those three days that I'm out they are losing information because all I'm doing is giving them book work and aren't they really learning anything from this book work, if I'm just giving it to them. But then you have to look because I don't want to have to send a group of kids with just volunteers because I don't want to send volunteers I need to make sure that these people have been properly screened before you send them off to Florida or send them off somewhere else. So I agree maybe use some of your other staff members on campus who know your students well enough to and have a vested interest in them rather than just sending just any volunteer.

PD-Provide incentives for great teacher attendance?

Participants F,J,C,H, D, G, B, E, I: Agree

PD- Should the district schedule district professional development during non-instructional time?

P-J: I can't recall any times during instructional time.

P-B: I know that for beginning teachers especially first year teachers they're usually pulled out once a month or once every two months during the day for PD, but BT2s and BT3s we go after school for professional development so that's one example that I can think of that could be provided during non-instructional time, which would keep them with their students, since they really need to be with their students to bond with the students and earn that respect so they can give quality instruction to them.

P-I: I do agree because a lot of our teachers who are pulled for those PDs are the ones who are in those core courses and they are being pulled from their students you know at certain periods of the day. And so those students are losing very, very important instruction and that is what our efficiency rate at the school is based off a lot of their scores. So having the professional development outside instructional time would be awesome.

PD- Combine management tools with policy to make expectation of the board of education known to all district teachers; the board adopts and implements a policy of high attendance expectation?

P-F: I agree that, having that expectation set forth before the teachers would definitely be a great idea in addition to that I think that you would have to have some consequences linked to it for it to truly be effective. If it surpasses this amount of days then we're going to take this step and have something signed as H said earlier at the beginning of the school year.

P-C: I agree.

P- G:, E, J, I: I agree.

P-H: I agree, I just wonder if it's an active policy where we have to do something or is this going to be a blanket statement. You know somethings are just written, but it doesn't really, it's not an

action type thing where you do anything. You just read it. These are expectations, that's fine. That's what they expect.

PD- Have teachers establish attendance goals at the beginning of the year?

P-F,H,G: I agree

P-B: I think it's a very good idea and I think that it can make a difference. I stated earlier with teachers that are intrinsically motivated to want to meet goals that they set for themselves, especially if they share it with their principal or their grade level may have a competition, that sort of thing, to make sure that they are meeting their goals. So they are not saying, okay this is another thing that I did let me pat myself on the back, but they can also meet the goal and share it with others and be rewarded for it.

P-J: I agree, but I think for a person who has that motivation to come to work and not miss a lot of days, then I just think what's the use, I mean you know, I don't miss a lot of days, so why would I need to set that as a goal for myself.

PD- The principal participation includes: If the principal review monthly attendance printout with violators who take frequent short absences from work, would you agree that your principal should: participate by reviewing monthly attendance printout with violators who take frequent short absences from work, conduct monthly conferences with violators who take excessive Mondays and Fridays, provide attendance warning letters during the conference indicating that the conference was held, the principals should receive calls directly for all absences, no email, text, or voicemail and the principal write letters of commendation to staff with excellent attendance?

P-C: I agree with all components because you are talking about chronic violators and we have to have steps in place or procedures to address that because it takes care of the absentees. Student achievement will go up and everyone who's working their jobs will have it a whole lot easier in reference to teaching the students.

P-J: I agree with that, instead of saying it in a group of people you need to again, nip it in the bud and go directly to the source.

P-E: I agree, that makes a very effective principal and if we got an effective principal then he/she will work very hard to make the teacher effective and this ties in together.

P-F: I agree with all components.

P-B: I agree as well, principals take time to me with teachers who are having issues with things like classroom management and their academic knowledge to set goals with them and have conversations with them to get them the help they need. I think it should also include teacher attendance to help them understand that that attendance does affect their classroom management

and their academic knowledge in their subject. So I feel like that should be something the principal should do.

P-D: I agree the principal should be involved with everything dealing with absenteeism. It brings a closer rapport between the teacher and the principal. If the principal is going to be this designated person that's going to take care of everything and be responsible, then he or she is going to be more respected and then it alleviate any biases.

PD- NC has General Statute 115c-301.1 has a statute that says that teachers who take leave just the day before or just after a holidays must have it approved by the principal. What are your feelings on that?

P-B: I agree that should be enforced because especially if it's an extended holiday. Like with a Friday and students are getting ready to go on a break. Some of them might be anxious or worried about being at home because they do have all these other issues that they deal with. So I feel like the teacher needs to be there to be that static thing in their life that's always there for them and when they come back from that break. I feel like that's when the teacher needs to be there to calm them or soothe them or get them back in the flow, so that instruction can continue and that the students will continue to trust that teacher. So I feel like those are two very important times for the teacher to be there when the students don't know what's going to happen while they're not there.

P-F: I agree with B and if there is something that's going on because the principal has to approve it, that's a conversation the teacher can have with the principal to see if it's approved or not, but I definite believe that once the holiday is over, the holiday is over. And it doesn't matter when it begins and when it begins. I agree with everything B said.

P-J: I think it should be individual based because if someone is abusing it then, yes. If you really need to maybe take that day before, I think it should be individual based. I don't think it should count for everyone.

P-C: Once again, if it's a North Carolina state statute then it should be a county statue. Just my feeling.

P-H: I kind of agree with J because I don't like it personally because in some cases if you have to travel, you have relatives or family across the United States and you need that extra day to get started or to travel back. You know, it puts you in an awkward situation. It should be maybe used as an incentive for people who don't abuse their absences. They could get a couple of Monday/Wednesday type of choices built in their yearly leave options or something.

P-I: I do think the principal should approve it and but then I also look at it because some people do abuse it and every holiday or every time they're out they feel like I have to be out that day

after. I do think maybe it should be looked at on an individual basis. The principal still does need to approve it, and have some conversation with that person: I'll let you go this time but next time. Yes, the principal does need to approve it, but do I agree you need to look at it on an individual basis.

P-G: I agree with her. I agree with what most of them said. I think it should be on an individual basis because we do have a lot of teachers in the district whose families are out of town and sometimes you know they might need that time for traveling, but I do feel like the principal should do something on an individual basis with the teacher.

PD- Is there anything else you'd like to say about increasing teacher availability?

P-F: I think that there's a responsibility on all parties involved. The ones that can make the difference; the teacher has to be accountable; strong leader in the building; you need a strong board; and you need a strong central office staff. So everyone has to work together to ensure that teacher availability is improved, so it's not just the teacher, but it is also the principal and the board and the central office staff as well.

P-J: I don't know if this has been addressed. I think having more days, optional work days built into the calendar, not going to say that it's going to help everyone but I would like to see more optional work days in the school calendar where, when students are out maybe teachers can have that option to take the day off as well.

P-C: We have enough policy and procedures in place to bring about a big change if they are only enforced. They are not enforced. That's just my opinion.

P-B: I feel like your rapport with your principal and with the coworkers that you have, I think that does greatly affect whether or not you come to work. I know that in my building I have a great respect for my principal so I come to work every day. I might not want to be there; I might be sick; I might not feel good, but I'm there for her and I'm there for my kids that's why I went into this job. That's why I wanted to be a teacher to make a difference in their lives, so sometimes you need to find that motivation to put how you're feeling that day to the side and just do what you need to do. You might not give your best if you're not feeling good but you're there and that makes a difference to the kids.

PD- Well, ladies I want to thank you very, very, much for your participation this afternoon.

APPENDIX E: INFLUENTIAL TRANSCRIPTION

Influential Focus Group
Wednesday, March 4, 2015

PD= Policy Developer

P- = Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant E, Participant F,
Participant G, Participant H, Participant I, Participant J

PD- And so our question is: **How important do you think it is to increase teacher awareness of the absentee problem?**

P-G: I think that based on information that we've been given with the amount of money that is spent on substitute teachers, I think it is very important for the entire district to become aware of teacher availability.

P-J: For me I think it's more so for the teachers need to reflect on what happens when they are not in the classroom. At my school when the teachers are out most of the time they will get another teacher to cover their class and for me to cover someone's class just specifically it is a headache. Not only does it takes my planning period, but also I don't know the students and so while if you come in my classroom and that student who acts that way I can deal with that student because that's my student and I've adapted my routine of how to work with that student but when I go into a whole different space while that teacher may know how to deal with that student I don't know how to deal with that student. Now I'm frustrated because I have to put up with something that I had not planned on putting up with and when the teachers are out that quality of instruction the quality of work that they leave for the students when they leave work for the students does nothing for the students but try to keep them on task for that time period but

is it overall impact the students in a negative way because they're not getting what they need at the end of the day to move forward.

P-E: It definitely negatively affects the instructional day really the students it really throws them off task. Teachers, especially new teachers, is very hard for them to adjust especially if they have to cover someone else's class because a lot of them have things so laid out and prepared and that one little thing will throw them off if they have to watch a class of students that may arrive to them at third period or third block and they are watching them during third block. Well, it's going to throw off how they organize and plan for the day. So, it really affects the instructional piece.

P-A: I think it will also lead to exhaustion to teachers that have to cover and at the same time the ones that the substitute teachers that have to come in sometimes what they do is baby sit the kids. And like, I have to agree with what everyone that said the instruction is negatively impacted by it. So, beside like spending more with substitutes, we could use that money for something else that could benefit both the teachers and the students.

PD- Anyone else? okay. So our fourth question is: **What type of incentives do you think the district should provide for great teacher attendance?**

P-E: Well we've already acknowledge students of the month, employee of the month well you may want to perhaps acknowledge teachers who have perfect attendance for the month. And something as simple as acknowledgement or a certificate will really go a long way. In my opinion.

P-A: I just like to share when I was at Enfield Middle that was like 2009- 2012 we have like a monthly social. I remember I'd always get prior to having a baby I would always get perfect

attendance. So, I think some of the schools are doing that and I don't know if they still do it at this time of the year.

P-J: Stipends are always great, even if it's something small.

P-H: Or if like, I know that McDonald's and Logan's and places like that, just say hey you came to work you know. I say 100% of the time its hard, unfortunately and I have small children and I've missed a week of work in the last month because they've been sick they got sick and then I got sick, but you know if I got even if it's a McDonald's milkshake coupon just saying hey I'm glad you came to work this month. Something small, money would be nice, but I know that we can't afford it in the county, but anything really.

P-C: I also agree that the coupons from restaurants, some type of gift card, if it's a gas card, or a Walmart card. We're teachers and we are always going into Walmart. I know I am anyway and you can always use that for something so some type of incentive like that and like you said the monetary incentives would be great. But if not some type of token of appreciation just to let us know that okay we appreciate the fact that you are coming to work like you are suppose too.

P-H: I'm okay with like a sticker. Just acknowledge us, just say hey, put it in an email, like a little shout out or the intercom or something. Yeah, I mean just something simple to let me know that all of my hard work is not going unnoticed.

PD- (participants are nodding their heads)-If you agree with H's comment, just say your letter and say you agree with the incentive that she just named.

P-C: I agree with the incentives she just named.

P-A: Agrees

P-G: Agrees

P-I: Agrees

P-F: Agree

P-E: Agrees

P-J: Agrees

P-B:

PD- Would you add any additional incentives?

P-I: Other than what they have recognized, like we know that there's no money, but a simple pat on the back or a high five you know. I'm like the children just recognize it. You know, acknowledge it.

P-F: I think that along with the other type of programs of opposition, even if they don't have any of those you can just put them on the website. For example, we have such and such person who has had perfect attendance for this month in that way every month you can recognize somebody. There's enough ways you can recognize teachers.

P-B: In addition to acknowledging on the website, you could also do it at a board meeting.

P-C: I was just thinking back several years ago at my school, they were giving certificates and it would have the month. Each month you had perfect attendance that was put in your box and they would put pencils and a small piece of candy or something just to say that you are appreciated and I really liked it. So I would put mine up in the classroom and then that would help me to be able to motivate my students to be able to come to school on a daily basis. So those things are very important as well.

P-G: At one point we were doing a yearly celebration also, like at the end of the year. If there were people who had perfect attendance for the entire year, they were honored at a yearly celebration, so that may be also an incentive and it was publicized.

PD- Was that a district celebration?

P-G: Yes it was.

P-F: They can have it as a whole county thing where, whichever school has the highest teacher attendance, they can recognize them in the board meeting or they can have some incentive for that particular school especially because that school stands out in front of all of the other schools.

P-A: I agree with what she just said. Yeah, because that would make everyone like to compete against each other.

PD- Our next question: **Do you believe, teachers with 4 or less yearly absences, is a reasonable number of absences to have in order for the district to host a recognition banquet and honor these teachers?**

P-H: I think like when we did the Race to the Top and we got money if you only missed 5 days. My kids were out and I just missed a week last month, so it's hard if you have small children and I'm not criticizing people that don't have small children but it's difficult to not. Somethings can't be avoided. Now if I was just taking off you know every Friday because I wanted to go somewhere, I think that would be different, but, I don't know what a good number would be. But 4 is hard. I think.

P-C: Also we get sick too and speaking for myself, I got really sick about a month ago and I got really sick for 2 weeks and they look at all that. Like you said, you're not out just to be out. You're out because you're sick and if they're looking at the time that you are absent even if you're sick. I think that would really be unfair. So, I'm like Participant H, I'm not sure exactly what would be a good number to say that we could use to help qualify for that particular incentive, but I just think for four days or less is almost impossible.

PD- But if you had to guess C and H just guess a number.

P-H: 10

P-C: I thinking the same thing I was thinking 10.

P-H: When you start teaching isn't that how many days you get in the beginning? They give you a day a month and you work for 10 months. Don't you get 10 days a year or something, I think?

P-E: It's easy to look from the outside and make an assumption. I know when I started teaching and I didn't have a child, I would think to myself, my goodness why are these people taking off all of these days, can't they find a babysitter? And things of that nature, so kind of setting a limit of you know how many days a person would have to miss in order to qualify it's kind of unfair. Then you have people who are single parents and so how would they fit into that equation as well? I know for myself if my daughter gets sick she has to go all the way back to Virginia. So would it be fair for me? I put in all this time when I can if my daughter gets sick or my daughter gets sick and we have to miss. I can't participate in these celebrations.

P-G: Trying to be fair on both sides, I think that when we had the incentive that we missed 5 days or less that we could get the incentive well, other people could get it, then a lot of people did not miss days. They were able to make accommodations because they wanted the incentive. The thing that was added was unless there are extenuating circumstances. Which yours would have been, yours would have been and if you can't have a baby sitter that's an extenuating circumstance. However, I think there's a fine line with who is approved for an extenuating circumstance and those who are not. So, if we say five days and there is truly an extenuating circumstance and you have evidence to show that and you're out for two weeks, I'm sure that you've gone to a doctor somewhere so, you have that proof that you're not just staying at home. As well as evidence of the fact that the rest of the year, I've been here for years before. So, I think that we should have a way of tracking, what has happen in the past with you or evidence to

show that you have been out and use that as an extenuating circumstance regardless of who you are or regardless of who you have a close relationship with. Just be consistent across the board.

P-J: It seems like a while ago I can't really recall when but when I first began teaching which was some years ago, it seem like we had not so much more breaks, but we had like the teacher workdays that were built in. But now it seems like we work the entire, 180 plus days of the school year. So for example, we are all women in here if you have something set up like a doctor's appointment where you had to get your annual at a certain time those doctor appointments cannot be set up on like a Saturday so you have to go or wait to Spring Break to come like you are always. So, for me personally, I always have to move my date for that particular appointment to match up with the district's like have no time for personal time.

P-G: To piggy-back on what you said, I wrote that down and it's right here, workdays, because if you look at the calendar for this school year, I think there were two work days on the calendar one in February and one in March. And so we won't probably get either of them because of the snow days. But you've worked a whole semester and you don't have any. Now I've had a situation a couple of years back where I scheduled my doctor's appointment in August because I had to work the whole summer, well let me do it right before we go back to work and it was schedule 6 months ahead of time. And when I put in my leave request because it was a work day, I was going to take that work day, when I put it in they said its mandatory and you cannot take this day. And I'm like what if I do, because I have this doctor's appointment. "Well I'm not going to approve it, I just don't know what would happen." So, I had to reschedule it for 4 months later. So, I thought that was a little bit ridiculous.

P-E: I don't know there's been something set-up in the county set up before where there is a committee that needs to be formed that would take a look at situations like that because I don't

think that that's fair that you've set up something that far in advance and because it's a scheduling conflict with what the district has set-up that you'll have to not be able to go. And I think that's something that a committee should be able to take a look at and say well she's put in the time way ahead in advance notice, let' see what we can do to accommodate her. And look at everything else that you have done. It's not like you've waited the day or the week before and say, oops I have a doctor's appointment let me go.

P-G: In knowing that I did not know that that day was going to be a mandatory day. I had no idea it was set up before the next calendar year was the days were put on the calendar so.

P-J: I think that putting those days back in would be one of the best incentives, even if it's not but a mental break day, when we have snow, if you look on social media and the parents are complaining because they have to keep their kids all day. So, you know, I'm like yes snow day and the parents are like no snow day but I'm like we deal with their children everyday so even if it's just like a day to get yourself together. Like we need that and when we don't get it those days are when we end up running into bigger problems. Where maybe coming from health, it may be stress, you are not giving your parent, children that attention they need because they may be sick but you can't take care of them until it gets to be a little bit more than you can handle. So we need those things put back. And I don't know how to put them back, but I just think that it was the day after report cards go, the day when it was time to get report cards. We had like a half day and then a full day and those would be ideal times for you to handle appointments to do those things that you need to do, but when you don't when the district refuses to give those to us you have to take them and when like Participant G said we're setting up dentist appointments and doctor's appointments, like six months in advance because that's how you have to do them and you don't have any idea that you know that you're going to say that you have to be here and that's

the demand of our district. They say you have to be here regardless of whatever in life is going on you have to be here.

P-E: What I found very interesting and odd I've heard some of my colleagues say I need to take a day at home so that I can get the work done that I can't do during the school day. So that's definitely an issue if you have to take time off from your job to do work at home, that's an issue. It's because we don't have workdays that are built in and during our day, our day is so scheduled with other things during our planning time and probably during lunch you know that you cannot get those things that you need completed during the normal day.

P-A: I'm just going to share especially like this year with my own schedule. Like I work two schools and my main job is to provide services to teachers, but on top of that I need to, we have like regular meetings and mid-year reviews on top of the regular scheduling of re-evals, initial placements, we have like 3 more activities that we have to do every week. But like you said, having to take a day leave off because every day when I finish with one school when will I have time to do the paperwork. I need to go to another school then I have to work from 1-3:30 at that school so 3:30-4:00 is not enough to complete one document.

PD- So what I think I hear you all say is to be inclusive with more work days.

P-A: Exactly, because just like I look for February 11 and when I talked to the principal, I said oh my God my kids are not going to be here tomorrow. And they were like no they will have to because you know they changed. I said oh my goodness, I thought I was going to be able to do my paperwork, but because we had to change that.

P-G: I think that if the district, the people who are concerned about teacher absences, I think if they would go back and look at the historical data as to when we did have those half days, we did have those full days, I think that they would see they would see that there were less absentees by

the teachers. And other things, the decisions the administration department makes impact teachers. How does that impact teacher attendance?

PD-Just as we establish professional school goals at the beginning of the year, do you think, to determine our preferred state should teachers establish attendance roles as part of the preferred state?

P-E: If it's those individuals who are having trouble with attendance I don't think that they should, we have to look at the circumstances of why they are having trouble with attendance. Because I could use myself for example, my first year in the county I ended up with pneumonia and then my daughter was sick throughout the year and I was 19 days like over the amount you could miss before they would start taking money out of your check. And so I would be one of those people who would be considered a person who has a problem with attendance, so you really have to look at those circumstances and situations.

P-E: umm uh

P-B: I would say that like if they have a history of attendance issue then maybe that become part of their professional development plan and be put in their goals and then I mean the principal could do something with them and track it.

P-E: I would not want that a part of my, when its doing with an evaluation or you know a plan or anything of that nature because I am a single parent. I am responsible for my child and I know that I'm going to miss a day. I could miss 10, 15 days or whatever the case may be, so I would not want something like that attached to anything that's going to place me on a plan or be a part of any type of evaluation.

P-H: I mean, I'm concerned about what are we saying is the problem? What would be the number that their saying, oh you've missed too many days? Because what I think is too many

days versus what someone else thinks they may not be the same. Because as terrible as it sounds if you're single and you don't have children and you're just missing 15 days a year, I think you have a problem because what are you doing? Are you off having a good time? Versus someone that does have small children or elderly parents or you know you have to really look outside factors to determine that I think.

P-F: I agree with what letter E said, because I don't want anything to be on my plan because I don't know whether it's going to happen or not. Because even if it's a single parent or if it's two of them still I have to, my husband can't take care of my son or my daughter because it's going to be hard for him and if I'm in the school it's going to be in my mind okay what's my daughter doing, what's happen to her is she fine, what's happening? So, I'm not going to focus on my work right either. So I would rather take the day off because I want my children, I want my family, as I want my job and I want my students all to be good. Everything has to be balance. So, if my family needs time, so yeah they're going to get the time and place until they get better. So, I don't want anything on the evaluation saying that she missed such and such days so she's going to be evaluated on that. Because you don't know what circumstances are going to show up, you don't know it may be one day, one week, or one month.

P-B: I want to go back, she did say that it was a lot of absences, so it's not that your child get sick and you had to stay out a week but like the person just pops off 15 days all the time and doesn't want to come to school and realistically, I haven't been an administrator but I know several. They put people on action plans when they miss a lot of days. So it's going to become a part of your evaluation if you are missing a lot of days. Now, whether or not your principal decides to put you on one is a totally different story, but it's going to be documented.

P-C: When they do that or however they do that I still think they need to look at, like we were saying earlier, the history behind why the person is out and they require a doctor's notes and things like that. So that's the proof that you are just not out just to be absent. So if they use that factor to track everything, I think it may be ok and I agree with Participant E and F, you don't really want that attached to your name when they get ready to do evaluations. Because, sometimes, some administrators, use that to their good, but to your bad. If that makes sense, and I've known stuff like that to happen. That just need to be fair all away across the board with things like that take place. So, if they track it the correct way then yes, I would agree that may be a good way to solve that.

P-J: I don't know. I have kinda mixed feelings about it. I've been at my school through a great deal of individuals who have so many creative reasons for why they miss. The reason that they miss that they tell the teachers versus the reasons that they miss that they tell the administrators and at the end of the day the kids are the ones who suffers. If it's a personal issue, yes, that is something that could not be helped. If it's medical, family related, but to take a week off to go to CI it's not a valid reason. You know and we had those individuals every year. Just for example I'm not picking on anyone but if you were an Aggie but we had staff members who were Aggies so during A&T's homecoming they took that week off. They were going to take the week off for the MEAC and they would also go down to Raleigh and take the week off for CIAA. So that was 15 days. But if the administrators know that the same issues are ongoing with the same people, like I have a principal now who says, "Why, I know she's lying." Like she can kind of see through people, so she'll say "She will call right here at 7:00 to say that she can't come to work," knowing she knows the situation. But because the people are habitual and it's constantly the same things the same kind of excuses, but I guess that goes in a whole total different issue with

Halifax County. And when we have individuals who are ineffective in their jobs, instead of bringing someone in who will be effective, they just keep on expecting them to maybe change years down the road.

P-G: I'm kinda like Ms. J. I agree that I'm a little mixed on that because there are people who have legitimate reasons for being absent. I know at one point my mother was deathly ill and I had to be out for a while and I got a lot of flack for that, to the point I felt like okay if I have to get some flack about it I'll just take the rest of my sick days. I'll just take the rest of the year out. That's just how it made me become. You know I had some ill feelings about that and I'm like I'm here all the time and if I'm late I make up my time. I try to make sure that I do what I need to do, but it seems like it became a problem at one point. And so I have mixed feelings about it because there are people who have legitimate reasons, but then there are people whom I've seen this, I mean just don't come to work. You know whatever happens the night before I can't make it in the next morning. They just don't come to work. But I would say if we have good leaders in the building, you kind of know who those people are and so as we had with our presentation on the first day of school or we going to be treated like the walker or are we going to be treated like the runner? You know, if you know that I'm a runner and I'm absent don't give me, treat me with the same, feed me with the same spoon as you treat the walker who you know is just not going to do anything when they get there and lay out when they feel like it. So I think if it comes by decision that the administrator should probably look at as to does this person needs to set some goals?

Does this person need to set some goals based on what I know about your previous history?

PD- I'm glad you said that, I do want to clarify from a personal perspective, but think about the people in your building who work around you as well as you're being reflective on these questions. So you know, don't just personalize it but think about what's going on in your building

around you and what you know with your experiences also in your building. Okay, apply it that way also and so this brings me to the next question: **When should your principal or your administrators become conferencing with teachers who show patterns of sick leave abuse by excessively missing Mondays and/or Fridays?**

P-E: If it's constantly a Monday or Friday, perhaps that third Monday or that third Friday they should call him or her into the office and say you know, what's going on, you need to talk to me or tell me about something because it's interfering with you coming to school and providing instruction to the children. But once again that goes back to the type of relationship that you, the staff member has with the administrator and so they have to have that good working relationship because it may not be a sickness, it could be something like a domestic abuse, sort of thing that could be going on, you don't know you have to have a good relationship with your administrator in order to perhaps reveal those things. Because they may have to leave on a Friday and a Monday because that person is coming home or coming in the area and they have to get away, but they may not feel you have a doctor's note for that. But you have to feel comfortable enough to sit down and have a conversation with your administrator about that.

P-J: It has to be some backing from the district also for the administrators. Like our principals always tell us, "Don't promise anything to the students that you can't follow through with," so don't say that I'm going to suspend you and then at the end of the day they're still sitting in your class. And so for ours, I know personally that a lot of time our district does not support our administrators and so if the administrators say I see that participant E you are constantly missing Mondays and Fridays and you don't have a valid reason, I will write you up and you will not return next year. But then the district goes and say well we need her she's a great math teacher so at the end of the day who has the upper hand is it the person that is constantly absent or is it the

administrator because they really don't have the backing. They do want what's best for the students, I believe. But I don't I think they compromise a lot so it's really having those conferences with that individual who's habitually missing all these days.

PD- So when are you saying that should occur?

P-J: I'm not saying when it should occur. I'm saying is it going to do any good if it does occur. Because to meet with them and I say my problem is I like to go to Raleigh and club on Fridays and I'm so tired by Monday that I need to take Monday off so like I can tell you that but what really within your power at the school level. Do you have to really move me out of that job?

PD- So if you were an administrator and you saw this occurring in your building when would you begin conferencing with people you know are showing abuse of sick leave with the missing of Mondays and Fridays. When would you begin conferencing?

P-J: I think as Participant E stated, the third one is great, but I'm saying even if the person, the individual is bold enough to tell you that story on why they miss Mondays and Fridays knowing it's not a secret on how much real power that our school level administrators have, the teachers know that a lot of times our principals hands are tied. They know the situation in the district where you only have like two certified math teachers at that school and you know she is a good teacher and she provides good results. She just doesn't come to school. They're not going to really push her out because they know how hard it is to get other math teachers in, so they're are not going to really push her out and that teacher knows that so that teacher will continue to abuse it.

P-A: I don't know if this matters, but I think also with the new teachers because I sometimes work with, I'm bias with the new teachers because sometimes they are more motivated. And when you're a new teacher you're supposed to show that you're aggressive with your work, so I

think you have to see also how often is this new teacher absent because then that tells us he or she is really for this job. I don't know if this makes sense, but you know.

PD- For the sake of this question, pretend that this has already occurred.

P-A: My thing is the sense of urgency especially for the new teachers should be like don't wait until the third or fourth because if you're on probationary just coming from the district as a new teacher then you have to work for the kids and show that you are there every day. I don't know because when I started in 2007, I was like there even if I had a headache. I don't miss days, but it's different now that I have a family because like I said, its only three of us.

PD- So when should a principal?

P-A: It's urgent so maybe like the second Monday.

P-H: On the other hand, I work at a school and we have two days of planning and that's the only two days I have away from my students. And it's terrible to say, but if I'm going to miss a day, I want it to be one of those days that I don't have planning and that is so terrible to say, but since they've moved our teacher, they've cut us back. We're sharing one resource teacher with another school so, I have planning two days a week and I'm in a classroom. I have no support as far as anyone to come in and help me. Unfortunately if she has meetings, I don't have a break from my other kids then, so and it's terrible by the time I get my lunch and I sit down and eat, maybe 15 minutes. And you have one chance to go to the bathroom. So, if I'm going to be out then it's something like a doctor's appointment something that I plan for, I'm going to plan it on a day that I don't have planning. And that is awful to say, but if I got called to the carpet for it and she ask me, I'm going to tell her why. Because in the same sense of I don't think and her hands are tied, she can't do anything about it, my administrator can't, but from the district level sometimes I

feel like they are not supporting what we need. Because not having that time away, when you're an elementary teacher and their there from 7:45 to 3:30.

PD- Let me redirect for a moment. We're talking about excessively missing Mondays and Fridays, those people who have shown sick leave abuse Mondays and Fridays. We're not saying if you don't get a planning time. We're talking about Mondays and Fridays for those teachers. When should a principal begin conferencing with those people that they have a pattern of this, they've already exhibit the pattern. And it's been excessive and the pattern is Monday or Friday, it's not you personally. Think about what's going on with people around you and people who have done that. And even if it's not happening in your building, if you were an administrator and you've had a teacher or teachers who have missed excessively Mondays and Fridays and have constantly shown this pattern of abuse. When would you begin conferencing with them?

P-G: I agree that three times is fair. If you do it two times, it may be just a coincidence but three times, I think that starts to show really a pattern. So, I would think three times is fair and in everything that we do we need to think about how fair is it. So, that's just my opinion.

P-C: I think three days would be fair, three times would be fair also, but thinking as an administrator if this is happening. If it happens once Monday and Friday, the second time it happens, I think that would be a good time to maybe pull them to the side and just show that you are really concerned and not trying to be in their business. But just asking to make sure everything is okay and then it may make the teacher aware. My principal is really watching me so maybe if it is something that they are doing to be absent then maybe more mindful not to do it. And kind of watch that and if it continues you know they may feel that my principal is going to say something to me to make sure that everything is okay.

P-E: To connect with Participant C, perhaps the principal does have to make that initial conference. Perhaps it could be the assistant principal or if there is a mentor teacher in the building or a team leader or someone to say I just want to talk to you a little bit about you missing some time. Because, this will happen and you will have to see the principal after the next time you are absent on Monday or Friday and then that might set that person straight and say oh I'm not going to keep missing Mondays and Fridays.

P-I: I think it needs to be immediately because like you all have said, it could be these circumstances that could lead to it, but if it's not made aware then it can continue. But then you're made aware of it like Participant C was saying and it will make you aware well okay my principal has picked up on this. I need to be mindful of it.

PD- What is your response to this, just respond it's your opinion, your perception of this: **If the district provided a \$400 bonus for each teacher and then reduced it by \$50 for every sick day taken?**

P-H: I would be out of money.

P-E: It would have to be something within guidelines set up for people who have children. You have to take those types of things into account. I mean we would just be left out. I don't know how many people here at this table have children, but you know we would just be left out of all the money, incentive type of things. We would just not qualify for those types of things. It's just not feasible.

P-F: I think ah if they want to look at the stipend, they could put a guideline and say after such and such days, after if you missed such and such days then you're not going to get your bonus or you're going to have \$50 taken off or anything like that. And that way at least it motivates other

teachers. The teachers who cannot make it and you cannot make it anyway at least for the teacher who can make it after a certain point of this at least they'll be happy benefiting with those.

P-C: I agree with Participant F, if they set the guidelines and lay them out front from the very beginning then you will know exactly what you have to look forward to. And even those of us that have kids or get sick and things like that or have doctor's appointments, you would try your best to maybe plan them later in the afternoon so you won't miss a whole day or things like that. So, we would be mindful of our situation; therefore, we have that stipend to look forward to.

P-H: I was doing the math on my phone. I would be curious like, I think it should be that you were present 100% or 98 instead of just saying a day. You know, put like a range and just say if you were there less than I don't know 93% is that an A. You know if you were there you would have an A with the attendance or whatever you know. If it was 93 to a 100, just do it on a scale of that instead of saying one sick day. I mean because we all have to work the same number of days throughout the school year so because then that way you would say well, I could dropped a percent and you really won't want to do it that way, I think.

PD- Well, **what would you do to increase teacher attendance?**

P-F: Stipend.

P-H: I agree. Because if we are spending \$600,000, how much money did you say \$600 million in substitute pay? I mean, how much money would it costs to give us a stipend to say hey, you came to work.

P-C: I'll go back to what we were saying earlier we need those days back because like participant E was saying, if you have to take that work home to do, and for myself I stay at school really late some evenings because I don't want to take that home. Because I have my daughter, dinner, I mean you name it, you have family responsibilities to take care of so I would say stipend would

be wonderful. I would say that would be number one, but we would need some of those days back built into the calendar. So, we cannot go to a meeting and sit have things told to us that we already know or have heard, but, to be able to actually work in our classroom to get prepared for our students for the next day or the day after.

P-E: Perhaps maybe look at how your school day is structured at your school with your schedule because that plays a major role if for example if you always have a planning at the same time and you've had that planning for the same time for the past three years and then that kind of gets redundant and it wears on you maybe if you just look at how your school day is structured. Maybe you can make some adjustments there. Little things to me in my opinion make a difference.

P-G: I would think to look at the number of initiatives that the teachers have to include into their day. Like they get started on one thing and then something else is added and then something else is added and something else is added to kinda look at what is really going to impact student achievement and try to move that initiative. But, I think sometimes there are so many things that teachers are asked to do. That it's just so many fires burning so many flames, but not any fires you know so what are you going to do to decide what is it that we need to have teachers to do with fidelity one or two things instead of putting so much on them. It becomes overkill it becomes burn out to the teachers and I think that we just need to look at what are we asking teachers to do that is going to make an impact and kind of limit those.

PD- You feel that would increase teacher attendance?

P-G: Yes

PD- Are you saying reducing the number of initiatives?

P-G: Yes, to find out what's really, to do some studies on what they are bringing in and see how have they made a difference before we even ask teachers to do them. But we do a lot of trial run things, then the next time we quit. Trial run and quit. And we don't have anything we can show that we've done with fidelity that has an ending point that we can really measure anything. And so teachers are just compounded with one thing after another thing after another thing and they get tired. And I don't know what to do next. I don't know what to do first. I don't know what to do second. What do I do that's the most important? And it becomes very stressful and it wears them down and so at that point they take off. They take off.

P-A: I agree totally with that on top of the regular ed requirements like for the special ed to like it has compounded and matter of fact when we have our PLCs, we talk about it among ourselves. And we said are we going to back off the activities that have been asked for us to accomplish each week and till this day we are still going to have another meeting with what has started. And I have to agree that I am personally stressed out and working with other teachers. So with that being said, yeah maybe we will have to look into the type of activities because most of the teachers are stressed out and so you know it's like Monday is like you don't want to see Monday because you're stressed out with work. You know and I'm just being honest. I try to come every day, but like I said a majority of us regular ed teachers, special ed teachers we are like there's too much work that's being required of us to do. And we see the results, like what she said. It's probably going to come up again because this has compounded.

P-H: It's kinda going off in a little bit in the sense of the ones of us that care. We're there, but we're also asked to do all of the committees so all of the people that are missing all these days they're not doing anything.

PD-What would you do to increase teacher attendance?

P-H: I would ask them not to come back. I mean that sounds ugly but you're not going to be there to work and you're not there for the kids why are you there? Maybe you just call them to the carpet and just ask them you know, hey you only came to work 80% of this school year. What do you care about? The question you ask is, "Why do you want to teach?" Because, these kids are not learning when you are not there.

P-B: I agree with some of the other things that have been said, bringing the work days back. I'm new to the district, so I'm not use to not having any work days. We had one every month. We also had an early release day every month for PD. So, definitely some work days because I mean teachers get burned out, coaches get burned out, administrators get burn out. I also like the idea of the stipend, but as H pointed out I like the percentage piece added in there with it.

P- I: I definitely think we need the work days back cause I'm like Participant C, I stay late just about every day making sure that I'm prepared for the next day, so those work days added in would give me that cushion that I need so that I don't feel stressed

PD- What do you think is happening with teachers who take leave without pay and what you do about it? They're out of sick days but they are still taking leave.

P-B: I have been that person before. And after you get to a certain point where the climate is so bad and the culture is so bad at your school you don't want to be there. So take my money out my check, I don't care.

PD- So you think that is what is happening, it may be the climate and culture at the school?

P-B: Yes, and burn out having to do all of these things and you don't have time to do it and teaching a set of children. It's just too much.

Participants E, J, G: I agree with Participant B, I agree, I agree

PD-Tell me specifically, what do you think is happening with these teachers when you say you agree, are you saying you agree with the part that because of the climate of the school?

P-E: I'm agreeing with Participant B response and to the school climate. It directly affects how the person feels about coming to work on a daily basis they may be out of days or as she stated take my money, but I need this mental break from this place. It's just wearing me down.

P-J: There are a lot of factors that I think that kinda turn people off from education. And while they may have that passion and that strong will to do what they can for the students, when you have to deal with so many other factors that a lot of times and I can't speak for you guys but a lot of times in the school day teaching was probably the furthest thing you did. Out of all the responsibility and task you had the whole day, because you had meetings after meetings and then sometimes after school they would throw a professional development on you. So it gets to the point where people feel their backs are against the walls and they have no, they've run out of options so it is take my money, I'm okay with that. Every day I just refuse to go back. When the morale gets low and they feel like they are giving more than they are receiving then people don't want to really be there.

P-G: I also think that teachers feeling a sense of worth sometimes. I think that they don't feel like they are valued that they work hard. They are just not valued and so if people don't see me as worthy, why am I going to break my neck to come to work every day. I think that people need to feel valued.

P-F: I agree with G because I have similar situations where some people who come to school, I mean the teachers who come to school every day work hard. They are not recognized and they are not given that kind of respect that kind of value they need or not to say that they need it. But I

have seen the teachers who miss they're still in the classroom the whole year or 6 months or 1 month they're still in the school, but they have higher recognition that the person that deserves it.

PD- So Participant J, are you saying that's a climate or F are you saying that's a climate issue or a cultural issue?

P- F: It's not just from the building, I've seen it from the top. I mean it has been everywhere.

PD- Okay so are you identifying it as a climate issue?

P-F: Yeah it's more like a climate issue.

P-B: I don't know if this would be a climate issue. But, I think just a nasty administrator, would make you take off work and say take my money. I've had the type of administrator before where she was hands on deck and if she said work on Saturday, everybody was like yay we will work on Saturday. And then you get the flip side that wants you to come to school on Monday and you are like and I got to deal with you. I rather stay home.

PD- Are you classifying that as a relationship?

P-B: We can put that under relationship.

P-C: I can vouch for that, I will say relationship and climate. I dealt with a principal that had their picks and therefore they showed favoritism to some and let them do whatever. And then for me, I was busting my behind trying to follow proper protocol and things like that and it's one little thing you did wrong, you would get chewed out, written up and things like that. But in the end, they ended up flipping on everybody else. It was causing people to get sick, me in particular, and several other people were getting sick. And I mean I would literally sit at home and cry because I didn't want to come to school, now I love teaching. I was ready to quit, that's how bad it was, when you don't have a good morale with your staff and you're coming in trying to be the big boss in charge and you're going to do what I say no matter what and how you feel.

You are not going to get anywhere like that. Everybody is going start turning against you and yes they're going to miss days out of school and when I was out and I had doctor's notes. They would call, "Why are you not here at work?" So you know, I'm not going to answer the phone. It's either you go and get it and you're at home. And they are still harassing you about not being at work so, it makes it really hard. Like I said, I'm passionate about what I do, but it really made me want to quit. So, if you don't have that relationship with your staff and it causes a bad taste in your mouth and you don't want to go to work and like you all said, take my money, take my job, I really don't care. So yeah all of those things play a factor as to if people come to school or just say forget it, just take everything and it's okay with me.

P-A: Like sometimes you know we target kids. You know like you say, it's difficult to come in the morning because your kids are rowdy, but like the major reason is that you don't have a good relationship with your supervisor and he doesn't know how to respect you. So you rather not come to work. You can take the children because they are kids, but the way your supervisor treats you. I'm not talking about my own experience, but a friend I know who was badly treated by a supervisor and then he ended up leaving the county.

PD- From my research I've looked at strategies in other Districts and these strategies have worked for other districts, but may not necessarily work for Halifax so, I am going to name some strategies and I am going to name them one at a time and I kind of want to get your feeling in terms of do you think that's a good strategy for Halifax and it's your opinion. It's your perception, so with the first one is to **increase teacher accountability by having absent teachers call principals as a management tool versus calling the call-in system and just leaving a voicemail. Should the teachers that are going to be absent call the principal?**

P-C: That is what we have to do at our school and I don't have a problem with that because we have an open line of communication with our Principal at my school and to me it's just a common courtesy to just to let them know. And the new system that they have going on and where we would have to put in for a sub and all that I think that's being kind of non- personal. And I don't know, I don't think that would be a good way to call in and handle things. I think we should continue to call the principal and let them know you are going to be absent because you may want to explain to them why and all those things. So, I think it would be better for us to continue that way.

PD-So you're saying that's a strategy that would work in Halifax to call your principal?

P-C: I think so.

P-E: I agree with the comments of what Participant Cs stated as well and we already have to do that at our school.

P-H: We already do it at my school and I don't have a problem with it.

P-F: We have the same system in our school. And there's no problem with it.

PD- So when you say there's no problem with it, I'm only left to assume that you are agreeing with this strategy.

P-F: C,E,H: yes.

P-F: It's also going to give the principal a chance to keep, lookout for those classes. Because you have substitutes and they don't know everything in there, so in turns of discipline it will be a better idea for them to know, I have to look out for those kind of buildings in that way.

P-B: Can I interject? If you are listing strategies can we go around and say I agree or disagree?

PD- It's up to the respondents.

P-A: We only have one strategy right, informing the principal?

PD- Well, no I have several, but that's the one that I'm on? So, the second strategy and again these are the strategies that I found in the research that have worked with other districts and it may or may not necessarily work. What I'm simply asking you to tell me is whether not you think that that's a good strategy for Halifax? So the second one is: **Link teacher attendance to their evaluation?**

P-E: I disagree with that.

P-C: F, A, G, I, H, J, B all disagree.

PD- So the next strategy is **increase teacher awareness of absentee problem with a public campaign** such as at Convocation make it known that this is an issue, so to increase their awareness.

P-F: No, Disagree with it.

P-A: I have a clarification, like make it a general term not singling out a person?

PD- Oh, no.

P-F: I do.

P-H: I disagree, because I don't think it really works because we still have the problem, when you said 11-12 and you told us the results for 12-13 it went up, so obviously it didn't work. It means its interesting knowledge, but it's not effective.

P-G: I think that it could work depending on how it's presented. Because when it was presented it was in a threatening manner. I felt that it was in a threatening manner and so, I feel like if you don't threaten people they may be more open to trying to follow the rules and the policies as much as they can.

P-E: I agree with Participant G. That all depends on how the information is delivered to the members of the staff.

P-H: I would be curious if they broke it down by school and did the results by schools versus by the whole district. And even including central office staff, I mean I know that they don't get substitutes, but I want to know how much they are out. If they're going to tell us how much we're out.

P-A: So you are agreeing that it needs to be done like that as a strategy. You're requesting know that everybody needs to be included.

P-H: I think that if it's district wide, I don't really think that it's effective. Hey we missed this many days, but if you say Scotland Neck Primary they were 75% and at Northwest they were 80% , you know it would be a good conversation for the administrators to have. What did you do differently? Versus what did I do?

P-J: Disagree

P-B: Agree

PD- **Do not extend the sick leave bank beyond the state statute of 20 days.** The state statute gives you 20 extended days but don't extend it beyond that. Is that a strategy that will work in Halifax?

P-H: I disagree. When I had children I went out, I missed over a 105 days, not my problem, it was a problem I had in my classroom, I was taken out, I had severe complications, I had children that went into the NICU for eight weeks and I don't think it's fair because if I hadn't a had leave that was donated me and my children would have been without insurance.

P-E: Disagree

P-F: C,J,A,I: Disagree

PD-**Utilize volunteers on field trips, rather than using additional teachers?**

P-J: F, H,I,G,A,C,B: Yes, agree

P-E: Disagree

PD- Schedule district professional development during non-instructional time? Would that strategy work in Halifax?

P-A: J,E,C,F,I,H: Disagree

P-B: G, Agree if it's a workday or 1/2 day

PD- Combine management tools with policy to meet expectations of the board of education know to all district teachers, the board adopts and implements a policy of high attendance expectations, a policy of expectations.

P-E: F,H,A,C,I: disagree

P-G: B,J agree

PD-That the principal participation includes reviewing monthly attendance printout with violators who take frequent short absences from work, the principal reviews that, the printout and then they conduct monthly conferences with the violators who take excessive Mondays and Fridays, they would provide an attendance warning letter during the conference indicating that the conference was held and the principal should receive calls directly for all absences no email, text, or voicemail and the principal writes letters of commendation to staff with excellent attendance.

P-B: C, E, J,F, G,I, H, A: agree

PD-North Carolina General Statute 115C(3.01.1) Should the Principal, indicating that the principal must provide approval for teachers who are absent just before or just after a holiday?

P-G: E, H,F,J,I,A: Disagree

P-B: C, Agree

PD- Exit Question: **Is there anything else you would like to say about increasing teacher availability?**

P-E: No

P-A: I figure whatever the plans that we have monetary support, respect from the administrators, and what kind of work load do we have to continue doing for the rest of the school year. I think we should have that started or be implemented so that we can have teacher availability.

P-G: I think that the only other thing that I would add is that often times when people come out of the classroom and they're decision makers, they don't consider some of the decisions they make for the people that are in the classrooms so, I think if they could not remove themselves so far from what's going on with the classroom teacher, just think about that and what if I was in that situation and how have things changed, since I was in that classroom setting.

P-I: Just keep or be mindful of circumstances, contributing factors, use can't just use one set of criteria to make decisions, when you are talking about teacher availability.

P-H: My thing is that stay more positive, call out the good, not just the bad. Recognized the people that are there, if that have to be a shout out at Davie.

P-C: I would say give everybody a fair chance and don't go in with a big head thinking you're going make everybody do exactly what you want them to do. Go in with an open mind, yet be firm and fair and the morale I think would stay where it needs to be and make it fun and then your teachers would want to come to school.

P-J: Just to the administrators, remember that life happens and there are some things that are outside of the control and many of those situations I'm sure people do not want to be in, especially when it's dealing with health, and family members, and things they would much rather come to work, so if you have people who are working and they are diligent in their aim for

student achievement and the success of the child to don't I guess don't shun them but if they are dedicated to what they do then they will come back and when they come back they will come back ten-fold.

P-G: Also, listen to your teachers. Just hear them and let them know that their thoughts and their opinions matter and that you don't have to be the one to make all the decisions. Because often time, we are asked through surveys different things, but the results you never hear from them. You never see any fruits of what happened in the survey, nothing changes, so it seems like it's a dictatorship. You know all the decisions are made from the top down. We're all adults. We have opinions we have thoughts and so I think that our opinions should matter and our input should matter especially if it's going to impact us.

PD- Ladies I think you for participating today. This was most engaging.

APPENDIX F: NOVICE TRANSCRIPTION

Novice Focus Group

Friday, March 6, 2015

PD=Policy Developer

P- = Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant E, Participant F,
Participant G, Participant H, Participant I, Participant J

PD- How important do you think it is to increase teacher awareness of the absentee problem?

P-H: I think it's very important to increase teacher awareness of the teacher absentee problem, I think it's important for teachers to know how big the problem is.

P-F: It's very important for teachers to know about the absenteeism, the teacher availability and absenteeism, sometimes I think teachers aren't aware of how much they impact students when they're absent students can't do what they need to do because they need their teacher there.

P-E: The impact the teacher has is consistency. Like I mentioned before, once your class or your students see how much time you sacrifice and you spend with them, especially when you have circumstances such as children. The time that you take away from your personal life that you invest into your students once they see it and recognize it they reciprocate that and they buy into your system and the level of success rate shoots through the roof.

PD-What types of incentives should the district provide for great teacher attendance?

P-B: I think that at the beginning of the year when they do the convocation, instead of pounding and harping on the absentees they should give out accolades for the teachers that who have good

attendance they should go that route and then say the bad. Be positive first and then say the negative.

P-D: Just buy small things such as advertising in your local newspaper. So therefore not only will the school know but parents and outside of the school would know.

P-C: I feel like just a small certificate every 20 days that we record attendance shows the impact that it has on student achievement and the recognition that you are appreciated and you are valued.

PD-Do you believe, teachers with four or less absences, is a reasonable number of absences to have in order for the district to host a recognition banquet in honor of these teachers?

P-H: Yes, I think four or less is grounds for applause and worth acknowledging.

P-F: I agree also four days, I mean that what's roughly one every quarter, just missing one day that should be enough, we do all have emergencies but I don't think most of us have four days of emergencies, you know most of the time. Oh course you know there is some extenuating circumstances, but four days should be enough.

P-C: Yes, I think four days is acknowledgeable for a teacher because we never know what personal circumstances may or may arise as long as we don't abuse that.

PD- Just as we established professional school goals at the beginning of the year to determine our preferred state. Should teachers establish attendance goals as well as part of this preferred state?

P-F: I would say teachers who that have had problems with attendance in the past probably if they've been notorious with being out 10 and 12 days a year. They probably want to work with their principal to set some new goals.

P-A: Yes, I think so. I think they should. Like she said if you've been missing prior before, then yes attendance should be your goal, but me personally, I really don't like missing days, but yeah I think so.

P-J: I think that would be a very important goal, due to the fact that we do have a lot of absentees with the teacher and maybe that would make them more focus on their atmosphere.

P-C: I just like to add that, when a substitute is in your classroom, they cannot bring the type of instruction that the classroom teacher can. So, yes, establishing attendance goals is at the beginning the year is crucial because there is a direct link between teacher attendance and student achievement.

P-B: I think that because we have such an issue or that they should focus more on their substitutes that come in; not that they can't teach but, they shouldn't be just a body in the room. A lot of them are just bodies in the room and that's dangerous. It's dangerous for the children, it's dangerous for us, very dangerous for them and I don't think they realize it. I think that they should do more training with the substitutes that they use because it is an issue and it's not going to change overnight. So when they bring them in, even if they just taught them transitions and the importance of maintaining order. The lessons we leave are intended for children learning. And so, therefore, they should be able to facilitate; not that they are going to be in here changing growth, but they should be able to facilitate for that day because it is an issue and it is constant. So, it's just like they are just there, sometimes it's just a body.

P-J: Just thinking outside the box, I agree with you participant B. I think when it comes to substitutes, they should be like trained if they are going to be out in the area. If they are going to be a substitute for English then they need to be trained in that. So when they go in they will

know what to teach. Beside like you saying being a body in the room and not have confrontation with the students that cause a lot of disruption in the class.

PD- When should principals begin conferencing with teachers who show patterns of sick leave abuse by excessively missing Mondays and/or Fridays?

P-J: I would say at that four day mark for both of them. Because when you see that pattern you need to bring them in so that they can be aware.

P-A: I agree with participant J.

P-C: I definitely agree. I think it should be addressed immediately. Because Standard 6 should always be a part of attendance, attendance is a part of Standard 6 as well as student achievement and student achievement, as soon as the principal notices this pattern is happening, we should address that and let that teacher know that at the end of the year this going to impact your student achievement so that they won't continue to abuse it, and misuse it.

P-E: Yes, I do. I concur with that four day mark, because in this district I think we are allotted 5 sick leave days and before you reach the fifth one, if you have that conference on the fourth one or after the fourth one to say hey, I see some patterns and I don't want you to go over I want you to be aware that you could possibly go over and if you go over too many your pay will be docked. You don't want to lose your bill money.

P-H: I agree with participant C and others, it should be addressed immediately I think that the four day mark is a good point to begin looking at that to begin addressing bringing that person in, that teacher in, and say well hey are you aware that you have taken four Mondays or however many just to, highlight the absenteeism.

P-E: Yeah, those are two of how you end the week and how you start the week, so probably on the second one I would say have a conference with the person.

P-B: I think that in that form when we fill it out maybe it should be a two sided form, where it has the dates you're missed and you can see. Us, as humans, you know that would stop you as you get on that list, when it starts to come down and you can see it. And you can see the pattern of Monday and Friday that will break you; that will break anybody. Go and take your paper and flip it over, I can't do that. I just did it three times. So that might help.

P-A: I want to piggy-back on Participant E. Like you said, on the second one. Like he said you don't want to wait to late, when it's already the fourth one. They need to know before it gets to the fourth one.

P-C: I just like to say that I know that in my particular building teachers have to sign-in. And so, once the principal notices that pattern happening, then immediate attention to it should again break that habit; however it would be counter-productive to ignore the issue.

PD- What is your response to this: **What is your response to the district providing a \$400 bonus for each teacher and then they reduce it by \$50 for every sick day taken?** What's your response to that?

P-H: Yes, I agree with that. I think any type of monetary incentive to come to work? We already have a monetary incentive that's our paycheck. But at the same time any extra money incentive I do believe that that would it would incentivize me I would want that \$400.

P-F: At our school we are lucky to have the SIG grant and I don't know if other schools are doing the thing that we are doing. It's like six things that you have to do, and one of them is you can only miss 2 1/2 days a semester. And I hear teachers say I'm not staying out and I'm not messing up because I might mess up in another area. Because one is like testing, evaluation and they know that attendance is one that they can have. It's not depending on student growth and things

like that. I think that that monetary thing would definitely work. And when you're losing \$50, I mean it doesn't sound like a lot but that's a water bill. I think that it would be a good incentive.

PD- You have any feelings about that D?

P-D: No

PD- A \$400 bonus and reduce it by \$50 for every day you're out sick. E any comment

P-E: I concur, you know \$400 an extra \$400 just for coming to work. I would definitely think twice about that morning I'd wake up and get up and go to work.

P-A: I'm with participant E, I will think twice about it. You feeling a little down and not wanting to go in and deal with the kids, especially the ones that call your name all day every day. I would think twice about it.

P-J: It will make you come.

PD- So do you agree that if the district did that you would agree with that?

P-J: Yes, I think that would make more people come to work the ones that stay out a lot. It will make them want to come. Give them the incentive.

PD- What would you do to increase teacher attendance?

P-E: Personally or cohesively as to where I work

P-E: Personally, try to be proactive, I know I have a two year old.

PD-Excuse me let me rephrase that: If you had to make decisions at your school about how to increase teacher attendance. What would you do to get everybody to come to work?

P-E: Well, I think that really plays into boosting the morale of the school. If I was with School Improvement, hey randomly give teachers a donut when they walking into the cafeteria in the morning for duty. Hey let's all wear these t-shirts on Fridays. If you don't wear your t-shirt, just know you're going to feel like you know the spoil apple in the bunch. Not necessarily a bad thing

but, little things like that whatever teacher comes early and stays late, give that person a golden apple to carry around. Hey, you're the super star teacher you spend a lot of time at work. Little things to boost the morale in there are several things I'm pretty sure everybody could pitch in to that idea. But I would try to boost the morale of the school. To have people want to come to school every day.

P-C: I think buy-in in the school also would boost the morale as well as encourage the teachers to come to school. I know that I am probably one of the older people here as far as education is concerned, but a lot of time it's not the money that's important, its feeling like what you are doing is important and what you're doing is valued and it's seen as being a good job sometimes just having a certificate to say good job. I see the work that you are doing makes a difference in this school. So having teacher buy-in into what you are doing so that they don't feel isolated would definitely help.

P-D: I would say something small as, far as in my school, 100% teacher attendance throughout the week, come Friday teachers can wear jeans and their sneakers. That's all I have to say.

P-J: I would think that have something for the teachers during their planning we could have like a spa day. You can come in and something relaxing during your planning. Maybe have your planning and they can come in and just relax, something like that.

P-H: I agree with participant E, I think morale is important, I also agree with Participant C being appreciated is important. Thinking as an administrator, I would definitely want my subordinates to be appreciated. I think that makes a big difference, sometimes it's not the certificate, sometimes it' just you did a great job. Thank you. I mean just a thank you.

P-F: I was going to say during staff meetings, you know staff meetings can be real heavy sometimes. You know, so maybe start off your meeting with okay all of your names are in a

raffle for being here all month and just do like a small token of appreciation. Something, just draw somebody's name out. One thing I know about teachers is that the average one loves free things. So, just a gift basket or anything just something small.

P-H: I agree with participant F. I think that as teachers we all know that if you highlight the positive students and the high achievers then the other ones do take notice. They may not immediately respond, but I think that same principle can be used in this case as well. You know like staff meetings, that participant F mention. You came and you had perfect attendance this month you are in the raffle for this. The other teachers may not immediately respond but they will take notice.

P-B: I'm glad we have these letters because if it was our names I won't say what I'm about to say. But I firmly believe that people come to work if it's a happy place. And we have to admit in Halifax it's not a happy place. I've taught in two other systems and there are at times, I'm not treated as a professional. I'm highly intelligent, I'm very smart and if you, just like anybody if you stroke my feathers I'm going to do even more, I'll fly higher. But you're constantly beat down, constantly ridiculed, you are constantly told what you are not doing. We all are low performing. Judge Manning is going to close some schools down; you haven't done this; look at the scores; we got the MAP test back you didn't do this; your CFA's don't look like this; what is this; what is that. We're never ever spoken to as professionals and there are times when the mask is on but then, especially after they come from the principal meetings and it comes back down. It trickles back down and it's just, it's so disheartening to me because I went to school to be an educator, my roommate went to school to be a respiratory therapist. I have another friend that's a botanist and when we meet up over the summer for our little vacation together, they have totally different outlooks on everything. The way they are treated, the way they feel, their jobs. Halifax

could actually call Google, which is supposed to be the happiest place on earth to work, and find out why is it the happiest place on earth to work . We all are here to foster the minds. A happy teacher makes a happy student and foster happy students. But if you are constantly being beat down or not spoken to as a professional and not treated as a professional, you know there are very few, far people in the county that treat you as professionals and speak to you as a professional. You know when I go to home to my parents or my grandparents, I feel like a superstar. “You know that's my baby, teaching. You know she’s a teacher.” They are so proud, but you come back to work and you walk through the door, immediately I know what percent I'm at. It's important to know it, but we should be coming to the table together as professionals. What can we do to do this, what can we do to do that? It's always a whipping. People can sugar coat it however they want it, you're constantly being whipped. That's why people take Fridays and Mondays because something may be due that Tuesday. If you have your PEPs that's due, it's kind of a whipping put on you to get the PEPs done first of all. I can't fill it out if I don't have the parents, I can't fill it out if the parent don't come to the meeting, if you haven't given me my scores back that you just tested the kids, how can I put the scores in to give it to you, how can you ask me for something that I can't get without your part, I haven't done my PEP because you haven't signed off on it. I'm on a list because you haven't done your part. People to be honest in defense of the ones that are taking those Mondays and Fridays Sometimes there's no way to avoid having to deal with something you don't want to deal with. It's just human nature, you know you're going to be confronted or something else is going to happen. We got this coming down the pipe. We just tested 2 weeks straight , who wants to MAP and then do 21st Century that's CFA. We're not teaching that's the real elephant in the room.

PD- What do you all think is happening with teachers who take leave without pay? And what would you do about it? They have exhausted all of their sick days and they're still taking leave, they are not getting paid, but they still take these days. What would you do about it? What do you think is happening first with these teachers and then what would you do about it?

P-E: If that's the case, if the teacher or faculty member is cognizant they are not getting paid because they are missing so many days, then clearly there's something personal going on with that person that prevents them from doing what they need to do. A lot of time in this profession, you really have to sacrifice, if you want to succeed. And sometimes things do come up when you have and other circumstances. Someone might have a child that suffers from autism that require a lot of the attention. However, their passion is teaching, but you got to take care of home. If you've missed more than the days, then you needed and you continue to miss those days, then you have to exhausted other options to see, I would think that it's something personal going on that may either be ready to share with their supervisor or may not be ready to share. I won't bring down the hammer on them, I would just try to pull them in and see what's going on and I can help you as an administrator to bring your attendance up.

P-C: I agree with you that yes definitely could be something personally going on within the home within the family but at the same time if it's not personal then I would think they have considered the fact that they're not putting students first and students should be put first.

P-A: Also I think it goes back to when they are hired. You know sometimes I feel like that people are getting hired in our county just to fill-in the position. And so they really don't care they just getting a paycheck that's how I feel.

P-F: I would agree too, a lot of things about work ethics. I've been in education for a while and I've seen a lot of change in people that are hired. You know, as he was saying, sometimes you've

had teachers that wouldn't miss a day for anything, it just was a group or a team working, now I see some and their like I just don't like teaching, I don't want to be a teacher. I don't know why I work here. So people actually say things like that. I'm just making it to the end of the year. So that's a lot of the problem, it's their work ethic or they are in this career that don't want to be here.

P-B: I think it goes back to if you don't have a happy environment they're not coming, if they don't want to be there so, you can get in a space where even though I've exhausted all of my days and I'm not getting paid but I don't want to put up with this, I'm not going to put up with this headache that I have hear, you coming down on me here, I got parents coming to the right. So, I would just bet to say if you are paying out that much money you have to look within somethings wrong within its not all personal and it's not all the person is just a lazy person. Nobody wants to come to an unhappy place.

P-D: To piggy-back on participant B, it all boils down to your supervisor being an effective leader in the beginning. If, a book I'm reading call the "21 laws of leadership" the law connection is lawyer employees, you never know what days they might miss, like if they need to come to you about anything, you would know your employer, they missing so many days, you like what's going on, what's going on.

PD- So in my research, I have found other districts who have this same problem and what I did was I lifted the strategies that they used in their district. Well you know every place is unique, so I'm going to name some strategies and you're just tell me yes or no. We're kind of coming to an end now. You're just tell me yes or no. Yes, I think that strategy will work in Halifax County, No, I don't think that strategy would work in Halifax County. So the first strategy is, **increase teacher accountability by having those teachers call their principals as a management tool**

rather than a call in system, talk to a live person, would that strategy work in Halifax? You can just tell me yes or no. If you think there's no right or wrong answers

Participants J, E, B,C,D,H: Yes

PD- Would this work in Halifax **link teacher attendance to their summative evaluation?**

Participants F,D,C: Yes

Participants E,B,A,J: No

P-H: I just want clarity, so are you asking that the absentees will count on the summative basically as a negative thing? Not going into the why's ?

PD- For those excessive absences.

P-H: Ok, no.

PD- Would this strategy work, increase **teacher awareness of the absentee problem with a public campaign?** And with a public campaign I mean such as someone might mention at convocation, letting everybody know that this is a problem, so increasing their awareness of the absentee problem. Will that work as a strategy?

Participant F, B: No

Participant C, A : Yes, with a solution to the problem

Participants J, D, H: Yes

P-E: Yes, with maybe a \$1200 incentive or something

PD- In this district, would this work? **Do not extend the sick leave bank beyond the state statute of 20 days.** You know the state of North Carolina if you've exhausted your sick leave days, the state of North Carolina will give you 20 extended days, so the district does not extend it beyond that 20 days would that work as a strategy? Just cap it at that 20 days that the state gives you and say that's it.

Participants B,E,A,C,D,J,H: No

PD- Would this work as a strategy? **When teachers are taken on field trips, utilize volunteers on field trips rather than using additional teachers in the building?** For example, Ms. Field trip is taking her class on a field trip, she needs some chaperones to go with her on the field trip, she goes down her hall and asks other teachers to come with her on the field trip, rather than utilizing volunteers, so should she utilize volunteers rather than additional teachers. Would you utilize volunteers rather than go find other teachers?

Participants E,A,F that's what we did in a previous district, I never heard of teachers being pulled out until I came here and went on a field trip, C,J,H,D: Yes

P-B: No

PD- **Schedule district professional development during non-instructional time.** What I mean by non-instructional time, you're not in front of students. So whether it's the summer, whether it's after school, any time you're not in the presence of a student, that's when the district should hold professional development? Would that work in Halifax county? Schedule professional development during non-instructional time?

Participants B,C,J,A,H,F: Yes

PD- **Combine management tools with policy to make expectations of the board of education known to all district teachers?**

Participant F, B, C, A, J, H, D, E: yes

PD- Now this one is kind of lengthy, this relates to your principal the action of your principals, Should the principal use this strategy: **The principal participation includes: reviewing monthly attendance printouts with violators who take frequent short absences from work, they conduct monthly conferences with those violators who take excessive Mondays and**

Fridays, the principal provide attendance warning letters during that conference, indicating the conference was held, the principal should receive calls directly for all absences, no email, text, or voicemail and the principal writes letters of commendation to those staff members with excellent attendance, would that strategy work in Halifax County?

Participants A,E,F,B,C,D,J,H: yes

PD- North Carolina has a general statute 115c-301.1 and what it says is that teachers who need to take off just before a holiday or just after a holiday that the principal has to approve that. Should the principal enforce that statute? Will that work in Halifax County?

The principal has to approve it. Should they enforce it?

Participant A, C, E, H, :yes

P-B: no

P-F: yes

P-A: if it's an emergency you got to go, they can force you.

PD- Here's our exit question, is there anything else that you would like to say about increasing teacher availability in Halifax County?

P-E: Yes, I think one of the biggest things that we talked about here in this focus was group today, was the morale, the morale of anything that you think of that was important, if you are a part of a basketball team, football team, you want the morale to be high, you want to be able to go somewhere and be proud of, I hoop for Halifax County, I teach for Halifax County. I want to go somewhere and have a Northwest shirt on and people say oh, I want to teach there you know so morale is very important for teacher attendance. You have to be happy where you work nobody wants to go to a sad house nor a sad work place.

P-B: I agree with everything participant E just said, it's important to be treated as professionals and not where a negative stigma of a score of my building, I think it's important that we even take professional developments on how we treat each other, that's the only way you're going to make people want to come and be there every day and not miss. If you're happy, busy, and assigned to activities with the children and you got to get your activity, that will help you come to work every day because you have a goal, a purpose. We all need to be acknowledged, praised, and we all need a purpose and goal of achieving the goal to push our children to reach our goal, it needs to be done professionally.

P-A: You know we all call ourselves professionals we should act accordingly, if we're professional then that means you should come to work, everyday if it's not an emergency.

P-C: Yes, I most definitely think working in a happy place would make you definitely a more focused and satisfied person, understand at the same time that that is extrinsically and we have to work intrinsically on our purpose of why we want to teach and why we want to be there and collegiality at the school level is definitely important.

PD- **Any other comments about increasing teacher availability?** Well, I will certainly thank you all for your honest responses and I would like to say all though some of you may know each other, please make sure our responses stay in this room. Please afford the participants in this room the opportunity for anonymity, okay, because as we all say we are all professionals and this is your honest opinion and this is your perception, but I need to be able to craft a document, when I go back to the board members, it needs to be your voice, it's my dissertation but it's your voice. Thank you all and please have a wonderful weekend.

APPENDIX G: DRAFT TEACHER ATTENDANCE EXPECTATION POLICY

Policy Code: Halifax County Board of Education Teacher Attendance Expectation Policy

The Leave Policy for Halifax County Schools is aligned to the NC Benefits Manual and to the NC General Statutes regarding teacher leave. All employees are encouraged to take leave in accordance with board policies and administrative procedures. With that said, the board maintains expectations of high teacher attendance even when exercising teacher leave privileges.

The board will adopt and implement a policy of high attendance expectations.

A. ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

It is the expectation of the Board that all employees adhere to the specific arrival and departure times communicated by their immediate supervisor or building level administrator.

B. TEACHERS COMMUNICATE ABSENCES

Teachers should make every effort to contact the building level administrator via personal communication for any impending absence (no voicemail, text, or email).

C. PUBLIC AWARENESS OF AVAILABILITY

The board will publicly make teachers aware of the lack of teacher availability during events such as convocation when short term substitute costs exceed \$430,000 the previous year .

D. FIELD TRIPS

Volunteers will be utilized on field trips where necessary rather than using additional teachers in the building whose instructional activities are non-related to the field trip.

E. ATTENDANCE GOALS

Building level administrators will ensure teacher attendance goals are developed for teachers with excessive undocumented absences during the prior year. Excessive undocumented absences would include absences in excess of 5 days per semester.

F. INCENTIVES

The district will recognize teachers with 8 or less yearly absences with certificates, gift cards, webpage shout outs, and/or other forms of recognition. Teachers with 4 or less yearly absences will be recognized during a yearly banquet. With district realized savings from the substitute line, the district should make every effort to provide a monetary stipend to teachers with excellent attendance equaling 2.5 days per semester or less.

G. SCHOOL LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS

A monthly attendance printout will be reviewed with violators who take frequent short absences from work. A conference will be held with teachers who show a pattern of missing discretionary days such as Mondays and/or Fridays but not exclusive to these two days. A warning letter with teacher and administrator signatures will be issued indicating the conference was held. Building level administrators will receive all calls directly for all impending absences. Building level administrators will write letters of commendation to staff with excellent attendance at a juncture conducive to promoting the morale in their building. Building level administrators will engage in activities to promote good-will in building the culture, climate, and morale in their building. Principals are encouraged whenever possible to use trade-off days with staff to provide on-site coverage rather than calling a substitute teacher and to communicate their willingness to assist the absent teacher.

Legal References: G.S.

Cross References: Halifax Leave policy 7510; Family and Medical Leave policy 7520; Military Leave policy 7530; Voluntary Shared Leave policy 7540; Absences Due to Inclement Weather policy 7550; NC Benefits Manual

Adopted:

