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Empty $eats

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ABSTRACT

This literature review explored one of the most profound problems that public schools deal with on a daily basis: Student truancy and the repercussions stemming from the absentees. Student absenteeism has become a growing problem in American schools and there doesn't seem to be a definitive answer to solving this crisis. It appears that school administrators aren't dealing with the issue in a successful manner and thereby are not getting to the root of the issue. These problems with attendance go deeper into the culture of the generation that is in schools today. Failed parenting styles and failed legislation is drowning public schools and putting many obstacles in their path to success. New truancy laws are being passed only put more pressure on the schools instead of inconveniencing the parents and letting them deal with the consequences of their truant child. This paper also explored what stop-gap measures schools are putting in place to deal with these attendance issues such as programs and incentives to battle this epidemic.

Keywords: Absenteeism, Dropout Prevention, School Administrators, Truancy, Truancy Laws.
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1.   Introduction

What exactly does truancy mean? According to Mallett (2015), it is "…the habitual, unexcused absences from school exceeding the maximum set by the state law" (p. 339). From this definition, one can ascertain truancy to take place on a regular basis, exceeds the number of days the state allows and is not considered a plausible reason for being absent from the classroom. Since this issue is not an elusive theory debated by intellects, politicians and administrators, why hasn't truancy been remedied or in the very least brought under control? What measures have been taken over the years to remedy this problem?

This topic has been the focus of school administrators, society, as well as the government. With truancy being a major concern, there have been many programs implemented over the years in an attempt to stem the rise of absenteeism, but apparently there has been no successful panacea to this pandemic.

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The one main entity that truancy affects is the most important of all: the truant student. According to Cabus and De Witte's study (2014), when students are truant, not only does the school and society lose out, but more importantly, the student is the most affected. "School Dropout prevention is expensive…Despite the high costs for dropout prevention, it has been argued that the (discounted) benefit for individuals and society are significantly higher" (Cabus and De Witte, p. 62, 2014). Unfortunately, an all too often the end result of habitual truancy can be witnessed as the individual ends up "…caught within the school-to-prison pipeline—a phenomenon of harsh and rigid discipline protocols—and a vortex that is difficult from which to escape (Mallett, p. 337, 2016).

The authors believe truancy needs more attention than it has received in the recent past. The public must be made aware of how serious truancy is; in what way it is affecting society and that a definitive remedy has yet to be discovered and implemented. This literature review will enhancement the current body of knowledge concerning the stop gap measures and incentives that have been put in place over the recent years in an attempt to stem truancy and get the students back into the classroom to fill those empty seats.

2. Methodology

This study examined many of the various genres of literature currently available to the researchers. The literature was reviewed for content pertinent to truancy, particular stop-gap measures utilized to prevent or slow down the rate of truancy in school systems around the United States, and success or failure rate of those measures. Lastly, the review concluded with the researcher's brief discussion of their findings.

3. What strategies are schools putting in place?

One basic tenet of student attendance is how schools receive money and schools are going to extremes to keep that attendance rate high, and in turn, the focus is on that, rather than instruction in the classroom. In essence, in an attempt to fix one issue, another one comes to the forefront to be dealt with. Neither problem is currently being successfully addressed.

Schools are developing strategies that implement parental involvement, to changing the whole focus of what causes absenteeism, and the creation of individual action plans that cater to the needs of the children one by one. Education is the way to a healthier, more meaningful and productive life, and that all starts with the importance of attendance in the early days of school.

Public school issues have been in the limelight for years, from low test scores to mass shootings as well as scandals dealing with teachers and students. Chronic absenteeism is a major underlying problem that isn't getting the attention it deserves. According a U.S. Department of Education 2016 report, six million students were absent in the 2013-2014 school year. That amounts to 14 percent of the student population or about 1 in 7 students who missed 15 days in one calendar year (Education, 2016). Schools are losing hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly, due to the low numbers of students who are just not coming to school for whatever reasons. This dilemma has administrators searching for ways to improve attendance to the point of considering bribe students to show up in school.

4. Parenting millennials

Parents and our communities are the backbones of our public schools, and the culture of how we live is also crucial to the growth of our youth. The sad part is that society is attempting to fix a problem that goes deeper than just missing classes and not showing up for school. For example, millennials (those individuals born between 1980 to 2000) have grown up in an age of technology dominating the world where children are growing up with iPads and iPhones in their hands. These children are the products of failed parenting strategies that have conditioned them to not care much about anything other than what they are seeing on the screen in front of their eyes (Mooney, 2017).

According to Mooney (2017), millennials have been praised by their parents for their actions more often than not and were told they could have anything they wanted in the world merely because they wanted it. These children have also grown up with never having to wait for something they can quickly look up on the web. "I'll just Google it" has become a common phase in today's world.

Society has watered down the competitive edge by providing first place, last place and participation trophies. In essence, they are receiving the same trophies for not the same results. This acclimatizes their thinking in a way that tells them they don't have to try, and they can still get what they want. Impatience and receiving participation trophies for coming in last is another reason why these children lack the ambition to try at anything. They have grown up with little reason to put forth much effort, and they sadly care more about social media and their cell phones than actual real-life achievements.

This 'millennial mindset' has been found to transition into school attendance. Their mindset is why try because I will still succeed and not have to work for it so what not skip class? Another issue contributing to absenteeism is school districts purposely promoting students to the next grade level because of their modifications or primarily because they are a discipline problem and the school doesn't want to have to deal with them another year. So instead of being held accountable for their actions, these children are again rewarded by moving up to the next grade. These failed parenting strategies only give them a false impression of how it's going to be in a high school setting, and sadly when they do get to 9th grade, they are already so far behind that frustration sets in, absenteeism becomes the norm and dropping out becomes the only option they see before they ever reach senior year.

However, that much love can blind a parent with ignorance and ultimately, they want to protect their child from adversity. Adversity builds character and parents are losing this key incentive when they attempt to protect their children from their own actions. Martin Luther King said it best, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Parents want to give their children everything they never had or be their friend. This is understandable, as parents want the best for their offspring and want to be liked by their child. In many cases, parents are doing more harm than good. Parent overcompensate their child for what they themselves didn't have as child and relegating their position of parenting in order to be a friend to their child. This manner of thinking often times, spills over into school attendance. Elementary schools are more than just babysitting drop-offs as most parents tend to think. When children miss those days of elementary school, it hinders their chances of reading at grade level in the future (Education, 2016).

Elementary Schools, as well as parents, have found loopholes in the system by doing what is called "drive-by attendance." This is when parents knowingly take their children to school any time before they count the Average Daily Attendance or "ADA." Allowing parents to bring kids late to school on a daily basis is why they don't have urgency when it comes to showing up on time to class. Parents in the recent past would be fined and sent to jail if found guilty of negligence when it came to the child's school attendance. With the new laws in place, parents can still be fined and sent to court, but a judge can dismiss a case if he/she feels it's in the best interest of justice (Langford, 2015). Schools can still send kids to court for truancy, but it would be an act of God to get any punishment for the child or the parents.

This is quite troubling, when these children get to the fifth grade and up, they will not be equipped to deal with the changes in how attendance is counted. Instead, of counting attendance once a day, they will now rely upon every period of the day. So, they can be filed on for the 1st stage only or any other term they choose to skip. These students and parents might get the notion that they have this window of time when they get in the upper grades and that is just not the case.

5.   Old laws versus new laws

With the lack of repercussions, the schools and the courts levy when punishing these truant students has contributed to absenteeism. The new truancy laws have done nothing but make it harder for schools to get any help from the courts. The old truancy laws in the state of Texas required that students see fines as punishment and if you were 17 years or older you could be held in contempt and sent to jail (Langford, 2015). This isn't the case anymore as schools now can't just take students to court if they are truant. The initial step is to first notify the parents of the consequences that could happen if they don't send their child to school every day. Before the court system can be brought into the picture, or even before pressure can be put on the parents, the school has to show they are doing everything they can to provide help to the student and parents first.

Another reason why schools are losing the power to keep students in school is the process in which absences are counted. Before the new laws came into effect, if a child missed three days in a four-

week period or 10 days in a six-month period, they were sent straight to court for review. With the new laws that were passed, schools have to have a face to face meeting with the parents. Then they will determine if the absences were due to situations like homeless, pregnant or foster care or in some cases the primary earner for the family (Langford, 2015). If this is the case, the child would be given counseling support, and basically, the truancy is waived.

Now let's say the student doesn't fall into any of these categories and they still don't comply with the school. Students can be fined, but the fine is only one-hundred dollar, and most of the time the child will be given community service or have their licenses revoked. This doesn't make much sense because they already aren't coming to school, so let's just take their licenses away so they can have another excuse to be truant. With the previous law, the parents would be fined and sent to jail if found guilty of negligence when it came to the child's attendance. Now, with the passing of the new truancy law, parents can still be fined and sent to court. However, a judge can dismiss the case if he/she feels it's in the best interest of justice (Langford, 2015). So basically, schools can still send kids to court for truancy, but it now takes a more rigorous route to get any form of punishment for the child or the parents.

These new truancy laws might look good on paper, but after further examination, they have given more leeway to these truant students and their parents. There are so many loopholes and hurdles to get through to have any student arrested and fined with the way the new laws are set up. Again, we need to stop allowing these students to get away with not facing up to their consequences because we are only setting themselves up for failure in the future.

6.   How are schools handling this crisis?

Schools are having to deal with this attendance epidemic; districts are trying to find ways to entice these students to come to school every day. Imagine going to school and seeing a brand- new car sitting in the middle of the classroom. You would be intrigued when you discover that it's an incentive for students to make it to school every day. Incentives are basically bribes given to the children to get them to produce. Other motives have been free dress day Fridays for students who go to the school where dress codes are in place.

Incentives are not the answer because it only tells the child that if he/she again just shows up he/she can have an opportunity to win something. Never mind if he/she passes their classes, as long as they are in their seat, the school gets money, and the student might win a car. Schools are losing their credibility and are focusing on the wrong ways to deal with attendance issues. Incentives are not the answer just like participation trophies weren't the answer back when these kids were in sports. Schools have been focusing on the wrong items to invest their time in when it comes to attendance. Average daily attendance (ADA) is nothing more than numbers that portray false evidence. For example, this year the Baltimore public school attendance rate is 93 percent (Nadworny, 2015). What is driving Baltimore's attendance rate of 93 percent? What secret have they discovered that the rest of the country has not? Is this because the school is doing their job and students are showing up? Upon further examination, it would be seen that 20 percent of students ranging from 1st – 5th grade have missed almost 20 days. That's 6,000 kids who lost 20 days of instruction and will be behind going into the next fiscal year (Nadworny, 2015). We have to do more regarding just using creative accounting techniques when it comes to these children attending school on a regular basis.

7.   One Texas school's answer to the attendance dilemma

A Texas school has gotten creative and implemented a new program with a new way of thinking to deal with the culture of the school. The school implemented a course called *Teen Leadership* and it targets what many students are faced with every day from bullying, peer pressure, social skills, and many other things that develop the child's self-awareness and builds their self-confidence. Often times, students might skip a class due to peer pressure, bullying or even anxiety. It's been two years since this course has been implemented and it has certainly had a positive impact on the student body. This is just one of the various ways schools are now tackling the attendance issues, by establishing a relationship with the students and helping them build their confidence. Other ways schools are attempting to find ways to connect with these students is through their hearts by creating an environment that's welcoming to not only the students but the parents as well.

8.   Other strategies

Attendance is dwindling, and schools are finally understanding that they can't just harshly react to the issue, as they have to come with an open mind and figure out the broader issues that are holding the child back according to the UCLA, Schools Center for Mental Health. Society has come to the realization that the stresses of life for some people can be severe and have cheated these children of their independence in a sense because we have been blaming attendance issue to laziness and didn't understand that it can be because kids don't have running water or electricity in their home. Or maybe their dad just beat up his/her mom before school, and he/she had to be the one who stopped it. Although this is an outrageous example, it's a reality for some children.

On a positive note, there is a new trend in public schools, where they are implementing strategies that are focusing on the character of the child, and instead of just reacting to the surface issues, they are looking more in-depth as to the why. There are some proven strategies that author Shaun Killian spoke about in one of her articles titled, "10 Proven Ways to Improve School Attendance." In this article, she talked about strategies that can be implemented to change the climate of the school and the mindset of these students (Killian, 2015). Some of these strategies talk first and foremost about creating a relationship and building trust with the students. Just like Flip Flipped says, "To capture a student's mind, you must first capture their hearts." By creating a connection with the students, it allows the educator to show that they care and are willing to help the student be the best they can be. Creating a good rapport with the students is what will make them feel important and accepted. Talking with your students outside of class and by genuinely showing that you care about them and how they deal with their everyday issues (Killian, 2015). What about the issue of failed parenting strategies and participation trophies that gave false impressions to the kids growing up? It has been rediscovered that sports in general, are essential and if revamped, the idea of real competition in the younger ages, there will be children who can deal with adversity and know that sometimes their best isn't good enough. Connecting to a sport in school can bring a sense of pride to the child. Students who are connected to a classroom through an extracurricular activity miss less school (Killian, 2015).

The Adventure Program is another new program that gets the child out of the house with no technology involved. This program places students in areas where they will connect with nature and form real friendships through trust, by rock climbing, rafting and other games geared towards team building. By participating in these challenging adventures, they are testing themselves and busting through any limitations that have manifested through fear (Mooney, 2017).

In today's world, life changes at record speeds. For example, cars from the 1950s look much different from vehicles of today and flip phones have, for the most part, gone the way of the dinosaur. However, we still try to engage our students with the same assembly line teaching methods that were implemented years ago. Times have changed, and students have changed in many ways. With this thought in mind, one can deduce that changes in the way the curriculum is delivered has to change as well. Why not revamp our teaching methods and not teach every student the same way, but create individual growth plans that strengthen not only the students but the teachers? The emphasis here is on delivery system changes and not curriculum changes. This new delivery of content is called *Adjunct Questioning* (Killian, 2015). Basically, this method requires the student to show their mastery of the material before moving on to the next part of the lesson. For this method to be effective, one must allow the students time to think of a solution to the questions.

All these strategies can show promise, but the schools can spend many hours and millions of dollars on solutions. An important piece of these plans requires the support of parents. Educators need to spend time with the parents and explain the value of education. For example, parents need to know that when a child starts elementary school and attends class 85-100% of the time, that child will have a far better chance of reading at grade level and to also pass the standardized tests for their respective grade level. It's imperative that these students and their parents be taught the importance of a quality education and that starts with just showing up every day and put forth their best effort to each day and make every minute count.

9.   Conclusion

School attendance is the vehicle that will give a child the appreciation of what school can offer. Education is the vehicle that will take them anywhere they want to go in life and sadly our generation of

students have fallen short of a quality one. Research has proven that strategies focusing on the individuality of each student's specific needs is a far more effective strategy than grouping students together and attempting to fix everyone with the same solutions (UCLA, Schools Center for Mental Health, nd). To deal with the issues of absenteeism, schools have to spend the time and focus on "what's wrong with that student." Individuality is promoted as the way to go these days, but this theory isn't utilized or given the same priority in our school systems where the students are concerned.

Often times, one hears adults lament "Man, these kids today have changed!" Sadly, these researchers have to disagree with this statement, as it is not the children who have necessarily changed, but the adults are the ones who have failed to change with the times. The education system has let down the youth in America. It takes a village to raise the attendance and we have to again raise our standards as a civilization (UCLA, Schools Center for Mental Health, nd).

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