ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: STRENGTHENING HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION AND ATTENDANCE: EXPLORING MULTI-LEVEL RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

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Chronic absenteeism is a growing problem in the United States and is associated with poor educational and health outcomes including high school dropout, criminal justice system involvement, chronic disease, mental health concerns and early death. African American children in low income, urban areas are at elevated risk for chronic absenteeism based on factors at all levels of the social ecological model including mental health concerns, systemic and individual racism, parental, peer, and teacher relationships, school and neighborhood climate. The transition to high school is a critical moment when absenteeism rates increase dramatically.

This study used a mixed method approach to better understand chronic absenteeism in urban high school settings. A survey gathered data from a cohort of ninth

grade students transitioning into high school and regression analysis was used to identify risk and protective factors that may explain chronic absenteeism (n=216). A total of 30 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with five chronically absent and five regularly attending ninth grade students from a predominately Black school. Critical Race Theory was used as an analytic lens for the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Participants discussed challenges and opportunities that arise when transitioning to high school including finding a friend group, coping with anxiety, planning for the future, navigating a new school environment and maintaining ties to rapidly changing communities. Findings suggest that African American students possess many strengths including skilled navigation of social situations, adaptive coping strategies for emotional distress, creating a team of adults and peers for motivation and support, aspirational planning for future goals, and vocal resistance to oppression that can be further developed or cultivated to support positive attendance behaviors and contend with the impact of systemic racism that can sometimes be disregarded in predominately Black schools. Implications include the increased need for student voice in decision making processes, enhanced curriculum that addresses social emotional learning and gives students agency in determining individualized learning plans, school discipline reform, and community engagement. These findings are critical to transforming dominant narratives about chronic absenteeism in low income, African-American communities and providing feasible recommendations to improve educational and health outcomes.

STRENGTHENING HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION AND ATTENDANCE: EXPLORING MULTI-LEVEL RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to every current, former, and future student that has felt even for a moment that your voice wasn't being heard. Your voice is important and deserves to not only be heard, but considered as an expert opinion. The goal of this study is to amplify your voices as we reimagine the ways in which schools can be positive, safe, welcoming environments for all students but especially those who have been marginalized based on their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, neighborhood, sexual orientation, perceived ability, or whatever aspect of your identity people in power have used to try and make you feel less than. Thank you for persevering and I am grateful for the opportunity to work alongside you in the journey towards transformational change.

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Finally, to all of my students, current and former, from 4th grade to undergraduate, please know that you've left an indelible mark on my life and I carry all of your stories and our memories with me everywhere I go. You continue to inspire and motivate me every day and I am so thankful for each and every one of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing over 10% of school days or approximately 18 days of school, has reached alarming rates in the United States and must be addressed through collaborative public health and education initiatives. During the 2015-2016 school year, 7.3 million children in the US missed over three weeks of school, up from 6.8 million students in the 2013-2014 school year (Bauer, Liu, Whitmore, Schazenbach, & Shambaugh, 2018). Low income, African American children and adolescents in urban areas represent a disproportionate share of chronically absent students contributing to disparities in achievement and racial health disparities (Attendance Works & Everyone Graduates Center, 2016; Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011). Missed instruction time can lead to academic difficulties, poor school performance, poor academic achievement, and disruptive behaviors that have a devastating impact on students' life outcomes (Kearney, 2016). Chronic absenteeism is associated with poor educational and health outcomes later in life including high school dropout, limited job opportunities, poverty, involvement with the criminal justice system, increased high risk sexual and alcohol/drug use behaviors, higher levels of chronic disease, mental health concerns and early death (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang, 2014; Allison et al., 2019; Chu, Guarino, Mele, O'Connell, & Coto, 2019; Stempel, Cox-Martin, Bronsert, Dickinson, & Allison, 2017). Chronic absenteeism has become a national education priority, but this complex problem requires additional research conducted through a public health lens in order to address the social determinants of health that drive these growing rates.

Research studies in public health, education, and the social sciences have identified numerous factors associated with chronic absenteeism including student physical and mental health, living in urban areas, poverty, adverse childhood experiences, student mobility, housing instability, parent poor mental health or substance use, school climate, and weak school ties among others (Van Eck, Johnson, Bettencourt, & Johnson, 2017; Kearney, 2016; Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014). These risk factors are often described singularly in their effects on dropout risk or as part of composite risk assessments. Previous attempts to group absenteeism factors have largely followed the convention of four broad categories: (1) misconceptions meaning students are unaware of the severity or consequences of their absenteeism, (2) barriers meaning students cannot attend school, (3) aversion meaning students will not attend school, and (4) disengagement meaning students do not feel connected and thus do not attend school (Chang, 2014). Beyond the subjectivity in the distinctions between these categories, they are heavily intertwined, and many students in low-income settings may be simultaneously experiencing numerous factors. Even though these categories are not mutually exclusive, the conceptualization of the school attendance problems as school refusal based on underlying anxiety or emotional concerns as opposed to truancy defined by a "willful" missing of school to engage in more appealing activities greatly influences the way students are viewed and how key stakeholders intervene to reduce absenteeism. Internationally, many research studies have explored how best to differentiate between truancy, school refusal, school phobia, and school withdrawal. However, little research has examined how these different factors across the socioecological framework may work synergistically to increase student risk of absenteeism among African American

students. Severe deprivation and syndemics are two anthropological frameworks that specifically address the importance of exploring the ways that different risk factors interact and exponentially increase risk of negative life outcomes. Severe deprivation is defined as acute, "categorized by a scarcity of critical resources and material hardship," compounded, including the "clustering of different kinds of disadvantage across multiple dimensions (psychological, social, material) and institutions (work, family, prison)," and persistent, described as "enduring disadvantage impervious to change" for long stretches, at specific critical moments within one's life course, or generationally and encourages researchers to strive for complex solutions to complex problems (Desmond, 2015, pp 3-4). Syndemics is defined as "two or more epidemics intersecting synergistically and contributing to excess burden of disease" (Singer and Clair, 2003) and recognizes that simultaneous forms of disadvantage such as food insecurity, housing insecurity, and inadequate schooling not only overlap but the combination can worsen outcomes. More research is needed to understand if there are particular combinations of factors that exponentially increase a student's risk of absenteeism and eventual dropout, what specific profiles exist that would benefit most from rigorous, targeted intervention, and how race affects these profiles in a heavily segregated United States public school context.

Another critical component missing in current research on chronic absenteeism are student voices. Few studies have surveyed children and adolescents to collect data on the reasons for absenteeism and what students do when not in school, but even these studies have provided children and adolescents with limited opportunities to explain and contextualize the phenomenon of chronic absenteeism in their own words (Get Schooled, 2012). When planning interventions on an individual level, detailed examination of the

child's perspective is deemed necessary for gaining insight into what solutions would best aid that individual student (Elliott & Place, 2019). Students, both those who are chronically absent and those who attend school regularly, are experiencing firsthand the ways these risk and protective factors interact and should be regarded as experts on their own lived realities. In particular, when emphasizing examination of the role of race and attempting to critique the current existing narrative around education and categorizing school refusal and truancy using Critical Race Theory, storytelling and the narratives of those dealing with the impact of living in a racialized society are critical to any research inquiry. Critical Race Theory asserts that compelling stories from members of the priority population are not only legitimate tools for knowledge construction but are essential to provide the necessary context for understanding phenomena such as chronic absenteeism and deconstructing the oppressive structures and discourses of classic liberal perspectives in education. As researchers and policy makers continue to make assumptions and rely solely on quantitative data or data reported secondhand from teachers and parents, the disconnect between the solutions to the growing chronic absenteeism problem and the students whom these initiatives are supposed to impact will continue to grow.

Research Question

This dissertation work focuses on the following research question:

How do individual, interpersonal, school, and neighborhood factors come together to impact school attendance and chronic absenteeism during the transition from middle school to high school? Factors of interest include attitudes, values, beliefs, mental health, conceptualization of race and racism, and external influences, such as parental

involvement, peer interaction, teacher relationships, and school and neighborhood climate.

Study Design

A concurrent transformative mixed method research study design combines quantitative and qualitative data collection to address this research question and results will be used to advocate for social change through interventions at every level of the socioecological model. The quantitative component uses multiple regression analysis to identify factors that predict chronic absenteeism among a cohort of DC 9th graders and examines the strength of individual, interpersonal, school, and neighborhood factors' differential contribution to explaining chronic absenteeism. The qualitative component uses individual interviews of rising 9th graders to tell the stories of chronically absent and regularly attending 9th graders and through thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, examines how different risk and protective factors including cultural wealth and connections to structural and societal forces affect school attendance. Due to the varied and complex nature of multiple risk factors, both quantitative and qualitative inquiry is necessary to establish how factors interact and the mechanisms through which they affect chronic absenteeism. The concurrent transformative mixed method design specifically allows researchers to use a social justice theory to frame data collection, analysis, and interpretation within marginalized communities and ultimately lead to a call for action (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This design approach was chosen to incorporate Critical Race Theory into the framing of chronic absenteeism among low income, African American populations and to inform interventions that spur social change through reduction of absenteeism.

Justification

Geographic Location

Washington, DC is a critical urban region in which chronic absenteeism can be studied because of the combination of socioecological factors facing a largely African American population of students from low income families. In the 2016-2017 school year, 27.3% of Washington DC students were chronically absent as compared to the national estimated average of 16% of the student population (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2017). In the 2016-2017 school year in Washington DC, just under 20% of middle school students were chronically absent whereas over 50% of high school students were chronically absent (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2017). School choice in Washington DC also means that students attend a variety of public, charter, and private schools that will allow for varied study of how school climate affects absenteeism. Finally, schools in Washington, DC remain heavily segregated with over 75% of Black students attending predominately Black schools and much of the diversity based on ethnicity being provided by Hispanic/ Latino peers (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2017). Aside from serving a predominately African American population (68.1% of students identify as non-Hispanic African American/ Black), District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) also serve many students (80.3%) categorized as economically disadvantaged based on family income and eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2017). Many DC schools fit the profile of high poverty and are comprised of mostly Black or Hispanic students. High-poverty and mostly Black or Hispanic schools (H/PBH schools), have grown significantly over the past two decades across the nation.

The number of students attending H/PBH schools has doubled in this time period to 8.4 million students, approximately 17% of all K-12 public school students nationally (US Government Accountability Office, 2016). Students attending these schools are retained, suspended, and expelled at disproportionately high rates which are all risk factors for chronic absenteeism.

Time/Age

The transition from middle school to high school is a critical time point to study chronic absenteeism. Rates of absenteeism typically increase dramatically as students have more autonomy in getting themselves to school during high school and school attendance behaviors are typically established by the end of ninth grade (Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore, & De La Torre, 2014). Specifically, attendance during the first semester of ninth grade is a strong predictor of future graduation rates (Allensworth et al., 2014). Following students for the first semester of ninth grade provided important preliminary data as chronic absenteeism in the first month of school strongly predicts chronic absenteeism for the entire year (Olson, 2014). Students who miss two to four days in the first month of school are 5 times as likely as those who missed fewer than two days to be chronically absent at the end of the school year (Olson, 2014). Students who miss more than four days in the first month of school are between 12 and 16 times as likely as those who missed fewer than two days to be chronically absent at the end of the school year (Olson, 2014; Attendance Works & Everyone Graduates Center, 2016).

Individual Risk Factors

Chronic health conditions such as asthma and diabetes along with dental, vision, and hearing problems, are associated with chronic absenteeism (Baltimore Education

Research Consortium, 2011). Students may miss school for an "excused" reason or lack of access to adequate health care; however, the missed days still contribute to chronic absenteeism and amount to critical missed instruction time. Longitudinal studies have shown associations between chronic absenteeism and Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), conduct disorders or depressive symptoms (Allison et al., 2019). Anxiety disorders have also been shown to contribute to school refusal and absenteeism but more research is needed on the impact of anxiety on absenteeism among African American youth. Characteristics such as race, grade point average (GPA), overage, multiple ACEs, substance use behaviors and individual attitudes toward school are also factors associated with chronic absenteeism (Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011)

Interpersonal Risk Factors

Social network analysis revealed that students often coordinate absences with their peers and students are 4.7 times more likely to skip class with a specific student identified as their "closest or "strongest" peer connection as compared to another peer (Bennett & Bergman, 2018). Secondary data analysis of the National Health Interview Survey revealed that parental depressive symptoms were adversely related to school attendance (Guevara, Mandell, Danagoulian, Reyner, & Pati, 2013). More research into the mechanism through which parent mental health affects student attendance is necessary. Insufficient parent support, family responsibilities such as babysitting other siblings, family education, unemployment, victimization including bullying and perceived teacher targeting can also contribute to chronic absenteeism (Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011).

School-Related Risk Factors

School related factors that contribute to school climate and student's feelings about school can also increase risk for chronic absenteeism. Specifically, teacher conflict, perceived lack of safety, inadequate school programming or engaging instruction, ineffective school discipline, lack of school ties, limited school resources, and the perception of physical learning environment can contribute to absenteeism (Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011; Van Eck, Johnson, Bettencourt, & Johnson, 2017).

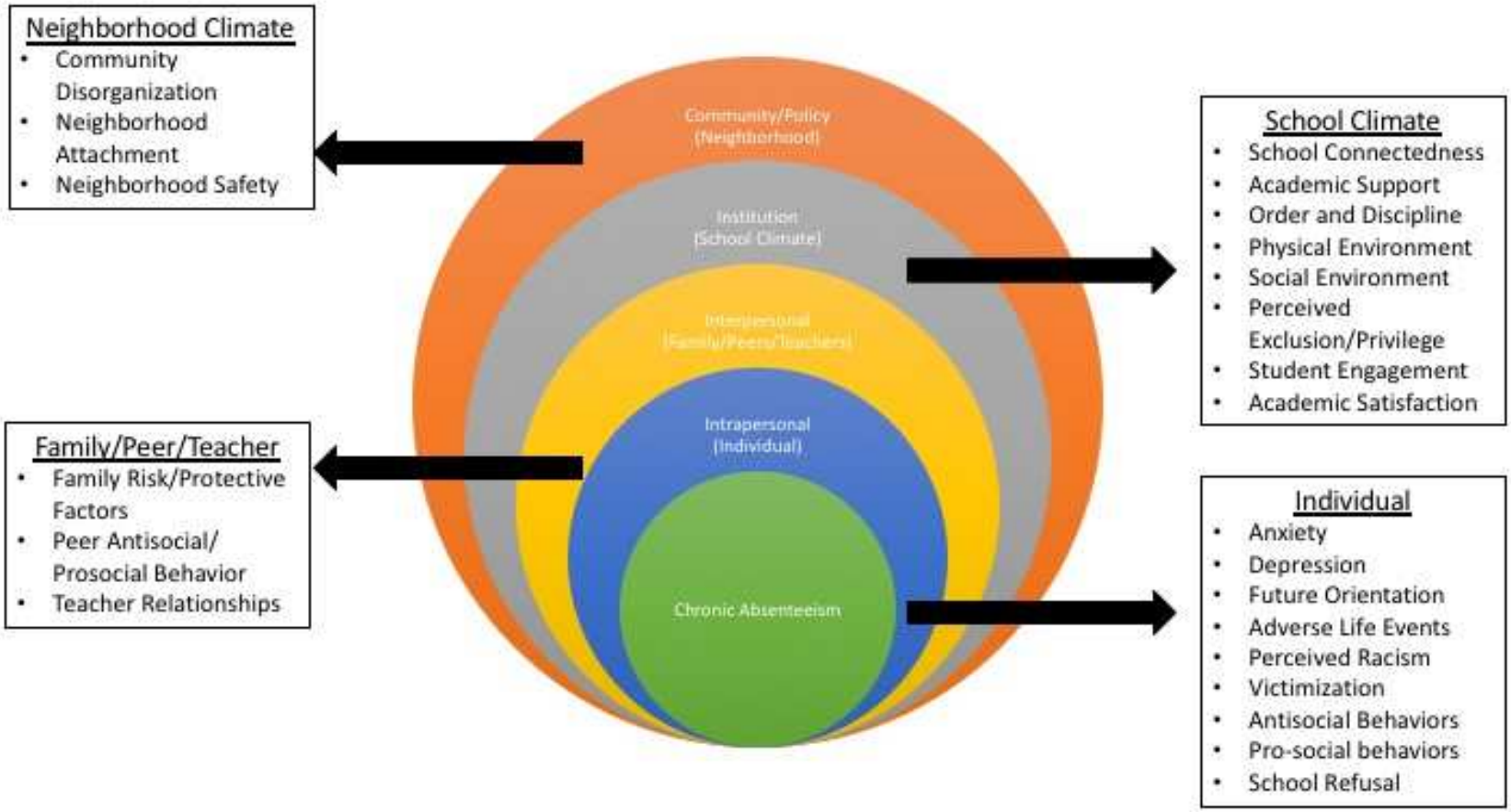
Neighborhood Risk Factors

Exposure to neighborhood violence, housing and food insecurity, lack of transportation, and unsafe routes to school can contribute to chronic absenteeism (Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011). Students living in low income, urban areas are more than three times as likely to be chronically absent than students not living in economically disadvantaged areas (Attendance Works & Everyone Graduates Center, 2016).

Figure 1 describes the variables of interest for this research study and where they fit into the socioecological model.

Figure 1

Chronic Absenteeism Conceptual Model



Hypotheses

This dissertation tests individual, interpersonal, school and neighborhood factors as predictors of absenteeism and to what extent factors grouped at each socioecological level contribute to absenteeism risk. In parallel qualitative analyses, these multilevel factors affecting attendance were explored through in-depth qualitative interviews with students and subsequent thematic analysis.

Individual Level Hypotheses

The following hypotheses test individual factors that are expected to predict absenteeism. Individual factors focus on mental health, behaviors, perceived racism, and school refusal behaviors. These individual-level hypotheses are:

Students with elevated anxious mood are more likely to be chronically absent than students with low anxiety.

Students who report high levels of school refusal behaviors are more likely to be chronically absent than students who report low levels of school refusal behaviors.

Students who report engaging in "antisocial" behaviors (substance use, criminal or delinquent behaviors, etc.) are more likely to be chronically absent than those who do not report engaging in antisocial behaviors.

Students who report high exposure to racism are more likely to be chronically absent than students who do not report high exposure to racism.

Interpersonal Level Hypotheses

The following hypotheses test interpersonal factors that are expected to predict absenteeism. Interpersonal factors focus on parent/child relationships, teacher/student relationships, and peer victimization and peer group influence. These interpersonal-level hypotheses are:

Students who report close ties to peers engaging in antisocial behaviors (substance use, criminal or delinquent behaviors) are more likely to be chronically absent than students who do not report close ties to peers engaging in antisocial behaviors.

Students who report high levels of parental involvement are less likely to be chronically absent than students who report low levels of parental involvement.

Students who report higher levels of family conflict are more likely to be chronically absent than students who report low levels of family conflict.

Students who report higher levels of positive student-teacher relationships are less likely to be chronically absent than students who report lower levels of positive student-teacher relationships.

Students who report higher levels of peer victimization are more likely to be chronically absent than student who report lower levels of peer victimization.

School Level Hypotheses

The following hypotheses test school climate factors that are expected to predict absenteeism. School factors focus on perceived school connectedness, academic support, order, discipline, and exclusion practices, academic satisfaction, opportunities for social engagement, and physical/social environment. These school-level hypotheses are:

Students who report attending high schools they perceive to have negative school climates are more likely to be chronically absent than students who report attending schools they perceive to have moderate or positive school climates.

Neighborhood Level Hypotheses

The following hypotheses test neighborhood climate factors that are expected to predict absenteeism. Neighborhood factors focus on community disorganization, neighborhood attachment, transportation, exposure to community violence and opportunities for prosocial environment. These neighborhood-level hypotheses are:

Students who report living in neighborhoods they perceive to have negative climates are more likely to be chronically absent than students who report living in neighborhoods they perceive to have moderate or positive climates.

Students who report high exposure to community violence are more likely to be chronically absent than students who do not report high exposure to community violence.

Students who report transportation challenges (long routes, unsafe routes, inconsistent public transportation, lack of transportation) are more likely to be chronically absent than students who do not report transportation challenges.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chronic absenteeism is a multi-faceted issue with many underlying causes that were explored through this research study. A review of the current literature is included to put the research study into the context of the larger educational landscape, analyze and build off of already identified risk and protective factors, identify gaps in the literature that must be addressed in order to move the field forward and initiate the transformational change this research study endeavors to support. First, this review articulates the overarching theories and frameworks that ground this research. These frameworks serve as the theoretical underpinnings for potential mechanisms between risk and protective factors and attendance. Then this review examines the current literature on the research methods, multiple regression analysis and qualitative methods. This review also explores the current inconsistencies in the ways in which chronic absenteeism is conceptualized, critiques of the current discourse on absenteeism, the risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism and interventions that have been used to address this issue and get students to attend school regularly.

Overarching Theories/ Frameworks

Social Ecological Model

The Social Ecological Model was first introduced in 1979 by Bronfenbrenner's work on ecological systems theory as a way to organize and analyze the multi-level factors that affect children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory identified five ecological systems, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem which interact and impact development of children and adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This theory has been updated and the

social ecological framework has been applied to school absenteeism and other issues related to educational attainment. The levels have evolved to incorporate more agency on the part of the individual and the corresponding five levels are individual//intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational/institutional, community, and policy (Max, Sedivy, & Garrido, 2015; McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988).

The individual/intrapersonal level incorporates characteristics that influence behavior such as skills, knowledge, attitudes, motivation and identity(McLeroy et al., 1988). When applied to chronic absenteeism this includes individual factors such as mental health, values about education and attendance, and attitudes towards school which can all affect a student's attendance behaviors. The interpersonal level describes how relationships with others impact an individual's social identity and in turn affects their behaviors (McLeroy et al., 1988). With respect to chronic absenteeism, this includes family environment, parental support, peer influence, teacher-student relationships and cultural characteristics that shape student beliefs about attendance and ultimately reinforce their attendance behaviors. The organizational/ institutional level includes the ways in which the rules and regulation of different institutions can impact behavior (McLeroy et al., 1988). Specifically, school related factors including school discipline and incentive policies and overall school climate can impact a student's decision to attend school regularly. The community level encompasses the availability of resources as well as the social and cultural norms that impact behaviors (McLeroy et al., 1988). For chronic absenteeism, this includes transportation, neighborhood safety, housing instability and other structural racism and poverty related factors that can impact school attendance. Finally, the policy level addresses local, state, and federal policies that impact health

behaviors (McLeroy et al., 1988). This includes the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the national replacement of No Child Left Behind policy, which has prompted states, including DC, to adopt new systems to track and monitor student attendance as well as local policies and laws on truancy, child neglect, and consequences for problematic absenteeism. While the social ecological model is not explicitly discussed in all research pertaining to chronic absenteeism, an ecological framework is often applied throughout the discourse when examining risk factors for absenteeism (Zuel, LaLiberte, & Sugrue, 2016).

Syndemics

Syndemics was first developed in the medical anthropology field and describes a population level clustering of social and health problems such as mental health conditions and poverty, stress, or structural violence (Singer, Bulled, Ostrach, & Mendenhall, 2017; Singer & Clair, 2003). Criteria of a syndemic include (1) multiple diseases of health condition in a specific population, (2) social factors creating the conditions in which the diseases or health conditions cluster, and (3) clustering results in adverse disease interaction, biological, social or behavioral, and increasing the health burden of the affected population (Singer et al., 2017; Singer & Clair, 2003).

Syndemics has largely been applied to HIV risk in vulnerable populations and while researchers recognize the importance of examining the co-occurrence of psychosocial and structural problems that may contribute to excess burden experience by vulnerable populations, there has been some debate about the most analytically sound approach to effectively measure syndemics(Tsai & Venkataramani, 2016). Researchers have begun eschewing the most common methods for assessing syndemics and exploring

the use of latent class analysis to identify profiles of risk and resilience HIV risk, substance use, and HIV treatment adherence (Bourey, Stephenson, & Bautista-Arredondo, 2018; Cleland, Lanza, Vasilenko, & Gwadz, 2017; Turpin et al., 2019).

While there was no research found explicitly mentioning syndemics in the absenteeism literature, there were studies of co-morbid diseases and conditions and the effects that comorbidity can have on absenteeism outcomes (Ingul, Klöckner, Silverman, & Nordahl, 2012). Different forms of anxiety, such as social anxiety, separation anxiety, avoidance, and agoraphobia, can interact and increase risk of absenteeism (Bagnell, 2011; Becker, Jensen-Doss, Kendall, Birmaher, & Ginsburg, 2016; Lai, Kelley, Harrison, Thompson, & Self-Brown, 2015; Melton, Croarkin, Strawn, & McClintock, 2016). Symptoms of anxiety and depression often overlap in children and are seen at higher rates in students who are chronically absent (Melton et al., 2016). Anxiety disorders and conduct disorders or problem behaviors can also interact to increase absenteeism among children and adolescents (Kearney, 2008; Orpinas & Dube, 2009). Significant gains in attendance have been found in in-patient therapy settings that have used Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to reduce comorbid mental health problems (Maynard et al., 2018). It is clear that numerous health and social conditions contribute to the excessive burden of chronic absenteeism in urban, African American school settings and the use of the syndemics framework provides some anthropological and epidemiological validity to the discourse on absenteeism.

Severe Deprivation

Severe deprivation is a newer anthropological paradigm that is responsive to the ways in which the nature of poverty has changed in recent years and challenges

researchers across disciplines to better conceptualize poverty beyond income and including the ways in which material scarcity and psychological turmoil are experienced (Desmond, 2015). Severe deprivation is comprised of three components of economic hardship: (1) acute hardship categorized by a scarcity of material resources critical for survival, (2) compounded categorized by the clustering of disadvantage across institutions and psychological, social, and material dimensions, (3) and persistent, lasting for long stretches of time, beginning in early life and setting individuals towards certain negative trajectories, and generational, passed from parents (Desmond, 2015). The lens of severe deprivation has important policy implications, most importantly that there is no "silver bullet" solution for complex problems like chronic absenteeism and increasing support for one initiative at the expense of other necessary supports will not bring about visionary change (Desmond, 2015).

Severe deprivation has not been used specifically to study chronic absenteeism, but there has been qualitative research conducted with those living in poverty and dealing with similar adversities as members of the priority population. People living in low income settings have often been the subjects of qualitative fieldwork detailing adverse childhood experiences including homelessness and abuse (Desmond & Western, 2018). More recently these works have included mental and physical illness, the effects of mass incarceration including parental incarceration, and kinship and disposable ties formed navigate urban poverty and ultimately survival (Sykes & Pettit, 2015; Desmond, 2012; Desmond & Western, 2018; Hagan & Foster, 2015). Most importantly, all of these works have attempted to document the imprints poverty can leave on the minds and bodies of individuals without reducing people to their hardships (Desmond & Western, 2018).

Equal weight must be given to the pain and exhaustion, as well as the resilience and creativity, of young people living in conditions of severe deprivation. This notion informs the decision of hearing from both chronically absent students and those who attend regularly. All perspectives concerning hardships and barriers as well as gifts and talents in both groups of students are essential to understanding the complex nature of chronic absenteeism and advocating for solutions that address hardships but also build off of already present strengths.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) grew from an earlier legal movement called critical legal studies and is defined by the following principles: (1) racism is normal, not aberrational in American society, (2) interest convergence white supremacy serves important purposes both materially and psychically and thus large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it, (3) races are socially constructed categories that are not objective, inherent, or fixed to any biological or genetic reality and thus society can invent, manipulate, and retire them when convenient, and (4) the existence of a unique voice of color that is imbued with history and experiences with oppression and are critical and legitimate counterstories the existing narratives (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; "What is Critical Race Theory?", 2019; Yosso, 2005). CRT is a transdisciplinary theory that aims to examine existing power structures, critique and challenge dominant ideologies such as liberalism and meritocracy, and empower scholars to play an active role in achieving social justice and eliminating racial oppression (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT has been applied extensively to the field of education to understand issues of school discipline, achievement testing, the charter school movement, and the language of deficit such as "the achievement gap" used to describe educational inequity (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; McGee & Stovall, 2015). One framework developed from CRT to move away from a deficit view of Communities of Color is a reexamining of cultural capital as more than money and assets, but aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). This framework challenges and expands upon Bourdieu's theory on cultural capital and the role it plays in social mobility and has been used extensively in educational research to offer counterdiscourse that emphasizes cultural wealth in communities that have experienced systematic oppression (Andreotti, 2011; Milner IV, 2007; Nasir, 2011).

Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005). This resiliency is evident in families that allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their current circumstances often without the objective means to attain those goals (Yosso, 2005). This mindset is particularly important in the study of chronic absenteeism as aspirational capital or future oriented perspectives have been found to be protective against chronic absenteeism (So, Gaylord-Harden, Voisin, & Scott, 2015). Students who have internalized education as a pathway to their future goals and who remain future oriented are more likely to attend school regularly (So et al., 2015).

Linguistic capital describes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication in more than one language, style, or medium such as art, music, or poetry (Yosso, 2005). This also includes the rich history of storytelling that may enhance skills

such as memorization and attention to detail that can crossover to academic success which can impact chronic absenteeism (Yosso, 2005). The audience and cross-cultural awareness could be important to school factors, such as perception of school climate and teacher conflict, which are both important factors that impact chronic absenteeism.

Familial capital refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among families (blood relatives or other important kinship ties) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition(Yosso, 2005). These important referents can model lessons of caring and coping that can affect emotional, moral, educational, and occupational outcomes including absenteeism (Yosso, 2005). These communal bonds may also affect how isolated students feel when dealing with their problems including school victimization or mental health issues which in turn can impact their attendance.

Social capital describes networks of people and community resources including peers and other social contacts that can offer instrumental and emotional support (Yosso, 2005). Traditionally communities of color have leveraged social capital to attain education, health care, legal justice, and employment opportunities(Yosso, 2005). Students with social capital may be able to learn of different academic or mental health resources that can positively impact their school attendance.

Navigational capital refers to skills a student of color uses to maneuver through social institutions, especially those not created with Communities of Color in mind (Yosso, 2005). Specifically, the concepts of academic invulnerability and resilience are examples of navigational capital that are particularly important to absenteeism (Yosso, 2005). Academic invulnerability is a student's ability to "sustain high levels of achievement despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at

risk of doing poorly at school and, ultimately, dropping out of school"(Yosso, 2005). Resilience is recognized as "a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning" (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital recognizes the positive role that individual agency even within institutional constraints can play in facilitating navigation of the school setting and protecting against chronic absenteeism (Yosso, 2005).

Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005). For example, research shows some "African American mothers consciously raise their daughters as 'resistors' through verbal and nonverbal lessons aimed at teaching their daughters to assert themselves as intelligent, beautiful, strong and worthy of respect to resist the barrage of societal messages devaluing Blackness and belittling Black women" (Yosso, 2005). This awareness of the structures of racism can motivate individuals to work towards social and racial justice and transform oppressive structures (Yosso, 2005). As students learn to be oppositional with their minds and spirits in the face race or class inequality, this can be a strong motivator for school attendance(Yosso, 2005).

It has been important in this research study to avoid framing chronic absenteeism as a problem only discussed using language of deficit and instead finding the modifiable protective factors that can help students attend school regularly (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2017). In the qualitative analysis, the framework of cultural wealth helps organize thematic inquiry while still giving students an opportunity to describe their experiences in ways that may contradict or expand understanding of cultural wealth.

Aside from the emphasis placed on storytelling and narratives and re-examining negative framing through emphasizing the forms of cultural capital that African Americans' possess, CRT contains an activist component that is essential to the research study. CRT aims not only to analyze how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but also to transform society for the better.

Previous Findings

The concurrent transformational mixed method research design incorporates both multiple regression analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews for qualitative data. The combination of these methods contributes the literature on absenteeism and address gaps in understanding that exist in the current research on chronic absenteeism.

Quantitative Methods

Dembo (2016) previously studied the latent constructs of mental health problems, specifically ADHD, anxiety, and mania like symptoms, and substance use on delinquency among truant adolescents using structural equation modeling and latent class analysis (Dembo, M. Krupa, Wareham, Schmeidler, & DiClemente, 2017; Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, & Winters, 2016; Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, & Winters, 2016). In a sample 300 youths aged 11-17 with two or few misdemeanor arrests and alcohol or drug use, Dembo et al (2016) examined the variation and identified subgroups for youths and then compared them on a variety of sociodemographic and psychosocial characteristics at baseline and frequency of arrests during a 19-24-month follow-up (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, et al., 2016). This sample was diverse and included 26% African Americans and 63% males. The biggest

contribution to the literature was showing that mental health problems were not limited to anxiety based school refusal but also to students who are considered truant (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, et al., 2016). Youth reporting mental health problems had more negative attitudes towards school. This study did not identify a high anxiety subgroup but noted this could be because a general anxiety scale was used which did not include measures of social anxiety or because the youth were exhibiting antisocial behavior and did not miss school with parental authority, they were not by definition, school refusers. Youth who received treatment focused on diminishing maladaptive beliefs and promoting protective factors such as problem-solving skills and strengthening support, had lower rates of future offending (arrest charges) than those in the same subgroup who received standard truancy services. It was unclear why this process did not work similarly for youths in the other latent classes and more research is needed on the connection between mania-like and depressive symptoms and coping mechanisms. This research shows the importance of underlying mental health concerns in students labeled as truant and exhibiting antisocial behaviors. This research study builds off this work by expanding analysis to both truant and non-truant students.

In a sample of 99 3rd through 8th grade students with attendance problems, three profile groups were identified; multiple (17.2% negative and positive reinforcement), positive reinforcement only (60.6%), and no profile (22.2%) (Dube & Orpinas, 2009). Positive reinforcement or positive tangible rewards included parental attention, watching television or playing video games. Negative reinforcement included behaviors that indicated avoiding or escaping from school. The multiple profile group had high scores for both negative and positive reinforced school refusal behaviors. This group also had a

higher average of behavioral difficulties (emotional difficulties, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and peer problems), higher frequency of victimization, and a higher total count of traumatic or stressful events as compared to the other groups. The no profile group may represent a group of students whose absences are not child motivated. This sample was 90% white and 58.5% male. These findings support the hypothesis that the majority of children's attendance problems are positively reinforced because they find school boring, classes unengaging, and staff members unapproachable making absenteeism more likely to occur. This increases the importance of measuring school related factors in addition to mental health characteristics. This study also expanded the application of school refusal research data collection beyond the clinical setting and therefore among students without documented chronic illnesses or mental health problems.

A study using data from the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH; SAM-HSA 2011) restricted the sample to 1,646 adolescents aged 12–17 years that reported having skipped one or more days of school during the previous 30-day period. Latent profile analysis identified four distinct classes: achievers who had skipped class an average of 1.58 times in the past month and were normative in other areas of school and academic achievement, moderate students who were highly engaged in school but a relatively greater number of contextual risk factors including externalizing behaviors, academically disengaged (41%) who had lower school engagement and a moderate level of contextual risk and externalizing behaviors, and chronic skippers (6.26%) who had a high rate of skipping, lowest levels of school engagement, more antisocial and externalizing behaviors. This study affirms that truant youth are a

heterogeneous group that should not be targeted with a one size fits all interventions and introduces a protective factor of school engagement that was important in students of different socioeconomic statuses.

A large scale study completed with 106 schools in an urban school setting serving predominately African American students, used multilevel latent profile analysis to identify profiles of individual level factors and school climate (Van Eck et al., 2017). Three individual level profiles were identified based on students' perceptions of school climate; positive school climate (25%) had the highest means on positive domains such as value placed on academics, school connectedness and teacher relationships, moderate school climate (59%), which demonstrated moderate levels across both positive and negative domains and negative school climate (17%) which had the highest means for negative domains such as delinquent and aggressive behavior. Two subtypes of schools were found, climate challenged (66% of students and 56% of schools) which had a larger proportion of students reporting "moderate" and "negative" climate and marginal climate which had a majority of students reporting positive and moderate climates (34% of students and 45% of schools (Van Eck et al., 2017). Chronic absence was significantly lower in the "positive climate" profile at the individual level and "climate challenged" schools had significantly higher chronic absence than "marginal climate" schools. This research suggests that only targeting youth who are chronically absent is an insufficient strategy and school-wide changes are necessary to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Qualitative Methods

There is a dearth of peer-reviewed literature on chronic absenteeism and mental health using qualitative methods to gain insight from children and adolescents. Of the few

studies that claim to include student perspectives, they often provide little detail, barely include student voices, and do not describe any qualitative methodology to ensure a rigorous level of inquiry. Other studies include survey data collected from students but no opportunities for students to express their attitudes, values, and nuances of their experiences in their own words. The Get Schooled project partnered with John's Hopkins University and Hart Research to interview 516 8th through 12th grade students who skip school a few times a month or more, but the surveys had few open responses and students primarily choose from responses created by researchers (Get Schooled, 2012). Also, these students were surveyed in the mall and underlying mental health concerns were not measured (Get Schooled, 2012). The following studies were focused on mental health and chronic absenteeism, included detailed qualitative methodology, and centered student voices.

In France, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 adolescents aged 13-18 years old and receiving psychiatric care for anxiety-based school refusal and their parents (Sibeoni et al., 2018). Thematic analysis revealed importance categories self- transformation and problem solving for understanding how students felt about treatment (Sibeoni et al., 2018). Students expressed that their internal distress was invisible on the outside and parents, peers and even health care professionals sometimes denied their suffering or did not believe them (Sibeoni et al., 2018). School was not perceived as the cause of the disorders but rather a place where students' pain was expressed (Sibeoni et al., 2018). Most adolescents considered that they themselves were the source of their problems (depression, anxiety, distress, suffering, malaise, anguish, low self-esteem, low self-confidence) and some described the changes they needed to

make as disappearance or diminution of psychiatric symptoms while others described the changes as gains in self-confidence, autonomy, maturity, or better self-knowledge (Sibeoni et al., 2018). While parents were principally worried about the academic consequences of their child's absenteeism this was always a secondary concern for students but they were aware it was the primary issue for their parents (Sibeoni et al., 2018). The adolescents discussed isolation and the desire for a social life and fitting into a peer group (Sibeoni et al., 2018). The most important finding for the purpose of the research study is that parents and adolescents diverge in their interpretation of the goals of treatment for anxiety based school refusal (Sibeoni et al., 2018). Parents see returning to school and recovery as essentially the same and focus on external goals, while adolescents are more concerned with addressing their internal issues (Sibeoni et al., 2018). It will be important to explore if students struggling with chronic absenteeism in the United States place a similar emphasis on internal issues as opposed to external goals. This research also emphasizes the importance of interviewing the adolescents as parent information alone may not be indicative of the student perspective and thus interventions using only their interpretations will be ineffective.

Two phenomenological studies in the UK examined the experiences of four secondary-age children who had experienced attendance difficulties lasting at least one term and three children and five mothers who were on the roster for home education because of identified school non-attendance (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Gregory & Purcell, 2014). Data consisted of semi-structured interviews exploring early school experiences, perceptions of the causes of non-attendance, support received, anything they felt might have been done differently, and hopes for the future (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Gregory &

Purcell, 2014). While students had different initial school experiences they all reported feeling nervous when transitioning to secondary school (Baker & Bishop, 2015). Students described causes for non-attendance including anxiety, feeling like they did not fit in, social isolation, depression, teachers who did not care or made students feel scared, bullying, illness, school environment, learning difficulties, tiredness and disrupted sleep (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Gregory & Purcell, 2014). All students reported similar support experiences of feeling the pressure to return to school and being labeled as lazy or naughty (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Gregory & Purcell, 2014). The school response was delayed and students felt that the schools only care about their figures and trying to push the same quick fix on everyone and they did not feel like they had anyone to rely on for support (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Gregory & Purcell, 2014). The all report wishing for more care and more understanding and a quicker response (Baker & Bishop, 2015). While the experiences of these students add important information to the literature, the race/ethnicity of the students was never described nor any socioeconomic factors that could affect attendance and only students who struggled with attendance were interviewed. The research study includes African American student voices who may have additional insights based on race, socioeconomic status, and living in urban areas.

An interview based investigation study in Sweden interviewed 15 students with 30% or more unexcused absences during the ninth grade to explore their perspectives on truancy, school life, their own futures, and the interaction of these factors (Strand, 2014). The majority of students reported that they did not enjoy school and cited external forces such as school conflict, social exclusion from teachers and peers or peer pressure from other truants, bullying, and the school atmosphere including classroom noise as

explanations for their non-attendance (Strand, 2014). Students expressed needing academic help, help fitting in, or someone who understood them as what they would want if given an opportunity to repeat earlier grades yet most had few expectations for the future (Strand, 2014). Many students who eventually began attending school regularly cited a caring adult who would not give up as the reason they eventually stopped being truant (Strand, 2014). This has important implications for policy and strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism as well as the training of adult stakeholders to respond appropriately to chronic absenteeism problems.

There were some available theses and dissertations that had used qualitative methods to interview and discuss absenteeism and truancy and mental health with more diverse populations (Díaz, 2015; How, 2015; Katherine, 2018; Shilvock, 2010). These works provided insight into the complexities and intricacies of students' descriptions of absenteeism, interruption on a trajectory to dropping out, and the importance of early intervention coupled with social support.

Chronic Absenteeism Conceptualization: Refusal vs Truancy vs Withdrawal

In reviewing the literature on chronic absenteeism, there is no consensus on how chronic absenteeism should best be split into subtypes (Brandibas, Jeunier, Clanet, & Fouraste, 2004; Ek & Eriksson, 2013; Heyne, 2019; Kearney, 2008). Chronic absenteeism is defined purely by the number of absences whether excused or unexcused and makes no judgement or distinction about the underlying motivations. However, when attempting to reduce chronic absenteeism, effective intervention requires functional assessment of the behavior and thus understanding the underlying causes and mechanisms leading to the absenteeism is a critical component. There has been much

debate about the most accurate conceptualization of the subcategories of absenteeism as they are not mutually exclusive, culturally responsive, and when a student is labeled in one particular category, there are differing levels of stigma or assumed personal responsibility attached to their behaviors (Lyon & Cotler, 2007).

Traditionally students with problematic attendance were grouped into two subtypes, students who stayed home because of fear or anxiety and students who skip school because of a lack of interest or to defy adult authority (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003). The former group was labeled as a school refusal subtype, anxiety-based school refusal or school phobia whereas the latter group was labeled as a truancy subtype. Another important factor that was often used to separate truancy from school refusal was whether or not students concealed these absences from their parents (Berg, 1992). Truant students were conceptualized as engaging in antisocial behaviors and hiding their absenteeism from their parents whereas students engaging in school refusal were at home upset at the prospect of going to school and sharing this fact with their parents or family (Berg, 1992). School refusal is defined by four characteristics; (1) severe difficulty attending school, (2) severe emotional upset when faced with the prospect of having to attend school, this may only take the form of unexplained somatic physical symptoms, (3) staying at home with the knowledge of parents, and (4) manifesting no severe antisocial tendencies, apart from possible aggressiveness when attempts are made to force school attendance (Berg, 1997; Heyne, Gren-Landell, Melvin, & Gentle-Genitty, 2019). Truancy is then often differentiated from school refusal based on concealment and lack of consent from parents, the intent behind not attending, and presence of conduct disorder or

other antisocial behaviors. These conceptualizations in turn impacted the interventions for absenteeism.

Interventions for the school refusal subtype centered on addressing underlying mental health concerns whereas truant behavior was met with punitive measures and punishment to deter skipping school (Heyne et al., 2019). Also, punitive measures are sometimes levied against the parents of school refusers if they are not taking the appropriate steps to get their children back to school and these long stretches of absences are seen as parental neglect (Heyne et al., 2019). Again, this approach represents a differential view of personal responsibility in a child's school attendance and does not account for different contextual factors that could be related to socioeconomic status and race. The parent of a "truant" student may have a demanding employment schedule in order to maintain a basic standard of living and this schedule may impact their involvement in their child's academic endeavors. This limited involvement may preclude them from knowing of their child's absences or a child may not want to increase their parents' burden by expressing underlying mental health concerns or a fear of attending school. Cultural differences may exist in the way mental health issues are perceived and these differences may impact a student's decision to disclose the anxiety or depression that is influencing their attendance without any antisocial behaviors. A CRT lens enhances the discourse on chronic absenteeism and further the understanding of what school refusal looks like in the context of predominately Black schools as the United States education landscape become more segregated. Also, school refusal and truancy are not mutually exclusive nor exhaustive categories to describe chronic absenteeism.

Newer research has included school withdrawal and school exclusion as subtypes of chronic absenteeism. School withdrawal is defined as primarily parent motivated nonattendance whereby parents deliberately withdraw a child from school for their own needs such as provision of comfort, company, or assistance to other family members, protect child from real or perceived threats at school, or hide something from school staff such as maltreatment, or malnutrition (Heyne et al., 2019). School withdrawal that is parent motivated can often be missed by studies measuring school refusal behaviors as they do not always address the lack of agency a child may have in getting themselves to school. Finally, school exclusion is defined as absence caused by school-based decision making, such as inability or unwillingness to accommodate for a student's special needs, encouraging students to stay home in order to meet performance requirements, and disciplinary exclusion that extends to suspensions or expulsions that are outside accepted guidelines, unfair, nontransparent, or inconsiderate of the student's needs (Heyne et al., 2019). These processes are especially important to examine using a CRT lens which has already been applied in research and shown how the perceptions of race influence school discipline policies.

The inconsistencies in school refusal behavior definitions have persisted throughout the past 50 years and while researchers were initially concerned with working towards a shared definition on particular subtypes of absenteeism, there has been a recent trend in researchers arguing for descriptive definitions of school refusal that are free of assumptions about etiology or associated psychopathology (Egger et al., 2003; Heyne et al., 2019). This approach is supported by the often used School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS), which measures (1) avoidance of school-related stimuli provoking negative

affectivity such as feelings of depression, fear, or nervousness, (2) escape from aversive social situations such as difficulty making friends and talking to other children, (3) attention-getting behavior, and (4) positive tangible reinforcement such as staying home and watching television (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Even this scale used in isolation is flawed as it does not simultaneously consider family, school, community, and larger contextual variables. Also, low income, African American families are the most likely to experience chronic absenteeism and the least like to successfully interface with the mental health system and are at increased risk for interventions that punish rather than empower (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). This research study attempts to address the gap in the literature of comprehensive, multilevel assessments performed in predominately Black communities where students attend predominately Black school and face a different set of challenges than the students typically studied in clinical settings.

Researchers can acknowledge and explore all potential subtypes and the ways in which particular subtypes require different interventions, and use the umbrella term school refusal behaviors or problematic non-attendance or absenteeism to denote the severity of the number of missed school days. Even chronic absenteeism is difficult to define across states as different school districts have different numbers of days in the school year that can also be affected by inclement weather in certain regions. Therefore, researchers must rely on local definitions to determine if absenteeism meets the threshold for chronic absenteeism and then attempt to understand and target the many risk factors for absenteeism.

Risk Factors for Chronic Absenteeism

Many risk factors for chronic absenteeism have already been mentioned but in this section they are organized by the different levels of the socioecological model.

Individual/Intrapersonal Risk Factors

Several health conditions are associated with chronic absenteeism including asthma, diabetes, obesity, sickle cell anemia, epilepsy, chronic illness, chronic pain, poor oral care and ADHD (Allison et al., 2019; Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014). Specifically, several mental health conditions diagnosed or students reporting symptoms are associated with increased chronic absenteeism including anxiety (social, generalized, separation, posttraumatic stress, phobias), depression, oppositional defiant disorder, and conduct disorders (Cameron et al., 2018; Finning et al., 2019; Kearney, 2008; Pilkington & Piersel, 1991). Attitudes towards teachers, classes, and school in general along with limited sense of belonging and victimization/bullying (LGBTQ, race, or other reasons), while formed in relation to interpersonal and school factors, are also individual barriers to attendance (Kelsey, Zeman, & Dallaire, 2017; Oelsner, Lippold, & Greenberg, 2011; Poteat, Berger, & Dantas, 2017; Voisin, Kim, & Hong, 2018). Behaviors and characteristics such as low academic performance, school engagement and connectedness, repeating grades, perceived racism, low self-esteem, substance abuse, reporting ACEs, being in foster care, experiencing homelessness, school mobility, receiving special education services, sleep difficulties, somatic complaints, and teenage pregnancy are also associated with chronic absenteeism(Morrow & Villodas, 2018; Van Eck et al., 2017). The underlying mechanisms that explain these associations are that

individual factors can make attendance unappealing causing students to avoid school or that these factors serve as actual barriers to attendance.

Interpersonal (Family, Friends, Teachers) Risk Factors

Positive reinforcement of absenteeism behaviors from peers, families, or other important referents can increase chronic absenteeism (Kearney, 2008). Interpersonal family factors that are associated with increased absenteeism include single-parent households, low socioeconomic status, parental unemployment or incarceration, divorced parents, low parental support, low parental academic involvement, maltreatment, parents with mental health illnesses including maternal depression, large family size, living with a step-parent, parents without a high school diploma, family conflict, and family obligations such as taking care of younger siblings (Kearney, 2008; Henderson et al., 2014; Bauer et al., 2018) Interpersonal peer factors associated with increased absenteeism include social isolation, negative interactions including bullying, and peer networks that are also chronically absent or engage in other antisocial behaviors (Kearney, 2008). Interpersonal teacher factors associated with increased absenteeism include lack of emotional support, teacher-student conflict which included students feeling targeted or disrespected, lack of academic support, lack of engaging curriculum delivery (Kearney, 2008; Henderson et al., 2014). The underlying mechanisms that explain these associations are that interpersonal factors influence individual attitudes and behaviors that in turn cause students to avoid school or these factors present challenges that make daily school attendance difficult.

Institutional (School) Risk Factors

School culture and climate can greatly influence a student's individual motivation or aversion to attending school. School culture and climate, lack of appropriate or engaging instruction, unsafe school environment, school organizational ineffectiveness limited courses and extracurricular activities offered, ineffective or harsh school discipline practices, student to teacher ratio, incidents of delinquent or aggressive behavior, and delayed or ineffective response to early indicators of chronic absenteeism (Cameron et al., 2018; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018; Van Eck et al., 2017) . The underlying mechanism is that these factors impact student connectedness and engagement which are important individual factors that drive students to be chronically absent if they are feeling disengaged or not connected to school(Thomas & Smith, 2004; Van Eck et al., 2017). School composition has also been linked to absenteeism by the ways it affects school climate and teacher demands. Schools with high dropout rates often serve many more freshman than seniors and school and staff may become overwhelmed by the concentration of high need students that need additional academic and emotional support in order to succeed academically which in turn can affect the timeliness and effectiveness of the response to early attendance warning signs (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Community Risk Factors

Community or neighborhood factors that affect students psychological or emotional well-being or place physical or perceived barriers in the way of students attending school can impact chronic absenteeism. Unsafe neighborhoods with increased community violence, living in low income, urban neighborhoods, lack of social and educational support services or healthcare facilities, and lack of reliable transportation

routes can increase risk of chronic absenteeism (Ingul, Havik, & Heyne, 2019; Ingul et al., 2012; Jacob & Lovett, 2017)

Policy

Most policy discourse on the subject of chronic absenteeism is focused on policies aimed at reducing risk of chronic absenteeism, thus most policy analyses focus on if there was a significant effect on reducing absenteeism but not on non-school policies that may actually increase absenteeism. While there is not always explicit discussion of policies and the ways they impact absenteeism, there is support for the underlying mechanisms that could lead to increased chronic absenteeism. Unclear statewide attendance policies can contribute to limited parent and student knowledge on attendance expectations and procedures which can lead to increased absenteeism (Henderson et al., 2014). Limited resources allocated to creating safe and supportive schools equipped with nurses, mental health professional, and effective teachers can also affect school and individual factors which in turn increase absenteeism (Henderson et al., 2014). Policies that impact citywide transportation such as fare hikes or route changes may also create barriers for students to physically get to school. Policies that rezone or shut down underperforming schools and thus impact geographic location and travel time for students who must attend schools further away from their homes may also impact chronic absenteeism. School achievement policies such as those under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), that place high stakes on teachers in the classroom and schools to achieve their progress goals as that impacts funding can also influence school climate and school policies that try to limit distractions and restrict attendance of students who display disruptive behavior (Heyne et al., 2019). Policies that impact incarceration rates such as Stop and Frisk, three strikes

rules, inequality in drug sentencing can impact family factors and individual factors, "kid catching" law and order truancy policies can increase risk for absenteeism (Ekstrand, 2015). This study also explored how increased gentrification affects absenteeism as low-income housing communities are relocated, police presence increases, and economic inequality becomes more apparent.

Factors that Protect Students from Chronic Absenteeism

Like risk factors, many protective factors for chronic absenteeism have already been mentioned but in this section they are organized by the different levels of the socioecological model. Most literature on chronic absenteeism discusses protective factors in relation to their risk factor counterparts. For example, living in a single parent home is a risk factor for chronic absenteeism so living in a two-parent household may be protective for absenteeism. Despite this traditional conceptualization, there have been some specific studies conducted that are framed with the protective factors centered. This section of the literature review highlights factors examined in these studies and also emphasizes modifiable factors in order to present potential targets for intervention.

Individual//Intrapersonal Protective Factors

Good study habits including setting time aside to complete homework and study, studying for tests, skipping time with friends to study, and trying to do well even when uninterested are associated with better attendance (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Students who express high levels of trust for their teachers and those who report perceived support are more likely to attend school regularly (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). School bonding factors such as commitment to the values and beliefs of the school and feeling attachment and engagement with one's school lead to increased academic

motivation and self-efficacy which are linked to regular school attendance(Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Oelsner et al., 2011). Students who are future-oriented and have high aspirations, whether considering higher education or a different path, are more likely to attend school regularly (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). This study elicited student responses from students who are chronically absent and those who are not to determine if they report any of these protective factors and how important they believe these factors to be in their attendance behaviors.

Interpersonal (Family, Peers, Teachers) Protective Factors

Mentoring programs that connect students to caring adults, whether teachers or staff in school or in the community, have a positive impact on attendance (Ekstrand, 2015). School bonding factors, specifically positive peer and teacher connections that students experience at school and the extent to which they feel cared for and respected by their teachers can impact their level of school participation and thus increase their regular attendance (Oelsner et al., 2011). Parental and positive peer support have also been associated with regular attendance (Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014). Religious socialization has been shown to positively impact adolescent psychological wellbeing in African American communities though this protective factor has not been studied extensively with respect to absenteeism. (Butler-Barnes, Martin, & Boyd, 2017). The study explored the possibility of religion or religious socialization affecting absenteeism.

Institutional (School) Protective Factors

School level incentives, policies, and characteristics can positively impact individual and interpersonal factors that encourage students to attend school regularly. Breakfast programs have been shown to increase attendance as students struggling with

food insecurity or poverty feel incentivized to attend school for the meals (Allison et al., 2019; Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014). Schools that make the connection between high school and students' futures have better attendance outcomes(Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Setting future achievement as a value of the school increases students' internalization of these positive values and can act as informal controls to attendance behavior (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Oelsner et al., 2011). Engaging curriculum including diverse, challenging, and interesting content has been shown to encourage attendance(Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Academic tutoring programs that help students experience academic achievement and teacher support have also improved attendance outcomes(Haight, Chapman, Hendron, Loftis, & Kearney, 2014). Training for teachers about the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism that gives them a new perspective and attitude towards students who miss school can improve school climate and in turn improve attendance(Ekstrand, 2015). School- Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) have also been shown to improve attendance outcomes (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Specifically, attendance groups and rewarding children who choose school are effective ways to reduce absenteeism in some students but it is important to note that this method is not effective with all children and there may be other contextual factors across the social ecological framework that prohibit incentives from improving attendance (Ekstrand, 2015). The research study provides insight into students' views on the effectiveness of these attendance strategies.

Community Protective Factors

Wrap around services and wellness centers that provide emotional support to students are effective in improving student attendance by addressing underlying

psychological causes for absenteeism (Hutcheson, 2017). Initiatives aimed at providing healthcare access, transportation and safe passage to and from school in neighborhoods with high levels of community violence have been effective in improving attendance rates (Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014).

Policy

National, state, and districtwide policies that directly impact factors at the other levels of the social ecological model can greatly improve attendance rates. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) ensures that schools are able to provide breakfast and free and reduced lunch to students who may otherwise be unable to eat regularly, and this policy has helped some districts to improve attendance rates (Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014). Other federal initiatives such as the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, began during the Obama Administration and led efforts to coordinate federal, state, and local efforts to address chronic absenteeism (Bauer et al., 2018). The program also enlisted the help of celebrities to spread the message of the importance of school attendance through social media and some states even got celebrities to give wake up calls to students (Henderson, Hill, & Norton, 2014). The Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development, as well as the Attorney General, sent a joint letter to states calling for cross-sector strategies to combat chronic absenteeism, held a national summit on chronic absenteeism (Bauer et al., 2018). While the effects of these strategies have not yet been empirically evaluated, more awareness around improving chronic absenteeism could help normalize regular school attendance.

The transition from NCLB to the 2015 federal education law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), empowered states to design and implement their own accountability systems (Bauer et al., 2018). Thirty-six states, the District of Columbia,

and Puerto Rico have all chosen chronic absenteeism as a school quality or student success (SQSS) indicator that they will track, develop accountability plans, and implement strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism (Bauer et al., 2018).

In New York, one tenant of the New York City (NYC) Interagency Campaign to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism was the NYC Success Mentor Corps (Success Mentors), which worked directly with students and their families and greatly improved attendance rates for students who were previously struggling with chronic absenteeism (Bauer et al., 2018). Washington, DC is currently restructuring their educational accountability agencies to address recent attendance issues. This study elicits responses from students on their awareness and perceived effectiveness of new policies.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Priority Population

The priority population for this research study are African American children and adolescents ages 11-16 who are transitioning to high school and living in low-income, urban settings. African American children have higher rates of chronic absenteeism and the transition to high school is a critical moment when absenteeism rates increase dramatically and education is still compulsory. Students in Washington, DC are representative of students living in low income, urban settings nationally and the intersection of socioecological factors that place these students at elevated risk for chronic absenteeism.

In Washington, DC, 39% of African American children and adolescents live in families with incomes below the poverty line while virtually no white children in DC live in poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2017). This rate is also higher than the national average of 33% of African American children living in poverty and 19% of children of all races (Koball & Jiang, 2018). The crime rate in Washington DC is nearly three times the national average, 1004.9 per 100,000 people as compared to the US rate of 394 per 100,000, which means that many DC children are exposed to community violence (FBI Uniform Crime Reporting, 2017; Wotring et al., 2014) The stresses of poverty and exposure to neighborhood risk factors including community violence, increase the risk of developing anxiety disorders, struggling with chronic absenteeism, and not graduating from high school among these students (Kearney, 2016; Merikangas et al., 2010). The research study identified individual, interpersonal, school, and neighborhood level risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism within this

population and provides evidence for strategies that will improve attendance within this population.

Description of Sampling Procedure

The study uses a convenience sample of a ninth-grade cohort of students affiliated with two charter schools in Washington, DC. These schools, which will be referred to as Malcolm X Prep (MXP) and Martin Luther King Prep (MLKP) to protect their anonymity, serve primarily low income and minority students. The MXP/MLKP school leaders and general counsel reviewed documents and procedures and gave permission for their students to participate in this research study and approval to use their school sites for data collection. Prior to data collection, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Maryland College Park approved all the procedures and documents associated with this research study. Additional information on the Protection of Human Subjects and IRB approved procedures and considerations are included in Appendix B.

The ninth-grade cohort of MLKP and MXP freshman is approximately 300 students. Ninth grade students enrolled at either school were eligible for the study. Accounting for parent and child refusals, student mobility, and potential time restrictions at MXP, the enrollment target for the quantitative survey was 180 students, which is 90% of the MLKP freshmen population. Prior to the quantitative survey, all ninth-grade parents and guardians were sent a description of the study and a parent refusal form where they could indicate if they did not want their students to participate. The recruitment process for the qualitative component of the study (n=10) began in October once a group of students had reached four absences and students had indicated on the quantitative survey that they would be interested in talking more about these issues.

Data Collection

All quantitative data were collected through an online Qualtrics survey (Appendix C) administered at school via Chromebook computers or in the school computer lab. Self-reported data from the student participants were collected. Surveys were chosen based on appropriate reading levels for the sample, previous use in relevant research studies, and recommendations from national and global public health entities. Survey measures underwent pilot testing to ensure the questions asked were clear and understandable while not being unnecessarily intrusive or discomforting and that the expected time estimates are accurate. Ten MLKP and MXP students completed the quantitative survey for pilot testing and provided feedback on the length of the survey, clarity of the questions, and their comfort level answering the questions. Research memos and all copies of drafts were kept in order to document the adaptations made to the survey instruments and justifications. The quantitative data were collected for MLKP and MXP students during one period in school with a make-up session for students who were absent on that day. Students were also given to complete the survey during homeroom if they missed the data collection or make-up date. All students were invited to participate in a pizza party and students who took part in the survey were entered into a raffle for one of four $25 Visa Gift Cards as an incentive. We received three parent refusal forms and students who participated in the quantitative survey (N=216) provided assent electronically before the survey began and eight students did not provide assent.

Participants for the qualitative component of the study (n=10) were recruited from the students who completed the quantitative survey. The subsample of students for interviews was recruited from two tiers of September absenteeism (0-1 absences or 4 or

more absences) with five students representing each group. The sample consisted of 10 students in Grade 9, five of which who had four or more absences in September and five of which who had zero absences in September. Students chose their own pseudonyms and they are referred to by those names throughout the project so the data is de-identified. Table 1 presents a summary of demographic information about the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics for Qualitative Interview Participants

Variable	Chronically Absent Group	Regularly Attending Group
Age (in years)	14-15 (Mean: 14.6)	14 (Mean: 14.5)
Gender		
Male	5	1
Female	0	4
Race		
Black	4	4
Biracial or Mixed	1	1
September Absences	4-9 days (Mean: 5.8 days)	0 days
End of Year Absences	7-75 days (Mean 29.8 days)	1-6 days (Mean: 3 days)
End of Year Chronically Absent		
Yes	3	0
No	2	5
End of Year Truant		
Yes	3	0
No	2	5
Q1 GPA	1.47-3.07 (Mean: 2.03)	1.97-3.80 (Mean: 3.42)
Q4 GPA	0.22-3.52 (Mean:1.68)	0.12-4.30 (Mean: 2.92)

Nine of 10 students were 14 years old and one student had just turned 15. All five students (100%) in the chronically absent group were males and one of five (20%) of the Regularly Attending (RA) group were males. 80% of students identified as Black or African American; the other two students identified as biracial or mixed, one being Black and white and the other being Black and Hispanic. One of the students who identified as Black said he was also mixed “with Spanish” but that he was “mostly Black.” Only one student had been suspended during ninth grade. First semester GPAs for the CA group

ranged from 1.47-3.07 and for the RA group they ranged from 1.97-3.80. Q4 GPAs for the CA group ranged from 0.22- 3.52 and for the RA group they ranged from 0.12- 4.30. Within the CA group, the number of total absences in September ranged from 4 to 9 and the number of unexcused absences ranged from 0 to 6. Their total absences for the entire school year ranged from 7 to 75 and the number of unexcused absences ranged from 4 to 29. Within the RA group, they all had 0 absences in September, their total absences for the entire school year ranged from 1 to 6, and the number of unexcused absences ranged from 1 to 4.

These students participated in a series of three in-depth interviews. Informed consent from parents was obtained before scheduling interviews, and assent was obtained and confirmed at the start of each of the three interviews. Students were compensated a total of $50 for their participation, on an increasing pay scale ($10 for Interview I, $15 for Interview II, and $25 for Interview III). All interview guides were pilot tested by two rising sophomore MLKP students to determine estimated time of completion, burden placed on participants, and to understand if the questions are clear and understandable for adolescent participants. Aside from this cognitive interviewing process and better understanding the appropriateness of the interview guides (Appendices D-F), this pilot testing also allowed the interviewer to become comfortable with asking the questions, prompting responses, and then make any necessary changes to the interview protocol. The majority of interviews were conducted in person in the school meeting rooms and three interviews were conducted via Zoom. The first interview used the Interview Protocol I (see Appendix D) and allowed participants to provide a school life history that chronicles their educational experiences, the transition to high school, future aspirations,

and their experiences with absenteeism. The second interview used the Interview Protocol 2 (see Appendix E) and focused on individual and school factors that impact absenteeism and necessary supports that help students attend school regularly. The third interview used Interview Protocol 3 (see Appendix F) and focused on family/peer factors and neighborhood factors that impact absenteeism, necessary supports that help students attend school regularly, and any additional information students want to provide. All participants (n=10) completed all three rounds of interviews. Each participant was interviewed on their own schedule between November and March of their freshman year and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using NVivo transcription services. Table 2 describes the lengths of each interview and shares the pseudonyms used by each participant.

Table 2

Qualitative Interview Lengths

Chronically Absent Group				
Participants	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Total
Fred	57:12	55:39	22:21	2:15:12
Will	44:24	44:37	26:12	1:55:13
AJ	37:12	46:03	18:12	1:41:29
Derrick	1:15:03	59:47	26:59	2:41:50
Kay	26:26	54:45	30:16	1:51:27
Average	48:03	52:10	24:48	2:05:02
Regularly Attending Group				
Alexis	53:05	1:04:08	25:37	2:22:50
Miracle	1:12:59	1:14:54	36:17	3:04:10
June	1:32:56	2:13:34	39:36	4:26:06
Jared	1:26:33	1:19:00	33:09	3:18:42
Septembra	43:29	1:01:12	16:41	2:01:22
Average	1:09:48	1:22:34	30:16	3:02:38

Through peer debriefing sessions with members of my dissertation committee, fellow PhD candidates, and members of the Qualitative Research Interest Group, as well as biweekly meetings with my undergraduate assistant, I was able to discuss emerging

themes and receive feedback on data analysis and interpretation to ensure that participant perspectives were centered and that descriptions were detailed. Member checking was also essential to ensure interpretations were representative of participants' views. Participants were presented with verbal summaries of their previous interviews and given the opportunity to confirm, expand, edit or clarify information and interpretations of what they had shared. While there has not yet been an opportunity to follow up with participants and present the final themes, I was able to present data summaries to MXP/MLKP leadership, educators, and attendance coordinators. This was done through two small group discussions and presentations with MXP/MLKP leadership and attendance coordinators. Each group praised the research study, provided feedback on the results, validated the accuracy of certain themes with anecdotal evidence and shared next steps they hoped to take based on the data presented. I will continue to share results with participants, additional students, and parents so they can comment, ask questions, and engage in conversations about the interpretation of the data and how it can be used to improve strategies and practices encouraging attendance. This will involve presentations for participants, student representatives, MXP/MLKP Parent Organizations, and the parent engagement team. Beyond academic journals which can improve the literature around chronic absenteeism, briefs can also be shared with important stakeholders in DCPS, DCPCS, and other urban school districts to inform their attendance practices as well.

Designation of the Validity and Reliability of Quantitative Survey

All survey questions are included in Appendix A. Through pilot testing including cognitive interviews, the quantitative survey was further edited to an estimated time of

45-60 minutes so that it could be completed in one sitting. The order of the questions and visual display was constructed to ensure active participation, limit fatigue, and prioritize the most important study questions in the first half of the study. Table 3 describes the survey items and psychometric properties of all scales used when creating the quantitative survey.

Measures

Demographic and background variables were collected including self-reported information on the participant's age, gender (male, female, nonbinary), zip code, school mobility, mode of transportation to school, number of parents/guardians living at main address, household composition, parent's education and race/ethnicity. Participant's age (in years based on when the survey was administered), gender (male or female), and race/ethnicity was also collected from school records and used to supplement missing data for data analysis.

Absenteeism Measure

The outcome variable Chronic Absenteeism was measured at two time points, once in September and at End of Year. September absences ranged from 0 to 15 with a mean of 1.56 and a standard deviation of 2.162. September chronic absenteeism was defined as greater than 4 absences and 14.8% of students were chronically absent in September. End of Year absences ranged from 0 to 84 with a mean of 9.55 and a standard deviation of 10.004. End of year chronic absenteeism was defined as 14 or more absences (10% of the entire measured school days) and 19.9% of students were chronically absent by the end of the year. This data was collected using school attendance school records

Anxiety Measure

Anxiety was measured using questions from the Screen for Childhood Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED) which is a 41-item questionnaire that screens for childhood anxiety disorder including subscales for general anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social phobia, and school phobias. Students rate how accurately symptom statements describe their feelings in the past 3 months, on a 3-point Likert scale (0=Not True or Hardly Ever True, 1= Somewhat True or Sometimes True, 2=Very True or Very Often True) The measure is intentionally brief and at an elementary reading level and thus can obtain reliable measures for ninth graders reading below grade level. Studies that have assessed this measure's robust psychometric properties have shown high internal consistency (α=0.9) and reliability among different genders, ethnicities, and non-typically developing children (Birmaher et al., 1999; Birmaher et al., 1997; Boyd, Ginsburg, Lambert, Cooley, & Campbell, 2003; Stern, Gadgil, Blakeley-Smith, Reaven, & Hepburn, 2014). The current study used 20 items for a total anxiety scale (α=0.888), composed of a 9-item general anxiety disorder subscale (α=0.806), a 7-item social anxiety disorder subscale (α=0.813) , and a 4-item traumatic stress disorder subscale (α=0.789) . Scores on the Total Anxiety Scale ranged from 0-39 with a mean of 14.274, and a standard deviation of 8.190. Scores on the Generalized Anxiety Scale ranged from 0-18 with a mean of 6.306, and a standard deviation of 4.034. Scores on the Social Anxiety Scale ranged from 0-13 with a mean of 5.780, and a standard deviation of 3.540. Scores on the Traumatic Stress Disorder Scale ranged from 0-8 with a mean of 2.13, and a standard deviation of 2.263. The total anxiety scale was operationalized into a binary variable with a cutoff of 17 with scores above 17 being classified as high anxiety and scores below 17 being categorized as low anxiety. This

cutoff was chosen based on the additive SCARED rating subscales scoring guide which may indicate clinically significant levels of anxiety. A total of 81 students (37.5% of the sample) had a total anxiety score above 17 and were categorized into the high anxiety group.

Antisocial Behaviors and Attitudes Measures

Antisocial behaviors include lifetime and past 30-day substance use (marijuana, alcohol, and cigarettes) and past year school discipline and criminal activity. These items all come from the Communities that Care youth survey (CTC) that measures risk and protective factors among adolescents from age 11 to 18 that was tested extensively on a diverse sample of students nationally and was shown to have high internal reliability and construct validity (Glaser, Horn, Arthur, Hawkins, & Catalano, 2005). The lifetime and past 30-day substance use asks about frequency of drug use and the antisocial behavior subscale (α=0.864) asks about the frequency of behaviors from suspensions to arrests all ranging from never to 40 or more occasions (Arthur et al., 2002). Scores on the antisocial behavior subscale ranged from 11-56 with a mean of 16.230, and a standard deviation of 8.512. Substance use at 30 days and lifetime were operationalized into binary variables as the majority of students reported no substance use and those students who did report alcohol or cigarette use, had mostly used less than 5 times. For marijuana use, while the majority of students still reported no use, there was a larger percentage of students reporting heavy marijuana use defined as greater than 10 times in previous studies on adolescent substance use. To capture the difference between students who may have experimented with marijuana a few times as opposed to more regular users, operationalized marijuana use into a binary variable of Heavy marijuana use vs little to

no marijuana use. In the sample, 9.3% of students reported lifetime heavy marijuana use and 5.1% of students reported heavy marijuana use in the past 30 days.

Perceived Racism Measure

Perceived racism is measured by the Perceptions of Racism in Children and Youth (PRaCY) which was adapted from adult perceived discrimination surveys and is psychometrically sound for children as young as eight years old (Pachter, Szalacha, Bernstein, & Coll, 2010). This 23- item survey measures students' experiences with discrimination on a six point scale from 0=Never, 1=Once, 2= Twice, 3= About Once a Year, 4= About Once a Month, 5=Weekly (Pachter et al., 2010). The current study used the 23-item PRACY scale (α=0.923) and mean scores ranged from 1 to 5.04 with a mean of 2.192 and a standard deviation of 0.942. In addition to the frequency questions, there are follow-up questions regarding emotional and coping responses to discrimination that are incorporated into the qualitative component of the study.

School Refusal Measure

School refusal is measured with the revised School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS), a 24-item scale that measures four domains of school refusal, avoiding school because of stimuli that evoke negative emotions, escaping aversive social or evaluative situations at school, pursuing attention from caregivers, or pursuing positive reinforcement outside of school. Responses are on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 0=Never, 1=Seldom, 2=Sometimes, 3=Half the time, 4=Usually, 5=Almost Always to 6=Always. Internal consistency is adequate (α=.68-.78) but more research is required with this measurement in diverse samples in community settings (Lyon, 2009; Lyon & Cotler, 2007). This measure is the most prominent scale on school refusal and is widely

accepted in absenteeism research (Gonzálvez et al., 2018; Kearney, 2008; Lyon, 2009). The current study used the 24-item school refusal scale (α=0.823), composed of a 6-item general avoidance subscale (α=0.777), a 6-item escape subscale (α=0.628) , a 6-item attention seeking subscale (α=0.728) and a 6-item tangible rewards subscale (α=0.652). Mean scores of the school refusal scale ranged from 4.00- 20.33 with a mean of 11.462 and a standard deviation of 3.1363. Mean scores on the general avoidance subscale ranged from 1.00-6.67 with a mean of 2.208, and a standard deviation of 1.137. Mean scores on the escape subscale ranged from 1.00-5.17 with a mean of 1.989, and a standard deviation of 0.871. Mean scores on the attention seeking subscale ranged from 1.00-6.50 with a mean of 3.112, and a standard deviation of 1.264. Mean scores on the tangible rewards subscale ranged from 1.00-7.00 with a mean of 4.201, and a standard deviation of 1.217. The subscale with the highest mean score is considered the primary cause of the student's school refusal behaviors and scores within 0.50 of one another are considered equivalent. The most common primary cause of school refusal was tangible rewards (81.9%) followed by attention seeking (29.3%), avoidance (7.0%) and escape (5.6%). Of the sample, 19.9% students had multiple primary causes of school refusal with the most common combination being attention seeking and tangible rewards (11.2% of the total sample).

Family Measure

Family relationships are measured by risk and protective factors from the CTC survey, specifically the Poor Family Management subscale (α=0.857 and Attachment subscale (α=0.763), and the Parent Involvement subscale from School Climate Survey (Arthur et al., 2002; Zullig et al., 2014). Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale

ranging from 0=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree. The measures have been shown to be psychometrically sound in ethnically diverse children and adolescents in community settings (Arthur et al., 2002; Glaser et al., 2005; Zullig et al., 2014). The current study used the 8-item Poor Family Management scale (α=0.811), the 4-item Attachment subscale (α=0.700) with 2-items related to Mother attachment (α=0.781) and a 2-items related to Father attachment (α=0.879), and the 3-item Parent Involvement subscale (α=0.719). Mean scores of the family management scale ranged from 1.00- 4.00 with a mean of 3.079 and a standard deviation of 0.638. Mean scores of the mother attachment subscale ranged from 2.00- 8.00 with a mean of 6.017 and a standard deviation of 1.828. Mean scores of the father attachment subscale ranged from 2.00- 8.00 with a mean of 4.5028 and a standard deviation of 2.227. Mean scores of the parent involvement subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 2.448 and a standard deviation of 1.032.

Peers Measure

Peer relationships are measured by risk and protective factors from the CTC survey, specifically the Interaction with Prosocial Peers subscale (α=0.703) and 2 items related to Friend's drug use. (Arthur et al., 2002). Students respond with the number of good friends, ranging from 0 to 4 or more, that are engaged in prosocial or drug use behaviors. These measures have adequate internal consistency and construct validity (Arthur et al., 2002; Glaser et al., 2005). However, in the current study, the 5-item Interaction with Prosocial Peers scale (α=0.631) and 2 items related to peer drug use (α=0.462) had low internal consistency. Mean scores of the prosocial peers subscale ranged from 0.00- 4.00 with a mean of 2.063 and a standard deviation of 0.940. Mean

scores of the peer drug use items ranged from 0.00- 4.00 with a mean of 0.669 and a standard deviation of 0.944. Of the sample, 3.7% of students reported having no good friends who engaged in prosocial behaviors and 49.1% of students reported having no good friends who engaged in drug use behaviors.

Victimization Measure

Peer Victimization is measured using questions from the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale (MPVS), a 16-item scale with four subscales measuring physical victimization, social manipulation, verbal victimization, and attacks on property. Students respond how often they've experienced any of the different examples of victimization in the past year from 0=Not at all, 1=Once, and 2=More than once. This scale (α=0.716) and each of the four subscales (α=0.73-0.85) have been shown to have adequate reliability and construct validity (Joseph & Stockton, 2018). The current study only uses the 4-item physical victimization subscale (α=0.689), the 4-item social manipulation subscale (α=0.782), and the 4-item verbal victimization subscale (α=0.835). Overall peer victimization mean scores ranged from 0.00- 22.00 with a mean of 6.808 and a standard deviation of 6.035. Mean scores of the verbal victimization subscale ranged from 0.00-8.00 with a mean of 3.302 and a standard deviation of 2.776. Mean scores of the social manipulation subscale ranged from 0.00- 7.00 with a mean of 1.351 and a standard deviation of 1.812. Mean scores of the physical victimization subscale ranged from 0.00-8.00 with a mean of 2.275 and a standard deviation of 2.361.

Teacher Relationships Measures

Teacher relationships are measured by a subscale from the School Climate Survey that measures student perceptions of teacher-student relationships. This 9-item subscale

measures responses on a five point Likert from 0=Strongly disagree to 4=Strongly Agree (Zullig et al., 2014). The current study uses the 9-item Positive Student-Teacher Relationships subscale (α=0.885). Mean scores of the Positive Student-Teacher Relationships subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 3.136 and a standard deviation of 0.874.

School Climate Measure

The School Climate Survey is a 50-item measure with 10 subscales that measure multiple dimensions of school climate based on student perceptions of the academic, social, and physical school environment. Responses are measured on a five-point Likert from 0=Strongly disagree to 4=Strongly Agree. This measure is a psychometrically sound (α=0.82-0.93) and the brief version of five combined school climate measures and has been used in large, diverse community settings (Zullig et al., 2014). The current study uses the 4-item School Connectedness subscale (α=0.760), the 6-item Academic Support subscale (α=0.916), the 7-item Order and Discipline subscale (α=0.894), the 4-item School Physical Environment subscale (α=0.917), the 2-item School Social Environment subscale (α=0.888), the 3-item Perceived Exclusion/Privilege subscale (α=0.848), the 6-item Opportunities for student engagement subscale (α=0.894), and the 2-item Academic Satisfaction subscale (α=0.742). Mean scores of the Academic Support subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 3.707 and a standard deviation of 1.018. Mean scores of the Order and Discipline subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 3.373 and a standard deviation of 0.916. Mean scores of the School Physical Environment subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 3.239 and a standard deviation of 1.101. Mean scores of the Academic Satisfaction subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of

2.598 and a standard deviation of 1.224. Mean scores of the Perceived Exclusion/Privilege subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 2.773 and a standard deviation of 0.989. Mean scores of the School Connectedness subscale ranged from 1.00-5.00 with a mean of 3.159 and a standard deviation of 0.898. Mean scores of the School Social Environment subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 3.169 and a standard deviation of 1.119. Mean scores of the Opportunities for student engagement subscale ranged from 1.00- 5.00 with a mean of 3.355 and a standard deviation of 0.965.

Neighborhood Measure

Neighborhood climate is measured by community risk and protective factors from the CTC survey, specifically the Community Disorganization subscale (α=0.828), Low Neighborhood Attachment subscale (α=0.842), and Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement (α=0.729) (Arthur et al., 2002). Responses to these items are on a four-point Likert scale from 0=Very False, 1=False, 2=True to 3=Very True and measure student perceptions of their neighborhood characteristics and attitudes toward their community. The current study uses the 3-item Low Neighborhood Attachment subscale (α=0.441), the 5-item Community Disorganization subscale (α=0.682), and a checklist of Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement that were adapted to reflect the opportunities available to the sample population. Mean scores of the Low Neighborhood Attachment subscale ranged from 1.00- 4.00 with a mean of 2.664 and a standard deviation of 0.707. Mean scores of the Community Disorganization subscale ranged from 1.00- 4.00 with a mean of 2.100 and a standard deviation of 0.715. Exposure to neighborhood violence was measured with one item "How often, if ever, did you see or hear someone being beaten up, stabbed, or shot in real life?" with responses on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0=Never, 1=

Once, 2= A few times, 3- Many times. Of the sample, 17.1% of students had never witnessed neighborhood violence and 19.9% reported witnessing neighborhood violence many times.

Table 3

Quantitative Survey Items

Variable	Assessment	# of Items	Operationalization and Psychometric Properties
Individual			
School Refusal	School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (C)	24	Ages 5 and up, (α=.68-.78), 7-pt Likert scale from 0-Never to 6-Always
Anxiety	Screen for Childhood Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED)	20	8-18 years old, (α=0.9), 5 subscales (α=0.74-0.89), 3pt Likert from 0-Not True to 2-Very True
Anti-Social Behaviors	CTC Substance Use Frequency	7	6th-12th grade Lifetime and 30-day cigarette, marijuana, alcohol 0 times to 40+ times (α=0.806) "Delinquent" behaviors from 0 times to 40+ times
	CTC Antisocial Behaviors	11	
Perceived Racism	Adapted Perceptions of Racism in Children and Youth (PRaCY)	23	8-18 years old (α=0.78), 4pt from 0-Never to 3-Often
Interpersonal			
Interaction with Peers	CTC Interaction with Prosocial Peers	5	6th-12th grade (α=0.703), number of friends from 0 to 4 or more
	CTC Close Friend Drug Use	2	(α=0.716), number of friends from 0 to 4 or more
Family Risk Factors	CTC Poor Family Management	8	6th-12th grade (α=0.857) 4-pt Likert from 0-Very False to 3-Very True
Family Protective Factors	CTC Attachment	4	6th-12th grade (α=0.763) 4-pt Likert from 0-Very False to 3-Very True
	SCM Parent Involvement subscale	3	12-18 years old, 5-pt Likert from 0-Strongly disagree to 4-Strongly Agree
Teacher Relationships	SCM Positive student-teacher relationships subscale	9	12-18 years old, 5-pt Likert -0-Strongly disagree to 4-Strongly Agree
Victimization	Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (MPVS)	12	11-16 years old, (α=0.716), 3 subscales (α=0.73-0.85), 3pt Likert from 0- Not at all to 2- More than once
School			
School Climate (SCM) subscales	School Connectedness	4	12-18 years old, (α=0.82- 0.93), 5-pt Likert from 0-Strongly disagree to 4-Strongly Agree
	Academic Support	4	
	Order and Discipline	6	
	Physical Environment	4	
	Social Environment	2	
	Perceived Exclusion/ Privilege	3	
	Opportunities for student engagement	9	
	Academic satisfaction	2	
Neighborhood			
Neighborhood Climate	CTC Community Disorganization	5	6th-12th grade (α=0.828) 4-pt Likert from 0-Very False to 3-Very True
	CTC Low Neighborhood Attachment	3	(α=0.842) 4-pt Likert from 0-Very False to 3-Very True
	CTC Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement	6	(α=0.729), yes/no or 4-pt Likert from 0-Very False to 3-Very True
	Community Violence Witnessing PHL ACEs	1	6th- 8th grade reading level, 0-Never to 3-Many
Demographic Characteristics			
School Status, Gender, Age, Neighborhood, Family Structure, Race/Ethnicity		25	[Control]

Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative component of the study uses a thematic analysis approach in order to identify factors that students perceive to have the greatest impact on attendance, explore emergent themes that could explain positive attendance outcomes, and advance a social change agenda in the education African American students in low-income, urban settings. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility, responsiveness to rich, detailed, complex data, and feasibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). As common themes emerged across interviews, results were not wedded to any particular theoretical framework which allowed for data to be analyzed and interpreted by drawing upon many different public health, anthropological, and sociological theoretical frameworks as described in the literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The study involves prolonged engagement through multiple in-depth interviews with 9th graders who are chronically absent and those who attend school regularly. Thematic analysis is useful for examining the different perspectives of chronically absent and regularly attending students, highlighting similarities and differences between their perceptions, and most importantly for the study, generating unanticipated insights (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). As the research aims to center student voices of African American students in low-income, urban settings, whose unique perspectives as marginalized individuals have typically been excluded from the discourse on chronic absenteeism, thematic analysis allows for new and previously unexplored themes to emerge. Also, including these two critical, yet opposing, information-rich groups, allows for the confirmation or disconfirmation of the importance and meaning of

patterns that emerge during student interviews and can increase credibility and representativeness of findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Patton, 1990).

Throughout research study design, pilot testing, data collection and analysis, I kept a reflexive journal that detailed my own thoughts, values and biases and the ways in which those ideas influence my interpretation of the data. As a former District of Columbia (DC) special education teacher and an African-American woman who grew up in a low income, urban area, I needed to remain self-reflective and transparent about how my own experiences shape how I interact with my participants and my data. I combined all of these reflections into a reflexive statement that accompanies my work and details the process of confronting my own biases while still elevating my participants' perspectives and interpretations.

I used peer-debriefing strategies that allowed me to maintain confidentiality of my participants but share their words and stories with other researchers and educators who may offer different perspectives on the data and interpretation and help delineate the differences between my interpretation based on my experiences and the participants' interpretation. I also engaged in the process of member-checking with my participants to make sure that my interpretations reflect their realities and gave them an opportunity to correct, challenge, expand, or reiterate any information or interpretations gleaned from their data.

Reflexivity Statement

Throughout this study I kept a reflexive journal to document the process of self-reflection throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Along with member checking and peer debriefing, this journaling process helped me to reduce

researcher bias and ensure that my participants' experiences and the meaning they have ascribed to those experiences is front and center and that my own history and interpretations do not eclipse their narratives. Below is a reflexivity statement that summarizes these reflections and positions my identity, history, experiences, values, and understandings in relation to chronic absenteeism among African American high school students attending predominately Black schools.

At one point early in my dissertation research I wrote "a teacher writing a dissertation on absenteeism… how groundbreaking?" as a somewhat snarky explanation for my interest in this particular topic and to begin to address areas of bias I would need to overcome in my data collection and analysis. A more nuanced understanding of the positionality of my life and identity with respect to my dissertation topic emerged as I explored what it means for a Black woman from Brooklyn and New Jersey, a special education teacher, a youth advocate, and public health professional to attempt to serve as a conduit for the voices of DC students attending predominately Black schools within the frameworks of the socioecological model and Critical Race Theory. Aside from my own personal and professional experiences that comprised my lifelong journey towards this research project, the world continued to change around us all throughout the analysis process. It's been important throughout this journey to continue to understand and describe how the worlds' events, my reactions, and feelings have impacted my work and analysis.

My own educational experiences and my own motivation to attend school throughout the years was an important starting place to explore influences on my interpretation of my data. If I had been eligible for my current research study, I would

have been in the regularly attending group of students. I was a student who had perfect attendance for many years throughout my school career and I never missed many days of school. My earliest memories of my own school attendance and attitude towards school are all positive and filled with eagerness. As the youngest of three sisters, I was always fascinated and excited by the idea of school. I remember sitting at the dining room table and forcing my parents to give me "homework" so I could be just like my big sisters. I would play school and pretend to write long essays by just keeping my pen constantly moving and looping across the page. I would attempt the math homework of my older sister (who was two grades ahead of me) and had great success because multiplication just made sense to me based on our educational light up board. While my siblings were not always thrilled by my intrusion, they humored me and my parents encouraged me so much so that even though my birthday was after the cutoff date in October, I was able to test into kindergarten and begin my school journey at age four. I also became aware that not every student shared my excitement for school.

I began my school career at the predominately Black, district zoned school and the vast majority of my classmates "looked like me." I lived in Crown Heights which at that time in the early nineties was largely composed of a sizable Hassidic Jewish population and Black immigrants from the West Indies and other parts of the African diaspora that lived mostly separate lives because of intense racial tension. I was very aware and proud of my West Indian heritage and being Black has always been a source of pride for me. I felt very comfortable around my classmates and I felt like I fit in well with my peers. I remember having best friends who looked like me and while all of our parents were immigrants from different places, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica,

Guyana, we all felt like family. There was even another Sharifah in my class so I became Sharifah H. and even my name was not a unique identifier among my peers. We wore uniforms so I remember the joy we would feel on certain days where we could dress freely and laying out my pink sweat suit in anticipation of Friday's free dress day or my watermelon dress for my kindergarten graduation. I lived across the street from school and had near perfect attendance. My mother walked us to school every single day not only because of our young ages, but also because of perceived danger. My earliest educational experience in a predominately Black school in an urban area is something I share in common with many of my participants and I was able to see some overlap in those experiences. However, NYC in the 90s and current Washington, DC are separate contexts and there were just as many differences as there were similarities. Also, my transition to high school was very different from these students as I attended a predominately white institution, specifically an all-girls private boarding school. My parents had little control or influence over my attendance, the campus was very suburban, and it was nearly impossible as a boarding student to have an unexcused absence because your dorm parent would be sent to your room to check on you if you were not present in class. The clear differences between my own high school experience and my participants' high school experiences encouraged me to dig deeper into their perceptions as there was no direct frame of reference in my own experience.

In addition to my experience as a student, my experience as a special education teacher in DC also informed my interest in both chronic absenteeism and anxiety. I was always acutely aware of chronic absenteeism in DC, especially as it became more prevalent in the city. I distinctly remember in my first years of teaching on days with

heavy rain, we would expect lower attendance. It was just a known fact that some students would not travel in inclement weather to attend school. Throughout my time in the classroom, students and parents shared a myriad of reasons for missing school from not having sanitary napkins to experiencing depressive episodes. There were also many students who missed many days of school and no staff members had a good understanding of the reasons behind their absenteeism. I was also always aware of my presence as a Black teacher and the extent to which my students identified with me and felt represented by me. As much as I had similarities in background with my students, there were also differences and I was always open with my students and allowed them to ask probing questions to better understand the world around them.

My experiences with anxiety began with growing up in a family of individuals coping with varying levels of anxiety. The stress, anxiety, and trauma associated with living in poverty through a drug epidemic and racial riots never really leaves you and manifests in different ways. I was always a very observant child and was able to pick up on the little manifestations of anxiety like test taking anxiety or the familial habits of constantly checking the locks on doors and scanning for exit routes in a new location. Personally, my level of anxiety has always felt manageable whereas I have supported others with high clinical levels of anxiety. Through this work and deep reflection, I've become more aware of my own maladaptive and adaptive strategies for dealing with stress and feelings of anxiety, particularly different levels of avoidance behaviors. Throughout my schooling career, I was also always paired with students who needed additional support in the classroom for a variety of reasons including anxiety, conduct disorder, and trauma exposure. My enthusiasm for school, unshakeable desire to follow

the rules, and introverted nature lead me to rarely speak in class. This meant that my seat often moved throughout the year and I would be seated next to the students who teachers felt needed a near peer model or at least someone who could withstand constant attempts at conversation in class. I was resolute and took pride in my position and approached my relationships with my peers as a great responsibility. Everyone at my table would not be talking, our hands would be folded, and we would be on the correct page when asked and I wouldn't have to say a word. I formed close relationships with the students who sat near me and many went on to become some of my closest friends. In hindsight, with my training and professional development in education, I can recognize different behavioral concerns and retroactively understand supports that would have been helpful for different students but I remember just feeling a sense of camaraderie with my classmates regardless of their attendance behaviors or classroom conduct.

As evidenced by the reflection above, I knew going into this research process there would be opportunities for my own experiences to bias the research and that I had to be aware and honest about this possibility. I anticipated that my background in teaching may bias my interactions with students, especially when considering adult-student relationships or if they shared incidents and events that may be difficult to process. It was helpful that I had primarily worked with younger students so there was genuine curiosity and limited prior knowledge on what the transition to high school should look like, so the participants were providing foundational knowledge and were given numerous opportunities to elaborate and describe further. I found that my teaching background was actually helpful for establishing rapport and I was also prepared with a list of resources and mental health supports for students who shared challenging stories.

To address bias in analysis, it was important for me to have a voice other than my own during analysis that was closer in age and experience to my students and that's why I recruited an undergraduate student from the same community as the participants who shared many similarities. I spent time establishing a strong working relationship with my undergraduate research assistant, who was also studying childhood development, and created a dynamic where they were considered an equal researcher with expert opinions. We began working together prior to data collection and throughout analysis they were able to offer insight, ask probing questions, challenge assumptions, and help ensure that the interpretation was grounded in the data shared by participants. Through journaling, meetings with my undergraduate assistant, as well as other peer debriefing sessions, I was able to discuss and unpack my own feelings and ensure that they were not being attributed to my participants.

I also knew that as a Black woman analyzing race and discrimination of majority Black participants, my interpretations would be influenced by my experiences. Especially using the framework of Critical Race Theory, my research was framed to center the voices of these young Black students and understand how race intersects with chronic absenteeism and the ways in which this may challenge dominant narratives held in society. I also saw the impact our shared racial identity had on my participants when describing their own opinions about race, their Black peers, and the perception of Black people in America. Sometimes this dynamic came across as hesitation to make certain statements, a desire to explain further, and some nods to a shared understanding because I was also Black. The Black experience is not a monolith and I was well aware that the way I experienced Blackness could vary significantly from my participants. I had to

unpack and reflect on my own experiences with racial socialization and the intersection with beliefs about educational attainment. Also, in discussing and analyzing topics such as in-person attendance, mental health, policing, police brutality, discrimination, and systemic racism, as these topics were at the forefront of society meant that I had to spend additional time journaling and practicing self-care with breaks from my research in order to process collective and individual racial trauma and maintain positive mental health habits. Through honest reflection, careful analysis, and guidance from my participants, research assistant and peers to constantly examine my own interaction with the data, I am confident that the experiences of my participants transitioning into high school and their views on that process have been comprehensively represented in this study.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis involves multiple regression analysis using STATA/IC version 15.1. First, descriptive statistics were performed on all study variables to show the basic characteristics and distribution within the sample. Binary logistic regression was conducted individually for each variable [Table 4] to assess if each variable significantly predicts September or End of Year chronic absenteeism. Predicted probabilities of chronic absenteeism were determined by Exp(B), and odds ratios for each variable were reported.

Then we created four multivariate logistic prediction models for each socioecological level by simultaneously entering all borderline significant and significant independent variables (IV) [$p<0.1$]. Variables were evaluated and then a final model combining significant predictors across socioecological levels was created. Table 4 describes the variables that were analyzed and their organization by socioecological level.

Table 4

Variables for Logistic Regression

Category	Variables	Socioecological Level
School Refusal Independent Variable (IV)	School Avoidance Subscale Mean School Escape Subscale Mean Attention Seeking Subscale Mean Tangible Rewards Subscale Mean	[Individual]
Anxiety (IV)	General Anxiety Disorder Subscale Mean Social Phobia Subscale Mean Trauma Stress Disorder Subscale Mean	
Anti-Social Behaviors (IV)	Substance Use Frequency Cigarette Use Alcohol Use Marijuana Use E-cigarette Use Antisocial Behavior Scale	
Perceived Racism (IV)	PRaCY mean score	
Interaction with Peers (IV)	Number of peers engaging in prosocial behaviors (mean) Number of peers engaging in antisocial behaviors (mean)	(Interpersonal)
Family Factors (IV)	Family Management Mean Attachment Mean SCM Parental Involvement Mean	
Teacher Relationships (IV)	SCM Positive student-teacher relationships subscale mean	
Victimization (IV)	Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (MPVS) Scale	
School Climate (IV)	School Connectedness Subscale Mean Academic Support Subscale Mean Order and Discipline Subscale Mean Physical Environment Subscale Mean Social Environment Subscale Mean Perceived Exclusion/ Privilege Subscale Mean Opportunities for student engagement Subscale Mean Academic satisfaction Subscale Mean	(School)
Neighborhood Climate (IV)	Community Disorganization Subscale Mean Low Neighborhood Attachment Subscale Mean Number Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement Community Violence Witnessing (PHL ACEs) Single Item	(Community)
Demographic (Control Variables)	Age, Gender	
Chronic Absenteeism Dependent Variable (DV)	Not Chronically Absent= 0-13 absences Chronically absent= 14 or more absences	

Missing Data

Efforts to minimize missing data were addressed initially in data collection. First, data collection was available during a window of dates, leaving opportunities for students to

complete the survey if they were absent on the initial testing date or did not finish. The online Qualtrics survey has a system to ensure students are made aware of answers they have left blank and must confirm their desire to leave an answer blank before continuing on in the survey. Answers also had options of "don't know" or "prefer not to say" when appropriate, and these categories were considered missing data. Missing data were handled by multiple imputation of estimated measurements based on a model including other auxiliary variables. There were 20 imputed data sets and all survey items that were left blank were imputed. Imputation was done using the STATA/IC version 15.1. software.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The data collected in the qualitative component of the research study was analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis approach. While this six-phase method is presented as linear, it is an iterative and reflective process that is ultimately responsive to the data, and thus involved constant movement back and forth between phases (Nowell et al., 2017). I also included strategies to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of the data while maintaining rigorous analysis throughout each phase.

Step 1: Familiarizing Myself with my Data

The first step of the qualitative analysis process was familiarizing myself with the data which involved immersing myself in the data through repeated listening, repeated reading, and taking notes and marking ideas for future analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I conducted all 30 interviews and collected data through interactive means and thus was well positioned to be familiar the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After conducting each interview, I created a research memo and reflexive journal

entry that noted my ideas when searching for meaning and identification of possible patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used the technique of member checking throughout the interviews by sharing verbal summaries of information that participants had shared and allowing them to confirm, edit, clarify, challenge, or expand on what I had heard and understood from their words. Transcription services were utilized in order to increase efficiency and feasibility of the study, however, I read and reread the transcripts in full while listening to the audio in order to makes corrections, include pauses, and ensure the accuracy of the transcription. This process was quite detailed and involved repeated listening and rereading, as participants' styles of speech were sometimes difficult for the transcription to accurately identify for the final version. After each transcription, I added to my reflexive journal and create a research memo on what occurred during the transcription process. After repeated reading and continued immersion in the data, a final version of the transcripts were prepared and uploaded to the NVivo software. Some steps that were taken to enhance credibility of the data were prolonged engagement with data through conducting multiple interviews with one subject and repeated listening and reading of transcripts, documenting theoretical and reflective thoughts as well as documenting thoughts about potential codes and themes (Nowell et al., 2017). The initial field notes, transcripts, research memos, and reflexive journals served as the start to an audit trail that is an essential part of data analysis and excerpts are included in Appendix G. (Nowell et al., 2017).

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

The second step of the qualitative analysis process involved producing initial codes which are segments of the data that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding

attendance or absenteeism and that help organize data into meaningful groups (Braun & Clark, 2006). Each transcript was coded in Nvivo, line by line for factors of interest in understanding student attendance, both barriers and protective factors. This process was very grounded in the exact words and phrases students used to describe their attendance and thus the number of separate codes from each interview ranged 76 to 329 depending on the length of the interview. While open coding was responsive to the data and any codes were be possible, the open coding process also noted text related to specific cultural wealth factors, specifically aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. During this step, I coded for many potential themes and patterns as it was not yet known what would become important as analysis continued. For example, I coded all of the early childhood and elementary school data but later decided to focus primarily on high school and middle school data for this dissertation project. I included any tensions, inconsistencies, or contradictions that arose across the data, and highlighted and annotated any particularly important quotes in Nvivo and set them aside in my research memos. After initial coding of the first rounds of interviews, I formed an informal code manual in Nvivo and was able to reuse codes such as "back up plan" or "cool with everybody" and this helped aid in further analysis and interpretation as codes could include data across multiple interviews or participants (Nowell et al. 2017). This process was iterative and thus reexamined frequently and edited to include new important codes that were clearly defined and grounded in the participant descriptions. And continued additions to the audit trail in the form of research memos and reflexive journal entries increased trustworthiness of the results (Nowell et al., 2017)

Step 3: Searching for Themes

Step three of the qualitative data analysis process involved refocusing analysis at the broader level of themes by sorting the different codes into potential themes, combining codes to form overarching themes or subthemes, and sorting codes that did not seem to fit into a miscellaneous category (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These codes were analyzed by individual case, across cases based on absenteeism group membership, and across all cases. These codes were then mapped into 16 candidate themes organized by socioecological level. At this stage, it was still unclear if certain codes needed to be refined, combined, separated or discarded and for that reason they were not discarded. Research memos and reflexive journaling at this stage included information about relationships between codes and candidate themes as well as feedback from a peer debriefing session with Dr. Aparicio. Additional strategies to increase credibility during this phase included diagramming to make sense of theme connections and writing detailed notes about development of hierarchies of concepts and themes and how those analytic conclusions were reached some of which are included in the Appendix. (Nowell et al., 2017).

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

The fourth step of the qualitative analysis process involved refining themes by reviewing coded data extracts for each theme, finding coherent patterns, and determining whether the themes accurately reflected the meanings evident in the entire dataset (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout this process, new themes were added, candidate themes were combined or deleted if redundant, and data were reduced into significant themes and subthemes that succinctly summarized the text and related to one another in a meaningful way (Nowell et al., 2017). The criteria for determining if a

candidate theme should remain involved having enough data to support the theme, internal homogeneity so that all the data within a theme coheres meaningfully but is not too diverse and needs to be broken down into separate themes, and ensuring that themes adequately capture the important information from the data. After themes have been chosen and documented in research memos, I tested the themes for referential adequacy by returning to the raw data and comparing it to the developed themes to make sure that all conclusions are firmly grounded in the data and accurately reflect student perspectives (Nowell et al., 2017). This ensured that the research study continues to center student voice and increases the trustworthiness of the data.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

In the fifth step of the qualitative analysis process, I determined which aspect of the data each theme captures, identify the story each theme tells, select a "punchy" theme name that immediately gives the reader an idea of what the theme is about and write a detailed analysis describing each theme (Braun & Clark, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Some theme names remained consistent throughout the entire process of reviewing themes whereas others changed drastically. During this step, all of the data, and initial codes were reviewed again to ensure that the scope and content of each theme is well defined and distinct from other themes (Nowell et al., 2017). During this phase, peer debriefing and consulting experts with a great deal of knowledge about chronic absenteeism to discuss my methodological decisions and rationale for each theme was essential and their feedback informed the final presentation of qualitative themes.

Step 6: Producing the Report

The sixth and final step of the qualitative analysis process involves telling the complex story of my data in concise, coherent, logical write-up that includes my themes, sufficient evidence with vivid data extracts, and an analytic narrative that goes beyond description and makes an argument in relation to my research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The reports generated from this study include executive summaries for important MXP/MLKP stakeholders and non-MXP/MLKP stakeholders, the final dissertation, and manuscripts intended to contribute to the scientific community and discourse on chronic absenteeism. In addition to member checking with students during the interview process to check for accuracy and ensure that I accurately reflected their perspectives, I also shared my initial findings to school leaders and attendance coordinators in separate small group presentations. They confirmed that many of the themes aligned with what they typically see around student attendance behaviors, shared that some results they had not previously considered but they could think anecdotally about many students who displayed these behaviors and would fit into these categories and they became excited about how these results could impact new intervention avenues. This process along with thick descriptions of socioecological context which was informed by the quantitative survey data and a detailed audit trail including theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the study enhanced credibility of the data and final reports.

Table 5 describes the activities and outputs from each phase of thematic analysis.

Table 5

Thematic Analysis Activities and Outputs

Step	Activities	Outputs

STEP 1: Familiarizing Myself with Data	Conducting Interviews
	Reflexive Journaling
	Writing Research Memos
	Transcribing Data
	Reviewing Transcripts for accuracy, inflection, pauses, etc.
		Audio Recordings of Interviews
		Interview Transcripts
		Audit Trail
		• Research Memos
		  o Initial theoretical thoughts
		  o Potential codes
		  o Questions to follow-up on
		  o Additional literature to explore
		• Reflexive Journal Entries

STEP 2: Generating Initial Codes	Upload Final Transcripts to NVivo
	Line by line (open) coding in NVivo by creating nodes
	Collecting all nodes to begin the process of looking for patterns and examining meaning
	Creating an iterative code manual that will continue to be updated
	Reflexive Journaling
	Writing Research Memos
		NVivo Output with line by line initial codes
		Initial Code Manual after analysis of first 10 interviews
		Updated Audit Trail
		• Research Memos
		  o List of Initial Codes
		  o Analytic Decisions for inclusion or exclusion of particular codes
		  o Questions to follow-up on
		  o Surprising findings
		• Reflexive Journaling
		  o Researcher bias affecting interpretation of results and creation of codes

STEP 3: Searching for Themes	Analyzing initial codes to decide which can form main themes, subthemes, or that should be moved to a miscellaneous category for future analysis
	Creating diagrams that show the relationships between candidate themes/subthemes
	Extracting data and setting aside demonstrative quotes that are coded for and related to candidate themes and that may be important in the following steps and mixed method data analysis
	Reflexive Journaling
	Writing Research Memo
		List of candidate themes/ subthemes and their justification based on links to related codes
		NVivo Output with diagrams depicting relationships between themes
		Handwritten/ PowerPoint Diagrams depicting relationships between themes
		Updated Audit Trail
		• Research Memos
		  o List of candidate themes and subthemes
		  o Analytic decisions for inclusion or exclusion of candidate themes
		  o Questions to follow-up on
		  o Surprising/ Interesting/ Contradictory findings
		• Reflexive Journaling
		  o Researcher bias affecting interpretation of results and creation of themes

Thematic Analysis Activities and Outputs (continued)		
Step	**Activities**	**Outputs**

STEP 4: Reviewing Themes	Reviewing and refining candidate themes to create themes and subthemes
	Testing for referential adequacy by returning to the raw data.
	Creating a thematic map with refined themes
	Reflexive Journaling
	Writing Research Memos
		Thematic Map that tells overall story of the dataset
		Updated Audit Trail
		• Research Memos
		  o Analytic decisions for inclusion or exclusion of themes
		  o Questions to follow-up on and next steps
		• Reflexive Journaling
		  o Researcher bias affecting decision to keep, discard, refine, split, or collapse different then

STEP 5: Defining and Naming Themes	Naming themes and subthemes
	Writing detailed analysis of each theme and subtheme
	Peer debriefing
	Reflexive Journaling
	Writing Research Memos
		List of theme and subtheme names along with a description of the ”essence” of the theme, extracted data to support the theme, and a written detailed analysis
		Updated Audit Trail
		• Research Memos
		  o Analytic decisions for inclusion or exclusion of themes
		  o Detailed analysis of each theme and how it fits into the larger picture
		• Reflexive Journaling
		  o Researcher bias affecting decision to keep, discard, refine, split, or collapse different then

STEP 6: Producing the Report	Member checking with student participants Completing final reports for different audiences that detail findings and results Reflexive Journaling Writing Research Memos	Completed Audit Trail • Research Memos o Notes from Member checking with student participants • Reflexive Journal Final Reflexive Statement Executive Summary and PowerPoint Presentation for dissemination to MLKP?MXP team and families • Recommendations for strategies and interventions to address absenteeism Executive Summary for non MXP/MLKP school-based entities that can use data to inform practices and promote regular attendance Final Dissertation Manuscript Drafts

Mixed Method Data Analysis

The concurrent transformative mixed method approach requires the interaction and joint analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. The initial interaction took place when quantitative data from surveys is used to inform recruitment of participants for the qualitative component. Once data were collected it was analyzed in three phases.

The first phase of this mixed method data analysis involved analyzing the quantitative data using qualitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The logistic regression models were analyzed using the qualitative codebook to see if any statistical relationships can be coded qualitatively. Quantitative data were extracted if the data supports any qualitative themes or provides context for qualitative interpretations.

The second phase of the mixed method data analysis involved investigating patterns of association (converging or contrasting) between quantitative and qualitative data by juxtaposing the different forms of data (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011). Most important during this phase was the comparison the predictive individual, interpersonal, school, and neighborhood factors in the quantitative data to the perceived predictive nature of the risk factors across the socio-ecological model based on qualitative interviews. Divergence between the perceived causes and statistically significant causes could indicate inadequate measurement tools, perceived norms that influence behavior, and many other potential inferences that could inform future research and recommendations to promote regular school attendance.

The final phase of the mixed method data analysis involved making inferences, interpreting how the data fits into the larger picture and writing up results. These write-ups include recommendations that integrate student perception of needs and identified

barriers to regular attendance and are presented in the final dissertation and will be further disseminated in manuscripts intended to contribute to the scientific community and discourse on chronic absenteeism. Table 6 describes the activities and outputs from each phase of mixed method analysis.

Table 6

Mixed Method Analysis Activities and Outputs

Phase	Activities	Outputs

Data Consolidation or Merging	Analyzing Quantitative Data Qualitatively
	Analyzing Qualitative Data Qualitatively
		Quantitative data extracts that support qualitative themes
		Frequency of codes
		Descriptive statistics
		Updated Audit Trail
		• Research Memos
		  ○ Questions to follow-up on
		  ○ Surprising findings
		• Reflexive Journaling
		  ○ Researcher bias affecting interpretation of results and creation of codes

Comparing and Contrasting Data	Comparing and Contrasting Data
	• Do different data sources agree or disagree?
	• Do one set of data responses validate, support, or contradict the other set of data responses?
	Linking data based on thematic overlap
		Interrelated thematic or explanatory/ predictive statements
		Joint displays that compare and contrast data
		Updated Audit Trail
		• Research Memos
		  ○ Detailed analysis of each data convergence label and how it fits into the larger picture
		  ○ Surprising/ Interesting/ Contradictory findings
		• Reflexive Journaling

Report Results, Inferences, and Interpretations	Search for patterns Compare observations to expected outcomes based on hypotheses Explore extreme cases, contradictory findings, or any outlier cases Check conclusion against existing literature Makes inferences that best explain findings Write up mixed method analysis reports	

Chapter 4: Quantitative Results

End of Year Absenteeism Results

A total of 306 ninth graders were eligible to complete the quantitative survey. Of these 306 eligible students, 70.6% (n=216) provided assent and completed the quantitative survey. There were statistically significant differences between the group of eligible students who did not participate in the survey and those who did. The missing group was more likely to be male, more likely to chronically absent in September and for the entire school year, had more End of Year tardies, more out of school suspensions and lower GPAs for all four quarters. Additional missing data analysis is available in Appendix H.

Table 7 displays the distribution of key demographic characteristics of the final sample and the unadjusted logistic regression results that demonstrate how these variables relate to End of Year Chronic Absenteeism in the 9th grade year.

Table 7

Demographic Characteristics of Participants and their Association with End of Year Chronic Absenteeism (N=216)

Variables	Total Participants	Unadjusted OR	95% CI
High School 1	41 (19.0%)	1.031	0.438-2.429
High School 2	175 (81.0%)		
Female	124 (57.4%)	0.649	0.332- 1.269
Male	92 (42.6%)		
Age	Mean: 14.6 SD. 0.46	1.955	0.968- 3.948
September Chronic Absenteeism			
Yes	32 (14.8%)	**9.744**	**4.267-22.249**
No	184 (85.2%)		
Total Days Absent pre 9/30	Mean 1.56 SD: 2.162	**1.725**	**1.420-2.095**
September Unexcused Absences	Mean: 1.01 SD. 1.617	**1.784**	**1.405-2.265**
September Number of Days Tardy	Mean: 9.09 SD. 8.092	**1.059**	**1.018-1.101**
End of Year Unexcused Absences	Mean: 6.43 SD. 7.726	**1.609**	**1.396- 1.855**
End of Year Number of Days Tardy	Mean: 39.81 SD. 30.135	**1.015**	**1.004-1.027**
OSS			
Yes	54 (24.6%)	**3.555**	**1.753- 7.208**
No	162 (75.4%)		
Number of Days on OSS	Mean: 0.972 SD. 2.190	**1.321**	**1.147-1.521**
Q1 GPA	Mean: 2.58 SD. 0.79	**0.409**	**0.263-0.636**
Q2 GPA	Mean: 2.36 SD. 0.88	**0.248**	**0.151-0.406**
Q3 GPA	Mean: 2.51 SD. 0.84	**0.329**	**0.210-0.516**
Q4 GPA	Mean: 2.53 SD. 1.17	**0.516**	**0.380-0.701**

Bolded results at p< 0.05 level

Of the sample of 216 students, 43 students (19.9%) were chronically absent at the end of their 9th grade year. Students who were chronically absent in September were more likely to be chronically absent for the entire school year [OR=9.744 CI=4.267-22.249]. Students who were suspended for even one day during ninth grade (mean days suspended=0.972) were over three times as likely to be chronically absent as compared to students who had never been suspended [OR=3.555 CI=1.753–7.208]. GPA in all four grade periods was again associated with chronic absenteeism. Table 8 displays the individual factors, unadjusted logistic regression results, and how they predict End of Year Chronic Absenteeism in the 9th grade year among this sample.

Table 8

Individual Factors and Their Association with End of Year Absenteeism, Unadjusted Models (N=216)

Individual Factors	Descriptive Statistics	Unadjusted OR	95% CI
School Avoidance Subscale Mean	Mean: 2.2075, SD: 1.137	1.053	0.786-1.410
School Escape Subscale Mean	Mean: 1.9889, SD: 0.871	1.120	0.768-1.631
School Attention Seeking Subscale Mean	Mean: 3.1171, SD:1.264	0.966	0.739-1.262
School Tangible Rewards Subscale Mean	Mean: 4.2013, SD: 1.217	0.912	0.693-1.201
Generalized Anxiety Disorder Subscale	Mean: 6.3062, SD: 4.034	0.963	0.883-1.050
Social Anxiety Disorder Subscale	Mean: 5.7799, SD. 3.540	0.959	0.870-1.056
Trauma Stress Disorder Subscale	Mean: 2.1333, SD: 2.263	0.914	0.781-1.071
Total Anxiety Disorder Scale+	Mean: 14.2740, SD. 8.190	0.978	0.937-1.021
High Anxiety >17			
Yes	81 (37.5%)	0.646	0.313-1.332
No	127 (58.8%)		
Alcohol Use Lifetime			
Yes	61 (28.2%)	1.202	0.583-2.474
No	146 (67.6%)		
Alcohol Use Past 30 Days*			
Yes	20 (9.3%)	**2.867**	**1.097-7.483**
No	187 (95.8%)		
Marijuana Use Lifetime			
Yes	67 (31.0%)	0.913	0.440-1.896
No	139 (64.4%)		
Heavy Marijuana Use Lifetime >10 times*			
Yes	20 (9.3%)	**3.793**	**1.456-9.886**
No	186 (86.1%)		
Marijuana Past 30 Days			
Yes	34 (15.7%)	2.017	0.893-4.556
No	173 (80.1%)		
Heavy Marijuana Use Past 30 Days> 10			
Yes	11 (5.1%)	1.462	0.371- 5.765
No	196 (90.7%)		
Antisocial Behaviors*	Mean: 16.2304 SD. 8.512	**1.036**	**1.001-1.072**
PRACY Mean (Perceived Racism)	Mean: 2.51924 SD. 0.942	1.316	0.913-1.895

*** p< 0.05 level and +<0.10**

Of the individual factors examined independently, alcohol use in the past 30 days [OR=2.867 CI=1.097–7.483], heavy lifetime marijuana use defined as 10 or more times [OR=3.793 CI=1.456–9.886], and antisocial behaviors which encompass substance use, criminal, and delinquent behaviors [OR=1.036 CI=1.001–1.072], were significant predictors of End of Year chronic absenteeism. Total anxiety [OR=0.978 CI=0.978–1.021] was borderline significant. Students who reported alcohol use during the first month of school were nearly three times as likely to be chronically absent at the end of the year as compared to students who reported no alcohol use in the past 30 days.

Students who reported using marijuana more than 10 times in their lifetime were nearly four times as likely to be chronically absent as compared to peers who reported none or less than 10 times using marijuana. Students who reported more antisocial behaviors were more likely to be chronically absent as compared to their peers who reported fewer antisocial behaviors.

Table 9 displays the interpersonal factors, school factors, and neighborhood climate variables that were examined, the unadjusted logistic regression results, and how they predict End of Year Chronic Absenteeism in the 9th grade year among this sample.

Table 9

Interpersonal, School Climate, and Neighborhood Climate Factors and Their Association with End of Year Chronic Absenteeism (n=216)

Interpersonal Factors	Descriptive Statistics	Unadjusted OR	95% CI
Prosocial Peers Mean	Mean: 2.0635 SD. 0.940	1.239	0.844-1.819
Antisocial Peers Mean	Mean: 0.6693 SD. 0.944	1.317	0.927-1.871
Family Management Mean	Mean 3.0791 SD: 0.638	1.238	0.673-2.277
Mother Attachment	Mean 6.0168 SD: 1.828	1.125	0.907-1.394
Father Attachment	Mean 4.5028 SD: 2.227	0.971	0.823-1.146
Parental Involvement Mean	Mean 2.4477 SD: 1.032	1.322	0.923-1.893
Teacher Relationship Mean	Mean 3.1360 SD: 0.874	1.238	0.787-1.947
Peer Victimization	Mean 6.8084 SD: 6.035	1.006	0.945-1.072
Verbal Victimization Subscale Mean	Mean:3.2024 SD. 2.776	1.009	0.881-1.157
Social Manipulation Subscale Mean	Mean:2.2754 SD: 2.361	1.063	0.909-1.244
Physical Victimization Subscale Mean	Mean: 1.3412 SD. 1.812	1.019	0.831- 1.250
Perceptions of School Climate			
Academic Support Subscale Mean	Mean: 3.707, SD: 1.018	0.907	0.607-1.354
Order and Discipline Subscale Mean	Mean: 3.373, SD: 0.916	0.906	0.577-1.422
School Physical Environment Subscale Mean	Mean: 3.239, SD: 1.101	0.948	0.667-1.349
Academic Satisfaction Subscale Mean	Mean: 2.598, SD: 1.224	1.061	0.776-1.450
Perceived Exclusion Subscale Mean	Mean: 2.773, SD: 0.989	1.258	0.836-1.892
School Connectedness Subscale Mean	Mean: 3.159, SD: 0.898	0.975	0.609-1.560
School Social Environment Subscale Mean	Mean: 3.169, SD: 1.119	0.895	0.618-1.297
School Opportunities Subscale Mean	Mean: 3.355, SD: 0.965	0.804	0.543-1.192
Neighborhood Climate			
Neighborhood Attachment	Mean: 2.6643, SD: 0.707	1.129	0.674-1.891
Community Disorganization	Mean: 2.1000, SD: 0.715	1.475	0.859-2.532
Neighborhood Violence Exposure			
Never	37 (17.1%)	1.323	0.929-1.885
Once	23 (10.6%)		
A Few Times	36 (16. 7%		
Many Times	43 (19.9%)		

*** p< 0.05 level and +<0.10**

Of the interpersonal, school climate, and neighborhood climate factors examined independently, there were no significant predictors of End of Year chronic absenteeism. Appendix H is the expanded results section which includes all of the results for each survey question.

End of Year Multivariate Results

Four separate multivariate models were run to understand how clusters of individual factors, interpersonal factors, school climate, and neighborhood climate factors interact with one another and impact End of Year Chronic Absenteeism. For the individual multivariate results, variables representing school refusal, total anxiety, antisocial behaviors, and perceived racism were entered at once. General anxiety, total anxiety, and high anxiety are all impacted by the same individual items so total anxiety was used as the anxiety variable because it is continuous and was borderline significant ($p<0.1$) in predicting End of Year chronic absenteeism. Substance use frequency variables impact the overall antisocial behaviors and are highly correlated because of their independent significance, so alcohol use in the past 30 days and heavy lifetime marijuana were used because they were both significant predictors of End of Year chronic absenteeism. Table 10 shows the adjusted logistic regression results predicting year End of Year Chronic Absenteeism entered by individual, interpersonal, school climate or neighborhood climate.

Table 10

Multilevel Prediction Models of End of Year Absenteeism: Adjusted Logistic Regression

	Total Sample N=216	
	AOR	95% CI
Model 1: Individual Factors, Pseudo R^2=0.050		
School Refusal- Avoidance	0.856	0.399-1.838
School Refusal- Escape	1.034	0.451-2.375
School Refusal- Attention Seeking	1.228	0.799-1.888
School Refusal- Tangible Rewards	1.103	0.691-1.762
Alcohol Use Past 30 Days	1.755	0.374- 8.229
Heavy Marijuana Use	**5.066**	**1.227-21.084**
Total Anxiety Scale	1.010	0.939-1.087
PRACY Mean (Perceived Racism)	1.231	0.679-2.234
Model 2: Interpersonal Factors, Pseudo R^2=0.149		
Prosocial Peers	1.343	0.839-2.152
Antisocial Peers	1.818	0.762- 4.339
Family Management	0.827	0.383-1.788
Mother Attachment	1.142	0.886-1.473
Parental Involvement	1.106	0.722-1.694
Teacher Relationship	1.124	0.650-1.943
Peer Victimization	1.000	0.931-1.076
Model 3: School Climate Factors, Pseudo R^2=0.076		
Academic Support	1.176	0.506-2.733
Order and Discipline	0.938	0.417-2.110
School Physical Environment	1.038	0.642-1.743
Perceived Exclusion	1.430	0.918-2.227
School Connectedness	1.079	0.575-2.025
School Social Environment	0.802	0.460-1.399
Academic Satisfaction	1.188	0.798-1.769
School Opportunities	0.650	0.349-1.209
Model 4: Neighborhood Factors, Pseudo R^2=0.239		
Community Disorganization	1.261	0.691-2.300
Neighborhood Attachment	**1.981**	**1.046-3.753**
Neighborhood Violence Exposure	1.189	0.815-1.735

Bolded results at p< 0.05 level

In Model 1, only Heavy Marijuana use [OR=5.066 CI=1.227–21.084] was predictive of End of Year chronic absenteeism. Students who reported using marijuana more than 10 times in their life were five times as likely to be chronically absent as compared to peers who reported little to no marijuana use. There were no significant predictors in Models 2 and 3. In Model 4, Neighborhood Attachment [OR=1.981

CI=1.046-3.753] was predictive of chronic absenteeism. Table 11 shows the final End of Year absenteeism logistic regression model controlling for gender.

Table 11

Final End of Year Absenteeism Adjusted Logistic Regression Model

	Total Sample N=216	
	AOR	95% CI
Heavy Marijuana Use	**4.662**	**1.173-18.524**
Neighborhood Attachment	1.402	0.686- 2.866
Gender	0.879	0.389- 2.502

Bolded results at p< 0.05 level, Pseudo R^2=0.112. Models control for gender.

In the final model, which included all variables where the p-value was less than .05, only heavy marijuana use [OR=4.785 CI=1.195-19.165] remained predictive of End of Year chronic absenteeism.

September Absenteeism Results

September absenteeism was found to be predictive of End of Year chronic absenteeism. Logistic regression analysis of factors that predict September absenteeism were then examined to explore any potential explanatory variables that could serve as early signs or potential intervention targets at the start of the school year. Table 12 displays the individual, interpersonal, school climate and neighborhood factors unadjusted logistic regression results and how they predict September Chronic Absenteeism in the 9th grade year among this sample.

Table 12

Multilevel Factors and their Association with September Absenteeism: Unadjusted Odds Ratios and 95% Confidence Intervals

	Total Sample N=216	
	Unadjusted OR	95% CI
Individual Factors		
School Avoidance Subscale Mean	0.811	0.557-1.180
School Escape Subscale Mean	0.890	0.558-1.418
School Attention Seeking Subscale Mean	1.126	0.841-1.506
School Tangible Rewards Subscale Mean	0.993	0.729-1.354
Generalized Anxiety Disorder Subscale	**0.878**	**0.787-0.977**
Social Anxiety Disorder Subscale	0.929	0.831-1.039
Trauma Stress Disorder Subscale	0.862	0.714-1.042
Total Anxiety Disorder Scale	**0.945**	**0.898-0.994**
High Anxiety > 17	**0.311**	**0.122-0.793**
Alcohol Use Lifetime	0.767	0.324-1.818
Alcohol Use Past 30	0.983	0.277-3.491
Marijuana Use Lifetime	0.933	0.414-2.101
Heavy Marijuana Use Lifetime	1.411	0.439-4.532
Marijuana Past 30	1.481	0.581-3.773
Heavy Marijuana Use Past 30	1.230	0.253-5.974
Antisocial Behaviors	1.010	0.969-1.053
PRACY Mean (Perceived Racism)	1.086	0.711-1.659
Interpersonal Factors		
Prosocial Peers Mean	1.081	0.703-1.663
Antisocial Peers Mean	0.895	0.571-1.402
Family Management Mean	0.861	0.464-1.600
Mother Attachment	**1.340**	**1.010-1.778**
Father Attachment	0.948	0.781-1.151
Parental Involvement Mean	0.991	0.641-1.531
Teacher Relationship Mean	0.926	0.549-1.561
Peer Victimization	0.963	0.894-1.037
Verbal Victimization Subscale Mean	0.926	0.787-1.089
Social Manipulation Subscale Mean	0.947	0.785-1.143
Physical Victimization Subscale Mean	0.923	0.709- 1.202
School Climate Factors		
Academic Support Subscale Mean	0.994	0.648-1.525
Order and Discipline Subscale Mean	0.822	0.517-1.307
School Physical Environment Subscale Mean	1.008	0.673-1.510
Academic Satisfaction Subscale Mean	0.917	0.618-1.361
Perceived Exclusion Subscale Mean	1.158	0.752-1.785
School Connectedness Subscale Mean	1.123	0.695-1.815
School Social Environment Subscale Mean	1.258	0.815-1.941
School Opportunities Subscale Mean	0.863	0.545-1.366
Neighborhood Factors		
Community Disorganization Subscale	1.418	0.687-2.926
Neighborhood Attachment Subscale	1.029	0.562-1.884
Exposure to Neighborhood Violence	0.973	0.646-1.466

Bolded results at p< 0.05 level

Of individual factors, generalized anxiety [OR=0.878, CI=0.787–0.977], total anxiety [OR=0.945, CI=0.898–0.994], and high anxiety defined as an overall score greater than 17 [OR=0.311, CI=0.122–0.793] were all predictive of September chronic absenteeism. Students in the high anxiety group were approximately three times less likely to be chronically absent in September than their peers in the low anxiety group. Of interpersonal factors, only mother attachment [OR=1.340, CI=1.010–1.778] was significantly predictive of September absenteeism. Students who reported greater attachment to their mothers were more likely to be chronically absent in September as compared to students who reported less attachment to their mothers. There were no significant predictors among the school climate and neighborhood factors. Table 13 shows four adjusted logistic regression models predicting September Chronic Absenteeism grouped by individual factors, interpersonal factors, school climate or neighborhood climate. In Model 1, individual factors representing school refusal, anxiety, antisocial behaviors, and perceived racism were entered at once. General anxiety, total anxiety, and high anxiety are all impacted by the same individual items and were highly correlated so high anxiety defined as higher than the cutoff score of 17 was used as the anxiety variable.

Table 13

Multilevel Prediction Models of September Absenteeism: Adjusted Logistic Regression

	Total Sample N=216	
	AOR	95% CI
Model 1: Individual Factors Pseudo R^2=0.0832		
School Refusal- Avoidance	0.557	0.052-5.937
School Refusal- Escape	1.833	0.171-19.71
School Refusal- Attention Seeking*	**3.286***	**1.139-9.482***
School Refusal- Tangible Rewards	2.378	0.516-10.95
High Anxiety >17 *	**0.301***	**0.099-0.909***
Antisocial Behaviors	1.025	0.976-1.076
PRACY Mean (Perceived Racism)	1.236	0.741-2.062
Model 2: Interpersonal Factors Pseudo R^2=0.1186		
Prosocial Peers	1.153	0.675-1.970
Antisocial Peers	0.452	0.149-1.371
Family Management	0.544	0.218-1.362
Mother Attachment*	**1.438***	**1.012-2.043***
Parental Involvement	0.976	0.583-1.632
Teacher Relationship	0.881	0.453-1.719
Peer Victimization	1.008	0.920-1.104
Model 3: School Climate Factors Pseudo R^2=0.0636		
Academic Support	1.350	0.524-3.478
Order and Discipline+	0.489+	0.188-1.271+
School Physical Environment	0.942	0.523-1.694
Perceived Exclusion	1.038	0.579-1.861
School Connectedness	1.299	0.638-2.643
School Social Environment+	1.702+	0.873-3.317+
Academic Satisfaction	1.005	0.606-1.666
School Opportunities	0.694	0.277-1.741
Model 4: Neighborhood Factors Pseudo R^2=0.0345		
Community Disorganization	1.414	0.694-2.881
Neighborhood Attachment	1.493	0.721-3.088
Neighborhood Violence Exposure	0.903	0.586-1.391

*** p< 0.05 level and +<0.10**

In Model 1, school refusal for attention seeking reasons [OR=3.286, CI=1.139–9.482] and high anxiety [OR=0.301, CI=0.099–0.909] were predictive of September absenteeism. Students who reported more attention seeking reasons for school refusal were three times as likely to be chronically absent as compared to peers who reported fewer attention seeking reasons for school refusal. Students reporting high anxiety were

less likely to be chronically absent in September as compared to students reporting lower anxiety. In Model 2, mother attachment [OR=1.438 CI=1.012- 2.043] was predictive of September absenteeism. Students who reported higher attachment to their mothers were more likely to be chronically absent in September as compared to students who reported lower mother attachment. While there were no significant predictors in Models 3 and 4, Order and Discipline [OR=0.489, CI=0.188-1.271] and School Social Environment [OR=1.702, CI=0.873–3.317] were both borderline significant ($p< 0.1$) so they were included in the final model. Table 14 shows the final September absenteeism logistic regression model controlling for gender, including all variables that were $p<.10$ significance from Table 13.

Table 14

Final September Absenteeism Adjusted Logistic Regression Model

	Total Sample N=216	
	AOR	95% CI
School Refusal Attention Seeking	**3.707**	**1.222-9.855**
High Anxiety > 17	**0.259**	**0.083-1.000)**
Mother Attachment	**1.426**	**1.011-2.011**
School Order and Discipline	**0.387**	**0.173- 0.863**
School Social Environment	1.854	0.932-3.687
Gender	0.750	0.290-1.942

Bolded results at $p\leq 0.05$ level Pseudo R^2=0.1961

School refusal for attention seeking reasons [OR=3.707, CI=1.222–9.855], high anxiety [OR=0.259, CI=0.083–1.00], mother attachment [OR=1.426, CI=1.011–2.011], and Order and Discipline [OR=0.387, CI=0.173-0.863] were predictive of September absenteeism while School Social Environment [OR=1.854, CI=0.932-3.687] remained borderline significant ($p=0.78$). Students who reported more attention seeking reasons for school refusal were nearly four times as likely to be chronically absent as compared to peers who reported fewer attention seeking reason for school refusal. Students reporting

high anxiety were less likely to be chronically absent in September as compared to students reporting lower anxiety. Students who reported higher attachment to their mothers were more likely to be chronically absent in September as compared to students who reported lower mother attachment. Students who reported higher perceived fairness of order and discipline school policies were less likely to be chronically absent in September as compared to their peers who reported lower perceived fairness. While only borderline significant, students who reported greater happiness with the other students attending their school were more likely to be chronically absent in September.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Results

Participant Profiles

A total of 10 participants were interviewed for this research study. These students so generously shared their stories and experiences over the course of their ninth-grade year. Their voices and perspectives will be centered in the following findings to provide greater insight into the realities of the high school transition. Table 15 provides a brief attendance profile of each 9th grade student included in the study.

Table 15

Participant Profiles

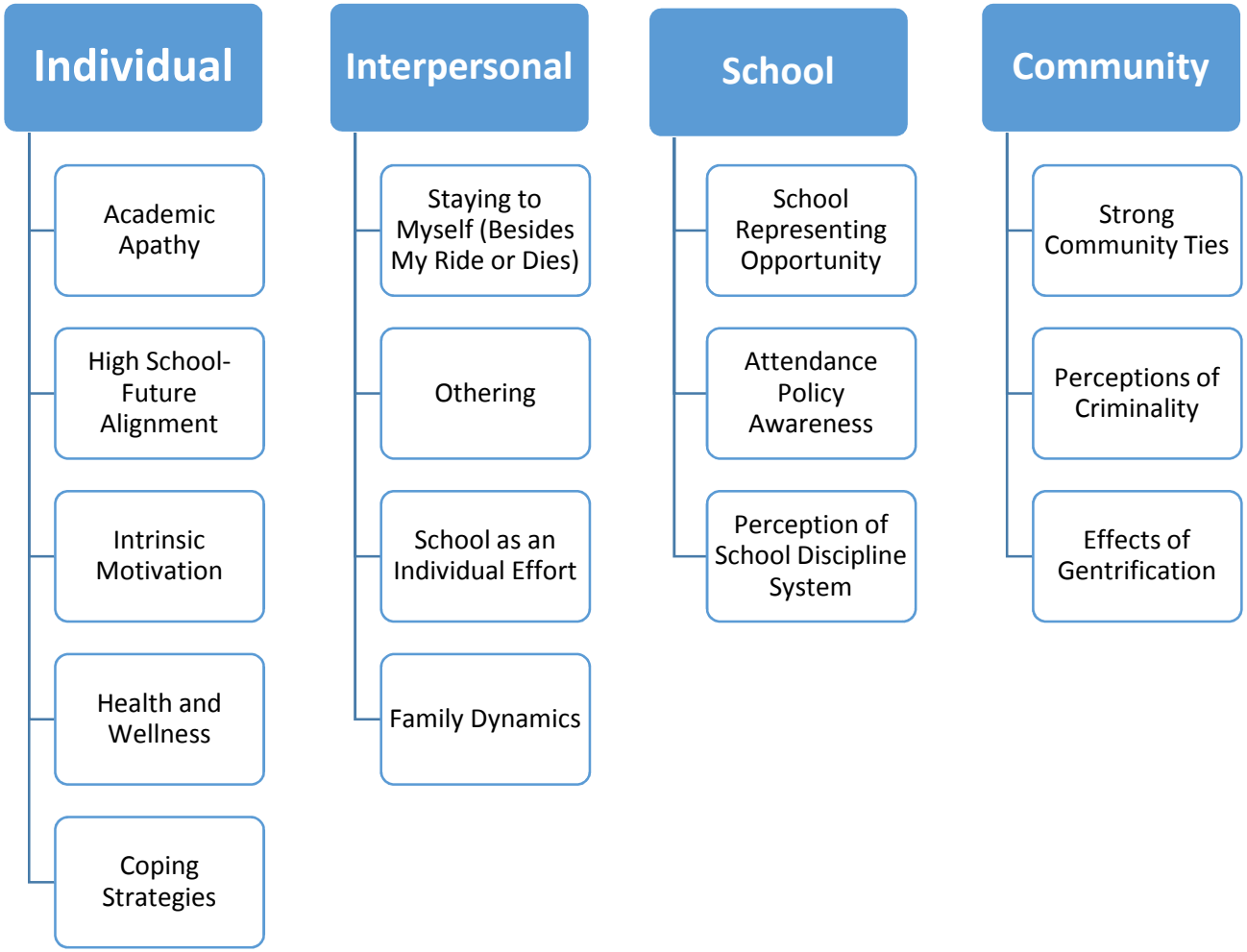
Chronically Absent Group		
Participants	Gender	Description
Fred	Male	Fred is a student with who had the majority of his absences in the first month of school and very few throughout the rest of the year. Nearly half of his absences were excused and by the end of the year, he was considered neither truant nor chronically absent.
Will	Male	Will is a student athlete with many unexcused absences. By the end of the year, he was considered truant but not chronically absent.
AJ	Male	AJ is a student with a health condition that caused him to miss a lot of school in his 9th grade year. While more than two thirds of his absences were excused, by the end of the school year he was considered both truant and chronically absent.
Derrick	Male	Derrick is a student who has had more absences in his 9th grade year than in previous years and the majority of his absences are unexcused. By the end of the year, he was considered both truant and chronically absent.
Kay	Male	Kay is a student whose absences were primarily because of out of school suspensions. By the end of the year, he was considered chronically absent but not truant.
Regularly Attending Group		
Alexis	Female	Alexis is a student involved in many extracurricular activities who had few absences throughout her 9th grade year.
Miracle	Female	Miracle is a student with many family responsibilities who often arrived late to school but had few absences throughout her 9th grade year.
June	Female	June is a student adjusting to living in a new household who had few absences throughout her 9th grade year.
Jared	Male	Jared is a student involved in many extracurricular activities who often arrived late to school but had very few absences in his 9th grade year.
Septembra	Female	Septembra is a student athlete with few absences in her 9th grade year.

By the end of the school year, two students were considered chronically absent and truant (AJ and Derrick), one student was considered chronically absent but not truant (Kay), one student was considered truant but not chronically absent (Will), and one student was neither chronically absent nor truant (Fred). By the end of the school year, none of the 5 students who were regularly attending in September were considered chronically absent or truant.

The thematic analysis revealed themes at each socioecological level that provide new insight into risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism that can be further explored and addressed through interventions. While many themes and subthemes emerged from this rich dataset, the 15 themes included in the results sections specifically highlight convergence or divergence among students who are chronically absent as compared to students who regularly attend school. Figure 2 displays the final 15 themes organized by socioecological level.

Figure 2

Qualitative Themes Organized by Socioecological Level



Individual Level Themes

The five themes that emerged at the individual level were (1) Academic Apathy, (2) High School-Future Alignment, **(3)** Intrinsic Motivation, (4) Health and Wellness, and (5) Coping Strategies.

Theme 1: Academic Apathy

"It's just normal. It's school, there's nothing fun about it… I don't feel nothing."
Kay, a CA Student

"She was my ELA teacher. She really like TAUGHT us, like it wasn't boring how the teacher now is. He's just so like… strict. Like, HER lessons, when we heard it, we was like 'we don't wanna learn about this,' and then when she taught it to us it was like, this is interesting! Instead of teachers now where they just hand us the work and they give us some background knowledge, and it's like do it and it's boring. I don't want to do this."
June, a RA Student

Participants reported many different feelings and emotions about particular aspects of school from their classes to the people they interact with, but there were also many descriptions of apathy towards the academic aspects of school, particularly from chronically absent participants. While students never used the word apathy to describe their attitudes towards school, some participants were unable to articulate aspects of school that they liked or disliked, hated or got excited about, and rather portrayed a very even or neutral attitude towards classes with no enthusiasm, concern, or passion.

When asked what he enjoyed about school, Kay responded, "Nothing." He reported not disliking any of his classes or having a favorite class. He said he did not have any favorite teachers or least favorite teachers. With additional prompting he said that he was unable to even rank his classes "because they are all literally on the same level." He said that there was nothing he was looking forward to in terms of school, nothing he was excited about, and nothing that he was nervous about. He reported that his

favorite part of the school day was “when it’s time to leave,” and he was easily able to articulate activities outside of school that he enjoyed or disliked and described spending time with his friends outside of school with enthusiasm. AJ similarly reported not having a favorite class or favorite teachers and that his favorite part of the day was the end of the day because he is “finally out of school” and he also showed more enthusiasm and passion for moments and activities outside of the school day showing that both students were capable of feeling passion, excitement, and concern but that those particular emotions were not triggered by their classes and interactions during the school day.

After responding “no” to many prompts about different emotions, negative or positive, that one could feel at school, Kay explained, “It’s just normal. It’s school, there’s nothing fun about it.” When asked to describe how he feels while at school Kay said, “Normal, I don’t feel nothing.” Similarly, when asked what he enjoys about school, another participant, Will, said, “I don’t even know, ever since football season ended it just, it's coming and going.” Fred used the word “indifferent” to describe his feelings about school. These descriptions of school contrast with regularly attending students’ accounts of school which were filled with favorite and least favorite moments, classes, and teachers, things they enjoyed or disliked, and extensive thoughts on the emotions and feelings that school should elicit from students. June shared that her emotions change throughout the day, “So one minute I'm like I don't wanna be here, then the next moment I be like oh this is fun I wanna stay here and learn some more, and then it's like eh, it's school.” The students in the CA described a wide range of positive and negative feelings they experience throughout the day while managing their oscillating attitudes towards

different classes throughout the school day whereas Kay said, “I don’t be thinking about that. I just go to school. I accept the fact that I gotta come to school.”

Theme 2: High School-Future Alignment

Both regularly attending students and chronically absent students had hopes and dreams for their futures with differing levels of forethought having been placed on the necessary steps to achieve those future goals. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed that education or high school specifically, was a necessary step in order to achieve their future goals, but differences emerged between the groups on how in depth they had considered and researched these future opportunities and how aligned they felt their specific school opportunities and activities were to those future goals. Overall, each student’s evaluation of how their current high school expectations aligned with their future goals impacted their attitudes towards school, the value they placed on attending school, and their desire to go to school daily. Despite their varying attendance levels, 9 out of the 10 students interviewed expressed that education and graduating from high school were an important and necessary pathway to their future goals. The following three subthemes that further illustrate the nuances of high school-future alignment emerged throughout analysis: Passing vs Learning, Future Stability, and Future Exploration and Planning.

Subtheme 2.1: Passing vs Learning

> “School, it's not really… I don't think it's like helping me know what I need to know for the future. It's just, like to me, not about like learning anymore it's about passing.”
> Will, CA Student

> “I liked the new things that we were learning. I liked the fact that we were learning like more harder stuff cause like in [previous schools] we were learning the same stuff so it was getting easy and boring, and yeah I just liked the fact we were learning more harder stuff.”
> Alexis, RA Student

Kay expressed that in the future he wants “to be rich” and “own his own business” and feels like finishing school and going to college is something he needs to do in order to achieve that goal. Despite this belief, he was unsure of how exactly school and his current education were aligned with his future goals. He said, “I don’t know why, but I feel like I need it [education]” and that all he needs to do now in order to reach his goals and succeed is “pass.” This concept of passing and the desire to do so was echoed by many students and was separate from a desire to learn. AJ was firm in his conviction that school was not solely about learning. He expressed, “I think that they just test obedience like not what you actually know… cause I’m pretty sure anybody can come to school and like miss a lot but learn something in that second… if you can remember stuff that is important, it can help you towards when you actually come to school.” Another chronically absent student, Will, shared that sentiment saying, “School, it’s not really, I don't think it's like helping me know what I need to know for the future. It's just like to me is not about like learning anymore; it's about passing.” He also added that “if you don’t pass, you gon stay back.” Fred similarly expressed a desire “to get good grades and pass.” This illustrates an emphasis or prioritization of passing and there was little mention of learning for the majority of the chronically absent students. While they still expressed some interest in learning new things, their primary goal was to earn the grades that would help them pass. Derrick expressed this most clearly saying “Cause I don’t care about the classes forreal, as long as I got the grade to pass I’m ok with this.” Even the regularly attending students were concerned with passing which may indicate a larger school or district culture that emphasizes passing, however, they also overwhelmingly expressed a desire to “learn new things,” described their favorite classes as ones where they

constantly felt like they were learning. and greatly admired teachers who they felt were good at teaching and made you want to learn. When describing how she feels at school, a regularly attending student June said “Oh, I don't wanna say eager to learn but it's nice to learn something new or something that's exciting, something that's going to make me want to learn.”

The importance of passing among chronically absent students impacted their attendance in interesting ways, specifically in motivating them to come to school on testing days. Students who were chronically absent overwhelmingly felt their attendance and desire to come to school was greater on testing days and those were the days they made great effort not to miss school as compared to days where they would just be learning or reviewing material. Derrick said, “I want to come to school on testing days cause like a test is like a lot, like a high percentage of our grade so I want the good grade… I want to make sure that like, I don't want to fail so, I'm just trying to think hard and all of that.” Fred echoed the idea that, “I feel like I have to be here because this is a test and I gotta get this done. I'm also afraid of failing that test.” Will said on test days he makes sure to come “cause I wanna pass it and get it over with so I won’t have to do make up.” Regularly attending students who emphasized learning more than passing were more motivated to attend school on days where they would be learning new material and much more hesitant about attending school on test days, even though ultimately they would still go.

June, who described herself as “not a big fan of tests” described feeling “uncomfortable” on mornings when she has a test but still knowing “I have to go to school and get it done.” Jared described feeling stressed on test days and not wanting to

attend school but knowing “I still have to go to school.” He also believed that testing days were days that students were more likely to miss school saying “probably testing days would intimidate kids, unless they really can't. We really can't control because some kids just don't want to go to school on the testing days. Testing days. It's just wow. No matter if you tell them what to do or that all the answers are simple, they still may not want to come to school because the test is stressful.” These divergent reactions to test days seem to be driven by separate motivations for school attendance and thus different perceptions of testing.

Subtheme 2.2: Future Stability

> “To have a job like you gotta be smart. So, I need my education because I don't want to be homeless.”
> Derrick, CA Student

> “I want to have a stable- I want to have a job you can rely on, you know what I mean? Like a job that pays around $1000 per paycheck, not a job that pays $8 an hour, like McDonalds. You know I just want a reliable job.”
> Jared, RA Student

Students who were chronically absent and students who were regularly attending both described a desire for stability in adulthood that would be made possible by having an education and a reliable job. Students expressed a variety of thoughts on what constitutes a reliable job and very different ideas about the professions and education required for these jobs. Still, the consistent narrative with both groups spoke to a great desire for stability. This stability seemed to have a strong undercurrent of financial security, and many students expressed wanting to be financially secure.

“Having a job and doing something productive” was very important to Derrick, and he expressed that he wants to “be a trash man” because “they make a lot of money and you don’t gotta go to college for it.” He was particularly worried about future

financial security and saw that as one of the most important reasons for the value of education. He said education is very important because “you can't be dumb and to have a job like you gotta be smart. So, I need my education because I don't want to be homeless.” His parents seem to have influenced his understanding of his future options and the importance of education and he said, “My father says I don't wanna go down the wrong route cause it aint the life I want to live. My mother, she just say, ‘you don't wanna be broke do you?’ and I said ‘no.’ and then she just said, okay, then get your education.” Will agreed that being financially secure was a common goal for everyone.

Will shared that he wants to “make it to the NFL, but just like get like get rich like everybody wanna be.” Kay had similar sentiments and said success looks like “being rich” and he wants to be rich in the future because he “likes money” and wants to be able to “buy the stuff that [he] want[s].” AJ wants to become “a professional gamer” and shared “I like playing games a lot and I want to try streaming to make money off of there.” He also mentioned a potential backup job that would still allow him to be financially solvent in case gaming doesn’t work out by saying, “If I wasn’t to become that I would probably work at a shoe store or something.” The majority of the CA students explicitly mentioned financial aspects of their careers when describing their plans for adulthood. While some regularly attending students explicitly mentioned financial hopes with their careers some did not. Those who didn’t however had chosen careers with implied financial security such as doctors.

Jared and Septembra both explicitly mentioned financial security as a component of their desired future career. Septembra shared “I just hope to become a famous dancer and get a lot of money. You know, live in a big house.” Jared wanted to be a music

producer but ultimately was most concerned with stability expressing, “I want to have a stable- I want to have a job you can rely on, you know what I mean? Like a job that pays around $1000 per paycheck not a job that pays $8 an hour, like McDonalds. You know I just want a reliable job.” Without mentioning financial security, Alexis said “I always wanted to be a doctor. I was thinking about a surgeon.” Similarly, Miracle expressed that she wanted to be a doctor, specifically a pediatrician because she “likes kids a lot.” Just as with Will and a professional football career or AJ and gaming, students expressed interest in careers to which they had been exposed and considered to align with their skillsets or interests.

In addition to future career plans, many regularly attending students offered commentary on their hopes for their social or personal lives in adulthood. Even with prompting, the majority of chronically absent students shared that they had not yet thought about family life or other ambitions in adulthood whereas many regularly attending students had very intently considered these other aspects of adulthood beyond career. Their descriptions seemed inspired by real life conversations they’d had with adults about the future and their perceptions of what is necessary to lead a happy adult life. Miracle wanted to “get better when it comes to cooking” and hoped to learn those skills from watching her mother. Alexis said that she hoped to “not be married or anything but just have a partner and no kids because, yeah… no.” Both Jared and April similarly described elaborate plans for having fun in adulthood that still considered financial security. April shared,

“I think I want to enjoy my first years of being an adult . You know what I'm saying like everyone's like when you get out of school, find you a nice job and yada yada yada and I'm like yes I know, I know. But y’all make it seem so ugh like what happened to- you're grown, go out and have some fun. I know you have bills and things you need to do and

jobs. But y'all make it seem like it's just horrible. I'm like my aunt she's grown and she's living her best life. I'm like that's…that's how I aspire to be… like my aunt. She has two jobs, yes, two sons and she still managed to go out and have fun go to parties, manage her jobs, get sleep. She does hair. She has her own nail salon. She does nails, she designed cakes, she design clothes and she still has time to go out with her friends and party. That's my role model right there."

Jared expressed a desire to create a space for fun and excitement in adulthood with his closest friends sharing,

"Well, I'm planning on moving out in North Carolina with my friends, my ride or dies. That's why I'm gathering so many you know. But like I mean, it's five of us. I'm like that's a lot of people. But what I'm thinking to myself is that those five people are gonna have jobs. So, we're gonna probably get a bigger house that one person probably wouldn't just live in, like five bedrooms, five bathrooms. You know, like those type of houses that cost a lot of money. You know, the reason why I think of myself like that, because, like, we all can I can't pay for this house. But all five of us together can pay the bill and pay the bills. Yeah, like you know. So that's my plan. But after personal finance and my history teacher teaching us about bills and life… it seems a little stressful. And I hope me and my friends can get through it, or we just drop the whole idea and I live in an apartment by myself."

Future stability for these students moved beyond their chosen careers and they had imagined what stability looks like in their social and personal lives. Overall, future stability whether career focused or inclusive of personal stability was a shared desire for CA and RA students. The majority of students agreed that the path to future stability included education and at least completing high school. While this shared goal does not allow for differentiation between CA and RA students in terms of explaining attendance behaviors, the following subtheme on future exploration and planning will give a better understanding of how CA and RA students differ in their current planning and preparation for achieving future stability.

Subtheme 2.3: Future Exploration and Planning

"I want to go to Spelman, all girl's school, and I'm trying to be a pediatrician. My mom feels like it should be something I do since I like kids like a lot. I had this all planned out since I was five. If being a pediatrician doesn't work out. I'll always have hair. I could

always do hair. I could always do makeup. I could always do nails. I can always write. I could always be a teacher."
Miracle, RA Student

"I just want to do gaming in the future but also I want to get an education so just in case gaming doesn't work out I have something."
AJ, CA Student

CA students and RA students both had career ambitions and potential back up plans for the future that were informed by their interests, desire for stability, and perceived talents. When asked to elaborate on the steps they would need to take in order to achieve those goals, many CA students had not yet mapped out a detailed path to their future career as opposed to the majority of RA students. Importantly, there was no clear differentiation between the groups on plan components such as the desire to pursue higher education as in both groups there were students who were planning to attend college, students who were not sure, and students who were not planning to attend. However, the difference was the level of thought and planning that had already been dedicated to mapping out the necessary steps to achieving a future career or pursuing a back-up plan if things did not work out.

Aside from being rich, Kay expressed "I wanna own my own business" but had not yet decided what kind of business he'd like to own. He also shared that in order to achieve his goal he would need to "finish school and go to college" but admitted that he did not know exactly why he needed an education but said, "I just feel like I need it. Cause school gon help me get to that point in my life." He hadn't yet looked up specific colleges but he knew that was a part of his future plans. AJ and Fred were both unsure if they planned to attend college. Fred shared, "I kind of want to be an artist, like I want to like draw things for a living" and his biggest priority was practicing and improving his art

skills to achieve that goal. AJ shared, “I just want to do gaming in the future but also I want to get an education but so just in case gaming doesn't work out, I have something.” His backup plan included potentially working in a shoe store and he believed that in order to achieve his goal he had to, “just to come to school and do what I got to do.” His mother had also incentivized his school performance by saying she would purchase additional gaming equipment based on how he was doing in school and she tied his ability to play the game to his attendance. He said “for instance if I miss a day of school, I can't play my game.” That was the only connection he saw between his current schooling and his plans for the future.

Derrick and Will were CA students who had additional details about the steps they needed to take in order to achieve their goals and they had acquired that knowledge from other adults in their lives. Derrick expressed that in order to accomplish his goal of becoming a trash man, he had to “graduate from high school.” He had not yet looked up the steps to apply, additional requirements or any programs that could help prepare him but he had researched and discovered that he would need a high school diploma. Will had done extensive research through talking to his uncle who had come very close to making it to the NFL, into what he needed to do in order to achieve his goal. Specifically, Will hopes to “get a scholarship” and attend a “D1 college for football.” Students like Septembra (dance) , Jared (music) and Will (football) were also led to their career interests by their extracurricular involvement at school and they compartmentalized these extracurricular activities as separate from school. Even though Will expressed that his future goals were tied to education because he is hoping to get “a scholarship for a Division One College” so he has to “make sure to get all my grades and stuff and like do

good to make sure I get spotted to go to like LSU something like that," he later expressed that getting better at football was "getting [him] ready" for his future more than school." This sentiment had an impact on his attendance as well and Will believed that during football season his attendance was better than the rest of the school year. He also admitted that sometimes "I would miss a day of school but I wouldn't miss a day of practice. If I missed school that day, I would come to practice." If asked about it by his coach he'd say "Nah, I'm coming I just couldn't come to school but I'm still coming to practice." Will believed that his coach "cared" that he had missed school, but ultimately that "it was fine."

Jared who was also inspired by his extracurricular activity of music, said he plans to go to a college focused on entertainment, media, art, and technology because he "want[s] to be a musician" or "even work in a music arts store." He "just hope[s]something to do with music" and had done significant research in choosing a particular first choice university dedicated to this highly specific area of study because of his future goals. Despite his goal to "become a well-known producer or well-known musician," he had also done thought deeply about other careers that he might pursue to achieve his ultimate goal of financial security. He shared.

"Maybe I can find another career that can help me out like if I can't drop music or I don't feel like I can. It can either be a main thing or a side thing. I don't know what the main thing's going to be maybe somewhere in computers maybe. But because computers and coding and all that stuff seems logical, it seems like the straightforward. All that stuff seems straightforward because there's a lot of people hiring coders and like all that stuff is gonna get more and more needed when we look to the future because I know people want robots and all that stuff. I might become a hardware engineer or a software engineer. Maybe that might pay the bills. But at the same time, I want to get into music and have fun. I'm not saying coding is not… I don't know. I haven't coded anything in my life and I'm just learning that for college because, like, um I have a cousin, that codes. Right and he made his own video game…and it was just like, oh, you can do this, too. He used to live with me. He's used to help me code. He was telling me, we were getting

started with binary. We didn't even get to binary because all I know is binary is 0s and 1s and that's how the computer… that's the computers language. But like um on this day, there's like sources, there's like things that you use to code like Java and all that stuff that was Java. So besides that [music] , that's also an option."

Jared had also researched and ruled out options for what else he could do with a music degree. He shared, "I want to know what jobs you get when you get a music degree. Cause I know me and my choir teachers talked about it. My choir teacher has like a music degree, that's why she's like the music teacher. So, I'm just saying to myself like, I like music but I don't like kids so I don't think I could be a teacher."

Miracle had already researched a college she wanted to attend and the amount of school she would have to complete in order to reach her goal. She shared, "I want to go to Spelman, all girl's school, and I'm trying to be a pediatrician. My mom feels like it should be something I do since I like kids like a lot. I had this all planned out since I was five. "She also had a backup plan in case her dreams of being a pediatrician did not work out saying "if being a pediatrician doesn't work out. I'll always have like hair. I could always do hair. I could always do like makeup. I could always do like nails. I can always write. I could always be a teacher." June discussed wanting to be a nurse and had researched a vocational high school she could transfer to in order to achieve that goal sooner as she already felt she had been in school for too many years. She shared,

"It was a nursing school like they made you wear the entire scrubs, down to the- top to the bottom. I wanted to be a nurse. I mean, I still do, but I don't know where I'm going to fit that in for cause if I go to- continue going to this school and I graduate I still have to go to school to be a nurse. But if I went to that school, I wouldn't have to go to school for nursing so I don't- that's a part of that. I don't know what else I would do if that doesn't work out I don't have a plan B I should but I don't have a year and a half, [laughter]

By the time we met for our second interview, June had shifted to wanting to be a veterinarian. She said,

"So, I just discovered this, what, like last week or so I didn't know. Till last week, well, what I wanted to do was I wanted to be a nurse. And that's been… I've been wanting to be a nurse since I was like a little kid. Like, I been telling everybody that. I told somebody that like a month ago, like, I want to be a nurse when I grow up and they be like, OK, I can see you doing that. Like you're good at math. You can do calculations. I can see you doing that. And I'm like yes, I know. Like, I really want to be a nurse and then my mind changed. The other day, I was watching something. I was like, no, I want to be a veterinarian. I just want to take care of animals. Like animals are the most precious things in the world like who doesn't want to take care of that and then I was on my phone Googling stuff like how much they get paid. And where can I start? Like, what I would need to complete in school? Like I've been wanting to be a veterinarian for a minute now. That's what I want to do. If that doesn't work. I don't really know what I want to do . I'm just like I've never had, like, this backup plan that everyone talks about."

Despite mentioning not having a backup plan, June had spoken extensively about back up plans that she had considered but ultimately rejected. She said "if nursing don't work out. I don't know, I want to say be a teacher, but no. If I know how I act there's no way I'm teaching kids." June also shared that college was now in her future plans. She said "I'm trying to get scholarships for college. I do not want to sit here and pay thousands of dollars to go to college. No, I want somebody to be like I want her. Pay me to go to your school. Basically, like, I don't want to pay." As a new step was added to her plan, June immediately began putting the pieces together and determining how she could accomplish her new goal. Her level of planning remained consistent even as her hopes for the future changed.

Theme 3: "To Get an Education"→ Intrinsic Motivation

"To get a education. [on why he goes to school]"
AJ, CA Student

"The kids here just.. they be begging to go home. I mean, I do, too. Same [whispers] 'I wanna go home,' but it's more of the fact that you got to still get your education, whether you like it or not. You still have to finish school. Might be hard. You might not like it. You might not like the teachers. None of the teachers might not like you or none of the students. You might come here because you parents don't want you home. But you still gotta learn either way"
June, RA Student

The majority of chronically absent and regularly attending students expressed that they go to school in order to "get an education." They also overwhelmingly felt like education was important and that this fact motivated them to attend school. This was an area of high convergence between both groups so further investigation was needed to understand why this shared desire to get an education doesn't translate to similar attendance outcomes. Tables 16 and 17 display students' responses to the questions following questions; "Why do you go to school?" What do you look forward to about going to school? "Do you think education is important? Why or why not?" and "Does this motivate you to attend school?" These responses and subsequent discussion shed some light on potential modifiable factors and attitudes that can impact attendance.

Table 16

Participant Responses on Reasons for Going to School

	Why do you go to school?	What do you look forward to about going to school?
	Chronically Absent Students	
Fred	"I go to school, cause well I kind of feel like I'm supposed to. Yeah, just come to school cause… that's it… and my mom. She wants and needs me to be here cause …reasons."	"I look forward to seeing my friends. I look forward to seeing them."
Will	"Just to like get an education and be successful."	"Um... I just be I don't really be thinking about that looking forward to something I mean, if there's like ever a certain day that I know I got plans for afterschool I look forward to it, like today… [I'm supposed to meet a couple of my friends later on today.]"
AJ	"To get a education"	"Um, just getting the work done "
Derrick	"To get my education so I won't be homeless."	"A guaranteed job "
Kay	"To be successful, like you need school. You can't do nothing without it.	"Um, I don't be thinking about that. I just go to school. I accept the fact that I gotta come to school."
	Regularly Attending Students	
Alexis	" So, I could learn and get an education ."	Making new friends and learning
Miracle	"Because I know that's where I need to be… Because I know that I need my education first to become a doctor. Can't go around being stupid trying to take care of people's kids"	"I've been really looking forward to like in one of my classes , which is biology I really been looking forward to dissecting things because we're dissecting pigs and I want to do it but I'm also in my head like eww"
June	"To get out my parents face for one. To occupy myself because there's nothing to do in this house and it's kind of driving me insane, but yeah, like to learn something new. It's always fun to like learn something new. Like I know, especially when you don't want to go to school, but you go to school and you find something that you really want to talk about and then like that's fun. Like, I don't know. Just having something to do, occupying myself that's why I go to school, to occupy myself, whether I don't like [my English teacher] or not, I don't like his work or not, I don't understand I'm going to go to his class so I can occupy myself whether I'm sitting there getting angry and frustrated, it's something to do"	"I would be looking forward to performing more in step, I would be looking to yeah they was signing up people for, like swimming and canoeing and stuff. I would want to do canoeing that's what I was looking forward to if we were still in school, I wanted to drive the boat. I wanted to do that. We were supposed to be dissecting an animal in biology. That's out the window now. I was looking forward to that. Getting sick to my stomach. Yes, I was like I wanted to do that."
Jared	"I go to school to make friends, but also to make to get an education so I can pass and do the real stuff I want to do in my life."	"I look forward to graduating and look forward to being considered as an adult when I hit 18. I look forward to people seeing me [in] a higher manner and as people because, you know, people don't really see, some of these seniors are not what they claim to be. Like you know how seniors are given that high like, oh, this person is most definitely going to graduate, some seniors don't graduate. Some seniors don't make it."
Septembra	"I go to school to learn and get education that I need for the future because it's definitely going to be needed. I get the knowledge that I need . So, it could help me."	I look forward to learning new things, a lot of new things like stuff from the past like way back then. Like this stuff is going to actually make sense and is important for me to know.

Table 17

Participant Responses on Importance of Education and Motivation

	Do you think education is important? Why or why not?	Does this motivate you to attend school?
	Chronically Absent Students	
Fred	"Yeah because you don't want to be stup-, you don't want to grow up all your life not knowing anything do you? Aside from it for how to read, aside from basic things, how to walk, how to talk how to clean yourself."	No, not really. No, I just know that education is important and I have to get- you have to get it.
Will	Yeah... but like without education you can't really do nothing. I mean you- you can't really like do nothing in life without education can't go nowhere, cause you need to know something to get somewhere in life	Um hmm
AJ	Yeah, because well you be able to after school be able to get a life basically.	I just want to do gaming in the future, but also I want to get an education so just in case gaming doesn't work out I have something.
Derrick	Yeah very, cause you can't be dumb and have a job like you gotta be smart and have a job so I need my education because I don't want to be homeless.	Yeah
Kay	Without education, you can't do nothing like without them skills what you gon do, you not gon know nothing	Yeah
	Regularly Attending Students	
Alexis	" Yes, because without education , you won't know what to do in life and it's not going to help you . Well , education is gonna help you , but if you don't have it , then you're not going know what to do in life."	Yeah
Miracle	Yes, because people need it. Because some people have like all these big dreams and goals that they want to accomplish . But you have to actually like go to school and have an education to do these certain things . You can't just go into like being an engineer without not having a tech- like not having the education you need . So , like you can mess up somebody's car because you don't know what you doing .	Um hmm

Participant Responses on Importance of Education and Motivation (continued)		
Regularly Attending Students		
June	Yes…but I feel like all these years of education is not as- like I don't feel like the need… like I've been in school since I was 7 years old. I'm now about to turn 15 next week and I'm not getting out of school until I turn 18. I've did all the calculations and I been in school since seven until 18 What do I need all that education for? And then some of the stuff we learn. Like we don't need that in a everyday life situation or we're not going to need that when we get older. It all depends on what you want to do but most of the things that we learn in school like what let me see. First grade. What do I need to know how to color a coloring page for? Cause that's basically what I was doing in the first grade and kindergarten. Like what? I'm like that's good like you taught me how to write my ABCs and how to sing my one two threes and days a week and stuff but like, yes. I'm a learn that once I get older and stuff but like the first, second grade, we can squeeze all that up to 6th 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th , 11th like we don't need all these grades . Like for what? I been saying that for the longest like most of the stuff y'all always talk about getting us ready for real life or when we grown and stuff. But most of the stuff we learn in school, most of it, grown-ups to this day still tell me and they have perfect jobs, great jobs, smart jobs whatever you want to call the jobs. They have high paying jobs say I don't remember half of the stuff I did when I was in school. So, what do we need all this stuff for? If we're not going to use half of this stuff. I feel like education is important, but some of the stuff we learn is not important to you."	Yeah, I'm still gonna attend school no matter what motivates me and what doesn't, but sometimes it… I don't know. I'm still gonna to go to school regardless."
Jared	"Yes, because education… like this… you can't get anywhere else besides college and other schools. That's besides the point. You know what I mean? You can't get this from some old guy on the street. You can't get this from anywhere else. This is a thing- education is very important. You don't see people talking on the street about calculus unless you're an architect but that's besides the point. You don't see this anywhere else. School is meant for teaching. You don't see anywhere else where it teaches you. Like you don't see any places to help you learn. Like I don't know how to describe it but you know what I mean. School is meant to be known for education. There's no other places that can offer you this opportunity like school can."	Yeah, you can possibly say that.
Septembra	Yes, I think it is. I feel like education is important because like if say if you want it. You're older now, but you barely went to school and you want a job and then look back and they're like, oh , you're not fit for this job . And then you don't even know anything.	Yeah

The notion of "getting an education" in order to be successful was mentioned by almost every student, chronically absent or regularly attending, as a reason for going to school. However, when looking at the things they are looking forward to about going to school, the majority of regularly attending students mentioned learning or a particular class activity whereas the CA students mentioned peer interactions in school and after school, future orientation, or admitted they were not looking forward to anything. Despite recognizing the importance of education and getting an education, the way that students have internalized what it means to get an education may differ.

Theme 4: Health & Wellness

Regularly attending students and chronically absent students both shared their typical eating and sleeping habits during the school year. In sharing their experiences, two subthemes that have great impact on students' desire to attend and productivity when at school emerged, specifically that students were often skipping meals throughout the day and that students were often tired.

Subtheme 4.1: Nutrition "I don't really eat school lunch"

"Hungry [on how he typically feels in the morning before school and during school]."
Kay, CA Student

"No [I don't eat breakfast]. The breakfast here is nasty, and I don't have time to eat at home. Unless I wake up at four thirty and that's not happening. I don't eat lunch either. I go all day without eating really. Go home and have something to eat, um I might have a little something but I don't really eat like a meal or something."
June, RA Student

The general consensus among CA and RA students was that school lunch was "nasty" and that sentiment was shared among the majority of students. Lunch was specifically mentioned by numerous students as something they dislike about school and all but one student, Derrick, reported that they did not like the food served at school.

Chronically absent students seemed less passionate about their critiques. Conversely, Jared initially shared that "lunch could be so much better" but noted "that's with all schools," and then he went on to say,

"The thing with lunch is you don't have a kitchen…It just has a room full of food that's from a truck that comes every week. It tastes like shit. We probably used to make it in a microwave. Regardless, that food is horrible and I don't think no one should be feeding anybody something that nasty."

Fred reported that he "usually pack[s] [his] own food" in order to make sure that he has food that he likes and overall many students regarded lunch as more of a social opportunity then a time to eat. The extent to which this personal preference actually prevents students from eating all day and how that practice has become normalized was a more novel discovery. The assumption has traditionally been that "food is preferable to hunger" but that is not the case for many students and as June said "I aint gon eat it regardless. Hungry or not." No matter the reason for students missing meals, the outcome of insufficient food intake is the same and this has deleterious impact on students' health and ability to learn and be productive throughout the day including their cognitive function, memory, ability to focus, and mood (Rampersaud et al., 2005; Hoyland et al., 2009).

AJ and Derrick are two students who reported liking the food served at school and while Kay did not like the food served at lunch he reported that he still ate because he was hungry and "just like[s] to eat." Will said he makes sure to eat breakfast at home because he just doesn't eat the food at school. Miracle said "Usually I get, like, snacks from friends. Well , sometimes like people at lunch will share food with me and stuff. Or if it's like, if I have money, I can buy snacks from people who sell 'em." Students also discussed how hunger impacts their mood and noted that snacks provided by teachers can

often positively impact their moods. While some students mentioned ways to adjust to not liking school meals or compensating by eating other meals throughout the day, some described missing several meals throughout the day. June shared, “I never liked it. I still don’t like it, I don't eat lunch at school. I don’t eat breakfast. I don't eat at home most of the time anyway but I don't enjoy that food. That food is nasty. I don’t understand how they feed that stuff to kids and then some of the stuff it be looking good or smell good and then it’ll flip your stomach upside down.”

When access is the root of the problem it must be addressed differently than when personal preference is what is preventing students from eating meals. The issue of student nutrition is often framed as one of access where students in households facing food insecurity do not have access to the appropriate number of meals a day. In those situations, free breakfast and lunch programs have even been shown to improve attendance for students who are dependent upon these meals. For example, Derrick, one of the few students who reporting eating and liking lunch served at school, described this dilemma and how nutrition decisions impacted his desire to go to school sharing that if he wakes up late, “Say it was like 9:00 or 10:00, I won’t go to school because I won’t be able to get here until like 11 and that’s when lunch gonna be over and I’m gonna be hungry all day.” Even Jared who strongly disliked school lunch said that school breakfast impacted his attendance because “they don’t make the food themselves, They have the cereal boxes and that’s the best part of breakfast to me.” Food insecurity is a very important issue that impacts attendance and that is primarily addressed through Free and Reduced-Price Meals for eligible students and also through District laws that require

schools to provide free breakfast for all students regardless of socioeconomic status, reducing stigma and providing access for all.

However, study data reveal that there is another subset of students with access to free breakfast, lunch, and snacks throughout the day that are skipping these meals because of personal preference. Miracle, a regularly attending student, shared the impact that not liking school lunch had on her desire to go to school saying, “I don’t eat school lunch and not having lunch to take to school makes me not want to come to school because then I have to like watch everybody else eat and it just makes me think about the fact that like this is nasty to me so I can’t eat that. So then it makes me think that I have to wait to get home to eat and that’s hours away.” While Miracle made sure to eat as soon as she got home, many students described going home and having inconsistent eating habits not because of access or socioeconomic concerns but forgetting to eat, not prioritizing dinner, or immediately taking naps when they return home from school and missing dinner time. Jared reported that when he goes home and sleeps, “Sometimes I just don’t eat.” Previous research has shown that issues of food access and food insecurity have been framed within the dominant narrative that students are not embracing healthy food options because they prefer “unhealthy foods” (Conrad, 2020). While this presumption centers white dominant culture and ignores the cultural significance of certain foods, it is also not universally accurate (Conrad, 2020). June, one of the most vocal critics of school lunch specifically shared, “I don't eat none of that stuff unless it's fruits,” directly challenging the narrative that students are just not embracing healthy meals because they prefer food which has been deemed unhealthy.

Subtheme 4.2: Sleep “I’m Tired”

"Sit in the house and go to sleep. [On what he does when he misses school] That's the only reason why I don't come to school, cause I feel like I don't get enough sleep. I be tired."
Derrick, CA Student

"I wake up like I'm still tired, I don't get enough sleep for this"
June, RA Student

Both RA and CA students overwhelmingly reported feeling tired before school, during school, and after school. Feeling tired with respect to sleep or "exhausted" was one of the most frequent codes seen during data analysis. Every student shared that they were tired at some point during the day and some students both in the CA and RA groups shared that sometimes they take naps at school or in certain classes. June speculated based on her experience with her peers that being tired had an impact on student's attendance saying,

"It's too early for most kids… I know a couple of my friends told me like , my mother woke me up and was like, 'Are you going to school?' and she was like, 'No, I'm tired.' Like, some people stay up all night trying to finish work that they didn't get to finish in class or study for a test and then when the morning you have to get up, it's like I'm too tired. If I wake up now and go to school, I might, I'm either gon be too tired to do the test or my brain not gonna be all the way on or I'm gonna miss questions. I'm might think I picked the right answer and pick the wrong answer. I'm too tired to do certain things that I want to do and want to get a good grade on so like, no, I don't want to go to school."

Derrick specifically shared the impact of being tired on his attendance sharing, "That's the only reason why I don't come to school, cause I feel like I don't get enough sleep. I be tired." Sleep deficiency is a known risk factor for chronic absenteeism however when looking at participants' sleep habits, as shown in Table 18, there were many similarities between CA and RA students.

Table 18

Participant Sleep Habits

	Typical Wake Up Time	Typical Bed Time	How much sleep do you get each night?
		Chronically Absent Students	
Fred	7:20 something after my brother finishes	Eleven o'clock.	I don't know
Will	6:00am	I don't know like it's not like a specific time except when I'm tired and I just fall asleep like around 9 something like that	I think I get a decent amount of sleep like that last me throughout the day
AJ	6:00am	Uh if I stay- if I stayed up all day I'll either sleep in the car and then once I get home, I'll be up until 11oclock and then go to sleep and if I don't go to sleep in the car then I'll go to sleep around 9 or 10, wake up during the middle of the night and then go back to sleep.	Uh around eight hours, if I have [symptoms of my medical illness] though in the middle of the night, I probably will sleep for about 5 hours.
Derrick	6:00am	I'll take my nap as soon as I get home . Soon as I get in the house, I lay in the bed and the time I go to sleep depends on how tired I am. I don't go to sleep at 8 that's too early I'm gonna wake up in the middle of the night. Probably like 10:30 or 11:00 cause I try to stay up so I don't wake up in the middle of the night.	Not enough because I still be tired
Kay	Different times, it's different every morning	On a weekday, I probably go to sleep probably like 9, 10. On the weekend I go to sleep at like 2,3	Like 10 hours
		Regularly Attending Students	
Alexis	6:45am	Like 9, 10 o'clockish	Like 7 hours
Miracle	Sometimes at 5:00am. There's multiple different times. Sometimes I wake up at 5:00am, 6:00am Sometimes later than 7:00am, 8am	Um, lately I've been going to sleep around Eleven o'clock.	Well I wake up a lot in the middle of the night. So not really a lot cause I'll be up for a while.
June	I wake up at 5am. [that first alarm] goes off at 5:00am that gives, that's my warning wake up. So, I'm like, I'm half up and half sleep. So, when my 5:25am alarm goes off, I'm up	9pm, 10pm once [my stepmother] comes in the living room and she goes throughout the house saying phones off. I'm gone I put on some music or the TV and I'm out	Not enough, not enough, not enough. I'm going to sleep at 10, waking up at 5. I don't know how teachers do it, but um not enough
Jared	6:40am, 6:30, I'm basically awake by 6:45	I have a nap when I get back home, probably six or seven and sometimes I don't wake up or it's like four. But most of the time, I go to bed around 12 or 1:00am. Yeah pretty late.	I 'm a just say six or seven. Six, or five
Septembra	Like 6:00am	Well, I usually go sleep like around . Ten thirty , 11:00	I was getting a lot of sleep

Bed times and wake up times span a roughly three to four hour time period ranging from 5am to 7:20am in the morning and 9pm to 12am or 1am at night. Some students reported trouble waking up in the morning while others had no issue at all. Will was able to get breakfast and said that despite waking up at 6am he doesn't leave his house until 7:30am and he is mostly "just chilling" waiting for his day to begin. Some students were so tired from their early wake up times that as soon as they got home they would need to take a nap. Other students reported having other issues at night that interrupted their sleeping cycle causing them to wake up in the middle of night and thus creating a pattern of continued tiredness. The varied sleeping patterns did not converge thematically, specifically for CA students or RA students, so additional underlying mechanisms may explain why despite everyone feeling tired at some point during the day, it doesn't impact everyone's attendance.

One possible explanation described by participants is that in transition from middle school to high school some students are adjusting to waking up earlier because their distance to school or mode of transportation has changed. Derrick shared, "I just didn't feel like getting up early in the morning. I got so used to being at the other school and I didn't have to get up early as early as I do now. [In middle school] I was waking up at like 7:00 now I have to wake up at like 6:00." He also shared that sometimes "sometimes I just wait until like I know math about to be over because I don't like it." This behavior was not attached to anxiety but rather a desire to make his day seem shorter. He further explained that this was not pre-determined decision and he said, "if I wake up on time I'm gonna go, I don't care, but if I wake up late and I know I aint gon be like on time for the do now then I say forget it." However, another chronically absent

student Kay noted that high school was farther away than his middle school, but that he had adjusted to his new wake up time and didn't feel like this was a barrier to his attendance. Miracle, a RA student, was similarly struggling to adjust to a school that was much further away but this manifested more as tardiness as opposed to missed days. She shared,

"All the way to elementary to eighth, I was always on time. Might have missed a couple of days, but it was probably because I wasn't able to get to school or I was just sick but as I got into like high school, school is like way far, way farther than it usually used to be. So sometimes when it's like really late, I just can't make it. I don't want to come to school and then there's all this stuff I have to make up. When I do come in, in the mornings now for the last couple weeks, I've been like really late. I've been missing first period lately because my mom is not home when we get up. She's already gone for work. So, I have to make sure I get my little sister ready, my little brothers ready. Make sure they're getting to school on time, walking to school, make sure they have everything they need before they leave out. So, I have to get up like really, really early in the morning sometimes. Sometimes we get up super late."

Theme 5: Coping Strategies "Get my mind off of it"

"I just do it, I don't know. I don't really have like a specific way I just be wanting to get it over with. [on coping with challenges]"
Will , CA Student

"I will usually maybe sleep or listen to music. Like, if I'm really angry at someone or upset with someone or upset with myself , I'll usually just listen to music , certain songs , that will help me calm down. [on coping with challenges]"
Alexis, RA Student

CA and RA students shared challenges they had faced in their lives and the different ways they overcame feelings of nervousness, sadness, or anxiety. In comparing their responses, there were differences between CA and RA students that may present another underlying target for intervention that can positively impact attendance behaviors. A few CA students shared that they rarely felt nervous or sad and when asked to share how they cope with these challenges or emotions, they gave little detail on specific adaptive strategies they used. Derrick said that the way he copes is "I just hold it

in." Kay said "I just take it and then move on," and AJ said, "I'll just like, gotta do it by myself." Will, a self-described cool, chill person said he doesn't get worked up too often but when overcoming challenges, he expressed "I just do it, I don't know. I don't really have like a specific way I just be wanting to get it over with." Specifically, when coping with sadness he had a bit more detail saying "I will play the game or something and get my mind off it." Fred shared the sentiment of wanting to get his mind off of challenges or feelings of sadness or nervousness sharing that when coping with sadness "the easiest thing for me to do is take my mind off of it." While RA students shared those concerns, they were able to share more detail about the methods they used in order to get their mind off of these feelings ranging from listening to music to crying in order to release pent up emotions.

Alexis shared her coping strategies saying, I will usually maybe sleep or listen to music. Like, if I'm really angry at someone or upset with someone or upset with myself , I'll usually just listen to music , certain songs , that will help me calm down." Septembra shared, "If I'm feeling sad I'll probably go to my happy place. I'll talk to somebody who makes me happy, and if I'm feeling mad, I'll just isolate myself from everybody. I would just distance myself and you know, cool myself down before I talk to anybody. She also shared that be sad is sometimes a motivator to go to school because "If I'm sad and I go to school I'll just go to my best friend. She makes me happy sometimes." Miracle shared that "I talk to myself sometimes. Today in class I was talking to myself in like math and I was thinking to myself like do I want to ask the teacher for help or do I want to read and actually do it." She also shared that when coping with sadness,

"I don't really show my emotions I bottle everything up, and then it'll be like something big that happens and then all of a sudden, everything just… everything just comes out. I

feel free because some stuff I'll bottle up for so long . You know , just be big event like all these emotions just start coming out and then I have all this sadness and anger and happiness . But like my only way of actually showing and getting everything out is crying, that's what helps me. I mostly do it in the house."

Miracle described a similar process to Derrick by bottling her emotions up but then continued describing the release of those emotions because she felt it was all a part of the process of coping. She could still benefit from more adaptive strategies to cope with her feelings and emotions but she was able to describe a process that she felt helped her handle her emotions. Jared shared that he often dealt with anxious feelings and thoughts and described his experience with those particular feelings saying,

"I try to stay alone. I try to get rid of those thoughts of people, cause most of the anxiety comes from, it's assuming what other people think about you. That's me. It's just that people have slick, negative thoughts about you and you're like afraid of what they actually think about you. You never know because you will not know. You can't ask people what they're thinking about 24/7. You can't do that. That's not how the world works. You just have a go and deal with it and I can't deal with it because it's always in my mind 24/7. It just makes you feel out of control and I know that I'm always gonna be out of control in certain situations, you just have it to deal with it. But like, you know, it's hard."

Jared's describes his anxiety as all-consuming and difficult to manage yet he also displays a lot of awareness of what triggers his anxiety, acknowledgement that getting rid of those thoughts is a process and also that he will feel "out of control at times." Social anxiety is a known risk factor for chronic absenteeism and Jared was very aware of the ways in which anxiety could impact one's desire to go to school saying "it made me don't want to go to school." Along with his level of awareness and articulation of his feelings, Jared also described a more direct approach to overcoming challenges saying "I think about it. I figure out about ways I can approach it and then I try to take care of it. And sometimes I might- Sometimes I might need some assistance, too. I can't do everything by myself." Even though he previously mentioned that his first instinct is to try and stay

alone, he also recognized that sometimes he needs outside help and support. Jared was one of the participants who had benefitted from previous work with a therapist. For some of the students, these coping strategies and ability to articulate them were learned skills gained through positive experiences with counseling or mental health interventions.

Subtheme 5.1: Counseling

> ”Uh good [my mental health] cause I ain't crazy or nothing. I had therapy at first. I aint like it cause I don’t like going to therapy. [Therapists] ask too many questions like they ask way too many questions. They ask you like do you hear voices? Do you see stuff?”
> Derrick, CA Student

> “Yes, I had therapy . Therapy is good. It helps. This is almost like a therapy session right now you feel like you're getting to talk about some things.”
> Jared, RA Student

Students described receiving mental health services with varying levels of perceived effectiveness. AJ said it was “fine” but that “stuff doesn't really affect me that much so it was helpful but I'm not gonna really say it did much.” Similarly, Derrick said therapy was “alright” but he added that he did not like going. He was happy that he no longer had to go and thought it was not helpful experience. His experience may have been impacted by underlying beliefs about the purpose of therapy as evidenced by his response when asked about his mental health sharing, “I aint crazy or nothing.” He said therapists “ask too many questions, like they ask way too many questions. They ask you like do you hear voices? Do you see stuff?” Conversely, Miracle, a regularly attending student, described a close relationship with the school social worker sharing that her entire friend group went to the school social worker because “like we know that she will sit and listen, give us feedback if we ask for it and if we don't and she like asks us questions and if we don't feel comfortable answering the question, she'll go to a different question. She won’t like try to push you to answer the question.” These differential

descriptions of the ways in which mental health professionals ask questions and the level of comfort students have with sharing may impact perceived effectiveness. Fred also reported having a good relationship with the school social worker and said the he "genuinely enjoy[s] being with her." He said that he and the social worker "just talk about things" and he felt that their interactions were helpful and encouraged him to attend school because "if there's like a certain day I have to be there to see her, I anticipate when it happens."

Two other regularly attending students, June and Jared, described exposure to trauma ranging from witnessing a classmate's death to being targeted and teased daily because of a health condition and they both credited mental health interventions and/or counseling with helping them process these events, gain coping strategies, and become resilient. Jared credits therapy for getting through a particular challenging time in his middle school career that he describes as "just a whole cluster fuck" as he dealt with a medical condition and intense social anxiety. He said, "Therapy helped me get through it. Therapy helped me get over my life fears and learning how to cope with them." June shared "I had a psychiatrist. I had a therapist. A PRP (Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program) lady," and that she was a part of a program for young women that helped her as well. She described her program saying,

> "It was me and a whole bunch of girls. It was about girls who struggle with their fathers. like didn't have they- like if they either had their father in their life but he wasn't really in their life or their father was just not in their life at all. We used to take trips to meet other people, people used to come to our school. We had diaries we wrote in yeah it was just to help us figure out like do we as girls growing up with no fathers. Is it something that we're missing? It was just something to make us have an outlet and I was just like… I mean, NOW my father's in my life because but at first it was just like, how would it be if he was my life from the beginning? Like if I knew him from the beginning? I was just like well now I'm learning. It was like where girls came in and talked about their problems. Got to leave school and help with other girls around the community and stuff like it was a whole bunch of stuff."

June felt like her time in therapy was only somewhat helpful whereas she felt her time in the mentoring group for young women was much more transformative and important for developing her coping strategies sharing,

"Well it was- it was calming. It wasn't always just about talking. It was like they would take me out to go places. Not even money, like spending money, just like just probably going to the park or going to a museum or something. or going to a get together , I don't know, get together with other kids, just talk or meet somebody new. It was just an outlet.."

When describing her own coping strategies, she echoed some of these experiences saying,

"I would just leave the house. I just probably walk down the street get some air, probably sit at a friend's house, just like chilling, just breathing sometimes my friends wouldn't even be there. I would just talk to their parents. I'd be like bro can I just sit right here for a minute and breathe. Just take in some air, I just need to think and she'd be like yeah, sure that's fine."

<u>Interpersonal Level Themes</u>

The four themes that emerged at the interpersonal level were Staying to Myself (Besides My Ride or Dies), Othering, School as an Individual Endeavor, and Family Dynamics.

Theme 6: Staying to Myself (Besides My Ride or Dies)

"It's always good to talk to people. I'm a loner, but even a loner needs somebody to talk to. I mean, I made some friends, but for me, I like staying to myself, you know. I don't want to make too many…I don't want to make too many friends because then I can make too many enemies."
Jared, RA student

"Everybody cool- I'm cool with everybody so far."
Will, CA Student

Participants primarily categorized their high school classmates into one of two categories, their closest friends whom they trusted and spent the most amount of time with and a blanket category for everyone else at school who they interacted with at varying levels but never reaching the same level of closeness. Despite this shared

dichotomy of close friends vs everyone else, there were subtle differences in the way chronically absent students and regularly attending students experienced close friendships and peer interactions with respect to attendance and school success.

All the participants reported having a small group of close friends, “best friends”, or “ride or dies” at their current high school. Students also discussed the process of forming these new relationships while evaluating and maintaining the relationships with their closest friends from middle school. These close friendships were very important to students and many described these close friends as being akin to family. In the CA group, most students felt like their close friends had little to no impact on their attendance as these friends neither encouraged nor discouraged them to attend school. Kay said of his close friends “we don’t talk about school” and he believed those relationships didn’t impact his attendance. Contrary to previous studies that posited the idea that that students coordinate absences with their peers, the chronically absent participants all shared that if they learned a close friend wasn’t planning to attend school that day, they would still come to school and most of them felt their peers had better attendance than they did. In addition to not being negatively impacted by another student’s attendance behavior, Will reported that the people he felt close to at school were always at school and that increased his desire and motivation to come to school. He said “I just be coming to school sometimes just to see them.” This motivation while inspired by his relationships with his closest friends was not discussed with those friends. This sentiment represented a change from the instrumental support around attendance that he reported receiving from his friends at his previous school. Will said of friends from his previous school “If I don't come like a certain day, some- at least one of them will like ask or text me or something

asking where I'm at or if I like miss like, a day like today some people knew where I lived so they would like come to my house cause they knew my mother and all that so they would come in there ask me if I'm ok. But yeah so if we didn't see somebody we ask where they were at." Will didn't feel that his connections were strong enough yet for this type of support but this combination of accountability and care from closest friends with respect to attendance was described by many of the regularly attending students.

Miracle said her closest friend cared about her attendance because she wanted Miracle to be successful so they could live next door to one another in the future. When describing her closest friend's impact on her attendance Miracle said "So she'll call me like seven times in the morning. 'Where you at?' 'You out the bed?' 'Little girl is you up?' She be like 'get up right now little girl, because we not gon be late because of you.'" Even though they would still often end up being late, Miracle still felt encouraged by her closest friend to attend school. June similarly described a morning phone tree with her friends reporting,

> "My friend [Friend 1] he just be like 'Bro what is you doing? Come to school. I be like 'I am coming to school. Are you coming to school?' and then I like text my friend [Friend 2] like 'Are you coming to school?' and she be like 'Well yeah I'm coming to school' and then I'll be like 'Well is [Friend 3] coming to school and then we'll text him and he be like 'Yes I'm coming to school…I may be late, but yes I'm coming to school." So, we're all coming to school."

June felt like this helped encourage them all to attend school and said that even on days when she was going to be absent, she would still participate in the phone tree and encourage her peers to go to school. Even without early morning conversations, Alexis felt like her attendance was really important to her friends because "if they see that I haven't been in school for a while they'll start to get worried" and then "they'll usually text my phone or like call me and ask me where I've been." Alexis appreciated that

support and felt like knowing her friends cared, encouraged her to attend school. These findings support the conclusion that close friends who care about each other's attendance and have conversations about school increases individual accountability for attendance, which can positively impact attendance behaviors.

Aside from differences in the support students receive from their closest friends, many students in the CA group and students in RA group described different relationships to their peers in general, with the majority of the CA group reporting "being cool with everyone" whereas the RA group described staying to themselves. Being cool with everyone and staying to one's self are not mutually exclusive in that students who reported staying to themselves still reported having no issues with other students. The difference in the description seemed to be in the effort taken to exclude one's self and having no bonds with these other students as opposed to forming weak ties based on getting to know one another at least superficially. While being cool with everyone didn't always equate to considering everyone to be a student's friend, it indicated interacting with the majority of their peers whereas staying to one's self indicated limited social interactions with peers outside of one's friendship group.

When discussing his peers and classmates Will shared, "Everybody's cool, I'm cool with everybody so far." Similarly, Kay said of his classmates "I'm cool with them" and reported having friends in all his classes. When describing the way these interactions happen he said, "They just act like teenagers. Sometimes they nice, sometimes they mean that's what I mean by playful and then they all like get to know each other and become friends." Derrick similarly described this process of warming up and getting to know his peers sharing that for the first month of school "I just stayed to myself" but after that

initial time period “that’s when I got cool with everybody.” Derrick believed that staying to one’s self was something the most successful students did that contributed to their success. When describing the things successful students do in class he said, “They aint talk as much. Let's say they friend try to talk to them, they just ignore em or they just stay by themselves so they get their work done.” June best exemplified this perception of successful students saying “I don't really talk to anyone. I stick to myself,” and “it's worth it. I'm focused on everything. I don’t pay them [my classmates] any mind. I get my work done.”

Similarly, Septembra shared “I only interact with a few people, I don’t really talk to people throughout the day…I just stay to myself.” Jared also reported of his peers and classmates “I don’t really talk to them, I only talk to like one or two” and he explicitly expressed “I like staying to myself, you know, I don't want to make too many…I don't want to make too many friends because then I can make too many enemies.” Jared believed that staying to one’s self had a protective effect saying “Now a lot of people don’t want to fight me because they don't know me. They aint got no reason to fight me and that's one of the benefits, I guess, of being to yourself.” In middle school Jared had come to the realization “You’re gonna have a lot of enemies. It’s gonna be that some people just don't like you. You can't be friends of everyone, you know, and I thought that for my whole elementary life. I was trying to be friends with the people that hated me, I was like, why do you hate me, can we just be friends? It was like ‘no, I don't like you ‘and I was just like why, it was just childish things. You know, I was just trying to be friends with everyone.” Jared’s experiences in middle school impacted his decision to stay to himself in high school and limit his interactions to his close friends.

Theme 7: Othering

In describing their own identities and behaviors, participants often separated themselves from other students that they perceived to behave differently. "Othering" is a concept from anthropology, psychology, and sociology that describes an "us" vs "them" binary based on perceived differences (Borrero et. al., 2012). Two subthemes related to othering emerged that describe how students compare themselves to their peers; Attendance Behaviors and Race Based Perceptions.

Subtheme 7.1: Attendance Behaviors

"Cause I don't skip school…I don't feel like I'm truant"
Derrick, CA Student

[On her attendance compared to other DC students of the same race/ethnicity] "It's better… because half of the people that go to school don't even come to school most of the time. They can miss like a whole month of school and they come back a month later."
Septembra, RA Student

When comparing their attendance to other students, participants in both the CA group and the RA group expressed varying views on whether their attendance was similar or different to their peers. Septembra shared that her attendance was better than other students who look like her in terms of race or ethnicity in D.C. because "half of the people that go to school don't even come to school most of the time. They can miss like a whole month of school and they come back a month later." Jared similarly felt that his attendance was better than other Black students in DC sharing "I'm always there" and he felt the difference was that those students "have the power to tell their parents that 'I don't want to go to school today' and [their parents] don't have enough time to tell them that you're going to school. My parents do… So, they get to stay home…and some parents just don't care." Jared separated himself from other participants based on the

amount of agency he had in making attendance decisions and this theme will be discussed further in the Theme 9: Family Dynamics. Many regularly attending students thought their attendance was similar to their closest peers, better than other DC students, but only similar or worse than students nationally revealing some beliefs about lower attendance rates in Washington, DC.

Conversely, Derrick and Will perceived their attendance to be worse than their closest peers, worse than their fellow classmates, worse than other Black students in DC but "not that bad" compared to students nationally. The act of comparison was not where students displayed "othering" but rather in their explanations for the comparisons. These statements revealed a desire to not be grouped with another particular group of students. Derrick acknowledged his own attendance behaviors saying "I barely be coming to school but I'm fixing that now," but also recognized that in the USA there were students with worse attendance saying "some people don't go to school at all." Will and Derrick were two chronically absent students who further differentiated their attendance behaviors from those of students who skipped school. When comparing his behaviors to others, Will shared "I know people that be skipping school and all that." Despite his unexcused absences, Will did not identify as a student who skipped school and added that if he were ever labeled as truant he would be motivated to "start coming to school more." Similarly, when describing truancy, Derrick distanced himself from students who skipped school. When asked what truancy means he said "People that come get the kids…I don't know cause I don't skip school. So, if I don't come to school I gotta stay in the house. I can't go outside…. skipping school is like being… it's being outside all day. Like acting like you going to school but you don't really go to school… I don't feel like I'm truant."

His understanding of truancy was limited to truancy officers and was informed by his mother who he shared had said, “If you skip school truancy gon come get you, so don't skip school.” Despite similar attendance outcomes, Derrick differentiated himself from truant students based on where they spent their time not in school and how upfront they were about the decision not to attend. He similarly described the truancy subtype to include students who were hiding and being duplicitous about going to school and thought truant was a negative label that did not describe him (Berg, 1992).

Subtheme 7.2: Race Based Perceptions

[On if students look like me in terms of race or ethnicity] Most… they don't act like me, I don’t think so, but they look like me.”
June, RA Student

[On going to school with people who don’t look like me in terms of race and ethnicity] Different… cause they'll probably be smarter than me or know more than me.”
Derrick, CA Student

Many participants in the CA group and the RA group gave descriptions of perceived differences between the expected behaviors of Black students and the expected behavior of white or in some cases mixed students. Table 19 shows the responses students gave when asked what would be different if they went to schools that were not predominantly Black.

Table 19

Perceived Differences based on Race of Classmates

	What do you think would be different if you went to a school with people who didn't look like you (in terms of race/ethnicity or a predominately white school), if anything?
	Chronically Absent Students
Fred	Well, bit like… a bit awkward like hmmm, this is weird, not what I'm used to.
Will	Probably some people be treated different. Just like the way they act or something probably cause some people gon say they don't act the same as us so they weird or something like that… it don't matter to me.
AJ	Act different… They would act different because... hmm... well white people … like white people and Black people act different of course… of course I wouldn't know as many people... uh I don't think really like educational wise, I don't think really anything would change.
Derrick	Different… cause they'll probably be smarter than me or know more than me. Just cause of like probably they gon get more opportunities cause I look different. Yeah, they'll probably look at me different.
Kay	Nothing.
	Regularly Attending Students
Alexis*	"We would be more smarter. I'm not trying to be mean , but like more like intelligent. Uh , more focused. Not as immature." [On attending a predominately white school] The kids scores like test scores would be really high. Attendance would be really good, grades would be really good.
Miracle	I feel like I'd be out of place.
June	I feel like when some people talk about going to a predominately white school. They think about like, oh how the kids gon look at them because they're different. It's a lot of stuff going around talking about whites and Blacks and stuff. I don't see the point in it. Just like get along, don't matter what color you are. Tan, black, grey, pink, purple it doesn't matter just get along. There's no point in you- well, what are you fighting over? Why are you fighting over skin?
Jared	I would feel alienated. I feel ostracized not ostracized well maybe. Like you know, going to a school full of a bunch of people that don't look like me is going to feel a little bit off because people have assumptions about me and I'm gonna have assumptions about them. And I know nine times out of ten they've been around white people so when they see a Black person, they don't know how to act, they don't know what to do. So, I might feel a bit weird.
Septembra	Well probably like , if I went to a school , where people didn't look like me and then I didn't look like them I don't know they would probably just judge me based on how I look , because I'm not like them They probably be like oh she's Black look at her hair, look how she's dressed, like little things.

Note. *Alexis identified as biracial and said she already went to a school where students did not look like her so she first described if she went with students who did look like her and then a predominately white school.

While some students felt that the experience would be largely the same, the majority of participants expected there would be differences between the school environments. Students discussed changes in how they would feel, how they would be treated, the social environment, how their classmates would behave, and characteristics of classmates. Derrick and Alexis specifically mentioned intelligence as a differentiating factor. Derrick believed his white classmates would be smarter than him and Alexis believed that other students that looked like her, biracial, would be smarter than the students she currently went to school with and that white students would have higher test scores. While Derrick mentioned some external factors like limited access to opportunities that may contribute to these differences, he assumed that students who don't look like him would be smarter than him. Racial disparities in academic outcomes certainly exist but these responses demonstrate that some students have internalized messages about racial educational disparities and this has impacted their beliefs about their own intelligence compared to their peers.

In addition to ability, some regularly attending students engaged in "othering" to avoid being grouped with their Black classmates based on perceived differences in behavior. June shared that while most of the students at her school looked like her with respect to race or ethnicity, "they don't act like me, I don't think so, but they look like me." She believed that her attitude and behavior was the reason she should be viewed as separate from her peers saying, "I think I try to make my day good. Most of the times people of my color are like, 'I don't want to do this,' 'Why am I here?' so sometimes I think then they don't come [to school]… Like, oh, my gosh just do it to get it over with. You don't have to enjoy it, I don't enjoy it, but I have to do it to get it over with." June felt

like her ability to actively try and make her day good and choosing not to focus on not wanting to be at school helped her attendance. She posited that choosing to focus on the fact that they don't enjoy school, which was a shared sentiment, had a negative impact on attendance behaviors. Jared shared that "In general, I'm not one of those ratchet kids. I don't like scream or talk back to the teacher, get kicked out for a whole class period. No, I'm not one of those kids at all… I'm fine." Jared's "othering" focused on behaviors that are detrimental to relationship building with teachers and that could result in disciplinary consequences including removal from class, both of which can impact students' desire and motivation to go to school. Alexis further elaborated on these perceived behavior differences saying that she felt would be able to fit into the structure of a predominantly white school because of the similarities she saw in their behaviors "I come to school every day. I focus in class and I get my work done," as compared to her Black classmates who did not engage in those behaviors. These regularly attending students felt that their behavior was different from their Black classmates and they considered those behaviors to be undesirable and to not align with the ways they hoped to be viewed.

Jared shared how the racial composition of a school affected his perception of that school saying,

"When I see a bunch of Black kids in a school, I don't hate my race but I just know that this school is probably not the best as a white school or any like that… I really thought this was to be a white school or a school, that is full of white kids and not a lot of Black kids but when I went inside, it's a bunch of Black kids. I really like the way the school looks and the way it looks so nice… now I think it's still nice, but it's just like it's still ghetto. Yeah, well, not ghetto ghetto, but you know what I mean. Ghetto….some schools have their own prestigious thing but if you're looking for a ghetto, you can most definitely find it in this school. Well, like, you know, there is everything in schools as you go along. If you're looking for procedures, the lack of feeling for classes, you can find that… you know, actually forget everything I said about the ghetto part is just that there's ghetto kids. Mm hmm. And you might see that there is ghetto kids here, but they're not- they're not all ghetto."

Despite his overall impressions of schools based on the race of their student body, Jared was again engaging in "othering" behavior and establishing that students at predominately Black schools are not a monolith of only "ghetto" students. Similarly to Alexis, he seemed aware of the negative ways his response could be interpreted and wanted to be clear that he did not hate his race or wasn't trying to be mean. It's important to note that many students understood how these stereotypes about Black students' behaviors could be harmful and did not intend to offend or disparage the students they were separating themselves from. Jared even acknowledged some institutional and community level factors that could contribute to the differences between white and Black schools sharing, "Most of these schools I've been through, I've seen, the ones I went to, most of them are predominately Black because of the neighborhood I'm in and some of these white schools. I'm not gonna lie, they look a little bit more better than our schools. It's just kinda like, you know, these, these white private schools are just a little bit better because they have a little bit more funding." Jared then offered a lengthy description of what "ghetto" behaviors were and how his status as an in-group member of the Black community allowed him to differentiate between those who engage in ghetto behaviors and those who do not. He made sure to note that he wasn't placing a negative value judgement on the "ghetto" behaviors, just acknowledging the separation. He said ghetto behavior was,

"Using words that, I'm not trying to be mean, but like, you know, using words that don't have two syllables, using words that are below three syllables like one syllable words, two syllable words. Using the same words over and over again, cursing multiple times because they can't find the words replace 'fuck' or 'shit' and also the way… I don't know, I just probably and I think I have a nigga sense, you know, cause I can tell when someone looks a little bit off, you know, the way they walk, the way they talk, the way they're hanging around with other people, you know, like, you know, I have a little sense of how

it feels. I feel like you have to be Black to understand that sense. I mean, you could be white or anything like that, but you can't tell the difference. I feel like because some people just see as all the same way while others see us as like, oh, these are the Black people and these are like the ghetto [people] and there's nothing wrong with both of them is just that there's a lot there's a difference between them."

Theme 8: School as an Individual Endeavor

"Myself, it's all on my side" [On anyone you need to help you in order to meet your goals]
Derrick, CA Student

[On most successful students]"They ask for help. I haven't seen kids, now, I'm not saying kids that are not successful don't ask for help, but [successful students] ask for help and they don't give up if they don't understand something. They'll go to somewhere else where they will understand like um office hours, for example."
Jared, RA Student

Participants in the RA group overwhelmingly described the support they needed from peers, family, and teachers in order to succeed in school. While chronically absent students did describe help they could receive from teachers and peers, they conceptualized the educational experience as a primarily individual effort. Students in the CA group believed that students were successful based solely on their individual effort, whereas regularly attending students saw individual effort as important to success but that it also needed to be supplemented with the support of additional people and resources they could access in the school setting. Table 20 shows the responses participants gave when asked about the skills students need in order to be successful.

Table 20

Participants Responses on Skills Necessary for Student Success

	What are some skills you need to navigate through this school setting in order to be successful? [What do the most successful students so?]
Chronically Absent Students	
Fred	All I can say is their work. They have to get their work done.
Will	[The most successful kids] Just pay attention make sure they got all their work done.
AJ	Just getting what I need to get done. [The most successful kids] Just try in school and do what they need to do
Derrick	Remembering stuff uh, making sure that they can uh keep up with the teacher and make sure you got a good pair of eyes cause if you can't see, it's gonna be a hard year. [The most successful kids] get their work done they ain't talk as much let's say they friend try to talk to them they just ignore em. Or they just stay by themselves so they get their work done
Kay	[The most successful kids] Come to school on time um They always here and they do, they do, all they work
Regularly Attending Students	
Alexis	They have to have the right mindset. [The most successful kids] They- if they miss a few days, then they'll go straight to the teachers and ask them for their makeup work and they'll finish it as soon as possible. And they focus in class when they need to focus. They talk when they get a chance to talk
Miracle	I need to learn how to stop talking. [The most successful kids] They go to office hours...
June	I mean, as long as I know what I'm doing or I'm getting the right help from the right person, the right information. I feel like I'm good. [The most successful kids] They need a lot of skills- I won't even say they need a lot of skills but. I feel like most of the skills that kids at my school need to learn is communication skills…Communication is the way you talk to somebody that's gon either lead you in the right or wrong direction. like don't. that's just like somebody say, give me this or give me that. Like you're not talking to me, like that I'm not going to give you anything. But like, if you kindly ask or something. Like May I. Or can I please have this? Yes, I'm gonna give it to you. You asked nicely, but yeah, it's just all the way in how you ask somebody talk to somebody. That's communication.
Jared	I feel that what can actually help them navigate is maybe a little more assistance because I feel like I need help sometimes too. [The most successful kids] They ask for help. I haven't seen kids, now, I'm not saying kids that are not successful don't ask for help, but [successful students] ask for help and they don't give up if they don't understand something. They'll go to somewhere else where they will understand like um office hours, for example.
Septembra	Well, you need to like have a good relationship with some of your teachers because at the end of the day if you need something, they're there for, you. And you know yeah, stay on top of your work.

Students in the CA group thought that doing their work was the critical skill necessary for students to be successful. This focus on individual effort affected the way they perceived the impact of interpersonal factors on their academic success and attendance behaviors. Students in the CA group often responded that interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers had little to no impact on their attendance and ultimately, believed they were largely responsible for their attendance and academic outcomes, positive or negative. This notion is best exemplified by Derrick's response to the question "Is there anyone you need to help you in order to meet your goals?" He said, "Myself, it's all on my side" and many students in the CA group agreed with him. This contrasted with the majority of students in the RA group who mentioned teachers, family members, and peers in addition to recognizing their own role in their success and reaching their goals. Jared described this community or network of people who can support him reaching his goals as "People that understand my goals and people who, understandably, know more than me can help me out. People that are interested in the same subject that I am can help me out because we can trade information to each other and talk about how we can become better together instead of, you know, staying down at the same place we were." Regularly attending students seem to believe that individual effort is one component of school success but that effort must also be directed towards taking advantage of school resources including peers and teacher.

Theme 9: Family Dynamics

Participants in both attendance groups described varied family dynamics ranging from tight knit families with strict rules and structures at home to more disconnected families or families managing conflict with little time to focus on enforcing rules at

home. While family closeness and cohesiveness may moderate the effect that families have on student attendance, two subthemes emerged that help explain student attendance behaviors with respect to family, Parent Control over Attendance Behaviors and Parent-School Relationships.

Subtheme 9.1: Parent Control over Attendance Decisions

> "I do got a bit of control [over my attendance] cause as far as me [experiencing symptoms of my health issue]. I still gotta listen to my mother most of the time so even if I [experience symptoms] I still gotta come."
> AJ, CA Student

> "Well, like if I'm sick at all it's like… really like if she [my mother] really believes that I'm sick… like witnessed things that tell her I'm sick, she'll let me stay home. If I'm like, where like one day I'm fine and next day I'm like, 'Mom, I'm sick I gotta stay home,' she'll be like 'Them teachers gotta call me and tell me your sick.' She be like, 'I don't believe you.' So, if I'm lying then yeah that's on me and I'll just be a school."
> Miracle, RA Student

When asked "Who makes the decision for you to go to school or to stay home?" every participant, regardless of what attendance group they belonged to, said that a parent/guardian was responsible for that decision. All students described the process of trying to influence their parent's decision by informing their parent of an illness, real or pretend, sharing the limited importance of the school activities they would be missing on that day, or expressing that they didn't want to come to school. Students in the CA group and the RA group differed in how much control they believed they had in convincing or influencing their parents' decision.

The majority of students in the RA group felt they had little to no control over their attendance. Septembra expressed "I don't have any control over my attendance. I just, if there's nothing wrong with me, I have to go to school." Alexis, who described

having more control than most of the CA group said, “I have some control over [my attendance]” and shared, “I usually don't feel like going to school if I'm sick , so I'll just tell them [my parents] that I'm sick and then they’ll like feel my head because I usually get fevers a lot and then they know I have a fever and then I won't go to school.” Miracle shared, “Well, like if I’m sick at all it's like… really like if she [my mother] really believes that I'm sick… like witnessed things that tell her I'm sick, she'll let me stay home. If I'm like, where like one day I'm fine and next day I'm like, ‘Mom, I’m sick I gotta stay home,’ she’ll be like ‘Them teachers gotta call me and tell me your sick.’ She be like, ‘I don’t believe you.’ So, if I’m lying then yeah that’s on me and I’ll just be a school.” Both Alexis and Miracle shared a process by which their parents had to believe or receive compelling evidence about their sickness in order to allow them to stay home. All of the efforts students in the RA group described for influencing their parents’ decisions about attendance were primarily focused on illness. The CA students generally shared that if their concern for missing school wasn’t “that I’m not feeling good” it was futile to even attempt to convince their parent to let them stay home from school. June said of non-illness related desires to miss school “It's my father's choice, he’s either telling me to get up and still get on that bus or he's sending me an Uber or he's taking me to school…. he still sends me to school.” Fred was the only student from the CA group to fall in this category, sharing that it was “probably impossible” to convince his mother to let him stay home from school, He said, “If I wake up and just feel like I don't want [to go to school] or I don't feel comfortable, I want to get some rest more sleep and not go…and then my mom, she comes in, I can't, I can never just tell her I don't want to go to school, she's THAT kind of parent. She probably wouldn't take me seriously.”

Some students in the CA group believed they had more agency in making the decision to attend school. Despite saying that his mother made the decision about him going to school, Derrick felt like he had “all” of the control because he chooses when he wants to come to school. He and Kay were the only students who admitted to “faking like I was sick” in order to convince their parents to let them stay home from school. He was also the only student to describe not following his mother’s attendance decision after she told him to go to school. Derrick said that that on some days, “If my mom say I can't stay home, I'm just [gonna] get dressed real slow… real real slow and then to the point she just get mad and I'll end up…and she won’t come back up there so I’m just gon stay in the house. Conversely, Kay said that in terms of control over the decision to go to school or stay home, “It's 50-50. It's me and my mother,” but emphasized “I gotta have permission from my mother to stay out.” AJ shared “I do got a bit of control [over my attendance] cause as far as me [experiencing symptoms of my health issue]. I still gotta listen to my mother most of the time so even if I [experience symptoms] I still gotta come.” Students in the CA group described playing a larger role in the attendance making decisions but that parental influence was still present.

Students in the CA group also expressed that illness wasn’t the only reason they could use to convince their parents to stay home. Will said, “I'd have to talk to her, I have to try to like convince her. Sometimes she like understands me not feeling like going, so she'll like let me stay home.” Will felt like his close relationship with his mother helped her to understand why he didn’t feel like going to school and he appreciated that she would sometimes support his request to stay home. He said, “We got the type of bond, connection… she’ll understand.” This understanding that parents have for why students

don’t want to attend school can be influenced by the frequency or timing of the requests, their relationship with their student, their relationship with their student’s school and their personal experiences with education.

Subtheme 9.2: Parent-School Relationship

> “Nah, not really. I don’t be talking about school.” [On talking about school at home with family]
> Will, CA Student

> “They’re involved like in a lot of school activities and stuff. Like they’ll attend the parent teacher conference or like especially my mother, she’ll like help with school events.”
> Alexis, RA Student

Participants described parent involvement with school and their parent’s relationships with school in many different ways. Some students focused on their parents’ connection to school based on the amount of contact parents had with teachers. Septembra shared that her mother and grandmother are involved with school and that they "really stay in contact with my teachers.” Similarly, AJ shared that his parents talk to teachers “a lot” via text and that was how they stayed involved with school. Some students focused on their parent’s connection to school based on how often they participated in school activities. Alexis perceived her parents to be very involved sharing that they “attend the parent teacher conference” and her mother specifically will “help with school events.” Even though Miracle’s parents weren’t likely to attend school events or conferences, she felt that they’re connection to school came through her and the discussions they had about school. She said they were “Very involved… they encourage me to do good in school, but like they don't always interact, like they don't come to parent conferences.” Despite her parents being unable to attend school events felt like their

conversations about school kept them connected to her school and motivated her attendance.

All of the students in the RA group shared that they talked about school and things happening at school with their parents at home. Even though June didn't always appreciate her father's involvement saying that he was "too involved" and knew things about her grades before she knew them, she felt that those discussions at home after receiving information from school were essential to motivating her to care about their academic and attendance outcomes. She said, "My father… you don't understand, he gets on my nerves when it comes to school. 'Did you finish this?' 'Did you do that?' Like, 'Yes, I finished it." I feel like they do a good job [communicating with parents]. It just happens to be the parents like, if you get a text and you're not getting on your kid about this being done or their grades or their attendance, they aint gon care either."

Every participant in the CA group described a different experience, sharing that they rarely if ever talked about school at home. Will said that at home, "I don't be like talking about school." Similarly, Derrick said "I don't talk about school at home," but also shared "my sister talk about school. She the only one that be talking about school… I don't." Derrick had the opportunity to talk about school at home but he didn't want to have those discussions. Kay went further and said that his mom's relationship with his school was separate from him and he didn't know how often she talked to people at his school or what they talked about. She only shared the content of the conversations with him if he had done something "wild" and in instances where he had done something "mild" like talking back, he said his mom "was just gon get mad at the teacher." Kay was the only student to describe a contentious relationship between his mother and teachers at

his high school. He shared that one time he was sent home while another person who had done the same thing was only sent to ISS and he said "I think that the only reason I got sent home cause my mother cussed them out, they was just mad. That's the only reason I could think about." Even though he believed that his mother's relationship with teachers had impacted his discipline, he felt like she had his back and that if he told her that he had a problem at school, "she was gonna go see what's going on." This support coupled with her less than positive relationship with the school impacted her opinion of the school environment and meant that Kay had to do less work to convince his mother to miss school and sometimes she didn't ask for a reason.

School Level Themes

The three themes that emerged at the school level were A New Slate": School Representing Opportunity**,** Attendance Policy Awareness, and Perception of School Discipline System.

Theme 10: "A New Slate": School Representing Opportunity

"Yeah… middle school was just kind of bad to be honest, but it helped me learn and prepare myself for what's coming in high school. And this is gonna be a little bit harder and I knew I had it in me. I wasn't dumb. I could do it. I just didn't want to. So high school, I decided, like, you know… to tell myself, boy you got to do this if you don't want the same outcome to happen. And [Jared], what happened in middle school you don't want that same thing to repeat. You don't want the same things you went through in middle school to happen in high school. It was like high school was a new slate for me. I was like I can finally start. I can do this and I can make new friends. So, it's gonna be a perfect year."

Jared RA Student

[On how high school is different from middle school] It don't seem different. Every- it seem the same… They're similar because like the rules the same, the school day still long, and it's still boring."

Kay, CA Student

Some students in the RA group described high school as being a “fresh start” and expressed how that mindset positively impacted their attendance. Jared shared that after some bad years in middle school, having the opportunity to change the narrative and make different choices in high school was important to him. He shared that after a bad middle school experience,

“I decided, like, you know… to tell myself, boy you got to do this if you don't want the same outcome to happen. And [Jared], what happened in middle school you don't want that same thing to repeat. You don't want the same things you went through in middle school to happen in high school. It was like high school was a new slate for me. I was like I can finally start. I can do this and I can make new friends. So, it’s gonna be a perfect year.”

Jared described an internal motivation to make his high school experience better than middle school and therefore high school represented an opportunity for him to do the things he had previously struggled to do and change his educational and personal outcomes. While Jared’s view of school as a new opportunity was primarily driven by his psychological desire and was independent of which particular new school he would have started, June described her excitement for access to tangible new experiences that were not options at her previous middle school. June shared her excitement about the new opportunities offered in high school as compared to her old school sharing,

“In middle school, we really didn't have that many [extracurricular classes] I think those were the only three. We didn't get as many as we do here. Like I never knew. I was gon come to the school and they were gonna have Choir and Dance, and when I came here I was like they have a lot of stuff, And then the computers. The kids were laughing at me when I first came here I did not know how to work computers. The computers [at my old school] were tore apart just like broken down. When I came here I was just like they got Apple computers in here at ninth grade orientation. I was just surprised walking around the school like ‘Can touch this?’ Like this gonna be in my hands? I been [at my old school] too long I was like oh my gosh, like it's so much stuff. I never imagined going to a school that had all this stuff. It got all these sports here. Only thing they really have for girls [at my old school] is volleyball, basketball, but like they got lacrosse They bout to come up with the swimming team and everything else. I'm just like woah.”

June viewed high school as a new opportunity because she was being granted access to so many resources that were previously unavailable to her. She said “So I was like it's a new beginning, it's high school. I'm bout to go to high school, lemme try something new.” Despite their different motivations, Jared and June saw high school as an opportunity to start over and engage in new, different behaviors and activities; the excitement associated with that prospect, had a positive impact on their attendance behaviors.

Conversely, some of the chronically absent students described more similarities between their previous schools and current high schools. The differences that they mentioned were more focused on the physical building and expectations as opposed to the content, climate, opportunities or how they felt about the school. Kay was most adamant that there was no real difference between his high school and middle school and described high school as a continuation of what he did in middle school, and thus still not exciting to him. Kay said of his high school “It don't seem different. Every- it seem the same… They're similar because like the rules the same, the school day still long, and it's still boring.”

Specifically, with regards to academics, Will felt like the work was a continuation of his previous middle school work noting “Well, some like in world history, the stuff that she's teaching us I learned it like last year, she's just teaching us like more of it. So, I kind of know most of it so it's pretty easy.” He didn’t think this situation impacted his attendance except noting that, “If I know it's a day we're gonna watch a movie or something, I'll come.” Will felt like there was no new academic challenge but rather a retread of previously learned material and this made him feel like his classes were easy and unexciting. This directly contrasts with Alexis who said, “Middle school wasn't like

as hard as it is now, like, if I missed a few days in school , I could easily bring that back up with like one or two assignments, but in high school it's gonna take me a while to bring back up my grades." Alexis embraced being in a more challenging high school environment and said she liked learning harder work. The change in rigor made her feel more engaged and also motivated her to attend school so that she would not miss any assignments as they were more difficult to make up.

Theme 11: Attendance Policy Awareness

"Oh, I don't really pay attention to the policy but I know because it happened to me. I don't know all the rules."
June, RA Student

" [On missing 10 days] They probably gon call your parent again…. Like in a row or just ten days? Uh in a row they probably gon ask about you like where you been at or if you just miss ten days I don't think they gon do nothing."
Derrick, CA Student

When asked to described the attendance policy at their school, most participants in both the CA and RA group were unclear of how attendance was tracked, who tracked attendance, the outcomes associated with reaching certain numbers of absences, or the potential consequences of numerous absences. All participants however, did understood that their parents would be notified via text, email, or by phone when they were absent from school. Students in the CA group mentioned that parents would be notified but they perceived that fact to have little impact on their behavior because they would not miss school without their parent's knowledge. From the RA group, Jared shared, "my parents would be notified if I was absent on that date… that's why I don't skip." June similarly described the parent notification system with regards to tardies saying "They will send your parents a email or they will text their phone and be like, well, such and such uh

came school at that certain time and it'll like give your parents the exact time you got to school." As described in parent school relationships, June would then have to have a follow-up conversation with her father and wanting to avoid that conversation motivated her to try and get to school on time. Miracle also added while she was often tardy that never turned into missing the whole day. She said, "I know if I'm not at school it sends stuff to her [my mom's] phone that I did not come at all," and while she didn't mind having a conversation with her mom about being tardy she did not want to have a conversation about being absent.

Reponses to questions about what happens if you miss a certain number of days were mostly focused on classroom procedures for making up missed work and consequences to student's grades as opposed to an understanding of the overall policy. Fred shared that after 10 absences "All I know is that your grades are going to drop." Jared shared that after missing five days he thought "My grades are definitely gonna drop... A grades Bs, all of the hard work, it's gon be done. It'd go back down to Cs and Ds." Jared connected his absences to a decline in his grades which were important to him and thus motivated his school attendance.

Derrick and Miracle had the most informed understanding of the attendance policy compared to their other peers but they were still unfamiliar with many aspects of the policy. Miracle was the only student who accurately described the consequences one could face outside of the school setting based on their attendance and Derrick was the only student who knew the office manager that was in charge of tracking attendance. Miracle said "I know that like , if we miss like a certain amount of days in there, like unexcused , they'll like have to get somebody from like CPS involved to like figure out

what's going on at home making people stay home and stuff like that… if you missed 10 days they automatically call CPS , because you feel like missing [like a missing person]. If you have like five unexcused absences then they'll send you a letter and notify you like what's going to happen if you miss this many days." She had never encountered these particular consequences as she'd been a regularly attending student all throughout her school career but prior life experiences, peer, and family interactions had informed her understanding. Unlike Miracle, many students were very open about not knowing much about the attendance policy because they only knew the portions of the attendance policy that had affected them, such as the tardy policy. June said, "Oh, I don't really pay attention to the policy but I know [about tardy because it happened to me. I don't know all the rules." Will shared, "I think they like send a letter home or something. I don't know cause I haven't like missed 5 days in a row." Some students in the RA and CA group were not concerned with understanding the attendance policy because they felt like it didn't apply to them and wasn't relevant to their experiences.

The only outcome AJ described for missing 5 days of school was having to "get a packet of work." Derrick accurately recognized that missing days consecutively had different outcomes than missing days non-consecutively but he thought that, "If you just miss ten days [non-consecutively] I don't think they gon do nothing." Derrick thought that missing ten days was not associated with any consequences at all. At the time of our meeting four students in the CA group had already passed the threshold of 5 absences and based on the information available in the school handbook, should have had an attendance intervention meeting where this information would have been shared. They all expressed that they had not had conversations with anyone about their attendance which

means that either these meetings didn't occur, students didn't remember these meetings, or they were not included in these meetings. AJ and Derrick expressed that their parents had previously had conversations about attendance, Kay said that his parents had not had conversations about attendance, and Will said "not that I know of."

Theme 12: Perception of School Discipline System

Participants described in detail the overall discipline system in their school, their interaction with the discipline system, and the ways they had learned to navigate the discipline system based on expected consequences. Three subthemes emerged to illustrate the ways in which the discipline system impacted attendance; Getting Sent Out of Class, Differential or Unfair Treatment, and Normalization of Discipline.

Subtheme 12.1: Getting Sent out of Class

"You get demerits for talking or doing anything you don't supposed to be doing and like when you get a certain amount some teachers send you out."
Kay, CA Student

"You're gonna give me a referral because I had the urge to laugh like, ok, it's laughter. Who's not gonna laugh. Some days it's just a laughing day or you feel goofy. But yeah, I've not got suspended or ISS suspended. I've never got detention or none of that… Most of my referrals or demerits come from laughter or like being a child."
June, RA Student

Every student in both the CA and RA groups mentioned getting sent out of class as a potential consequence that students could receive at school. Fred, Septembra, and Alexis were the only students who had never received an office referral or been to ISS and while June had received an office referral, she had never been in ISS. The rest of the participants had all been to ISS and they perceived this course of action to be a fairly common consequence. In describing the discipline system, some students had a clearer understanding of a ladder of escalating consequences whereas some students only

described exclusionary practices such as getting an office referral, getting kicked out of class, getting sent to ISS, or getting suspended as the primary consequences. June described consequences students can receive in worsening order sharing, “You either get the detention. You get a phone call. You get referrals. You get um, you don't get to go on field trips. That's most of that stuff… you get in school suspension, out of school suspension.” Kay similarly described the ladder of consequences saying “You get demerits for talking or doing anything you don't supposed to be doing and like when you get a certain amount some teachers send you out.” Students mostly felt like this system of warning students, moving up the ladder, and then getting sent out of class was fair, however, they noted that sometimes students got kicked out right away or that even if they had been warned, the consequence of having to leave the classroom seemed like too much.

Students reported getting office referrals or being sent to ISS for a myriad of reasons ranging from small infractions to bigger offenses. Jared shared that he was sent to ISS because, “I was doing math homework in science class, me and a friend too, and when the teacher told us stop I was like I was like, ‘No.’ I wasn’t trying to be rude, I just needed to get my work done.” Will shared that he went to ISS for not going to tardy detention.” Miracle had been sent to ISS for “airdropping stuff in class.” June and Derrick both described instances where laughing was enough to get students sent out of class. June believed that office referrals were not an appropriate consequence for laughing. She said, “You’re gonna give me a referral because I had the urge to laugh like, OK, it's laughter whose not gonna laugh. Some days it's just a laughing day or you feel goofy. But like yeah, I've not got suspended or ISS suspended. I've never got detention or

none of that, I've just got like a referral or something or a demerit cause I laughed. Most of my referrals or demerits come from laughter or like being a child." Derrick similarly believed that small offenses were sometimes perceived to be more serious or negative than they were. He said, "It's just like if you do something wrong, they gon catch you and then get you and then like they gon say something to you, but if you do something like if you do something little, they still act like you did something like real bad. They still gon keep you in ISS, or they gon call your parent and make it seem like you did something like real real bad." For Derrick this impacted his level of comfort in the classroom and the ways in which he navigated the classroom setting. Derrick specifically was cognizant of the fact that he could "get put out for saying something stupid" so he tried not to talk or play too much in class.

Of the more serious offenses that could get a student sent to ISS, Kay shared "[The teacher] wrote me up, he said get out the class so I was walking to get out the class and that's when he got in my way. He put his hand to me- he put his hand in my face so I pushed him. I wasn't thinking nothing, I was mad. I had the lady walk me down to ISS and that's when they told our principal how it- and then I basically, I got sent home and got suspended." Miracle shared that she told her teacher to "Shut the hell up" and he told her to "Get out." Miracle shared the impact that incident had on her relationship with her teacher. She shared she had been forced to apologize "so they would leave me alone" but that she "didn't really mean it," She said, "He know not to talk to me and I won't talk to him." The relationship between Miracle and her teacher was eroded because she was sent out of class and while it had not been repaired, she was still expected to go to class and learn from this teacher with whom she didn't want to communicate at all. While this

didn’t impact her personal attendance, she shared she believed incidents like this could impact other students’ attendance. She said, “Some of these kids think these teachers be doing too much and they aint gonna come.”

Some participants who had not been to ISS mentioned students completing work in that setting whereas ISS was characterized those who had been as a place where students “sit,” “be quiet,” “do nothing” and “get a zero” for the classwork they are missing. Furthermore, Septembra shared her beliefs on the impact ISS could have on attendance saying “if a student has to go to ISS for the whole week then they probably wouldn’t show up to school because they wouldn't want to be stuck in there doing nothing.” Students also didn’t perceive office referrals or ISS to be particularly effective, with both Jared and Fred sharing that it did not deter behavior. Fred shared that after receiving a referral, students “just walk back in the class, like, I'm going to do it again.” Derrick also thought that ISS was ineffective and described a strategy that he thought was much better. “Pulling them out to [the hallway], pulling them out of class. Oh, that's what my world history teacher do. She take them in the hallway tell em get out but she don't send them to the office or to ISS she just tell them to get out and just be like just collect yourself. Cause she don't want nobody to miss out on the lesson so she just tell you to get out , and get yourself together.”

Finally. students shared incidents that revealed a hierarchy within the school system not only of consequences, but of power. Derrick shared.

“I got sent to ISS for asking my friend did she get a haircut cause like she had a lot of hair at first and I thought she cut it all off and that's when the principal said go to the office. I meant, well she told me, to go to ISS, and I said, OK. Then my friend [who was in the hallway] he tried to walk me back there trying to be funny and then she told him, ‘what are you doing back here’ and then she said you know what, ‘you[’re] staying in here too’ and then he said ‘what’ and I started laughing and she acted like I was doing

something wrong…. Like that was funny cause he tried to be funny, then he got in trouble."

Derrick's story supports the previously described notion that minor offenses such as laughing, playing, and asking questions at the wrong time can get you sent out of the classroom, but he also adds the important consideration of how much power the adult you're interacting with has in terms of discipline. He believed this particular scenario may have had a different outcome if it didn't involve the school principal. Kay similarly described this power hierarchy saying, "Not listening, like if you don't listen to your teacher, then you go to ISS, but if you don't listen to like the admin then you get sent home." Derrick expanded on this idea saying "When you get in trouble by a teacher, they probably just call your parent or just call your dean and the Dean gon ask you what happened. Then he gon listen to the teacher's side of the story. Of course they gon listen to the teacher more cause [they] an adult… Sometimes cause they gon end up suspending you if you don't cooperate. That's what the Dean gon do, they'll suspend you. Talking back to a Dean or lack of cooperation with a Dean… I was bout to get suspended for laughing" He also added that "Some people be getting stopped by the principal too, for just for no reason." These power dynamics impacted the ways the Derrick and Kay navigated the school system. Derrick tried to avoid admin if he saw them in the hallway and he shared that if he did interact with a Dean, "I wouldn't say nothing. I'd just end up just stop talking and just let them keep talking and if they be like … just nod my head so they can't say I'm talking back."

Subtheme 12.2: Differential or Unfair Treatment

"So, like say if they know this a really bad kid and a really good kid. So say if you're giving a punishment to a really good kid, the teacher might be nice and say this your first time, I'm a do this to you be fine but for the really bad kid that's been getting

punishments and still doing the same thing. They might like you know, change the rule, a little bit more on them. OK, you got this AND this. Good luck. They trying to make them stop because the original thing is not working."
Jared, RA Student

"Everybody don't get the same punishment. Like some people, they get away with stuff and the others don't. Like if one person do something, like they'll get in trouble basically, because like teachers [will] say like they do the same thing every day but like another person do it like they do it like every other day, then they don't get in trouble."
Kay, CA Student

Participants discussed unequal application of discipline, unfair treatment of students, and feeling targeted or disrespected by teachers. Many students acknowledged that consequences were not applied equally and student's previous behavior and perceived character affected how they would be treated by teachers. Jared said "So like say if they know this a really bad kid and a really good kid. So say if you're giving a punishment to a really good kid, the teacher might be nice and say this your first time, I'm a do this to you be fine but for the really bad kid that's been getting punishments and still doing the same thing. They might like you know, change the rule, a little bit more on them. OK, you got this AND this. Good luck. They trying to make them stop because the original thing is not working." Kay also believed that teachers weren't fair to students because "Everybody don't get the same punishment. Like some people, they get away with stuff and the others don't. Like if one person do something, like they'll get in trouble basically, because like teachers [will] say like they do the same thing every day but like another person do it like they do it like every other day, then they don't get in trouble." Students were aware that students were judged and treated differently based on if they were thought of as "good" students or "bad" students. Alexis shared that she had never been disrespected by a teacher because "I'm a good child and I don't disrespect any teachers and I just come to class to do my work." While some students thought this

differential treatment was justified, others thought it was unfair and ineffective in improving behavior. Kay's proposed solution was that "Everybody get the same consequence…or nothing." Alexis shared "It's a lot of kids that get to do what they want, certain teachers that let them do what they want, and certain teachers pick on certain kids," and she hoped teachers would receive training to learn "how to like , not pick on people and treat them fairly." Miracle was the only student who had expressed these concerns directly to teachers and she told them "You should also like have something [positive] for kids that are like doing what they need to do, like that you're noticing are like doing better."

Many of the students mentioned teacher training as a possible solution for reducing this differential treatment. Other students felt that teachers needed support in managing their emotions so as not to be disrespectful to students even when enforcing school discipline procedures. Will saw the ways in which the school discipline system could erode relationships with teachers and then negatively impact attendance saying some students "don't wanna come to school because [of] the teachers." For the most part students described teachers' behavior as reactionary to student misbehavior, however some students believed that teachers were sometimes disrespectful to students without provocation. AJ shared an instance where a teacher had used a disrespectful tone when referencing his attendance saying, "I've had a teacher say like, like she said, I missed school a lot and I need to be listening but it was the way she said it…it was just disrespectful" Miracle believed that teachers' choices to speak to students disrespectfully impacted how they were treated in return. She said, "I understand that they want us to respect them but I also know they like you've got to respect people, you got to treat

people the way the way you want to be treated . So, I don't want teachers to like expect kids to respect them if they're going to be disrespectful." June felt like most her teachers were fair with respect to discipline but that they could also have bad days which would impact the way they treated students. She shared,

"I feel like some teachers when they have their bad days or I don't know… some teachers… they just mean on certain days or have this nasty energy on some days. I feel like some days teachers need to, I don't know, take a day off or something if they aint feeling well cause some teachers be like 'I'm not in the mood today.' I'll be like, well, I didn't do nothing to you. I don't know where all this attitude is coming from. All I did was ask for help and you bout to snap on me, so I'm gonna need you to take a couple minutes. Just like how you would tell me to get myself together, I'm gonna need you to take a couple minutes to get yourself together because you not about to yell at me."

June specifically referenced utilizing coping strategies as a suggestion to help her teachers to better manage their emotions and expressed frustration that someone who was supposed to be helping her was instead being disrespectful towards her. Miracle similarly expressed frustration when describing a strained relationship with a reading teacher and aide whom she felt had disrespected her when enforcing the school discipline system. She said after their incident,

"Every single day in class , when I will like try to ask for help, she'll ignore me or she'll act like she don't hear me. That's childish because you're a grown woman and I'm the child…She never apologized to me so I didn't apologize to her . So, I didn't talk to her or anything and it was like that for like two months."

Subtheme 12.3: Normalization of Discipline

"A lot of students, I feel, tend to fall into that kind of category like get angry at the teachers for punishing them and when they're in the wrong and getting mad at them like "How you do this?" and not realizing they are in the wrong- that you're the one in the wrong, not him."
Fred, CA Student

"If you're in class and a teacher is giving you directions and you're not following it and they keep telling you what to do and you're not doing what you're supposed to do and they give you a referral to go to detention, I think that's fair."
Septembra, RA Student

Despite descriptions of the discipline system that could be interpreted as negative, participants overwhelmingly believed the discipline system was “okay” and “mostly fair.” Even though Derrick shared that he “didn’t like anything” about the school discipline system and wouldn’t encourage his little sister to come to this school, he said “it’s okay,” and “sometimes fair.” Students felt most strongly about fairness when they saw a teacher move through the ladder of consequences with no behavior change from the student because then they believed that the student deserved whatever consequence they received. Septembra shared, “If you're in class and a teacher is giving you directions and you're not following it and they keep telling you what to do and you're not doing what you're supposed to do and they give you a referral to go to detention, I think that's fair.” Students also thought that the severity of the offense was also important for determining fairness and again felt that the punishments for serious offenses were mostly fair. June said “fairness depends on what you do... If you do a certain thing, I just be like that was your stupidity. You deserved that. You do. You deserve to get out of school suspension or you deserve to get in school suspension like why would you do that? I feel like sometimes it's fair, but sometimes it's not. Like you're suspending me cause I had holes in my jeans. Are you serious? Like that I don't understand… this is stupid.” As described in the Subtheme: Getting Sent Out of Class, some students believed that it was unfair for students to receive harsh consequences for minor infractions. Other students however, believed that a pattern of disruptive behavior necessitated exclusionary practices.

Kay, Fred and Will all emphasized personal responsibility and were sometimes annoyed when students couldn’t accept punishment for their actions. Will shared that

“some students they like don't like being spoken to even though they're in the wrong so it be like getting annoying sometimes.” Fred agreed adding that “A lot of students, I feel, tend to fall into that kind of category like get angry at the teachers for punishing them and when they're in the wrong and getting mad at them like ‘How you do this? and not realizing they are in the wrong- that you're the one in the wrong, not him.” Similarly, Kay shared “It's they actions. Whatever they do it's not the school fault, that they did it so…” This emphasis on personal responsibility meant that students often endorsed the punishment of other students for misbehavior and didn’t feel like it was a system that needed to be challenged. Kay shared an example of a time where he felt like his teacher didn’t handle a classroom discipline situation well saying, “Sometimes if somebody like making noise, like they [the teachers] don't put em out. They'll keep him in and like just let em talk and then make like the whole class stay back just for that one person talking.” He thought a better way to deal with it would be to “just send them out and write 'em up.” Kay previously expressed that he thought the differential application of school discipline was unfair but he didn’t think that the policies themselves were harsh or unfair. While some participants shared methods they perceived as better for handling misbehavior, Kay said that this discipline system was the same as his previous schools and he thought students being sent out of class or suspended was the normal way to handle misbehavior.

Some students thought the discipline system was too “lenient” and even had suggestions about harsher ways to punish students. Jared shared,

“After going to ISS, they just like they gon do it again. There has to be reason why you don't want to go to ISS… You can probably do something that threatens them to make them not go to ISS. Not somebody coming up to them say like threatening them with their life… threatening something that's probably more important, like their education. This might not sound like a good idea but what if we put their… Their grades are already on the line so why not add college credits to it too. Maybe subtract like one or two

college credits. Yeah. Maybe. Or like, uh, added up my other 100 or 200 moments where you just gotten into like ISS … 30 moments you got into OSS which is out of school suspension. Make that a limit so they can get kicked out of the school. So, if they really care about their friends and they will be the bigger person and begin to realize that, like wow me and my education is really on the line. Let me just not do that. It will probably fix the discipline issue."

This statement seemed to directly contradict when Jared had previously shared that if he were principal of the school he would have a more empathetic, lenient response to misbehavior. He said,

"I'll probably be more lenient on some students that got sent ISS. If I was in control of ISS, I'll be more lenient on those kids because, you know, I don't really see kids as like, OK, they're doing bad, right, but they're probably just having a bad day. Maybe it is like, you know, something's going on at home. You really can't blame the kid. I mean, you can blame a kid for doing bad things at school but there has to be a reason of why they did it. You know, there can't be a reason why they just said that they just wanted to do it. I mean, there's probably a reason why they'll say that, but maybe they're just hiding out the fact that something's going on at home and they don't want to share with us."

When asked to clarify these different responses to misbehavior, he said there was a difference between students who regularly misbehave and those who just made a mistake.

Community Level Themes

The three themes that emerged at the community level were Strong Community Ties, Perceptions of Criminality, and Effects of Gentrification.

Theme 13: Strong Community Ties

"My community…we all united. We basically feel like we family"
Kay, CA Student

"No, I don't go outside. I don't really have friends in my community.. except for my friend [student name] that lives down the street, I don't really have like people in the community that I talk to I stay in the house most of the time when I come home."
June, RA Student

Participants described many different communities with differing levels of perceived safety and cohesion. Participants lived in neighborhoods ranging from

“generally quiet” and “safe” to communities with crime ranging from robbery to gun violence. There was no clear difference in neighborhood characteristics based on attendance group, however, some of the students in the CA group described strong ties to their communities as compared to many of the students in the RA group, regardless of the neighborhood characteristics.

Kay shared that the people in his community are supportive and fun and that he enjoyed spending time with them. He said, “My community…we all united. We basically feel like we family.” Will similarly described his closest friends from his community as family saying, “I'm close with like a whole lot of people um from my old school…We all lived close so we would just like meet up with each other on the weekends and all that so it like made us closer. Like family, like another family.” Will had attended school with many of these friends since they were all in nursery school and transitioning to a new school environment without the majority of his closest friends was difficult for him. These close relationships had been formed over the course of many years and Kay and Will had not yet created these same strong relationships with students at their schools. While they were “cool with everyone” they maintained their close friendships with their friends from their communities and described often meeting up with them afterschool in their communities instead of hanging out with friends from their high school. While their friends from the community were not preventing them from forming new relationships, they did compare their new relationships with their old ones describing that they “weren’t really close to anyone like that yet.” These close community ties meant that students like Will and Kay felt most comfortable when at home or in their communities at the basketball court or the rec center than when they were in the school setting. Kay

specifically was much more motivated to attend and participate in community events than school events.

These close community ties also had important benefits for participants. Kay shared that his close community ties kept him safe and protected in his neighborhood. He said that “People get robbed by my house. It be shootings too,” but that he was not afraid because “It's me, I know them.” He expanded saying “I feel like in my community if I aint know somebody then people probably would rob me, I would have probably got robbed because I'm known like in my community I be having money. Yeah they just saw me with money, they'll try and rob me.” Specifically, with regards to his commute to school, Kay shared that “It's safe… for me but- I don't know about other people. Because I know a lot of people so... because it's me, I know them so they ain’t gon do nothing to me.” Thus, for some students, maintaining these relationships are critically important to students’ life outcomes and safety.

Conversely, while June also felt safe in her neighborhood, she shared that she had mostly avoided forming ties with other members of her community. She said, “No, I don't go outside. I don’t really have friends in my community… except for my friend [student name] that lives down the street, I don't really have like people in the community that I talk to. I stay in the house most of the time when I come home [from school].” This approach was an intentional choice June had made in order to avoid negative situations that she could get into within her community. She said, “It’s a lot of- if you want to call them gangbangers. Some of them around here are drug dealers, but they don't harm my safety because I know how to protect myself… but there is a lot of stuff that goes around here that I don't know cause I stay in the house, but lot of things that people can get

themselves into around here." June did not have strong community ties and her sense of belonging was much greater in the school context. This motivated her not only to attend school to escape the boredom of home, but to be involved in afterschool activities that interested her and kept her engaged as opposed to sitting at home.

Theme 14: Perceptions of Criminality

"If they see like a group, like a big group of people my skin color, just walking around, they might think we up to something. That's happened to me a couple of times, any [time] like me and like a group of my friends walking around going somewhere like white people think we up to something… it's like little things, it's people just like watching me like making sure I won't do something just little things like that."
Will, CA Student

"Most definitely people see me differently when I go to a place that looks not like it's where apparently I belong. Maybe those people in the neighborhood [think] like I'm gonna cause em trouble. Like I remember earlier on I used to be going to pools and there's all kinds of people there. There's white people and there's Black people and there's some people that look out for the kids and like wonder what we're gonna do… and that's mean, not mean, well, you know what I mean. that is being aware, because I do it, too. I do it with my own race."
Jared, RA Student

In describing how they were perceived outside of the school setting, many participants described instances outside of the school setting where they felt they were being perceived negatively because of their race and possibly their age. These instances ranged from racial profiling to police interactions and in many ways mirrored the discipline incidents they had described within the school setting.

When asked about racial discrimination, Derrick shared an incident of racial profiling saying, "I kept getting looked at inside the mall like they thought I was probably trying to steal. I aint say nothing I just walked out and just went home." He shared that he was a little bit upset because he "was tryna buy something" and the security guard had

assumed he was trying to steal. Derrick wasn't even able to accomplish his task because he was uncomfortable with the security guard following him and left.

Kay described the police presence in his neighborhood saying "Each day they come at a certain time and like say it's a bad neighborhood. [They] always assume that something's going on, you could just tell by they face. like it be looking all mean like I don't know they face expression just look like they think something's going on when nothing be going on." Will similarly described increased policing in his community as well and how officers perceived him and other members of his community. He said "They be a lot of police officers around, more than it used to be. I don't really be doing nothing…I don't know they just be thinking we wanna do something since it got like a large Black community and all that but it be like I guess teenagers they be thinking we up to no good." The differentiation between "bad" neighborhoods and "good" neighborhoods again mirrors the differentiation between "good" and "bad" students and the different treatment that they receive. Kay described an incident where he was out in his community and had an interaction with the police. He said, "They [members of his community] was shooting dice and I was right there and then [the police came] and they just was doing extra… like, they just take stuff overboard, like they don't gotta be so harsh…like, they just take stuff overboard... like it was what they was doing and saying, they was just cussing us out basically. They started cussing everybody out and then they slammed two people who had the dice." When asked how he was feeling during that interaction with police, Kay expressed that he wasn't scared or surprised, he said "I aint feel like nothing. I just feel like it was normal."

Will described incidents of profiling similar to Derrick but more explicitly mentioned how race played a role in the perception saying, “If they see like a group, like a big group of people my skin color, just walking around, they might think we up to something. That's happened to me a couple of times any [time] like me and like a group of my friends walking around going somewhere like white people think we up to something… it's like little things, it's people just like watching me like making sure I won't do something just little things like that.” Despite never having the intention of engaging in any negative behaviors, he expressed that he could understand why he was profiled saying “because like my people be stealing so [they] might think we're gonna do it.” Jared expanded this notion sharing, “Most definitely people see me differently when I go to a place that looks not like it’s where apparently I belong. Maybe those people in the neighborhood [think] like I’m gonna cause em trouble. Like I remember earlier on I used to be going to pools and there's all kinds of people there. There’s white people and there's Black people and there's some people that look out for the kids and like wonder what we’re gonna do… and that's mean, not mean Well, you know what I mean. that is being aware, because I do it, too. I do it with my own race.” Some students acknowledged that Black adolescents sometimes engage in negative behaviors and have internalized that being cautious or suspicious of Black adolescents in general is understandable, normal, and an activity in which they sometimes participate as well. Miracle described an incident of discrimination where she and her friends were perceived in a negative light by someone who was also Black. She said,

“One day we were outside and this is this Black lady, it’s mostly old people in my neighborhood,. well it was this Black lady on the porch and the people across the street are white people. They were letting us play like in their yard and stuff. She thought we were just over there like by ourselves. She thought that we were over there messing stuff

up. Well, we tried to tell her like they knew we were out here. They were in the house and they were aware that we were out there but she threatened to call the police on us… she said something about like how it's going to affect how the people that were moving in the neighborhood would think about how we act."

Miracle was upset by the interaction but was able to show some understanding of the woman's perspective. Miracle felt like the woman "was trying to help" but that "she should have listened to us first and then we could have explained to her like a reasonable conversation." She shared, "I just felt like maybe she would have listened to us when we told her that they knew we were like in the yard , maybe it would have been like a different discussion. I'm thinking maybe she felt like we were in the yard without permission. So if she was feeling that way, I'm guessing she was trying be like, if they see how you acting and if they see you trespassing, then maybe [they'll think] y'all trying to like do something." Miracle recognized the importance of using her voice to advocate against misperceptions of criminality that did not accurately reflect who she was. In this instance, after having that reasonable conversation, Miracle felt better, she said, "I was pretty upset because I was like maybe she should have minded her business, but once we like talked about it, because she came to our house to talk about it, once we talked about it, then I like relaxed." Being listened to was incredibly important to Miracle as she felt like it gave her the opportunity to clear up misunderstandings, reduce tension, and bring herself comfort.

Theme 15: Effects of Gentrification

"Yeah it's happened around my neighborhood plenty of times. I'm not tryna say it's a problem but I've seen like a lot of white, white people like move in and uh since that happened they was starting to like rebuild like more modern houses and mini apartments."
Will, CA Student

"Well, it was like three rundown houses in my neighborhood, but they rebuilt them and they look better than all other houses in our neighborhood, but then they were also

unaffordable. So, it was mostly like people who were white who were moving in the houses now. They're not mean. They're nice people. They realize that Black people live in the community, I don't think they really mind but it's still a fact that like our neighborhood is changing more and more. It scares me sometimes because we never know if it could happen to us. If like we can get pushed out of our house and then we have nowhere to go"
Miracle, RA Student

Students had varying levels of knowledge and understanding about what gentrification was and if it had impacted their lives in any way. Gentrification impacted police presence in some students' neighborhoods and thus impacted the police interactions. Gentrification also impacted students' anxiety as they feared the impact gentrification could have on their family's lives.

Jared defined gentrification as "How they changed certain parts of the neighborhood around D.C. or any place. It doesn't look appealing to other people and make it seem more appealing, like the changing neighbors. To make them look better. They're getting rid of the projects and making them to actually good apartments and stuff. But what they're also doing, which is not good, is making people move out because they can't afford it." Fred described gentrification as "when usually people uh usually Black, Latino, all of them are pushed out of the neighborhoods they've always been lived in for wealthier, usually white residents to make more money… and make less crime. He added that there had "been a sudden surge of apartments lately and self-storage units." Unlike other students, both felt like gentrification hadn't really impacted their lives.

Will was unable to define gentrification but after the definition was shared, he said "Yeah it's happened around my neighborhood plenty of times. I'm not tryna say it's a problem but I've seen like a lot of white, white people like move in and uh since that happened they was starting to like rebuild like more modern houses and mini

apartments." He linked gentrification to the increased police presence previously described and said that was the only way in which his life had been affected. Despite the increased interaction with police officers who he felt perceived him negatively, he wasn't worried about the effects of gentrification. Conversely, some students were fearful of the changes that gentrification could have on their lives and their communities.

Derrick defined gentrification as "White people change stuff" and described Barry Farms as an example of gentrification in DC. He said that it had not yet happened in his community and he hoped it wouldn't happen around him but he feared that it had already begun because he was starting to see "different people." Miracle similarly expressed fear and anxiety about the impact that gentrification could have on her family. She described gentrification as "when something in your neighborhood, or like a neighborhood is like changed." She shared that she felt the process was beginning in her neighborhood saying "Well, it was like three rundown houses in my neighborhood, but they like they rebuilt them and they look better than all other houses in our neighborhood, but then they were also unaffordable. So, it was mostly like people who were White who were moving in the houses now. They're not mean. They're nice people. They realize that Black people live in the community, I don't think they really mind but it's still a fact that like our neighborhood is changing more and more." She added that" It scares me sometimes because we never know if it could happen to us. If like we can get pushed out of our house and then we have nowhere to go."

Chapter 6: Mixed Method Results

This current study's concurrent transformative mixed method design entailed simultaneous collections of qualitative and quantitative data and then merging those results during analysis and interpretation. The understanding of the risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism is enhanced by the combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The following section shares findings that explore both triangulation and complementarity when merging quantitative data and qualitative data at every level of the socioecological model.

Individual Level Factors

Anxiety

In the total sample, 37.5% of students met the cutoff to be in the high anxiety group. Specifically, 24.5% of students met the cutoff for generalized anxiety disorder, 28.2% met the cutoff for social anxiety disorder, and 17.1% met the cutoff for traumatic stress disorder. Of the interview participants, 4 out of 5 regularly attending students reached the cutoff for elevated anxiety overall or in one of the following specific disorder categories: social anxiety, generalized anxiety, or traumatic stress. All of the regularly attendings students also had perfect attendance in September which is aligned with the quantitative finding that elevated levels of anxiety were a protective factor for students in September [OR=0.259, 95% CI=0.083–1.00]. Qualitative data adds important information about how students conceptualize and describe anxiety as well as the ways in which it may impact their attendance, especially at the beginning of the school year.

Septembra shared that while her anxious feelings made her consider missing school, her anxiety about missing school was more compelling and motivated her to attend school. She said that even though some mornings she does not want to go to school, “missing school is not gonna help at all cause at the end of the day, you’re still gonna have work, you still gotta worry about your grades and having to catch up with other people if you miss school.” Either choice, attending school or missing school, trigger anxious feelings but being present allows students to have more control over their experience and future worries.

Fred was a student in the CA group who did not reach the cutoff for high anxiety (overall score of 15) but that explicitly described feelings of anxiety. This occurrence may mean that the anxiety measurement does not accurately identify all students with significant levels of anxiety in this population and that the prevalence of high anxiety is even greater among this sample. Fred described primarily feeling social anxiety saying, “I’m nervous to be around people... I just get butterflies.” However, at the beginning of the school year, he described how his anticipation and excitement for the new school year outweighed his anxiety about interacting with new people. He said that at the start of 9th grade, “I was anxious, but not really. By that I mean, I was more excited than scared. I'm anticipating….I was more excited than scared or nervous. I was just waiting to see what's going to happen, ‘What's this gonna be like?’ but I wasn't constantly having the jitters about it.” He described the first few weeks of school in detail and with excellent recall sharing that the “first week of school was the most fun week to me” and then he said over time he was able to get more used to the people.

Jared described social anxiety as “assuming what other people think about you” and shared, “I'm always nervous …I just feel like I'm just little bit, I just have anxiety. I just don’t want to talk to the people. I don't think I have depression. I always wondered what people were thinking about me. So, when everyone has eyes set on me, I'm just… I feel… it's this level of like me feeling uncomfortable. You know, I don’t like it when people watch me. I don't like it at all. It makes me feel some type of way.” He specifically described presentations and performance-based classes as a source of anxiety that impacted his desire to go to school saying “whenever we have a presentation or whenever we have a class that’s meant for you to be seen and all that like dance stuff like that. I don't like- I just don’t like that at all.” However, Jared felt he was able to manage those feelings of anxiety because of his work with a therapist and still attended school regularly.

Miracle described a coping strategy for anxious feelings that could eventually have negative impact on her academic outcomes. Miracle was often late to school because of taking care of her siblings in the morning and hanging out with her friends. Once she knew she was going to be late, she would delay even further to avoid walking in late to her first period class. She shared, “I just don't like coming into [my first period] class and like everybody is like in my face. I don't like being the center of attention . So, when I walk into my first period class it’s just like all eyes on me, makes me just wanna like disappear all of a sudden.” Her strategy allowed her to time her entrance so that she could blend in with other students. She said, “I'll get here like as soon as second period is about to start so I can like walk in with everybody else.” Miracle's example illustrates

anxiety-based school refusal; however, it is isolated to only her first period class and she is still able to attend school regularly, albeit with additional tardy days.

Chronic Health Conditions

Chronic health conditions can impact student attendance. Of our participants, 3 reported having asthma but said that the severity had lessened as they got older and that it did not currently impact their attendance behaviors. However, one participant shared the ways in which his chronic health condition affected his attendance and described the experience of navigating attendance policies as a student with a chronic illness.

AJ reported that the most important factor impacting his absences was a chronic illness of which he had been diagnosed by a doctor. He had missed a significant amount of the school year and while 100% of his September absences were excused absences, only 69% of his End of Year absences were excused meaning he would also technically be categorized as a truant student. He explained the process for documenting his illness saying "When I don't go to the doctors [the absences] are unexcused but when I go to the doctor's, they're excused." He described how he and his mother navigate the decision of going to the doctor saying "I have medicine at home and usually in about two days, it works, but if it exceeds it or like goes to three days then I know I have to go to the doctor." This situation aligns with the school policy which excuses absences with a note from a parent or guardian within five days of the absence but also states that absences over three days require a doctor's note. Based on AJ's interpretation, on a day when he was absent and did not go to the doctor but did take his medicine for a known health condition, his absence was not excused. AJ felt like his teachers cared if he wasn't in school as evidenced by what he referred to as "a packet I gotta do at home." However, he

mentioned an incident where he felt disrespected by a teacher sharing “I've had a teacher say like, like she said, I missed school a lot and I need to be listening, but it was the way she said it….It was just disrespectful.” This disrespectful tone was evident to AJ, but he said he didn’t really care about it, and it didn’t impact his attendance.

Aside from whether the absences were excused or not excused, AJ recognized that he had missed a lot of school and said that his attendance bothered him because “I can’t really do nothing” and that “it's not the greatest because I miss school a lot based off of my [health condition] but as far as when I'm here it's fine.” AJ also described the experience of trying to come to school when experiencing his symptoms saying “If I come to school with them [symptoms from chronic illness], my brain basically… I'm just out of it the whole day, I just don't feel like doing anything.” He said that the best way to encourage him to go to school on a morning where he was experiencing symptoms was to give him the option of “coming to school and leaving early.” He said his mother will tell him “just get what you needed to get done and later you can leave early if it gets worse,” and that motivates him to at least attempt to go to school. AJ was also unaware of many of the school attendance policies and despite having agency in the decision to attend school, he had not spoken to any adults about his attendance.

Academic performance

Q1 GPA [OR=0.409 CI=0.263-0.636], Q2 GPA [OR=0.248 CI=0.151-0.406], Q3 GPA [OR=0.329 CI=0.210-0.516] and Q4 GPA [OR=0.516 CI=0.380-0.701] were all associated with End of Year Absenteeism. Students with higher GPAs were less likely to be chronically absent at all points throughout the school year. This relationship is bidirectional as students who miss school also miss assignments which impacts their

GPA. Chronically absent students were aware of this relationship and the majority of students in the CA group expressed that the biggest consequence of missing school was the impact that absences had on their grades. While both Fred and Kay were unaware of any attendance interventions triggered by five unexcused absences, they both expressed that “your grades will go down” or “drop” if you miss that much school. Derrick similarly shared that he “thinks about his grades a lot” and that in order to avoid “messed up grades” he needed to "come to school on time” and “make sure I don’t miss no days or miss lessons so I don’t get lost.” Students in both groups were concerned with passing their classes and described the importance of getting good grades or improving their grades. In the sample, 38.0% of students reported understanding their homework, 40.8% reported that they can do well in school, 43.0% reported that teachers make it clear what work needs to be done to get the grade they want, and 48.2% reported trying hard in school. While our chronically absent students that were interviewed had on average lower GPAs, Fred’s GPA was above the school mean every quarter and he qualified for honor roll [GPA >3.0] every quarter of his freshman year. Kay was the only other chronically absent student to have a GPA above the ninth grade mean and that only occurred in Q4. Every other chronically absent student was below the school average for all four quarters. Septembra was the only other student to qualify for the honor roll for all four quarters and her GPA was near or above 4.0 every quarter. June, Alexis, and Jared all qualified for the honor roll for the first three quarters but their GPAs were lower in the 4th quarter while still being above the average Q4 GPA. Among the regularly attending students, Miracle’s GPA was more comparable to those of students in the CA group and her GPA fell below the school average all four quarters. Alexis shared how her grades and being

academically successful motivated her to come to school in order to maintain that success. She said “My first quarter I had all As I had above a 4.0 and that was the time that I felt the most successful…It just encourages me.”

Interpersonal Level Factors

Peer Network Influence and Support

Regularly attending participants mostly described positive reinforcement of attendance behaviors from peers, and the lack of influence a close peer’s absences had on their own attendance behaviors. Students reported that if a close friend missed school that would not affect their decision to go to school that day. Some students in the chronically absent group also expressed not wanting to be labeled as someone with poor attendance or as someone who “skipped” school. The quantitative measures associated with prosocial peers and peer drug use focused on the number of best friends who engaged in certain behaviors. In the sample, 44.4% of students reported that 4 or more of their friends participated in clubs, 31.9% of students reported that none of their friends liked school, 57.9% of students reported that their friends do well in school. As evidenced in the Theme 6: Staying to Myself (Besides My Ride or Dies), students described small groups of close friends so if 1 to 3 friends are engaged in positive behaviors, that may represent a student’s entire close friend group. In addition to attendance accountability, June shared what this support could look like saying, “If I don't understand something, classmates help. It’s not always about the support system coming from teachers or parents. I mean your classmates can help you and motivate you to get something done.”

In the sample, 22.2% of students reported that 4 or more of their friends had pledged to be drug free in high school while 36.6% said they had no friends who had made that decision. Many students reported that none of their friends smoked (73.1%) or drank (51.9%). This aligns with self-reported substance use behavior of the samples as 28.2% reported ever having drank alcohol in their lifetime, 31.0% reported ever having smoked marijuana, 5.6% had ever used cigarettes, and 4.2% reported ever having used e-cigarettes. Drug use rarely came up in any of the interviews and questions about substance use were purposely not explored during the in-person interview. Only one regularly attending student reported having a close peer that engaged in substance use behavior.

Parental Involvement and Support

In the sample, 14.4% of students reported that their parents talk to teachers about what's happening at home, 17.6% reported that parents are involved in school activities, and 24.5% reported that parents were involved in discussions about what was taught at school. Based on these metrics, AJ, Derrick, and Jared reported high parent involvement, agreeing or strongly agreeing that their parents had engaged in these activities. Qualitative inquiry reveals a fuller picture as parents being involved in school activities and talking to teachers about what's happening at home or what's taught at school are not the only metrics students use to describe their parent's involvement. Conversations that parents have with school representatives are one way to be involved, but students also perceive parents who are inquisitive about their classes and school day to be academically involved.

Regularly attending students described conversations that their parents had with them focused on academics ranging from encouraging them to do well, giving them advice, or just learning about their day. Students had differing reactions to this type of involvement and June thought her dad was “too involved” whereas Miracle appreciated the pep talks and the way her mother “encourage[d] her to do good in school.” The majority of chronically absent students described not sharing information about school at home, not because their parent wasn’t open to or available for the conversation, but because they had no desire to discuss those things with their parents. While parents would still sometimes offer advice and encouragement, there wasn’t a back and forth dialogue about the school day or what was being learned at school. Among the total sample, 68.1% of students reported being close to their mothers and 50% reported sharing their thoughts and feelings with their mother. Every interview participant reported being close to their mother and only June, Kay, and Will reported that they didn’t share their thoughts and feelings with their mother. Mother attachment was a significant predictor of September absenteeism [OR=1.426 CI=1.011–2.011] .

It's also important to note that just as it takes time for students to form relationships with peers and teachers at a new school, parents are also navigating new systems and new staff members. Will shared that has mother had been very involved with his previous schools but she had “not really” gotten involved yet. He said “it's my first year so she doesn't really… she not too involved. I mean like this school got her number… so they would like call it if I get in trouble sometimes or if I get a referral or something.”

Parent's Education

Many participants shared that they received encouragement from their parents to do well and attend school. They felt that the encouragement was influenced by their parents' experiences with school. Will said of his mother, "Yeah she thinks it [education] is really important. She want me to go to college. Like she didn't, so she want me to go. Like she don't care how I get in, she just want me to go." This influenced Will's future goals and he saw football and a football scholarship as a way to achieve that goal of attending college. The majority of students reported that their parents had completed at least high school with 19.5% of students reporting that their mothers had completed college and 11.5% of students reporting that their fathers had completed college. However, some students did not feel that their parents' experiences had any impact on their attendance. Kay shared that his attendance was important to his mother because "she don't want me to be like her. She don't want me to drop out," but when asked if that affected his desire to go to school he said "Nah that don't affect me." Also, 9.7% of students in the sample did not know how far their mothers had gone in school and 19.0% of students in the sample did not know how far their fathers had gone in school. This illustrates that some students are not having conversations with their parents about their school history, at all.

Teacher-Student relationships

Students had differing views also on the role that teachers could play in student's lives. Will said, "I'm not gon like tell the teacher a personal stuff cause I don't like talking about like personal stuff with teachers, and all of that it's just something I don't do," whereas Miracle considered one of her teachers to be a "father figure" and felt like she

“could go to all [her] teachers about anything.” In the sample, 38.5% of students reported that their teachers were interested in their future, 27.3% reported that teachers are easy to talk to, 23.7% reported that teachers get along well with their students, 36.6% reported that teachers help with problems, 39.8% reported that teachers care about them, 37.0% reported that teachers make them feel good about themselves, and 43.1% reported that teachers believe that they can do well. In addition to positive and negative relationships with teachers, some students just didn’t feel like they’d made any strong connections with their new ninth grade teachers. Will shared, “I don't really got that like connection with teachers yet, at this school. Probably, like my 11th grade year, 10th grade year” This contrast from the descriptions of the close teacher bonds that students had in middle school and high school teachers must find a way to build meaningful relationships with students, relatively quickly when they transition to high school.

School Level Factors

Engaging Instruction

Of the total sample, 23.1% of students reported that school makes them enthusiastic about learning. Students shared specific teachers and classes that were fun and exciting and said that helped motivate them to want to come to school. June said “I never go to sleep in art or gym. I'm always active in there. It's always fun something fun to do to.” Jared shared enjoying his biology units “when we get hands on” and described an experiment where students “were studying cells and we had microscopes and all that stuff. We were looking at cells, you know, stuff that was interesting at the time.” Even students like Will who did not think that school was fun, shared that “making school more fun” would help motivate students to want to come to school. Kay agreed that

making school fun would keep students coming back and he believed that in order to do that, school needed to ”make it like ideas that they [students] want to do.” Of the total sample, 22.7% of students believed that students can make suggestions on course that are offered. When asked, Derrick. Will, and AJ shared that they were satisfied with the classes offered while Fred wanted art class and June wanted teachers not to “waste our time so much trying to teach us the stuff we don’t need to know instead of teaching us the stuff we need to know.”

Students had different views on the ways that specific assignments and projects impacted desire to go to school based on their investment and the type of project. While Fred felt that projects were too much work and Jared felt anxious about projects that required presentations, Miracle was really excited about her research paper on over the counter birth control. She perceived this assignment to be a vast improvement over the last unit that had everyone stressed. She said everyone “was loving this unit” and she was motivated to come to school in order conduct more research and share her results. Kay who described apathy towards his classes and school in general did share that he had one interesting project in history class. The topic was chosen by the teacher but he got to learn about Fred Hampton and he said he liked what he learned about him being part of the Black Panther Party.

School Discipline Practices

Student perception of behavior interventions is skewed toward negative reinforcements While students referred to getting “chances” or “warnings,” there was little evidence of a School-Wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (SWPBIS) that is said to be in place at the participants’ high schools. SWPBIS is a

decision-making framework aimed at improving student behavior and academic achievement (Nance, 2016). The goal of SWPBIS is to create an environment that prevents problems from developing and involves teaching and modeling positive behaviors, establishing accountability, giving students opportunities to practice those behaviors, rewarding students for appropriate behavior, and consistent application (Nance, 2016). AJ said "they give you a couple chances and then they send you out," and Kay added that "you get demerits for talking or doing anything you don't supposed to be doing and like when you get a certain amount some teachers send you out." Students perceived being sent out of class to be the most prevalent form of punishment and 7 of the 10 students interviewed had been sent out of class. Among the sample, 24.6% of students had been suspended (OSS) in their ninth grade year, 23.6% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the school rules are fair as compared to 18.5% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, 25.9% of students reported that discipline is fair as compared to 16.2% who disagreed. It's important to note that many students reported they neither agreed nor disagreed with some of these measures. Apathy or normalization of school discipline may be captured in these results with students choosing neither agree or disagree because they were indifferent or because they saw both the negative and positive aspects of the discipline system. For example, of the 34 questions asked about the school, Kay replied neither agree nor disagree for 21 of them (61.8%). Even though students describe a discipline system with harsh punishments for minor infractions and differential enforcement of the rules, 38.9% of students agreed or strongly agreed that classroom rules were applied equally and 26.8% who felt like school rules were enforced fairly. Few students reported that the school discipline system was something that needs

to be challenged which is explained by normalization and also a belief in the fairness of students receiving consequences for escalating behaviors that is modeled and enforced by teachers.

School Level Incentives

In the sample, 33.8% of students reported that students were publicly recognized for outstanding performances and 32.9% reported that students were rewarded or praised by faculty and staff for following school rules. While students had different opinions on the effectiveness of incentives for improving attendance, they all agreed that the incentives currently in place were not working for many students. Many students in both the CA and RA group expressed that the incentives wouldn't work because students "don't care" about the prize. Pizza parties were perceived as especially ineffective because as Septembra said "you can easily just go and buy your own stuff… not everybody is pressed over food." Some students thought that money would be a more motivating prize than food, "knowing how much people like money." Septembra said "I think kids, just be like it's a trip. Who cares? Or it's a activity, I can do that any day. Most of the kids in high school just really don't care anymore so I don't feel like it [attendance incentives] motivates them unless it's something like I don't know, just giving an example, if it was some money invested in it, I bet all the kids be at school. A large sum amount of money. Not like fifty dollars cause most of the kids these days can get that from their parents or from work but yeah." Fred didn't think it was appropriate to reward students for showing up to school saying, "Why? Like, what's the point of getting an award for just showing up to school? Like big whoop." While some students thought a

different prize could work, the majority of participants said that incentives just wouldn't work because "they can't force nobody to go to school."

Students also expressed that incentives tend to work for students who were going to engage in the particular behavior anyway. Miracle was frustrated that certain students continued to receive rewards for meeting particular criteria and shared that she had spoken to her teacher about a pizza party she had thrown for students who were doing well. Miracle said "It shouldn't just be for like kids that are like doing good in your class. You should also like have something for kids that are like doing what they need you do like that you're noticing are like doing better and like working hard ."

Community Level Factors

Neighborhood Attachment

Among the sample, 46.2% of students had been exposed to community violence at least once with 36.6% reporting at least a few times and 19.9% reporting many times. Despite these figures, only 20.9% of students reported not feeling safe in their neighborhood. Kay and June shared differing reasons for why they were able to feel safe in their neighborhoods even though bad things may happen in their community. Kay said "People get robbed by my house. It be shootings too," but that he was not afraid because "it's safe… for me but- I don't know about other people. Because I know a lot of people so... because it's me, I know them so they ain't gon do nothing to me." June shared, "I don't go outside. I don't really have friends in my community… except for my friend [student name] that lives down the street, I don't really have like people in the community that I talk to. I stay in the house most of the time when I come home [from school]" While Kay's strong community ties helped protect him, June's disengagement from her

community was what helped her feel safe. Many of the regularly attending students described not participating in community activities as compared to the majority of chronically absent who described rec basketball, friend's houses, and different spaces in the communities where they enjoyed spending time. Of interview participants only Miracle, Septembra, and Derrick expressed wanting to leave their communities, June, Jared, and Septembra did not think they would be missed if they moved communities, and only Jared reported disliking his community. Among the sample, 23.8% of students reported wanting to get out of their neighborhood as compared to 31.4% who did not, meaning that many students were attached to their neighborhoods and hoped to stay in those communities. Additionally, 41.2% of students reported that they would miss their neighborhood if they moved as compared to 24.1% who would not. Finally, 45.4% of students reported that they liked their neighborhood as compared to 19.9% who did not. While not significant in the final model, Neighborhood Attachment [OR=1.981 CI=1.046-3.753] was independently predictive of End of Year Absenteeism.

Transportation

Students in both the CA and RA groups described varied modes of transportation including being driven by parents, walking, and using public transportation, and various commute lengths. Their responses offered no clear groupings based on absenteeism and students in both groups relied on varied modes of transportation and had different commute lengths. Among the entire sample, 19.9% of students relied solely on public transportation and 54.7% reported travelling for less than an hour to get to school. Many students who relied on the public transportation system considered it to be at times unreliable or not an ideal mode of transportation to school. June shared that "the trains

are delayed, the buses are delayed. The bus apps where you time the next bus… they don't work sometimes. They be incorrect. I usually stand outside the bus on the app, say five minutes and you've been standing outside for 10 min I'm like 'Where the bus?' Busses run crazy and if one bus comes in 20 minutes, I'm either catching that or catch the one that comes in an hour and 30. I'm going to be late. But I still have to catch the bus to the train station." Jared shared how he feels on his way to school saying "I am tired. I'd rather sleep. I'd rather sleep on the metro if I can nut I can't. I'm too aware. I gotta stay awake I can't trust nobody." He also shared how the school commute impacts his personal hygiene and in turn his anxiety. He described walking from the metro saying , "I'm sweating because walking to school with all this clothing on is exhausting. Even though it's cold outside once I hit that room. I'm sweating, I'm dripping and basically ice melting at this point. People can put a cup on me and they get a full glass… I smell horribly and now I'm just so mad at myself because I just think, you know, I was just like doing so- I took a shower for once, not saying that I don't shower, but like, you know, I showered and all of that, it's ruined. Especially the cologne I bought for myself.. It's all just bad."

Students also described complicated and long routes to school with Miracle needing to take three trains and sharing that "the timing for those depending, can be sometimes tricky." Transportation can affect student tardiness, how tired they feel, their personal hygiene when they get to school, and their motivation or desire to go to school. Despite these challenges. June, Jared, and Miracle were able to attend school regularly. June shared that a peer had helped her understand the metro system and she took the train with him every day. She said, "I catch the- well I used to catch just the bus but I was

getting cold and my step mother was like I'm gon teach you how to catch the train but she never did. A 12th grader here, [student name] he helped me catch this train. He was my first- well he wasn't my first 12th grader friend, but he was one of the 12th graders who stuck. Like that's like my older bro. Like [he said] if you ever need anything just come to me and I got you and now we take art together. Now, just like that's my brodie right there people. So yeah he taught me how to catch the train so now me and my "friend", we catch the train together in the morning and home and stuff. So I catch the train everywhere now, like forget these busses." With these newly acquired skills to navigate the metro system, June felt better prepared for and supported on her commute to school. Similarly, Kay felt comfortable taking public transportation to school and believed that it did not impact his attendance. However, while transportation method and length of commutes were not predictive of absenteeism, qualitative inquiry shows that for some students, these factors did impact attendance. Derrick said, "I really don't wanna go to school cause I don't like being on the bus for a real long time," and he would prefer if he could walk to school or if there was "one bus that goes straight there."

Table 21

Summary of Mixed Method Results

Theme	Quantitative Data Examples	Qualitative Data Examples	Data Convergence Label
Anxiety	• 37.5% of students were highly anxious • 4 out of 5 students in the RA group reached the cutoff for elevated anxiety • Anxiety was protective against September Absenteeism in the final logistic regression model [OR=0.259 CI=0.083–1.00]	"Missing school is not gonna help at all cause at the end of the day, you're still gonna have work, you still gotta worry about your grades and having to catch up with other people if you miss school." Septembra, RA Student • Theme 5: Coping Strategies "Get my mind off of it" • Subtheme 5.1 : Counseling • Theme 15: Effects of Gentrification	Confirm, Explain, and Refine
Chronic Health Conditions	• 1 participant reported a chronic health condition that impacted attendance behaviors • 3 out of 10 participants reported having asthma that did not impact their attendance	"It's not the greatest because I miss school a lot based off of my [health condition] but as far as when I'm here it's fine." AJ, CA Student • Theme 11: Attendance Policy Awareness	Describe
Academic Performance	• 3 students in the CA group had below the mean GPA all 4 semesters as compared to 1 student in the RA group • GPA was negatively associated with absenteeism all four quarters	"My first quarter I had all As I had above a 4.0 and that was the time that I felt the most successful…It just encourages me." Alexis, RA Student • Theme 1: Academic Apathy • Subtheme 2.1: Passing vs Learning • Theme 8: School as an Individual Endeavor	Describe
Peer Network Influence and Support	• 44.4% reported 4 or more friends participated in clubs and extracurriculars • 22.2% reported 4 or more friends pledged to be drug free in HS • 31.9% reported that none of their friends like school • 57.9% reported that 4 or more friends do well in school • No prosocial or antisocial peer data predicted absenteeism	"If I don't understand something, classmates help. It's not always about the support system coming from teachers or parents. I mean your classmates can help you and motivate you to get something done." June, RA Student • Theme 3: "To get an education"→ Intrinsic Motivation • Theme 6 : Staying to Myself (Besides my Ride or Dies) • Theme 7: Othering • Theme 8: School as an Individual Endeavor	Explain and Refine

Summary of Mixed Method Results (continued)

Theme	Quantitative Data Examples	Qualitative Data Examples	Data Convergence Label
Parental Involvement and Support	• 17.6% reported parents are involved in activities • Parental involvement did not predict absenteeism • Mother Attachment was predictive of September Absenteeism in the final logistic regression model [OR=1.426 CI=1.011–2.011] • 4 out of 5 students in the CA group reported mother attachment • 4 out of 5 students in the RA group reported mother attachment (the 1 student who did not reported father attachment) • 2 out of 5 students in the RA group reported both mother and father attachment	"Very involved… they encourage me to do good in school, but like they don't always interact, like they don't come to parent conferences." Miracle, RA Student • Theme 9: Family Dynamics • Subtheme 9.1: Parent Control over Attendance Decisions • Subtheme 9.2: Parent- School Relationship	Explain and Refine
Parent Education	• 19.5% reported mother completed college • 9.7% did not know mother's education • Parent Education was not predictive of absenteeism	"Yeah she thinks it [education] is really important. She want me to go to college, like she didn't so she want me go. Like she don't care how I get in, she just want me to go." Will, CA Student • Theme 9: Family Dynamics	Describe
Teacher-Student Relationships	• No teacher-student relationship variables predicted absenteeism • 38.5% of students reported that their teachers were interested in their future • 27.3% reported that teachers are easy to talk to • 23.7% reported that teachers get along well with their students • 36.6% reported that teachers help with problems • 39.8% reported that teachers care about them • 37.0% reported that teachers make them feel good about themselves. • 43.1% reported that teachers believe that they can do well	"I don't really got that like connection with teachers yet, at this school. Probably, like my 11th grade year, 10th grade year" Will, CA Student • Theme 8: School as an Individual Endeavor • Theme 12: Perception of School Discipline System • Subtheme 12.1: Getting Sent out of Class • Subtheme 12.2: Differential of Unfair Treatment • Subtheme 12.3: Normalization of Discipline	Contradict

Summary of Mixed Method Results (continued)

Theme	Quantitative Data Examples	Qualitative Data Examples	Data Convergence Label
Engaging Instruction	• Academic Satisfaction was not predictive of chronic absenteeism • 23.1% of students reported that school makes them enthusiastic about learning. • 22.7% of students believed that students can make suggestions on course that are offered.	"See I don't like just going to school just being there and you not even learning nothing for real they just keep teaching the same thing over and over again After I learn the first things then that's when that's probably when I just be like I don't wanna go to school" Derrick, CA Student • Theme 1: Academic Apathy • Theme 2: High School- Future Alignment • Subtheme 2.1: Passing vs Learning • Subtheme 2.3: Future Explanation and Planning	Contradict
School Discipline Practices	• 24.6% of students received OSS • OSS predicts End of Year absenteeism [OR=3.555 CI=1.753–7.208] • 7 out of 10 interview participants had been sent out of class • Order and Discipline beliefs were predictive of September Absenteeism in the final logistic regression model [OR=0.387 CI=0.173-0.863] • 25.9% report that discipline is fair as compared to 16.2% who disagree	"Everybody get the same consequence…or nothing." Kay, CA Student • Theme 12: Perception of School Discipline System • Subtheme 12.1: Getting Sent out of Class • Subtheme 12.2: Differential of Unfair Treatment • Subtheme 12.3: Normalization of Discipline	Explain and Refine
School level incentives	• 4 out of 5 students in the CA group thought incentives with the right prizes could work to encourage attendance as compared to 1 out of 5 students in the RA group	"Why? Like, what's the point of getting an award for just showing up to school? Like big whoop." Fred, CA Student • Theme 3: "To get an education"→ Intrinsic Motivation	Describe and Explain

Summary of Mixed Method Results (continued)

Theme	Quantitative Data Examples	Qualitative Data Examples	Data Convergence Label
Neighborhood Attachment	• 37.2% reported exposure to community violence • Exposure to neighborhood violence was not predictive of absenteeism • Neighborhood Attachment was a significant predictor of End of Year chronic absenteeism but not in the final logistic regression model [OR=1.981 CI=1.046-3.753] • 23.8% reported wanting to get out of their neighborhood as compared to 31.4% who did not • 41.2% would miss their neighborhood if they moved as compared to 24.1% who would not • 45.4% liked their neighborhood as compared to 19.9% who did not	"It's a lot of- if you want to call them gangbangers. Some of them around here are drug dealers, but they don't harm my safety because I know how to protect myself… but there is a lot of stuff that goes around here that I don't know cause I stay in the house, but lot of things that people can get themselves into around here." June, RA Student • Theme 13: Strong Community Ties • Theme 14: Perceptions of Criminality • Theme 15: Effects of Gentrification	Describe Confirm
Transportation	• 19.9% rely solely on public transportation • Transportation was not predictive of absenteeism	"I really don't wanna go to school cause I don't like being on the bus for a real long time." Derrick, CA Student • Subtheme 4.2: Sleep "I'm Tired	Describe

Chapter 7: Discussion of Findings and Future Implications

This final chapter focuses on a discussion of all findings, applying a CRT lens to interpret and discuss findings, strengths and limitations of the current study, implications for practice, policy, and research, along with study conclusions.

Reconceptualizing A Wicked Problem as an Extraordinary Opportunity

Rittel and Webber (1973) introduced the term "wicked problem" to describe unique, complex problems of social policy that are difficult to solve because every aspect of the problem is a symptom of another problem and every implemented solution is consequential. The findings of this current study support the notion that chronic absenteeism is a wicked problem. Every factor that impacts student attendance is affected by other factors at different levels of the socioecological model (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Childs & Lofton, 2021). The syndemics framework helps us analyze the co-occurring and interacting causes of absenteeism while including the context of social conditions and structural issues that increase chronic absenteeism in the African American community. Academic apathy is impacted by how engaging students perceive classes to be, students distance themselves from their classmates because of stereotypes that are reinforced by their schools and in their communities, students' desire for future stability is impacted by their interpersonal relationships with respected adults and all of these interrelated factors are simultaneously impacted by race and socioeconomic status. Results indicate that focusing on interventions at only one socioecological level and downplaying the very real simultaneous influence of other

factors is an insufficient response to a multifaceted issue like chronic absenteeism and ultimately does a disservice to the very students these interventions claim to support.

While conceptualizing chronic absenteeism as a wicked problem may at first seem deficit-focused, it's an important step in reframing the dominant narratives about chronic absenteeism. So much emphasis has been placed on the individual level factors that affect chronic absenteeism, that the dominant narrative pertaining to African American students, is that students or parents are to blame for their absenteeism because of the choices they make. This undercurrent of blame for students who don't regularly attend school distracts decision makers from addressing the intersection of systemic issues with chronic absenteeism and slows distribution of the necessary resources and implementation of effective policies to improve attendance (Childs & Lofton, 2021). Even those who recognize the ways in which systemic racism and poverty impact these individual factors can still uphold these blame focused narratives when highlighting or featuring students who manage to regularly attend school despite similar circumstances. This mindset encourages the othering and propagation of negative stereotypes described in interpersonal themes. Chronic absenteeism is not solely a student problem, a parent problem, a school problem, or a neighborhood problem. It is not exclusively an education issue, a public health issue, a sociological issue, or a government policy issue. Chronic absenteeism is all of these things and more; necessitating an interdisciplinary, multi-pronged approach to improve attendance and educational outcomes for African American students. Oftentimes when the root causes of a problem are interconnected and different policy domains, agencies, and social sectors are simultaneously engaged, uncertainty around how to manage collaboration arises and the perceived solvability of these

persistent problems diminishes (Childs & Lofton, 2021). However, acknowledging that chronic absenteeism among African American students is a wicked problem is not an endpoint but a starting point on the journey towards transformational change. Each sector must work simultaneously to address issues impacting attendance but the most critical component of this process is an increased emphasis on student voice and student advocacy. We must move beyond just hearing how students experience these daily conditions and then using our own interpretations and expertise to create interventions, and instead begin engaging students as partners in this work of advocating for solutions that address problems by building off of already present strengths among African American adolescents. Students are the most essential stakeholders and should be treated as such through constant consultation as we work collectively to improve attendance and education outcomes.

Quantitative Data Analysis

For many of the proposed hypotheses, there was insufficient data to confirm or disconfirm specific conclusions. For the following hypotheses, there were findings to support or challenge the hypothesized outcomes and those results are discussed below.

Hypothesis 1: Students with elevated anxious mood are more likely to be chronically absent than students with low anxiety.

Students reported feelings of general anxiety, social anxiety, and traumatic stress. Overall, anxiety only significantly impacted September absenteeism. While it was hypothesized that students reporting greater anxiety symptoms would be more likely to be chronically absent, we actually observed the opposite result, and there was a protective effect for students with regards to September absenteeism [AOR=0.259, CI=0.083–1.00].

In the sample, students who reached a cutoff score of 17 based on the abbreviated anxiety measure scales were more likely to regularly attend school in September as compared to their less anxious peers.

Students with high anxiety may be anxious about starting high school, but this anxiety may feel manageable or they may have coping strategies that can help them still regularly attend school. Also, these students may have feelings of anxiety about matters outside of the school that may encourage school attendance in September, such as emotional distress outside of school, lack of routine, being perceived negatively for missing school, missing out, or falling behind. This finding supports the conclusion that among African American students, there may exist a certain range of anxiety at the beginning of the school year that positively impacts students' school attendance but that as the school year progresses, anxiety is no longer protective and may be more aligned with previous studies on anxiety-based school refusal.

Previous studies have shown that anxiety is a risk factor for absenteeism and anxiety-based school refusal is a widely accepted phenomenon that impacts students (Dembo, Wareham, Schmeidler, Briones-Robinson, et al., 2016; Sibeoni et al., 2018; Egger et al., 2003; Kearney, 2008). As Lyon & Colter (2007) observed, the majority of data analyzed were clinic-based and thus not necessarily representative of an entire population of students not attending school regularly who may not have severe psychopathology. This idea is particularly important among African American students in low-income, urban settings who may not be receiving clinic based, mental health services or who experience anxiety not based on unrealistic appraisals of situations but based on very real fears and stress. Even though there was no quantitative evidence in the current

study supporting anxiety as a significant predictor of chronic absenteeism, qualitative data reveals that there may still be students for whom anxiety causes them to miss school. Thus, this finding should be interpreted with caution and more research is needed on how African Americans at predominately Black schools experience and cope with feelings of anxiety and the ways in which that impacts their attendance.

Hypothesis 2: Students who report engaging in antisocial behaviors (substance use, criminal or delinquent behaviors, etc.) are more likely to be chronically absent than those who do not report engaging in antisocial behaviors.

Substance use behaviors, specifically heavy marijuana use defined as more than 10 times over the course of their lifetime [AOR=4.785 CI=1.195-19.165] and alcohol use in the past 30 days [OR=2.867 CI=1.097–7.483], were predictive of End of Year absenteeism. These findings support conclusions from previous studies that have shown that substance use behaviors are associated with higher rates of chronic absenteeism (Kearney, 2016; Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011). Less clear is the underlying mechanism to explain the correlation between these behaviors and chronic absenteeism. There may be specific personality traits or structural factors that would predispose a student to engaging in substance use behaviors that would also cause them to miss school. More research is needed on the underlying mechanism for how substance use behaviors impact chronic absenteeism.

While certain substance use measures were predictive of absenteeism, the overall antisocial behaviors scale, including criminal and delinquent behaviors, was only a significant predictor of End of Year absenteeism when examined independently [OR=1.036 CI=1.001–1.072] but not in adjusted models. Even when examined

independently, the odds ratio implied a 3.6% increase in likelihood to miss school. This result directly challenges a dominant narrative around chronic absenteeism for African American students and the ways in which delinquent behaviors impact student attendance (Cameron et al., 2018; Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018; Van Eck et al., 2017). Many students who are chronically absent are not engaging in antisocial behaviors. Labeling "delinquent behavior" as the root cause of absenteeism will ensure that punitive interventions aimed at addressing these assumed behaviors will be mismatched and ineffective at improving attendance.

Hypothesis 3: Students who report high levels of parental involvement are less likely to be chronically absent than students who report low levels of parental involvement.

The parental involvement with school subscale was not predictive of chronic absenteeism at any time period during the school year. In considering the effectiveness of the measurement items, having parents/guardians who "talk with teacher[s] about what is happening at home," "are involved in school activities," or "are involved in discussion about what is taught at school" may not be the most relevant factors to indicate parental involvement in their student's education among this population. Parents who are very involved in their student's educational career and know what is going on at school may not share what is happening at home with teachers because of privacy concerns or if they do not feel that information is relevant to teachers. Parents with demanding work schedules or additional time commitments may not be involved with activities at school or discussions about what is taught at school, but they may still be very much involved in their student's educational career. Also, these measurements may fall short in the particular context of charter schools such as MLKP and MXP, where parents are contacted regularly and conversations are often initiated by school staff. If parents have

grown accustomed to this model they may be less likely to seek out additional information or to initiate these discussions as they know that information will be relayed to them. Also, students may be unaware of the extent to which their parents have conversations with teachers on these particular issues because of how often teachers and parents meet, and thus may not have adequately represented their parent's involvement through self-report. While parental involvement did not predict absenteeism, mother attachment emerged as a predictive variable that may approximate a component of parental involvement.

Mother attachment defined as feeling close to your mother and sharing your thoughts and feelings with your mother was predictive of September absenteeism [AOR=1.426, CI=1.011–2.011] and independently predictive of End of Year absenteeism [OR=1.444, CI=1.008- 2.070]. While the current study did not measure separation anxiety, students who feel more attachment to their mothers may want to stay home from school to spend more time with their parent. Another possible explanation is that students who feel close enough with their mothers to share how they are feeling, may be more likely to open up with parents about how they feel about attending school. Then, if parents find that reason to be compelling, they may allow students to miss days. Students who do not feel as comfortable sharing those reasons, may attend school even when they want to miss days. Particularly in the ninth grade when students may still have limited agency in the decision to go to school, mother attachment may allow for greater involvement in the decision-making process for attending school. Also, mothers' relationships with the school, whether positive or negative, may also moderate the relationship between mother attachment and school attendance. If the mother has a

negative appraisal of the school setting, she may be more likely to allow her student to miss school days when they express perceived legitimate reasons for not wanting to attend. More research is necessary to better understand the underlying relationship between students' attachment to their mothers and the impact on absenteeism. Forming positive relationships with students' mothers may be another important step to improve high school attendance, which can be difficult to do if interactions are primarily negatively focused on attendance behaviors.

Hypothesis 4: Students who report attending high schools they perceive to have negative school climates are more likely to be chronically absent than students who report attending schools they perceive to have moderate or positive school climates.

Many school climate factors were not predictive of chronic absenteeism but perception of Order and Discipline [AOR=0.387, CI=0.173-0.863] was predictive for September absenteeism while perception of School Social Environment was borderline significant (p=0.78) [AOR=1.854, CI=0.932-3.687]. Students who perceive order and discipline to be unfair may be hesitant to return to school at the start of the school year after summer months where they did not have to encounter the order and discipline that they expect in the school setting. This finding supports conclusions from previous studies about the ways in which negative perceptions about the school learning environment can impact absenteeism (Van Eck et al., 2017; Kearny, 2008; Baltimore Education Research Consortium, 2011). While only borderline significant, a more surprising result is that students who reported greater happiness with the other students attending their school were more likely to be chronically absent in September. Students who report positive feelings about their classmates are still chronically absent and the impact of liking your classmates may not be the most motivating factor for students to attend school. Through

technology, students may still be able to connect with these classmates even when they are not in school. Also, as students transition to high school, liking your current classmates may not replace the strong relationships students had with their previous classmates who may be attending other high schools. Even though this result is only borderline significant, more research is needed to understand the connection between school social environment and absenteeism, especially since there was limited evidence among this sample to support the impact of bullying or a negative perception of the school social environment on attendance as shown in previous studies (Baker & Bishop, 2015; Gregory & Purcell, 2014). Timing may be an important mediator as these perceptions did not remain significant for End of Year absenteeism among the entire sample. These measures were captured at the beginning of the school year and perceptions may change as students adjust and become more familiar with their high school.

Hypothesis 5: Students who report living in neighborhoods they perceive to have negative climates are more likely to be chronically absent than students who report living in neighborhoods they perceive to have moderate or positive climates.

Students' reports of neighborhood disorganization, exposure to community violence, and presence of crime, graffiti or fights did not impact chronic absenteeism. This finding may be because there are many students who are chronically absent and regularly attending who live in the same neighborhoods and have been exposed to the same neighborhood contexts. However, neighborhood attachment which is impacted by the way students perceive these neighborhood climates did emerge as predictive of End of Year chronic absenteeism among neighborhood factors [AOR=1.981, CI=1.046-3.753] even though it was not predictive in the final logistic regression model for all students.

Students who reported higher attachment to their neighborhoods were more likely to be chronically absent. This measure included not wanting to get out of their neighborhood, liking their neighborhood, feeling safe in their neighborhood, and reporting they would miss their neighborhood if they moved. This sense of belonging in their communities may impact attendance behaviors if students do not feel that same sense of belonging in the school context. This sentiment is particularly important in Washington, DC and other urban areas where there is school choice, and students often attend schools in different neighborhoods that may not be considered part of their communities. Conversely, students who do not feel a strong attachment to their neighborhoods may be more motivated to attend school if they do feel a strong sense of community within the school setting. The dominant narrative around the ways that neighborhood factors impact attendance are typically around safe passage or the ways in which the structural factors such as structural racism, poverty and government divestment can create a "bad neighborhood" that negatively impacts student attendance. However, framed more positively, these findings reveal that student's home communities are an untapped resource and we must further explore how we can leverage strong community ties to improve attendance for students who feel pride in their neighborhoods and a strong attachment to their communities.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data results revealed a myriad of findings that help us better understand how students perceive the transition to high school and the impact different factors have on their desire and ability to regularly attend school.

Individual Level Factors

The experience of transitioning to 9th grade is filled with many individual challenges and opportunities for African American students regardless of their attendance status. Thematic analysis of the individual level factors revealed a complex tapestry of nuanced differences that help explain the differences and similarities between students who regularly attend school and students who need additional attendance support. At the individual level, the five themes and five subthemes that emerged (1) Academic Apathy, (2) High School-Future Alignment, (2.1) Passing vs Learning, (2.2) Future Stability (2.3)Future Exploration and Planning, (3) "To Get an Education"→ Intrinsic Motivation, (4) Health and Wellness, (4.1) Nutrition (4.2) Sleep, and (5) Coping Strategies work in concert with one another to impact student attendance.

Many participants in the chronically absent group reported little to no feeling, positive or negative towards their classes. While this apathy extended to some chronically absent students reporting little feeling towards their classmates or social interactions throughout the day, specifically, academic apathy described as "indifference, lethargy, and/or disengagement in the classroom environment," was apparent in many of their accounts of their school experiences (Marshall, 2012). There were stark differences in their accounts as compared to the descriptions offered by regularly attending students who described positive and negative reactions to particular classes based on their assessment of their abilities in each class, the class content, the teacher's teaching style, the relevance of the class to their lives, the time of day the class was offered and many other reasons. The distinction was not that regularly attending students liked school, as some of them explicitly expressed not enjoying school, and shared this feeling of

resignation towards needing to attend school every day. However, the emotional highs that they described throughout the day gave them classes and moments to anticipate and also gave them standards with which they could compare classes they disliked. Whether it was because of the teaching style as Alexis shared her history and ELA teachers "don't know how to make [class] fun" or the workload as June shared how English class is "packed", these students have clear expectations for class and academic preferences. Students describing apathetic feelings were just "coming and going" and did not feel entitled to a particular academic experience and thus had little to look forward to during the school day. It's important to note that students describing academic apathy were capable of feeling and expressing emotions towards other parts of their lives; so in order to counteract this apathy, the academic experience must better connect to parts of their lives about which they are passionate whether it's their current interests or future goals.

Previous studies have already shown that students who believe education is a pathway to their future goals are more likely to attend school regularly (So et al., 2015) and the current study findings affirm and further those conclusions. With respect to future goals, graduating from at least high school was a shared goal by all participants and students in both groups were motivated to pass their classes as doing so would allow them to achieve that goal. However, when passing becomes the ultimate goal and students "don't care about the classes" and just want to "hurry up and pass," students become hyperaware of a minimum level of effort required to pass that can happen even when missing days of school. Kay perceived that his parents had adopted this attitude saying that his mother is always "pressing me out about… not going to school but

passing." This notion is also evidenced by the divergent reactions to test days which seem to be driven by the motivation to pass.

Students who prioritize passing above all else recognize that tests are an important intermediary step in that process, and students have to pass the tests in order to pass the class. Thus, they are motivated to attend on test days in order to achieve their goal of passing. Conversely, students who are deeply concerned with learning the material perceived tests as an evaluation of their knowledge or mastery, and thus they had more apprehension towards demonstrating their understanding on a test. Ultimately, those students would still attend, but they described testing days as the days they are less likely to want to come to school which directly contrasts with chronically absent students who described feeling more likely to want to come to school on test days. The underlying belief of what it means to pass versus what it means to learn in school may present a modifiable attitude that can impact attendance as the school calendar has many more days of learning and review as opposed to test days. Connecting what students are currently learning to the skills and information they want to have in the future can help them place more value on the process of learning.

With respect to future goals post high school, students in the regularly attending group overall had done more extensive thinking and backwards planning to determine what steps they would currently need to take in order to achieve those goals. It's important to note that the students in the chronically absent group still had hopes and ambitions for the future and were able to express these ambitions and what they thought they needed to do now in order to reach that goal. These beliefs about what they needed to do now were mostly informed by their own intuition and experiences, all valid tools in

creating a plan to reach a goal that should be acknowledged and respected. This observation that they had not done further research by consulting other perceived experts or repositories of information is not to diminish the effort and thought these students had put into thinking about their future, but rather to highlight an opportunity to coach and guide students towards data triangulation and using additional resources for future planning if they so choose. The additional research that Miracle, Jared, June, and Alexis had done about their future goals, allowed for more specificity in the current actions that must be taken such as programs they should enter or classes they should take in order to achieve their goals. The curiosity and exploration that some regularly attending students displayed in choosing and researching potential careers may seem innate, but it is possible that it can be cultivated and encouraged in all students if they are given the tools and strategies to set goals for the future and determine the required steps along that path. This notion is particularly true because students who had yet to do extensive research on the intermediary steps to accomplishing their goals didn't seem reluctant to thinking about or planning for their future careers, but rather, the general consensus was that they had not yet considered researching, planning and decision making because they were only in 9th grade and had time to solidify their plan. This observation doesn't justify advocating for students to figure out exactly what they want to do by the ninth grade or putting additional pressure on them to choose a career path, but rather that a future goal with smaller milestones in which they are invested because they have spent time determining them, may increase motivation for achieving those milestones. It's important to also give students the space to change their minds and update their plans as they develop and learn more about themselves and the world, just as June began

researching a new path when she thought more about becoming a veterinarian. Also, students don't have to hone in on one particular career path just like Jared with his multiple interests, but the exercise of researching and backwards planning to accomplishing a future career goal seems to be a worthwhile endeavor that may protect against apathy by allowing students to interject their hopes and dreams into their curriculum.

Outside of the classroom, the impact of sports on attendance was an interesting finding because Will had done similar planning as compared to his regularly attending peers hoping to pursue their extracurricular activities as careers. However, because football is a seasonal activity whereas dance and music are year-round, he was less motivated to attend school regularly outside of football season. Future research should explore how the timing of extracurricular activities throughout the school year impacts attendance and how schools can create opportunities to continue extracurricular involvement around students' interests in the off season.

It is also interesting that many students with more extensive plans had considered teaching as a potential career path. Adults that students interact with regularly present opportunities for students to imagine following a similar career path or to ask questions and gather more information. Increased exposure to different careers and career paths, intentional, scaffolded coaching around determining where your passions and talents align, dedicated time for students to research future options as early as ninth grade, and individual alignment of the high school plan to achieving those goals may impact students' interest in different classes or learning opportunities and in turn increase their motivation to attend school.

As evidenced by student descriptions of why they need to get an education, the vast majority of participants see education as a "means to an end rather than an end in itself" (Richardson, n.d.) Students report getting an education in order to prepare themselves for a future in which they will need education to succeed and they believe that this notion is a motivating factor for school attendance. Each student's motivation reflects different points across the spectrum from extrinsic to intrinsic. External regulation is defined as when "behaviors/actions that are performed by a student to satisfy an external demand or obtain an externally imposed reward" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Fred was the only study participant who described external regulation as a primary motivation for attending school, stating that one of his reasons for attendance is the fact that his mom "needs and wants him to come to school." Typically, as students advance through their school careers, the goal is for them to shift from extrinsic motivations and become more intrinsically motivated as that leads to the best learning outcomes and a passion for learning that can be sustained and nurtured. Students move across the spectrum towards intrinsic motivation by internalizing the value of learning.

Introjected regulation is defined as when "a student performs an act out of pressure or in order to enhance or maintain self-esteem and the feeling of worth" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students like Fred and Miracle mentioned not wanting to be "stupid" as a motivating reason for obtaining their education and this sentiment falls in line with introjected regulation. This mindset still negatively frames the process of learning as a way to avoid a particular outcome, perceived stupidity, as opposed to a passion or excitement for learning. Identification is defined as when a student increasingly identifies with the personal importance of school and has thus accepted its regulations as his or her

own though not fully integrated as a personal value (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This belief is best illustrated by Kay who knows that he has not personally found the connection to school that excites him but he has "accept[ed] the fact that he has to go to school." Integration is defined as when "the student accepts the value of school, making it a part of the other things that he or she values, though still outcome dependent" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The majority of students fell into this category listing education as a way to not be homeless, to graduate, and to be successful in their specific careers. All of these reasons are legitimate and feel motivating to students but they have not reached the level of intrinsic motivation defined as "the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who are intrinsically motivated are moved "to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods, pressures, or rewards." (Ryan & Deci, 2000). June was the only student who truly described intrinsic motivation through her responses.

June's overarching reason for going to school was described by the phrase" to occupy myself" and she spoke of a desire to attend school separate from her parents' pressure or how her teachers treated her but rather because of meaning she had found and described as "having something to do." She was also the student who was most critical of the importance of education and insisted that some future outcomes such a "good jobs" were not dependent on the knowledge gained through classes, yet she was certain that she was still going to attend school. She even elaborated further on her perception of learning despite external forces saying,

"The kids here just.. they be begging to go home. I mean, I do, too. [whispers] 'Same, I wanna go home,' but it's more of the fact that you got to still get your education, whether you like it or not. You still have to finish school. Might be hard. You might not like it. You might not like

the teachers. None of the teachers might not like you or none of the students. You might come here because you parents don't want you home. But you still gotta learn either way"

This desire to get an education was primarily driven from within and not solely by potential future outcomes. However, the motivation of going to school "to occupy" oneself was a surprising revelation with regards to intrinsic motivation. Often intrinsic motivation in education and learning is described actively as a passion for learning for learning's sake which can be difficult to cultivate in students who feel less successful at school or disengaged. However, going to school because "it's something to do" seems like a more attainable attitude to move students towards. Many CA students described their days when not as school as times spent at home sleeping, sometimes reading, chilling, and largely doing nothing. Derrick even said of his days at home he "can't [talk to anybody or see anybody during the day]. Can't have no company. Can't go outside and I can't watch TV. And I don't have no phone right now. Just doing nothing." An alternate approach to increasing some students' motivation to attend school may be first shifting their attitudes to believe that while getting an education is important, school is a way to occupy oneself throughout the day. This mindset of course is still impacted by how positive or negative students perceive the school climate to be so this alternate approach would have to be coupled with a shift in school culture for students with a negative perception of the school climate.

In addition to students' feelings and attitudes towards academic pursuits and learning, overall health and wellness, both mental and physical, greatly impacts how students experience school and their desire to attend school. With respect to physical wellness, if basic needs for food and sleep are not adequately met, students may want to avoid the school setting in order to meet those needs at home. Previous studies have

shown the impact of early high school start times on student attendance and optimal performance levels (Dunster et al., 2018; Adolescent Sleep Working Group, 2014). The findings from the current study show that students, both chronically absent and regularly attending, are clearly expressing a desire to get more sleep. Sleep habits also impact nutrition as students may go home and choose sleep over eating a meal and then have limited energy for completing important school related tasks. With limited sleep, the cycle of fatigue can lead to students choosing not to go to school in order to catch up on sleep. Nationally, high schools need to grapple with the idea that developmentally, students need more sleep than they are currently getting and it's not always for the often-assumed reasons of playing video games or engaging in late night social behaviors. Some students have non-traditional sleep schedules because they are engaged in after school activities, are completing school work or having trouble staying asleep. Specifically in DC where school choice has students waking up earlier to get to schools that are not in their neighborhoods, school start times should be further examined. Also, students could still benefit from discussion about sleep habits and guidance to getting more sleep and good sleep such as limiting screen time before bed, consuming less caffeine later in the day, and other helpful tips that could improve the quality and amount of sleep they are getting each night. Coupled with the information about students' eating habits, there is evidence that discussions about nutrition would be beneficial to students as well. The idea that students do not enjoy school lunch is not new, but the notion that students avoid eating at school and can spend upwards of 8 hours without a meal reveals additional context for students' attitudes towards school and the impact on their desire to attend. Also, findings show that the framing of nutrition as purely an access issue distorts the

reality that based on personal preference, some students are skipping meals and thus not performing at optimal levels during the school day. Lack of sleep and poor nutrition can also impact mental health and is associated with psychological symptoms including depression and anxiety (Masley, 2005).

With respect to mental health, students described a complicated landscape of emotions associated with starting high school including: finding a sense of belonging, trying to maintain or start new friendships, adjusting to a new school year, dealing with stress, and managing feelings of anger, sadness, or nervousness. The majority of chronically absent and regularly attending students shared that "getting their mind off of it" was the best way to handle these complex emotions and a few described a process of confronting these thoughts and feelings head on and "dealing" with them. Regardless, students in the regularly attending group described many different coping strategies from positive self-talk, to self-care activities, to seeking additional support from a peer or trusted adult that they were able to utilize in order to overcome challenges and manage their emotions. Both chronically absent and regularly attending students shared that there were days that they didn't feel like going to school, but students who were able to clearly articulate strategies for managing anxiety, sadness, and stress were still able attend school regularly despite these challenges. These findings support previous studies' conclusions that wrap around services target mental health support and developing students coping strategies may help protect against chronic absenteeism. However, there are many different service delivery models and as June's case illustrates, finding the appropriate fit of the mental health intervention critical to ensuring students' perceived benefit of the service and utilization of skills learned. Positive experiences with mental health

professionals had an impact on students' coping strategies and this approach could be a possible protective factor that explains increased resilience and regular school attendance despite risk factors. Based on the different reactions to mental health services, it's apparent that the impact of these services are dependent upon how helpful students perceive these services to be. Students' responses to therapy do not necessarily dictate their attendance but rather if students need support handling the feelings that may impact their desire to go to school, and if they don't feel like therapy helps them do that, it will not improve their attendance. As Derrick found therapy unhelpful and intrusive he didn't incorporate the information he received into his daily life and there was no impact on his attendance behaviors, whereas Jared found his therapy session to be incredibly helpful in understanding his anxiety and learning how to deal with it to face triggering setting such as school. Similarly with Fred, talking to his social worker made him want to come to school, at least on days when he was scheduled to meet with her, and indicates the positive impact mental health support can have on school attendance. Further research is necessary to understand how to ensure proper fit with students and the mental health interventions they receive in order to create a positive experience, and in turn improve the effectiveness of these services and attendance.

Interpersonal Factors

At the interpersonal level, the four themes and four subthemes that emerged (6) Staying to Myself (Besides My Ride or Dies), (7) Othering(7.1) Attendance Behaviors, (7.2) Race Based Perceptions, (8) School as an Individual Endeavor, (9) Family Dynamics (9.1) Parent Control over Attendance Decisions and (9.2) Parent-School

Relationship explain the different ways that chronically absent and regularly attending students manage relationships with their peers, family, and teachers.

Students described small networks of close friends composed of school peers and peers from their community, whom they relied on for emotional and instrumental support. Many chronically absent students shared that the students whom they considered to be their best friends, did not attend the same school as them and they discussed little discussion with these peers that focused on school or attendance. While students overwhelmingly reported that their closest friend's attendance did not impact their decision to miss school, regularly attending students shared concrete ways that having peers who cared about their attendance, motivated them to attend school. Regularly attending students shared that their peers checked in with them in the morning to make sure they were awake and planning to attend school and they offered those same reminders to other peers. The agency in the decision to start these phone trees was also fascinating as this effort was not a suggestion from the adults in their lives, but rather the ways they had determined were best for supporting one another. These findings support the conclusion that close friends who care about each other's attendance and have conversations about school that increase accountability for attendance, can positively impact attendance behaviors.

In addition to small peer networks of close friends, students also described they ways in which they interacted with the larger school community. Regularly attending students described staying to themselves and limiting interactions with people they didn't know while many chronically absent students described being cool with everyone by forming loose social ties that were beneficial for moving through the school environment.

Staying to one's self and being cool with everyone represent navigational capital as they are both skills that students use to maneuver through the school social environment (Yosso, 2005). Despite describing an environment in which fights happen often, students who described being cool with everybody or staying to themselves expressed not fearing for their safety. Both groups felts safe because they were confident no one would harm them based on either positive or limited interactions. The ability to interact positively with different people and find common ground in order to form relationships is a skill that can be very useful in life but it is less encouraged during class time as teachers attempt to limit social interaction unrelated to the lesson. The ability to focus on work and limit social interaction in order to complete tasks is also an important skill for life and in the high school setting, there seems to be a greater value placed on this skill. The differential reactions to these skillsets can impact desire and motivation to come to school. Students who limit their social interactions and focus on their work receive positive reinforcement that helps them to feel successful in the school setting and can encourage them to attend school. However, students being skilled at relationship building in any setting is undervalued and students often receive negative reinforcement through school discipline when exercising that skill.

Students who described being cool with everybody were more excited about seeing their peers outside of the school setting. Whether students attend school or not they can remain in contact during the school day via text messages and then arrange to meet up after school. Limited social interactions in class can affect academic apathy and also places a huge burden on lunch time, a 20-minute block, to provide the majority of social interaction for the day. This situation in turn can impact eating habits and nutrition

as students are more concerned with social interaction as opposed to eating. Finally, students who are cool with everyone internalize that staying to one's self is the behavior of successful students and they may begin to believe that school is an individual effort. This particular misconception disadvantages these students because findings support the notion that there is some unspoken navigational capital accrued by regularly attending students. This navigational capital helps them seek out instrumental support from teachers and peers to achieve greater success in the school setting. Students in the CA group seem to be unaware of how to navigate this process of asking teachers for help, communicating with your teachers and peers in order to better understand content, and attending office hours that are important for student success. Moreover, many students in the CA group don't even know that these are skills they should have or that these activities are what they should be doing in order to be successful. In taking advantage of these networks and utilizing their available resources, students in the RA group feel more academically successful and are further motivated to come to school. Some students in the CA group described feeling less academically successful and because they believe school is an individual effort, they internalized that they should just be working harder in order to improve their outcomes. Messages that emphasize the ways in which student effort is critical to success, further reinforce these beliefs without acknowledging or developing these important navigational skills. The messages delivered to students about the importance of individual effort should be more nuanced and describe the effort and initiative necessary to create a community of learners and teachers that can support your academic success.

In high school, adolescents are developing their identities and learning about themselves and how they relate to the world. This identity development is influenced by the dominant narratives in society about Black adolescents and as much as students are exploring who they want to be, they are also rejecting ideas of who they do not want to be. Will and Derrick both believed the dominant narrative about students who skip school and their malintent or misbehavior when choosing not to attend school. They did not identify with students who "skip" school and did not want to be labeled as such. They believed their choice to not attend school, when they would just be in the house and an adult would be aware they were staying home, was not comparable to truancy behaviors.. All of the chronically absent participants described staying at home and not going outside when they were not in school. Kay and Will specifically mentioned that on days when they did not attend school, they would wait until at least 3:00pm when schools began letting out to leave their homes and meet up with their friends. These actions may be an attempt to navigate around the punitive measures currently in place where students not in school during the school day can receive consequences or be taken to school. However, this situation may also be because students can address the needs that motivated their decisions not to attend school, such as feeling tired, during the school day and are ready to engage with peers afterschool.

While there may be students not attending school who are outside during school hours engaging in "antisocial" behaviors, there is evidence of a subtype of chronically absent African American students that do not report elevated feelings of anxiety, fear or nervousness that still have severe difficulty attending school. These stories of students rejecting the label of truant because of the dominant narrative around students who skip

school, can expand the ways in which we conceptualize chronic absenteeism and the ways in which we intervene to improve attendance. If an assembly aimed at improving attendance focuses on skipping school, chronically absent students who don't classify their behavior that way may not receive the message of the intervention because it doesn't seem targeted to them but rather to other students. Using phrases such a "skipping school" when attempting to build relationships with chronically absent students or asking them to improve their attendance behaviors may alienate students who do not identify with that characterization and have limited impact.

In analyzing chronically absent students who did not engage in othering, there is evidence that the ways in which students perceive their attendance differs based on the primary causes of their absenteeism. Kay did not engage in the process of othering but he felt his attendance was similar to that of his closest peers, classmates, and other students who look like him. Kay believed that his attendance was good and that he goes to school "all the time." The majority of Kay's absences were due to suspensions and without those suspensions he would not have been chronically absent. Kay's perception was based on the reality that he actually did go to school on the majority of days on which he was allowed to attend. Conversely, AJ, another student in the CA group who didn't engage in othering behavior, believed that his attendance was worse than all comparison groups and shared "I can see that people come to school way more than I do." However, unlike Derrick and Will, both Kay and AJ said they wouldn't care or feel any negative emotions being labeled truant.

Students whose absences are primarily due to exclusionary school practices or health issues may form different conclusions about their identity as compared to students

who feel like they play a larger role in their absenteeism. Similarly, the impact to their self-esteem may be different as students who don't have school discipline practices or illnesses to explain and justify their attendance behaviors, internalize that they are at fault for their absenteeism which could cause students to perceive themselves in a negative light. These negative perceptions of self may influence the process of "othering" as students may be comforted by a social gradient of absenteeism that recognizes other students with worse attendance behaviors.

With respect to othering based on race-based perceptions, the underlying stereotype that students spoke to is a dominant narrative that Black students are academically and/or behaviorally inferior when compared to students of other races. Students from marginalized groups can internalize the ideology of inferiority that they see reflected in their institutions (Bell, 2013). Attending a predominately Black school and having countless examples of successful Black students still did not prevent students from internalizing the same harmful stereotypes about Black students. For regularly attending students who participated in othering based on race-based perceptions, they did not want to be associated with perceived negative behaviors. Jared's description of his peers' behaviors, his own behaviors, how white people view Black people, how he wants to be viewed, the systems of structural racism that impact disparities, and his concern at seeming as though he hates his race exemplifies a battle of conflicting dimensions of a marginalized identity reminiscent of W.E. B. DuBois's (1903) notion of double consciousness. Double consciousness is a term coined in DuBois (1903) work *Souls of Black Folk* that describes the unique struggles African Americans face in an oppressive United States context of trying to simultaneously construct their identity and view

themselves through the lens of the White dominant culture. DuBois explained that, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others . . . One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois, 2008). DuBois recognizes the difficulty of grappling with these ideas but also describes the strength necessary to manage this internal struggle. African American students who engage in "othering" behaviors to separate themselves from their Black peers may also possess particular strengths that positively impact their attendance behaviors. More research at predominately Black schools is needed to better understand the impact of othering.

The majority of students, chronically absent and regularly attending, described seeking parental permission in order to stay home from school. This behavior highlights the important role that parents play in student attendance behaviors and represents an opportunity for schools to engage parents around encouraging student attendance. As evidenced by Fred having the best overall attendance and not ending up chronically absent for the school year despite unexcused absences in September, parental control and limited perceived agency in attendance decision making may be an important protective factor against absenteeism. Findings indicate that regular discussions about school at home, whether they are parent initiated or student initiated, focused on accountability or just encouraging words, can positively impact student attendance behaviors.

Students' perceived success in the school setting may impact how motivated they are to have discussions with their parents that are centered around school. If they fear the discussion will veer into accountability or that they will get in trouble for something

shared, they are less likely and less interested in having these conversations. Without these regular conversations about school, students do not receive the positive impacts on attendance and academic outcomes described by regularly attending students. Also, negative parent-school relationships can be a risk factor for chronic absenteeism as parents may be willing to allow their student to stay home from school if they perceive the school climate to be negative. Schools should be concerned with building positive relationships with parents and repairing negative ones in order to improve attendance.

School Factors

Students spend the majority of their waking hours in the school setting. Their individual feelings, and interpersonal relationships are heavily influenced by their perception of the school climate. The systems in place to govern, educate and discipline students are experienced differently by students and impacts their attendance behaviors. At the school level, the three themes (10) "A New Slate": School Representing Opportunity, (11) Attendance Policy Awareness, (12) Perception of School Discipline System, and three subthemes (12.1) Getting Sent out of Class (12.2) Differential or Unfair Treatment and (12.3) Normalization of Discipline that emerged describe a school environment in which some students see opportunity and other students see futility.

Starting high school is a developmental milestone for adolescents. In the same way that students can feel anxious about adjusting to a new school, they can also feel excitement, anticipation, or little emotion at all. The perceived differences between high school and middle school seems to play a role in how students feel about starting a new school. All of the students described differences in the physical environment as they felt their new school was larger and better maintained, but chronically absent and regularly

attending students differed in noticing differences in school culture. Regularly attending students overwhelmingly described increased rigor and a wider array of extracurricular activities and resources whereas the chronically absent students mostly shared that high school felt like a continuation of middle school. It's difficult to know how much the description of middle and high school being the same was due to his feelings of apathy towards school or if the lack of perceived change between middle school and high school is what contributed to his apathy. Either way, the effect of this perception of "more of the same" was notably different from students who felt like high school was a clean slate upon where they could redefine themselves or try new things. Students who were taking the metro alone for the first time felt that they had more independence. It was an intangible difference in mindset as opposed to reaction to the physical environment or even the school culture that drove students to attend school. Kay did not think of high school as a fresh start or new opportunity and thus had no additional motivation for attending school whereas Jared, despite having a challenging middle school experience, latched onto the idea that he could change his circumstances and be successful in every aspect of high school. Students transitioning to high school may benefit from the framing of high school as a fresh start with new and exciting academic, social, behavioral, and extracurricular opportunities. The challenge will be cultivating that mindset in students who notice real similarities between their middle and high school experiences especially for students in charter schools where these similarities may be intentional because of vertical alignment with feeder schools.

In addition to what school can represent for students, the actual school climate can impact how students feel while they are at school and their desire to attend. The school climate that students like Derrick are describing is one where they are constantly policed and must adapt in order to avoid punishment. The focus on compliance does not

necessarily inspire academic engagement and can lead to feelings of apathy which in turn impacts attendance. In addition to the previously mentioned effects on apathy, interpersonal relationships, perception of school climate, and motivation and desire to attend school, this system mirrors the criminal justice system. Students can be randomly stopped, minor offenses can receive harsh punishments, consequences can isolate students or make it harder for them to achieve their goals, and damaged relationships can make the process of re-entry into the general school setting more difficult. Previous studies have shown how harsh discipline policies can impact attendance, lead to dropout, and maintain the school to prison pipeline (Nance, 2016). Both chronically absent and regularly attending students described getting sent out of class as a normal and regular occurrence at the school. Findings indicate that while getting sent out of class may seem like a small consequence when looked at in isolation, there are important educational and public health implications from this seemingly small action. While ISS is viewed as an intermediary between out of school suspension which formally counts as an absence, it is missed instruction time. While students may be responsible for making up the work that they missed, while in ISS they are not being taught similarly to if they were suspended, or had chosen not to go to school. If a student has been in ISS for more than 10% of the school year, they would not be officially categorized as chronically absent but in essence they would have lost the same amount of instructional time. While ISS is not viewed as or tracked as an absence it can have the same negative impact on academic outcomes and erodes student-teacher relationships. While the alternate strategy of giving students time to compose themselves outside of the classroom still involves some separation, it is not exclusionary and rather supports development of resiliency and coping skills. Schools

must work to address their discipline systems and ensure that students are being sent out of class for only the most serious offenses and safety concerns. ISS data must be collected and analyzed in order to better understand the rates and frequency with which this consequence is applied, any disparities in types of students who are more likely to be sent out of class, the impact on learning and attendance, and to evaluate its effectiveness as a strategy.

Students also described differential treatment and enforcement of school rules based on whether students were seen as "good" or "bad" This differential treatment impacts both students who are perceived to be "good" and those who were perceived to be "bad," as it affects school culture, interpersonal relationships, and individual attitudes and beliefs. Students who feel that they are seen as "bad" may feel alienated and criminalized in the school setting which can lead them to avoid the school setting by missing school. For students who feel they are seen as good, differential treatment reinforces the behaviors and attitudes described in the Theme 7: Othering where students did not want to be associated with some of their peers based on behavior. These differentiations are internalized and become evident when students shared that the consequences some students received weren't harsh enough because they didn't deter the behavior for the "bad" students and "good" students deserved warnings because they don't regularly misbehave. Jared is merely mirroring the dominant culture within his school where students receive differential treatment based on their previous behaviors and excluding them from the learning environment is an acceptable response. All of the other factors that Jared describes that can impact student behavior for "good" students who just made a mistake, also apply to students who have been labeled "bad" students.

The process Jared describes of focusing on the behavior instead of the student, considering the external factors and additional context that may influence student behavior, and responding with compassion and empathy instead of punitive measures could benefit all students. There are opportunities to reimagine the school discipline system to incorporate more inclusive practices that encourage positive student-teacher relationships, increase student engagement, and positively impact educational outcomes.

Negative student teacher relationships can also contribute to the perception of a negative school climate which can reduce motivation to attend school. The descriptions of feeling disrespected by teachers exemplify the ways in which the school discipline system can position students and teachers as adversaries as opposed to partners. Miracle spent two months in class receiving inadequate academic support because of perceived disrespect. As described in Theme 8: School as an Individual Endeavor, student-teacher partnership has positive impacts on academic and attendance outcomes. Therefore, creating an environment in which students are comfortable seeking instrumental support from their teachers is essential but the school discipline system can undermine that effort.

In addition to school climate which impacts motivation for school attendance, a basic understanding of school protocol around absenteeism is also important. The majority of chronically absent and regularly attending students had limited knowledge or misconceptions about the school attendance policy and were unaware of the interventions that would be triggered by certain numbers of absences. From the student perspective, it is unclear if these interventions are not being implemented with fidelity or if students are unaware because these conversations mostly happen with their parents. Conversations about attendance with parents are not always being conveyed to students as they may not

have conversations about school at home. Findings indicate that the parent notification system can have a positive impact on student attendance behaviors when coupled with students and parents having conversations about school at home. Students could also benefit from participating in discussions about their attendance and clearer explanations of the attendance policy. While he and many other students expressed that threatening students would not motivate them to come to school, there is a difference between threats of punitive measures for missing school and being informed of the school's approach to absenteeism based on number of absences and being allowed to brainstorm strategies to improve attendance. Building awareness about attendance policies and having attendance plan interventions that allow for student input could have a positive impact on student attendance behaviors.

Community Level Factors

In addition to handling the individual, interpersonal, and systemic challenges that arise in the school setting, students must also navigate these obstacles in their communities. At the community level, the three themes that emerged (13) Strong Community Ties, (14) Perceptions of Criminality and (15) Effects of Gentrification reveal the ways student attendance behaviors are impacted by students' experience and reaction to how they are treated and perceived in their neighborhoods.

Washington, DC is one of the top most intensely gentrified cities in the US and there are high rates of displacement of Black residents (Velasco & Cohen, 2021). Gentrification changes the composition of students' neighborhoods, increases their police interactions and increases the fear that they may one day be priced out of their neighborhood. While many students in the current study shared that gentrification had not

impacted their lives, the threat of possible displacement as a result of gentrification increased Miracle's anxiety. While Miracle had the coping strategies to manage that anxiety and still attend school regularly, other students may need more support in managing the anxiety that can be caused by living in an everchanging neighborhood. The school setting can be a place to provide that additional support and give students a space to discuss issues like gentrification and gain coping strategies to manage any associated anxiety. Gentrification can also bring new individuals to their communities who may have negative preconceived notions about Black adolescent behavior.

Students are dealing with perceived criminality and harsh punishments for minor infractions in their neighborhoods as well as in school. Students described being profiled and receiving harsh punishment in their communities in similar terms as they described being policed in the school setting. Police slamming men playing dice mirrors the harsh treatment for minor infractions such as laughing that was described in the school setting. Both scenarios erode relationships however in this scenario. the police are viewed as outsiders entering a united community whereas in the school setting, the administrators and teachers who administer these harsh consequences are built into the fabric of the school. Just as students can be stopped and questioned because of perceived misdeeds while walking in the hallway, they can have the same experience with a police officer in their community. Derrick even used the same strategy he uses to avoid being stopped in the hallway at school to avoid interacting with the security guard who was following him in the mall. When Derrick sees school administration in the hallways, he similarly avoids them because of the way he may be perceived or the fact that he may be stopped and end up with a consequence. While removing one's self from a situation may be an appropriate

navigational strategy in the community, if students use this strategy in the school setting, this action may lead to non-attendance.

Notably, this treatment and perception has been normalized and students have internalized that being constantly policed is a normal occurrence. This feeling in turn impacts student engagement in "othering" behaviors and aids the process of normalizing discriminatory treatment both in their neighborhoods and in the school setting. When these behaviors are normalized, many students don't feel the motivation to resist or advocate for a different way of doing things. Conversely, Miracle, a student who often displayed resistant capital within the school setting, did not accept profiling as normal. In both the school system and out in her community, Miracle had varying levels of success with being able to use her voice to express when situations were unfair. However, being heard and challenging perceived disrespect or negative misperceptions of her character was important to her and brought her comfort. This finding supports the notion that listening to students and allowing them to participate in discussions can help repair damaged relationships, and make students feel more comfortable at school which can impact their attendance outcomes.

As students transition to high school, they are often leaving behind relationships with peers in their neighborhoods that they have spent time building and cultivating for the majority of their lives. These relationships provide a sense of familiarity, comfort, joy, and belonging that many chronically absent students have not yet acquired at their new high schools. The sense of belonging in the community that has not yet been recreated in the school setting can impact student's motivation and desire to attend school, especially in the educational landscape of Washington DC where students often

attend far away schools that are disconnected from their communities. Nurturing these relationships with students from different schools that are stronger and more beneficial than school relationships is a priority for many students in the chronically absent group. They still communicate with these peers regularly and spend copious amounts of time hanging out with those peers in their neighborhoods in order to maintain these friendships which help provide them with both instrumental and emotional support ranging from checking in on you when you're sick to ensuring your safety in the neighborhood. This sense of community was tied to more than just the relationships with people from that community but also the places where they gather, the pride they feel for their neighborhood, and the sense of unity. Many regularly attending students had little engagement with members of their communities and mostly felt that the school community was where they received that support. This finding is not to imply that students should leave behind positive relationships or their neighborhoods, but to show that these relationships exist in an environment where students are happier and more engaged than in the school setting. More importantly, the comparison between the two worlds can enhance feelings of apathy and isolation. These findings provide important context as to why students with strong community ties have greater motivation to participate and be active members of their neighborhood communities as opposed to their school communities. School must examine the ways they can recreate the sense of belonging from communities in the school setting and also how they can form connections with students' communities so that the school community and neighborhood community are less disconnected. Addressing this disconnect can have a positive impact on attendance outcomes.

Mixed Method Data Analysis

The current study integrated quantitative and qualitative data to explore the ways in which chronically absent and regularly attending students experience the transition to high school and which factors impact their attendance behaviors. The following analysis focuses on 12 topic areas where data merged to illustrate a fuller picture of risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism.

Anxiety

Among the interview participants, students describing anxious feelings were still motivated to regularly attend school. Septembra's example offers a possible explanation as to why students with elevated anxiety may still attend school. If students are more anxious about missing school and the additional expectations associated with making up missed school work, they may be more motivated to attend school in order to avoid that anxiety. Specifically related to September attendance, anxious students who view school as an opportunity may be more excited than anxious about the start of a new school year. Fred's example illustrates that students with anxiety who are considering all of the things that may make them anxious about attending a new school, may also have considered all of the aspects of school that excite them. This excitement and anticipation coupled with other confounding factors, such as viewing high school as a place filled with new opportunities, may explain why students' anxiety is protective in September for all students but not for End of Year absenteeism. Also, Jared and Fred illustrate the benefits of coping strategies and mental health support in the school setting for anxious students who may consider school avoidance because of triggers at school.

Previous studies have shown that anxiety can increase risk of absenteeism (Bagnell, 2011; Becker et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2015; Melton et al., 2016). The current study provides little evidence for anxiety based school refusal with the only example being Miracle missing first period to avoid the anxious feelings associated with walking into the classroom late. Students with fewer coping strategies or more severe anxiety symptoms may use these avoidance strategies to miss the full day of school as opposed to just one class period. Even though the study showed a protective effect of anxiety at the beginning of the school year, there may still be students for whom anxiety causes them to miss school. Thus, this finding should be interpreted with caution and addressed by improving students coping strategies and connecting them to appropriate mental health supports.

Chronic Health Conditions

Despite boasting one of the lowest child uninsured rates in the nation, there are still barriers in access to care for DC residents that could impact attendance behaviors and the process of getting absences excused by a health professional (Chandra et al., 2009). Specifically, asthma and dental-health related problems contribute significantly to chronic absenteeism with asthma accounting for one third of all days of missed instruction nationally ("Chronic Absenteeism | Healthy Schools Campaign", 2021). While we did not ask any survey questions about chronic illness to the entire sample, it is evident from the qualitive component of the study that students with chronic illnesses are at risk of being chronically absent and could benefit from additional support as well as individualized plans to help them attend school regularly and make up work when they must be absent. Whether an official 504 plan with documentation of the illness, or a

more informal plan, students, families, and teachers must align on what supports a student needs in order to learn and be academically successful despite many missed days of instruction.

While AJ said his teacher's disrespect did not impact his attendance and he didn't really care about it, other students may have different reactions and feel isolated and less connected to school. I personally witnessed the disrespectful tone when delivering envelopes to be distributed by homeroom teachers. Upon seeing AJ's name, the teacher said in earshot of other students "Good luck with [student name], he's never here." The manner in which this teacher spoke about AJ did not reflect empathy or compassion for a student with an underlying health condition and projected an indifference to the reason for the absences and more focus on the outcome of many missed days of school. Students with chronic illnesses, particularly those without easily visible symptoms or physical characteristics, may require additional support and their teachers need additional professional development around empathetic practices.

Academic Performance

Academic performance and chronic absenteeism are highly correlated. This bidirectional relationship is often researched as the ways in which absenteeism negatively impacts academic performance. However, findings also show that chronically absent and regularly attending students were both motivated to attend school in order to improve their academic performance or to maintain their academic success. Students saw the connection between their attendance and passing their classes and wanted to be in school in order to keep their grades up. However, in addition to attendance, other factors can impact academic performance including student ability and understanding. Future

research must explore how student attendance motivation changes over time if they continue to attend school regularly and still do not see the academic results to which they aspire. Also, the correlation between academic performance and absenteeism can be used to identify highest risk youth and support early intervention.

Peer Network Influence and Support

Chronically absent and regularly attending students both described a small, tightknit group of close friends. Findings reveal that the quantity of close peers may be less important than the strength of those relationships. If those best friends attend the same school, they are well positioned to provide daily attendance support. Positive peer support ranged from phone calls in the morning providing accountability for attendance to encouragement for academic achievement. There was no evidence that the decision to not attend school was influenced by peers' attendance behaviors and most chronically absent students felt that their attendance was worse than their closest peers.

Students reported few friends who engaged in drug use. However, there may be some social desirability bias or fear of getting in trouble that may have impacted these self-reported measures and thus the prevalence of friends who use drugs may be underreported. There also may be some students who know and interact with students who engage in these behaviors, but do not consider them to be close friends so they were not measured but the survey items. Previous studies have shown that affiliating with peers engaging in antisocial behaviors such as drug use correlates to students' own substance use which was found to be predictive of absenteeism in the current study (Beardslee et. al., 2018). It is unclear if there is actual peer influence to increase risk or if

there's a selection effect and peers with similar behaviors group together but either way, substance use behaviors need to be further explored with qualitative inquiry around substance use, peer substance use, and school attendance.

Parental Involvement and Support

As evidenced by Will's example, it takes time for parents to form ties to their student's new school and feel like they can be involved. Opportunities before the school year begins for parents to meet teachers, experience the school setting, and start forming school ties may be beneficial for parent involvement and student attendance. It's also important that parents' interactions with the school are not exclusively negative as that can impact their perception of the school and influence the extent to which they will encourage their student to attend school if the student expresses they want to miss school. Nudges such as postcards with student attendance data can be an additional contact points from school that are neither positive nor negative, but rather a consistent reminder. Nudges are unobtrusive interventions with no penalty that can serve as reminders of where students are with respect to attendance. (Jordan, 2018). Nudges also help families understand their student's attendance as compared to other students at the school and their own personal attendance goals. Ten percent of the school year is actually just two days a month and parents often underestimate the extent of their child's absenteeism (Jordan, 2018). Nudges can ensure that parents have all the information about their student's attendance in order to have a conversation with them.

Findings reveal that students have a much broader definition of parent involvement that extends beyond parent interaction with the school and includes parent

interaction with students at home. Participants perceived parents to be heavily involved if the parent expressed interest in their student's school day and engaged in conversations about the student's education. Whether they enjoyed these conversations or not, regularly attending students reported engaging in conversations with their parents about school. These conversations may impact student accountability and perceived parental support and encouragement, which in turn can increase their motivation to attend school. Chronically absent students could benefit from these conversations but many of them are hesitant to talk about school at home even though they feel very close to their families. Parents may need reminders or support in order to initiate these conversations with their students and with the help of school and community partnerships, that support should be offered. Some parents may also have many demands on their time and schools must acknowledge this fact, and not overstep in suggesting strategies for having conversations with your students about school.

Parent Education

Previous studies have revealed associations between parent educational attainment and children's academic development (Davis-Kean, Tighe, & Waters, N. E., 2021). One proposed pathway to explain this relationship includes parental beliefs and educational expectations. Regardless of parent education, both chronically absent and regularly attending students felt their families valued education and expected them to be academically successful and at least graduate from high school. Parents' own experiences influenced the messages they gave their students about finishing school and many were encouraging their students to achieve higher educational attainment. These messages were motivating for some students in terms of shaping high school graduation as a future

goal, but those messages didn't necessarily translate to day to day motivation for attendance.

Some students were completely unaware of their parents' educational attainment revealing that some students and parents are not having conversations about educational history. Parent and guardian outreach emphasizing the importance of even brief conversations about school and educational goals can impact student motivation and in turn attendance. Schools can even create opportunities for students to engage in conversations with their families about education through interview assignments and family history reports. Opening the lines of communication between parents and students with regards to school and education, is an important first step some families can take to improve attendance and academic outcomes.

Parents' relationships with their students' schools can also be impacted by their own educational histories. Will felt like he and his mother had a strong connection and she would understand if he didn't want to attend school because she remembers having similar feelings about school. Will said " sometimes she be like knowing when I don't feel like be like going some days. She understands cause she felt the same way when she was my age…Sometimes she like understands me not feeling like going so she'll like. let me stay home." Fostering strong relationships between families and school and sharing information about how absenteeism impacts students' futures may help parents empathize with their child while still encouraging their attendance.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Overall, there was a subset of both chronically absent and regularly students who felt like they had positive relationships with some of their teachers and had received

support from them that was beneficial. Students shared different levels of support that they wanted from teacher student relationships based on their personal preferences, attitudes and beliefs about the level of connection they wanted to make with their teachers which was also impacted by their family circumstances and perceived negative interactions with teachers.

Some students describe a desire for care and mentorship and it made sense for teachers to fulfill that role in their lives. However, other students do not crave that type of relationship with teachers at all. Even students who wanted more superficial relationships with their teachers acknowledged that teachers care about students, believe students can do well, and make them feel good about themselves. Whichever relationship students want to have with their teachers, they should feel comfortable going to them as a resource for academic support and guidance. As described in Theme 8: School as an Individual Endeavor, regularly attending students understood the importance of tapping into teachers as a resource and adding them to their school support team. That additional support can help improve academic performance which can impact student desire to come to school. Chronically absent students could benefit from explicit instruction on building a school support team including their teachers, and explaining that they do not have to share personal information to benefit from a positive student teacher relationship. Also, teachers must be self-reflective and examine their practices that erode or encourage relationship building with students and how that can impact student attendance behaviors.

The additional context of transitioning to 9th grade means that students are leaving behind teacher relationships that they may have had at their previous school. For students who may have had negative teacher relationships at their last school, framing high school

as a clean slate and a place where they can have a fresh start with all of their teachers could have a positive impact on attendance behaviors. For students who are transitioning from really strong teacher relationships at their previous schools, we must acknowledge that it will take time for these relationships to form. One helpful way to help establish rapport with students quickly is for teachers to reduce the power differential and begin by showing some vulnerability and giving students opportunities to share their opinions (Mitra, 2018). We also recognize that many teachers may have an unmanageable workload that does not allow them to offer mentorship outside of the classroom to students in addition to instruction. These circumstances present an opportunity to engage the community and leverage the authenticity and credibility of other adults from the same neighborhoods as students who could be trained and serve in an official mentorship capacity.

Engaging Instruction

In order to address academic apathy and supplement students' desire to pass their classes with an increased interest in learning, classes must become more engaging. Students believe that if school is more fun, students will be motivated to attend and their intuition is supported by previous studies concluding that engaging instruction that it interesting to students encourages attendance (Van Eck et al., 2017; Kearney, 2008; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Hands on assignments such as lab work with microscopes gives students experiential learning opportunities beyond just reading from a text book that can address different learning modalities and preferences in the classroom and help keep more learners engaged. Exposing students to culturally responsive and relevant information that expands their understanding of the world and helps them make sense of

it, can also cause even an apathetic student's interest to be piqued. Also, teachers who deliver instruction in an exciting way that is accessible to students can help students feel engaged and thus more motivated to attend school.

Engaging instruction also includes allowing student agency in determining some aspects of the content they are taught. The reality of standardized tests and learning standards means that there will be times where students have to learn material that is uninteresting to them and that doesn't feels directly connected to their everyday lives. However there are small ways in which we can support students in influencing their learning, whether it's choosing their own research topic so they can select a topic about which they are passionate or allowing students to choose the skills they'd like to work on as they relate to their future goals. For example, Fred mentioned wanting to be in Art class and his future hope of being an artist. Art is an elective that is offered at his school, but in freshman year students do not have an opportunity to choose their electives. Allowing students to at least rank their electives and trying to accommodate their preferences allows students to have some choice in shaping their curriculum.

School Discipline Practices

The current study has yielded extensive findings and discussion of the school discipline system and the way it is perceived as normal and necessary by the students and the integration of qualitative and quantitative data strengthens those conclusions. Student descriptions primarily consist of discussion of negative reinforcements in the form of consequences. For many students the school discipline system aligns with their previous school and contributes to students feeling like high school will be more of the same as opposed to a fresh start. The emphasis on negative reinforcement contradicts the

principles of the SWPBIS that is said to be in place at MXP and MLKP, and this disconnect may be a failure in implementation of the SWPBIS or just an accurate depiction of how the SWPBIS is actually experienced by students. Schools must examine if SWPBIS policies are being implemented with fidelity. If not, teachers must be retrained on how to balance accountability and prevention of less desirable behaviors with modeling and highlighting positive behaviors. Teachers must also be reminded to respond to misbehavior with evidenced based intervention strategies instead of automatically resorting to exclusionary practices like sending students out of class. Schools in urban settings implementing SWPBIS with fidelity reported significant reductions in office referrals, out of school suspensions, in-school suspensions and increased attendance and achievement test scores after implementation (Nance, 2016).

School Level Incentives

Incentives are common practice in encouraging positive student behaviors and have been used extensively to encourage attendance (Ekstrand, 2015). Incentives however have varying levels of effectiveness and success as students get older and have more agency in securing items that are being used as rewards. Students can buy their own pizza so they don't feel any additional motivation to come to school in order to earn that reward. Getting early buy-in from students and allowing them to have input in what rewards they would like to see could have some positive effects on attendance outcomes. However, this continues to promote extrinsic motivation which is less sustainable as students grow older and it will still not work for other students who are apathetic about school rewards or who perceive greater value in staying home from school.

Incentives can also reinforce narratives about “good” kids and “bad” kids especially if the same students are earning these rewards or if the challenges preventing certain students from attaining these awards seems insurmountable. For example, if a student has to have perfect attendance and not be tardy for a month in order to receive the reward, students like Miracle who have responsibilities in the morning that often make her late would feel as though she were immediately disqualified from meeting these criteria, despite being a regularly attending student. Also, students with chronic illnesses would feel little motivation from this incentive as they have limited control over how they’re feeling and whether or not they’ll be able to attend school. Schools need to become more creative and concerned with equity in determining incentives.

Neighborhood Attachment

Students lived in varied neighborhoods with different characteristics but their perceptions of those neighborhoods and the ways they were able to navigate those settings, were more important in impacting attendance than the geographic location, crime rates, or community violence. The community was the center of the lives of many chronically absent students and a source of pride as opposed to the majority of regularly attending students who mainly saw their communities as just where they stayed. It wasn’t that the regularly attending students necessarily disliked their neighborhoods, but rather that they weren’t as invested in community life. For some regularly attending students, because they spent so much time at school participating in extracurricular activities and commuting to and from school, they spent very little time actually in their neighborhoods. While they still described enjoying time in their homes, their descriptions of time spent in the community actually mirrored the indifference and apathy

that some of their chronically absent peers showed towards school. Similarly, the ways in which students interact with their communities mirrored the strategies from Theme 6: Staying to myself (Besides my Ride or Dies). Many regularly attending students described interacting with their families at their homes but having limited interaction with other members of their communities and spending little time outside of their house. Conversely, many regularly attending students described being cool with everyone in their community and actually having strong ties to community members and activities. Chronically absent students may have spent years building these strong connections to their communities and creating a sense of belonging. These connections are positive ties that do not need to be minimized but rather leveraged in improving attendance outcomes. As most students don't attend their neighborhood schools, schools must find a way to recreate that sense of belonging in the school setting and tap into that neighborhood pride in order to bridge the gap between students' neighborhoods and school.

Transportation

In the current study, there was no clear alignment between mode of transportation or length of commute and chronic absenteeism. Some students who rely on their parents to drive them to school or who have a relatively close walk to school were still chronically absent and many students with complicated routes across long distances were still able to regularly attend. Students who have walking included in their commutes have to plan ahead and prepare for hygienic concerns that can impact anxiety and the ways they are viewed by their peers. Students with long commutes may have to adjust to waking up earlier and having less sleep in the morning in order to get to school on time. Students with complicated journeys may have to move through many different

neighborhoods and manage multiple transfers which can be difficult to time well. Transportation is but one piece of a complex puzzle that students must adapt to and persist through in order to have a successful high school transition.

In Washington DC, many students do not attend their neighborhood school and must commute further distances. Interventions that involve partnerships with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) including free transit passes for all students and shuttles to and from metro stops, have shown improvement in overall student attendance but at the high school level, these interventions did not have much effect on students classified as "at risk." Transportation is often viewed solely as a barrier to school attendance and while there is evidence of this theory, findings also reveal that there are many underlying factors that interact with transportation to impact attendance behaviors.

There are many personality traits and skills that may predispose students for attendance success and they can draw on these strengths to help them overcome transportation issues. Planning one's school commute requires executive functioning skills such as planning the route including all transfers, managing time to ensure you don't miss transportation options that run unreliably, paying attention and remembering details about scheduled trip. These skills can also transfer to other aspects of life that may help students be more successful in the school setting as well. Students like June who are skilled at research and planning may find it easier to contend with the challenges of public transportation and attend school regularly. Cultivating these skills and giving students an opportunity to practice and feel confident in their ability to accomplish these tasks may be helpful. Opportunities before the school year begins for students to practice making their trip to school in a fun, low stakes way such as a community gathering,

would allow them to build the executive functioning skills necessary to time and plan the school commuter. They may also be able to meet peers with similar commutes and begin creating a peer network that will support positive attendance behaviors.

As previously discussed, peers serving as accountability partners for school attendance can be helpful in promoting regular school attendance. June's peer network provided instrumental support by teaching her how to ride the metro and making the journey with her in the morning. Encouraging these positive peer relationships and giving students opportunities to find peers with similar commutes before the school year begins may help improve attendance behaviors. This may also contribute to their feelings about facing the new school year.

Jared used to exclusively be driven to school and being able to start taking the metro was a source of newfound freedom. He said, "I like how there's way more freedom that I had in the middle school because I can like walk to the metros. I can walk anywhere…. If I want to I can use the metro to get home or I [can] stop somewhere else like Union Station and get food. It's just more freedom after school and before school." This major difference from middle school to high school helped contribute to his mindset of high school being a new slate representing opportunity and made him excited about attending school. For students who may have always been using public transportation, it would be difficult to make the commute to school seem new or exciting, especially if the route has become more complicated or the journey is longer.

Structural factors outside of student's control impact the complexity and length of their commutes. Gentrification impacts the construction of new metro stops and the changing routes students may have to navigate. Government divestment in certain areas

can impact the maintenance and availability of different metro and bus stops. School choice policies mean that the majority of Black students in DC are attending schools out of their neighborhood and even the most determined and excited students can find these commutes to be a hassle (Wolf et. al., 2019; Burdick-Will, Stein, & Grigg, 2019). When students are deciding whether or not to attend school, these considerations about what it will take to get to school impacts their desire and motivation to go to school. Derrick did not want to go to school some days because the thought of being on the bus for a very long time was not preferable to staying home. The issue of transportation is multi-faceted and schools, in partnership with government agencies, must examine the ways in which they can make student commutes easier. Overall, there is evidence that improved and more reliable transportation options could positively impact attendance behaviors. This approach can be taken in conjunction with developing the individual and interpersonal strengths that will help students navigate transportation to school.

Critical Race Theory Analysis

CRT provides an important framework to analyze the intersection of race and education when considering all of the risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism at every level of the socioecological model. First, we must understand how white supremacy and the subordination of people of color impacts student attendance and how it is maintained by the culture and systems currently in place (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Then, most importantly, CRT research is motivated by a social justice agenda and thus prioritizes the desire to transform school culture and policies to address these factors and improve the high school experience for African-American students (Solórzano & Bernal,

2001). The following analysis will be organized by the four tenets of Critical Race Theory.

CRT Tenet 1: Racism is Normal

The first tenet of CRT is that racism is normal, not aberrational in American society (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). White supremacy is upheld and propagated not only through interpersonal interactions but through structures, systems, and policies that subjugate people of color (Stovall, 2013; Delgado & Stefanic, & Harris, 2001). These systems can negatively impact a student's desire and motivation to attend school, enforce exclusionary practices that contribute to student's absenteeism, and create systemic barriers to regular attendance. Communities of color continue to name, address, and resist the ways in which white supremacist ideals and anti-Blackness are embedded into school policies and culture and students should build the skills necessary to fully participate in this resistance (Stovall, 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

On the PRACY scale, more than 50% of students reported the following situations had happened to them because of their race or ethnicity; getting poor or slow service at a restaurant or food store, being accused of something you didn't do at school, getting grades you didn't deserve, having the feeling someone was afraid of you, someone calling you an insulting name, someone being rude to you, and you not getting the respect you deserved. Previous research has shown that adolescents are able to perceive racial discrimination by the time they reach high school age but they may not yet have developed a complex understanding of more subtle or abstract forms of racism outside of discrimination. (Byrd & Hope, 2020) The majority of participants were aware of racism and ways in which people can be discriminated against but not every student

reported experiencing or witnessing racism. However, some students would describe instances of overt or covert racial discrimination without labeling it as such either because of hesitance to classify the incident in that way or being unaware that the event could be labeled that way. This finding most clearly speaks to a broader culture where racism is so normalized and accepted that it doesn't even register as negative or aberrational. The majority of participants were more likely to respond to the prompt of unequal treatment as opposed to racism or discrimination. In predominately Black schools, when the majority of students share the same race, it can be difficult for students to recognize racially discriminatory treatment or practices and ideas of colorblindness, neutrality and meritocracy which are heavily critiqued by CRT, are allowed to flourish.

Ethnic-racial socialization is described as the "behaviors, practices and social regularities that communicate information and worldviews about race and ethnicity" (Hughes et al., 2017; Byrd & Hope 2020). While socialization messages delivered in the school setting is an understudied research area, existing research on the racial socialization within a family context can provide important information about how students come to understand issues of race and identity (Byrd & Hope, 2020). One dimension of parental racial ethnic socialization that is relevant to this study is colorblind socialization. Understanding what racial socialization looks like at the school level and what norms and values contribute to the way students conceptualize race at a predominately Black school further reveals the ways in which racism is normal and ingrained in the school setting in explicit and implicit ways.

In a predominately Black school, students are not interacting with many students from different races and intergroup interactions that happen with teachers and school

leaders of different races have an inherent power imbalance as both parties do not have equal status. Students who have experienced more diverse school settings seem to fall into very different categories based on how they interpreted those interactions. At her predominately white school Miracle expressed, “I always felt like the odd one out because, like , I can't really relate to them as much as I can to kids my color,” but at a predominately Black school she said “I feel like I relate to them [other students] better because you know they’re my color, they understand like what, we had to go through in the world and like what we feel about different colored teachers and stuff like that.” Miracle who had previously been in more diverse school setting and felt discriminated against and isolated because of her race, acknowledged that unequal treatment and inequality can still happen in a predominately Black school. She described some elements of critical consciousness socialization in which youth have learned to “recognize and address differences between racial groups in power and privilege” (Byrd & Hope, 2020). Conversely, students like June who had a more positive experience in a diverse school setting described a more colorblind type of racial socialization. June said of her experience at a predominately white school,

> “So, like it was only me and like three other Black kids in my class, in most of my classes and we got treated like any other type of people. Like, I don't I don't hold the race card against anyone, like you my friend, no matter what race you are, be my friend. I don't know. I just feel like when you hear a Black person going to an all-white school or mostly white school is just like uggghhhh, or oh they probably got looked at like this or looked at like that and I’m just like well, I had most of my friends were white and we were kicking it like we were best friends so I don't understand what you're talking about. I feel like, it's just all about your vibe and how you come off across people. If you have this irritated vibe or this mean vibe nobody wants to be friends with people like you because you look or you always seem mad or mean. Have a smile on your face sometimes, greet people.”

Colorblind socialization refers to messages that encourage youth to ignore the importance

of race in society and their personal lives (Byrd & Hope, 2020). June recognizes that racial discrimination exists but is less inclined to focus on these racial differences saying "It's a lot of stuff going around talking about whites and Blacks and stuff. I don't see the point in it. Just like get along, don't matter what color you are. Tan, black, grey, pink, purple it doesn't matter just get along. There's no point in you- well, what are you fighting over? Why are you fighting over skin?" June's desire for people of all races to interact positively is a worthy goal and her understanding is influenced by her own lived experiences. She is still aware of her race and identity and how that impacts her life, and her beliefs about race and structural inequality will continue to develop as she has more life experiences. Racial colorblindness is theorized to be harmful for the academic motivation and success of minority youth and there has been increased professional development aimed at encouraging identity development when educating children of color. However, there seems to be an implicit nature of colorblindness that can be masked by the predominately Black school setting. If all students are black, the treatment or mistreatment of particular students is not seen as racially motivated even if it is rooted in the same negative stereotypes that cause mistreatment of a Black students in predominately white institutions. Jared said with regards to discrimination at his school "It's probably happened, but I haven't seen it. I feel like there's racism, too. Actually, no. This is mostly a Black school. So, I don't see no racism." Students do not see this mistreatment or unfairness as racially motivated because "we're all Black", but based on the "misbehavior" or "ghetto" behavior that is attributed to some Black students and a separation that can be felt is created.

As described in the Theme 7: Othering and Subtheme 7.2: Race Based

Perceptions, successful students including some of our regularly attending students have internalized these respectability views rooted in harmful stereotypes. Some students even feel as though they would be able to adjust easily to an all-white school setting because their behavior or academic ability has closer proximity to that of white students. Merit is not divorced from privilege, racial or otherwise, and using this narrative to justify the exclusion of some students is still harmful to all students (Sulé, 2020) When participants were asked to conjecture about the ways in which things would be different if they were attending predominately white institutions [Table 19] some students relied on stereotypes such as white students being smarter or more well behaved. Students receiving messages that Black students are inferior to white students has been a normal occurrence in the United States throughout history. These stereotypes about the lowered expectations for students of color are harmful, anti-Black, and can ultimately impact the way students feel about school, which in turn impacts their attendance and academic outcomes. Woodson (1933) claimed that education was used to maintain white dominance and internalize self-hatred within Black students and the effects of structural racism continue to negatively impact the way students see themselves and their peers (Kohli, 2008). Racism, whether implicit or explicit, is still normal in predominately Black school settings and affects students' individual feelings, interpersonal relationships, school policy and ultimately student attendance. In order to address these hidden contributors to inequity and empower students from marginalized communities to transform these policies, we must actively name and inform students and teachers about the phenomenon, reckon with the ways in which even remnants of white supremacist ideals can profoundly influence how students of color experience schools, and seek to actively disrupt this impact (Garces & Gordon da

Cruz, 2017; Milner, 2008; Howard & Navarro, 2016).

CRT Tenet 2: Interest Convergence

The second tenet of CRT is interest convergence which posits that white supremacy serves important purposes both materially and psychically and thus large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). This means that change is more likely to occur when advantages to the majority group, who is protected by social, econmic, and political power and privilege, increase beyond the equity gains of the marginalized groups (Chapman & Donner, 2015; Bell, 1980; Dudziak,1988). Bell (1980) cites desegregation within the civil rights movement as an example of interest convergence because the continued demands from Black people for equity in education were finally met when white society saw those demands to be in their best interest as segregation provoked international condemnation and threatened the United States' standing as a dominant world power (Warren, 2017). School choice and marketplace theory in education are two phenomena that best exemplify interest convergence in education with regards to chronic absenteeism.

School choice is a practice by which students do not have to attend their neighborhood or in-boundary school and can choose from a variety of schools within their city (Doyle & Feldman, 2006). While school choice attempts to address the effects that racism and racial inequality such as racially segregated housing and school divestment can have on neighborhood schools, it does not seek to dismantle those institutionalized practices which created the disparate life outcomes for people of color in the first place (Chapman & Donner, 2015; Gunier, 2004; Bell,1980). School choice is driven by this notion of competitive market theory that posits that schools will improve if

they want to attract students, however, decreased enrollment reduces the funding for these schools and makes it more difficult for them to make improvements (Doyle & Feldman, 2006; Wolf et al., 2019). In the 2017-2018 school year, 60% of students in Washington, DC did not attend their neighborhood school and Black students were least likely to attend their in-boundary school (Wolf et. al., 2019). Of all students attending charter schools in DC, 82% of Black students attended a charter school that was further from their home than their in-boundary school (Wolf et. al., 2019). All 10 students interviewed in this study did not attend their in-boundary DCPS school and only one student, Will, was attending a school that was closer than his assigned school. These decisions to attend an out of boundary school can impact attendance in both positive and negative ways. Students who have some agency in choosing their school may find a better match that they perceive to meet their academic, extracurricular, and social needs and that aligns with their future goals (Doyle & Feldman, 2006). This opportunity in-turn could combat academic apathy, increase motivation, improve school connectedness and impact student's desire to attend school and their attendance behaviors. An in-boundary school may also be closer which may reduce transportation time and increase that amount of time students can spend sleeping which may also positively impact their academic outcomes. Conversely, based on the findings presented in Theme 13: Strong Community Ties, attending an out of boundary school could also negatively impact attendance behaviors.

In addition to ways that school choice can benefit or harm Black students, the report also revealed that white students were most likely to attend their in-boundary schools but most White/non-Hispanic and Hispanic students opted out of their in-

boundary school when the school served predominantly Black students and the schools they chose to attend were more racially diverse and had fewer Black students (Wolf et. al., 2019). White students were also least likely to change their school choice throughout the year indicating that they were typically satisfied with the schools they chose (Wolf et. al., 2019) Based on residential segregation, most white families live in areas with in-boundary schools that are well resourced and serve fewer students meeting the at-risk designation. However, as gentrification increases and more white people begin living in DC neighborhoods with higher African American populations, the in-boundary schools in those areas serve more African- American students and more students that meet the at-risk designation. Schools serving higher percentages of at-risk students typically have fewer resources to serve students with higher levels of need (Wolf et. al., 2019). Previous research has shown that White families conceptualize these schools to be problematic and assume that there will be higher parental involvement and more opportunities for their students at other schools (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Chapman & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2011; Roda & Wells, 2013). While the DC report could not determine if families' selections were based on student demographics, there seems to be clear evidence that school choice can be beneficial to white families as well, supporting the position that interest-convergence helps policies like school choice in being supported and maintained (Wolf et. al., 2019). The school choice application process also happens online and if parents do not take part in the process, their student is typically assigned to their neighborhood school. Prior research has shown that there are barriers for undeserved families to even take advantage of the school choice options in the same way that upper income white families do, further showing that school choice is an area where

the advantages to white people can sometimes even surpass the equity gains of marginalized communities (Wolf et. al., 2019)

Another area where market place theory has entered education is through the notion of workforce development. Some charter school advocates believe that schools should aid in the "production of qualified workers to fit the changing economic landscape of the U.S" and they equate "streamlining students into the workforce and reducing unemployment" with social justice initiatives for low- income communities (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Hankins & Martin, 2006; Lipman, 2011). This emphasis on workforce development is evidenced by the discussion in the Theme 2: High School- Future Alignment and subthemes 2.2 Future Stability and 2.3 Future Exploration and Planning where students described their desired future career paths. Creation of a workforce is beneficial to both the majority group and marginalized groups and because this strategy doesn't actually address issues of structural racism that limit career options and advancement opportunities for Black students, there is no real loss of privilege or status for the majority group. The economic gap still exists between white and Black members of the workforce because of institutionalized racism and differential resources and completion rates at highly selective colleges "confer substantial labor market advantages" to white people including higher lifetime earnings, opportunities for advancement and social empowerment (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). Ultimately, these policies, however well-intentioned, do not dismantle the structurally embedded nature of racism in the US and serve the interests of the majority group just as much if not more than they claim to serve the interests of marginalized groups (Garces, Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017).

CRT Tenet 3: Race as a Social Construct

The third tenet of CRT is that races are socially constructed categories that are not objective, inherent, or fixed to any biological or genetic reality and thus society can invent, manipulate, and retire them when convenient (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Black people are not a monolith and there is rich diversity present among students in a preodminately Black school context and the concept of race is somewhat flexible. This flexibility impacts individual, interpersonal, and community level factors that impact attendance.

Students were given an open ended space to further describe any previously unidentified ethnic groups with which they identified. Responses included, "black" "African- American" "Black Lives Matter" "lightskin & black" "biracial, "native american" and "black and asian." Skin color specifically was mentioned by a few students as an identity characteristic that is used to differentiate between students. When asked if they attend a school where students look like them in terms of race/ethnicity, both Fred and Alexis responded no and Fred said that he and his brother have often "been the only ones who look like this." Fred self-identifies as biracial and as Black but students are attuned to identity and cultural differences and perceived proximity to whiteness can also shape student experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Neither Fred nor Alexis believed that this had impacted their school experiences but Fred shared that he "gets annoyed by people making white jokes" and that if he were a school leader he would "want a little more diversity" in his ideal school setting. He described these incidents of being compared to a white person as the few instances of discrimination that he has experienced and he thought it happened "because of ignorance or like not knowing any better." He said that "people just see me, hear my voice and think 'Oh, he's White.'"

Despite identifying as Black and biracial, Fred's identity was questioned by his peers exemplifying the ways in which social context can dictate the construct of race as opposed to genetic makeup. Fred expressed that his reaction was to just ignore those incidents but they did impact the ways he moved through school and the people with which he chose not to interact. While it did not impact his own personal desire to go to school, it did impact his beliefs on the importance of diversity in the school setting. Other students in similar situations may react differently, and this reaction could potentially have a negative impact on student attendance.

CRT Tenet 4: Counterstories for Unique Voices of Color

The fourth tenant of CRT is that a unique voice of color that is imbued with history and experiences with oppression exists and these voices are critical and legitimate counterstories to existing narratives (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Students who are actually experiencing daily what it means to attend school at a predominately Black school, are often not invited to participate in discussions or aid in the decision making process because of their age and status. Young people of color tend to be further marginalized and deprived of a meaningful voice by the traditional power relations and structures within the school setting (Black, 2011; Baroutsis et al., 2016) These ten student personal narratives invite readers into a new and unfamiliar world of a Black high school freshman in this current time period and give voice to this typically marginalized group (Delgado, Stefancic, & Harris, 2001; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

Student voice is considered a central component of democratic education yet many adolescents report feeling alienated, that they have no voice, and that no one cares about what they have to say (Mitra, 2006b; Mitra 2018; Cook-Sather, 2006). Among the

9th grade cohort, only 34.7% of students reported that students have the opportunity to speak, and be listened to, in class. This feeling of alienation can contribute to apathy and disengagement with school which can impact attendance behaviors. Kay, a student who reported feelings of school apathy, described his ideal school as one where students "can voice their opinions about what they want." Kay exemplifies the importance of valuing student voice and the ways in which active engagement of students not just as receivers of knowledge but givers of knowledge can positively impact individual students, school culture, and improve the overall high school experience (Mitra, 2018). The ways in which student voice is incorporated into planning varies and Mitra (2018) describes three tiers of student voice activities: listening, collaboration, and leadership. The corresponding levels involve students (1) being heard (2) collaborating with adults and (3) building capacity for leadership (Mitra, 2006a). Each level of student participation can impact student attendance differently.

At the listening tier, adults recognize that students are often neglected data sources and elicit student perspectives and then interpret and analyze that data in order to inform strategies, practices, or interventions (Mitra, 2018). This approach can be done through individual interviews, surveys, or sometimes through representative bodies like student councils where elected individuals represent student voices with the oversight of school administration (Baroutsis et al., 2016). This listening process can be problematic as students are often not involved in the analysis and exclusionary criteria for participants can sometimes further silence or blame students who need additional support (Mitra, 2018). Ultimately, while listening is an important first step in unearthing counterstories from traditionally marginalized students that can challenge dominant narratives, it does

not encourage the deeper student participation that can help build trust in the school community (Baroutsis et al., 2016).

The collaboration tier represents a deeper level of participation where students engage in problem and decision making alongside adults (Baroutsis et al., 2016) At this tier, students are more involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data that they contribute (Mitra, 2018). While adults still tend to have the final say on group activities and decisions, students are able to develop important skills that enhance their agency, belonging, and confidence all of which can positively impact attendance and academic behaviors(Mitra, 2018). Collaboration is often a comfortable choice for school administrators as it creates meaningful opportunities for student participation and inclusion of student voices of color without relinquishing much control in the decision-making process. Tokenistic or merely symbolic opportunities for youth participation can have adverse effects including increased alienation and disconnect from school (Mitra, 2018).

The leadership tier is where leadership capacities are developed in young people and adults aid in that development (Mitra, 2018; Baroutsis et al., 2016). Coalitions at this tier are often community based opportunities as schools are typically less willing to give students decision making authority. These external efforts must then attempt to gain legitimacy in the school setting and the trust of school leaders in order to influence systemic issues in the school setting. Simply acknowledging the power differential in traditional student-teacher roles is not enough without giving up some of that power to restructure youth-adult relationships in order to demonstrate to students that their opinions and experiences matter. Student voice and the development of leadership and

activism skills has great benefits for students including improved academic performance and competence beliefs, increased student engagement and motivation, and encouraging belonging (Mitra, 2018). The benefits of empowering students to lead and advocate for change in their schools far outweigh the risks to the status quo and school leaders should embrace the opportunity to amplify the voices of the students they serve.

Intersectionality

CRT also calls for an analysis of racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression such as sexism, classism, homophobia, and ableism (Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). The term intersectionality addresses the ways in which multiple forms of inequality interact and how our complex identities composed of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability can shape the specific ways in which individuals experience bias (Gillborn, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 1995). It is necessary to explore interlocking systems of oppression when analyzing race and racism in public education to better understand how social inequities are created and sustained; ultimately this effort encourages coalition building aimed at challenging the status quo (Chapman & Donnor, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 1995). In addition to the intersectionality of age and race discussed with regards to student voice, the intersection of race, gender, and disability emerged as important areas of focus for analysis.

Previous educational studies, especially those concerning school discipline and future life outcomes, have primarily focused on Black male students and Black female students are still an understudied subgroup (Annamma et al., 2019; Caton, 2012). Typically the justification for this focus is the disparity in educational and criminality outcomes between Black men and Black women. However, Black female students are

still disproportionately impacted by the individual, interpersonal, school and neighborhood climate factors that affect attendance behaviors (Annamma et al., 2019). Also, there was no statistically significant difference [χ^2=1.613, p =.204] between End of Year chronic absenteeism rates for young women (16.9%) and young men (23.9%), While the outcomes are similar, there were some differences in predictive models for End of Year absenteeism that reveal that male and female students may have different experiences that are influenced by their gender. We must explore the ways in which the intersection between gender and race impacts how students experience risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism.

The two levels of the socioecological model where gender differences were most apparent were the interpersonal and community level. Specifically, young men and young women differed in their descriptions of their interpersonal relationships with the opposite gender and the way they were perceived based on their race in public settings. Most students described their closest peers as being from the same gender but the few girls who had close male friends shared how relationships between boys and girls were perceived. June remarked specifically on her father's overreaction to her having male friends and how that made her feel. Specifically, this male friend was someone who she traveled to school with and felt like they positively impacted each other's attendance behaviors. The strain placed on their relationship could potentially impact the relationship in the future and in turn the attendance behaviors. Though young men of color still face oppression, there may be some level of male privilege that protects them from their intergender relationships being heavily scrutinized which in turn could impact their attendance behaviors. At the community level, the majority of the young male

participants reported instances of racial profiling or being perceived as a threat because of their race when out in public whereas only one female student reported this perception. For some male students, this impacted the way they carried themselves in public, thus increasing anxiety which can impact attendance. For others, they claimed not to care what people thought of them but the perceptions sometimes caused inconveniences in their days from being followed in stores to being stopped by the police, which ultimately could also impact their attendance.

During the recruitment phase, it became apparent that young women and young men may experience chronic absenteeism and regular attendance differently. Finding chronically absent young women who wanted to discuss their attendance experience was a challenge and despite my best efforts, I was unable to recruit any of the eligible female participants. Conversely, recruiting regularly attending young women was a much easier task and it was challenging to recruit young men who regularly attended school. If the dominant narrative is that young men need more support in the school setting, there may be less stigma for a young man to share his experience than a young woman who needs additional support. It may be a point of pride for young women who are regularly attending to share their experiences as stories of excellence or perseverance whereas regularly attending young men may feel differently. Throughout the interviews, participants described those who were chronically absent in gender neutral terms and there was little inquiry around perceived gender differences with regard to absenteeism. However, with regards to counseling services, June described a group she was in that was specifically for young women where they used journaling exercises and participated in group activities focused on talking about and processing the emotions of being a young

woman growing up without a father. As previously discussed, June felt this opportunity was more effective in improving her mental health and providing coping strategies than the one on one opportunities with a therapist. She felt a connection to other group members because of their shared experiences and enjoyed having this outlet. It is unclear, however, if the gender composition of the group impacted its perceived effectiveness. Further research is necessary to better understand the intersectionality between gender and race with regards to chronic absenteeism.

Similarly, participants were not explicitly asked about disability or the ways in which special education status or perceived ability could impact attendance behaviors, even though special education status is associated with increased risk for chronic absenteeism. There was no specific inquiry around this topic for participants because the privacy of students receiving special education services is protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and only directory information was requested for all students to ensure there was no harm or invasion of privacy throughout the research process. Students did not disclose their special education status in interviews, whether they were unaware of it or didn't feel it was necessary to share as it wasn't explicitly asked for throughout the interview process. Students may also have different understandings of how their status as a student receiving special education services fits with their identity and this understanding can change and evolve throughout their high school career. However, based on their descriptions of class sizes and the lesson delivery model used in their classrooms, delivery of special education services was sometimes apparent. Special education status and disability can impact students' school experiences and their attendance behaviors. As evidenced by AJ's experience, whether a student has

qualified for an IEP or 504 plan, chronic health conditions can impact attendance and the ways that students are perceived by teachers. Specifically, teachers may hold beliefs about students in special education such as they "act out more, are less capable of acquiring knowledge, or are more responsible for their behavior than other students" that can impact the way they are treated, their interactions with the school discipline system, and in turn the school climate which can affect attendance behaviors (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Further research is necessary to better understand the intersectionality between disability and race with regards to chronic absenteeism.

Reframing Dominant Narratives and Cultural Wealth

Chronic absenteeism among African American students has traditionally been framed with a focus on deficits including individual shortcomings, negative interpersonal and institutional influences, and the historical and structural components of inequality in the US that contribute to increased rates of absenteeism and disparate educational outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2007). However, through the current study we have seen evidence of unique, positive characteristics possessed by Black youth that can encourage regular attendance. Through analysis of findings using Yosso's framework of cultural wealth, we can explore strengths of African-American students that can be further developed in all students in order to encourage regular attendance.

Aspirational capital is described as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived barriers was evident among many of our participants (Yosso, 2005). As described in the Theme 2: High School-Future Alignment, all participants regardless of attendance behaviors had hopes and dreams for the future. Regularly attending students had done more exploration and planning for their future careers and thus had done more assessment of real or perceived barriers. Students like

June, Miracle, and Jared had even considered potential backup careers in case their first-choice careers did not work out and yet remained confident that they would be able to lead fulfilling adult lives and achieve success in areas of which they were most passionate. Encouraging students to explore and plan career and life goals for the future will give them an opportunity to assess real and perceived barriers to achieving their goals and create contingency plans that will increase their confidence in their ability to achieve those goals. Students who feel more confident in their ability to achieve their goals will be able to maintain their hopes and dreams. Along with that confidence, students will gain a better understanding of how school and the academic and personal skills they are developing can impact their ability to achieve their future goals. This combination of confidence and understanding can impact student feelings towards school and in turn their attendance behaviors.

Linguistic capital describes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication in more than one language, style, or medium such as art, music, or poetry (Yosso, 2005). Many of the regularly attending students shared the ways in which the arts gave them a creative outlet for self-expression. Through dance, cheer, and step Alexis, June, and Septembra were able to feel excited, learn new things, and display their talents. Jared had the same opportunity with music and while Miracle was not involved in any extracurricular activities, she valued creative expression saying "high school really pushes people to like be who they are" and she advocated for changing the school uniform rules so that she could express herself creatively through fashion. These creative outlets both in electives and extracurricular activities, represented students' favorite activities and moments of the day which helped motivate them to attend school regularly.

Miracle also acknowledged that “some people just don’t feel like they can be creative here” and the negative impact that can have on attendance behaviors.

In addition to self-expression through the arts, Septembra, June, and Jared described having different styles of speaking when in school as compared to when they are outside of school in their communities. Septembra shared “I'll talk a certain way and like I’ll be all nice or whatever and then like outside of school I’m just a whole 'nother person.” Jared expressed “So like the way I talk in general, people have said I sound white, I don’t sound Black and I mean that made me feel some type of way, but when I'm with my true friends, my true emotions, I talk like me, I guess.” He felt the difference in his speaking styles had more to do with who he was speaking to as opposed to the location, sharing that even though he regarded his parents as best friends, when speaking to them he gives them a “high, high level of respect.” He was also the only student who asked at the start of our interview if he was allowed to cuss in order to better assess the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain language and adjust his speaking style to the set parameters. Despite agreeing that she had different speaking styles in school compared to outside of school, June also understood the importance and value of communication that may be deemed inappropriate for school. June shared,

> “Well, saying that we come from what they would call the hood or the projects, whatever you wanna call it, we all have our ways of communicating and some ways that we communicate aren’t school friendly but that's how we understand each other and that's how we talk to each other. So, um well, we- we have fun ways of communicating and then some ways are just like, if a altercation was to come up, some people take it as, oh, you not supposed to do this in school, you not supposed to do that in school but that's not the way we were taught. Like some things, some things aren’t meant for school, but some things have to be tooken out in a way at school. Just because of the way we… the people we hang around or the place, we hang around or how we grew up.”

June acknowledged the difference in linguistic styles that are seen as acceptable in school or unacceptable but she also recognized the importance of knowing when a situation, even in the school setting, called for a different communication style. It's important to note that all of these communication styles should be viewed as equally valuable and there should be no hierarchy based on dominant narratives about formal speech, honorifics, or stereotypes about different styles of speech. The process of discernment students use when deciding what speaking style or medium of expression they should use in a particular setting is an important social skill that can be developed in all students without denigrating their styles of speech, cultures, or identity. Finally, there was some evidence of strong storytelling skills and the importance of storytelling as a means of communication for participants in both attendance groups. Similarly to the reaction described in the theme Staying to Myself (Besides my Ride of Dies), these interpersonal skills can sometimes be discouraged in the school setting. Harnessing that potential instead of stifling it as a form of communication in the school setting could have a positive impact on attendance behaviors.

Familial capital refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among families (blood relatives or other important kinship ties) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). Many participants described examples of familial capital and the important and influential conversations they had with family members and other important adults. These conversations impacted their plans for the future, their values about education, and the decisions they made about school attendance and behavior. However, despite feeling close to their parents, many students reported that they didn't talk to their families about school. Families can be encouraged to incorporate

stories of education and discussion of daily school activities into the already meaningful conversations that they have with their students. These potential conversations could positively impact students' feelings towards school and thus their attendance.

Social capital describes networks of people and community resources including peers and other social contacts that can offer instrumental and emotional support (Yosso, 2005). Students described numerous examples of the instrumental and emotional support they received from peers, family, and mental health professionals. Most impactful for regular attendance were the positive mental health supports described in the Subtheme 5.1: Counseling and the positive peers encouraging attendance described in the Theme 6: Staying to Myself (Besides my Ride or Dies). The most prevalent community resource referenced were Rec Centers but there needs to be more exploration of the untapped community resources, the instrumental and emotional support those resources can offer, and the ways in which they can positively impact attendance. Especially given the inverse relationship between neighborhood attachment and attendance and the neighborhood pride described in Theme 13: Strong Community Ties, an opportunity to leverage strong community relationships to improve attendance behaviors exists.

Navigational capital refers to skills a student of color uses to maneuver through social institutions, especially those not created with Communities of Color in mind (Yosso, 2005). As described in the Subtheme 12.1: Getting Sent Out of Class, some students gained navigational capital skills as a means of survival in the school setting. Knowing how to navigate school systems, school discipline and peer interactions made a difference in students' academic and attendance outcomes. Regularly attending students often used navigational capital to access additional resources and thrive. As described in

the Theme 6: Staying to Myself (Besides my Ride or Dies) certain navigational skills, such as limiting peer social interaction throughout the day, are prioritized and positively reinforced. In addition to this navigational skill, knowing who to go to for different resources and information emerged as an important skill for positively navigating school systems. June described this process of accessing resources saying,

> "If I do need help finding something or getting or resource or trying to do whatever I do, the closest person I would go to is one of my teachers, not like any teacher, but one of MY teachers. If they don't know then I'll go to like my Dean and if he don't know then, I'll find another Dean and most of the time, one of the deans will know if a teacher doesn't know. I don't know what's going on with the D.C. schools, but I feel like the teachers don't know ANYTHING. They be like 'I'm waiting on the Dean to tell me. I'm waiting on the principal to tell me. I'm waiting on [principal name] to tell me.' I'm just like, wow, like, y'all don't know anything… like you need to tap into the tea, Like we need we need information. Like as students, we want to know what's happening. It's like the teachers don't know anything. I'm like, well if teachers don't know nothing I'm going to a Dean, but yeah I feel comfortable knowing that if I don't know something a Dean will or a teacher will."

June thought this process of information gathering was a necessary skill and shared that she felt she could be successful "as long as I know what I'm doing or I'm getting the right help from the right person, the right information, I feel like I'm good." June's knowledge of which teachers or Deans to talk to and her relationships with those individuals aided in her successful navigation of the school setting and she felt very comfortable going through this process. This aligns with the findings in the Theme 8: School as an Individual Endeavor where regularly attending students described the need to tap into school resources including teachers order to be successful. Explicitly informing all students about available school resources, demystifying the process for achieving academic success beyond "doing your work" and making it seem like a feasible option for all students, while also building navigational skills will have positive impacts on students' educational outcomes.

Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005). AJ and Miracle were the only students to report having seen another student challenging inequality and Miracle was the only student who had actually engaged in resistant behavior herself. AJ described a situation in which his cousin and one of his closest friends "doesn't like it when people mess with like people who don't mess with nobody" and when he sees that behavior his cousin intervenes. AJ went on to say that he thinks "it's cool or whatever" and that in a similar situation he would do the same thing but that he hasn't yet been in that situation. Miracle described many instances throughout her school history including at her current school where she thought something wasn't right and challenged it. Earlier in her school career in a more diverse school setting, Miracle shared, "I had a problem with my teacher that felt like they were, like, racist because it was more white teachers than Black teachers. So, it was more situations like when I got into it with them, I felt like they were being like a certain type of way towards me because of the color of my skin." She elaborated that "there would be other kids in the class doing something and she'd point me out and I didn't really like that and sometimes I just felt like she didn't like me, or felt some type of way about me." Despite being in elementary school at the time, Miracle voiced her concerns to the teacher in a way she described as "getting into arguments or altercations" and then she and the teacher "really talked about it… talked about our differences and stuff, and we were able to hug it out and be fine." She described feeling "apologetic" about the way she had handled it but this experience impacted the way Miracle handles perceived racism. As described in the Theme 14: Perceptions of Criminality, Miracle believes that listening to everyone's explanations and having "a reasonable conversation"

is the best way handle these situations. Miracle is skilled in articulating and discussing unequal treatment with adults in the school setting and that skillset has helped her find common ground with teachers regardless of how she feels about them, form deeper connections, and have some agency in her educational experience.

When compliance is emphasized, resistant capital isn't always nurtured and can be more of a liability when trying to navigate the school setting. June described this sentiment sharing "Well, I'm minding my business and going about my day. I don't do anything to start or challenge anything. If it's not none of my business… If I'm not challenging schoolwork... No." When asked if he had seen anyone else challenge inequality/ unequal treatment or resist in some way, Jared responded, "No. I don't hang out with those people," revealing that those students exist but that he did interact with them. Resistant capital was the area with the most possibility for growth among the sample. While students were sometimes unaware of oppressive structures and thus had little motivation to advocate for change, when they did describe inequity or unequal treatment, they could not articulate successful ways in which they had seen someone challenge that inequality. They were however, passionate about sharing their opinions and sharing recommendations and suggestions for ways to improve their school. Through youth leadership development with a focus on civic engagement, activism, and using one's voice to affect change, we can improve student engagement and positively affect attendance and academic outcomes.

Limitations

Study limitations should be noted for both the quantitative and qualitative components of the current study. Overall, the results may not be generalizable to all

African American freshman students attending predominantly Black high schools nationally because of the small sample size, the charter school setting, and Washington D.C.'s specific context as a historically majority Black city. For the quantitative component, End of Year attendance was based on attendance data only midway through the third quarter, 140 days of school, and students missing 10% (14 or more days) of school. Previous studies have shown that absences tend to increase in the spring towards the end of the school year so this study more than likely underestimates the prevalence of chronic absenteeism and this result in turn impacts the strength of the associations observed. In addition to missing data caused by students who did not participate in the survey, there was attrition throughout the survey and some later questions were not answered by as many students as the earlier questions. To address this missing data, multiple imputation methods were used and analysis was done to understand and explain the differences between those who participated in the survey and those who did not. Finally, causal conclusions are unclear and should be regarded with caution until results are replicated in additional studies.

With respect to qualitative data analysis, we are not able to generalize to the entire population of ninth graders attending predominately Black schools. Participants self-selected into participating in the study so there may be important differences between these students and eligible students who chose not to participate. Despite building rapport across multiple interviews, students may have been reluctant to share about certain topics because of social desirability or the confidentiality breach protocol outlined in the assent document before each interview. Also, as data were collected simultaneously, member checking with students was focused on clarifying specific points within each participant's

individual narrative and confirming or challenging initial interpretations as opposed to overall themes and findings found in case comparison analysis. Even though member checking occurred with other school stakeholders, the process of member checking with students must continue to ensure that students have the opportunity to critique and offer their input on these findings.

Implications

The current study has focused heavily on uncovering and discussing the multilevel factors that impact school attendance. The following implications of this research address the ways in which important stakeholders from researchers to school leaders and government officials can strengthen the transition to high school for African American students and improve attendance outcomes. In addition to improved educational attainment which is associated with better health outcomes, addressing the individual and structural factors that strengthen the transition to high school will have innumerable public health implications from improved nutrition, sleep habits, and mental health wellness to cardiovascular health and the impact of weathering.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study have many implications for practices and strategies that schools can implement in order to strengthen the high school transition and improve attendance outcomes. In centering student voices, these recommendations will address needs students have explicitly expressed and include their own suggestions as well.

Student Recommendations

Table 22 displays suggestions from ninth grade students for ways they could improve attendance and the overall high school experience to move their high schools

closer to their ideal school setting. Students offer critical analysis of current policies and strategies while conjecturing on what recommendations will be most helpful and why. Their words offer insight into how deeply students understand the educational landscape and their suggestions are at times in accordance with best evidence-based practices. As experts on their own lived realities, these recommendations should be held in high regard and carefully considered by decision makers.

Table 22

Student Observations and Recommendations

Participant	Observations and Recommendations
Alexis	• [On what DC does well in education] Educating some…but not everyone. I say the metro is pretty good and the bus. The bus rides are pretty good and the big school buildings are pretty good. • [On what DC could do better in education] With transportation, I think they could like have more available rides to certain schools. They can have like more like metal detectors because a lot of kids bring in certain stuff into the school that people don't know about. • [On what DC could do better with attendance] Because the attendance [in DC] is not that good and mainly because of kids. Well, parents letting kids choose what they want to do most of the time and also it could probably be because of transportation. • [If I were principal what I would change] Make the lunch longer, like the lunch period longer because we only have uh 20, like 20 to 25 minutes to eat and for some people, that's not enough. Make the day shorter because kids could get more sleep and that's it. • [On what would be in my ideal school] We would have like no uniform. The lunch will be catered to us. • [On encouraging attendance] Maybe having like parties, like maybe like the attendance thing. Uh if you have the best attendance, which class has the best attendance, then they get a pizza party or individuals with the best attendance will get a prize or something like that. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] By not encouraging them, like not giving them something.
AJ	• [On what DC does well in education] Um for the schools that are like good, they do everything correctly but for schools that aren't as good they probably just want more money or something. • [On what DC could do better in education] Uh help out the schools that aren't as maintained. • [If I were principal what I would change] Oh, I would... if I was a principal of a school… can you change what time you have to come to school? [I would change it to] Like 10 or 11 because no one probably really feel like waking up at six or seven in the morning just to come in to school. • [On encouraging attendance] Um I don't know besides the prizes thing that's probably the most, strongest thing. I mean I wouldn't really care if they had it. It'd be cool if they had it but it probably wouldn't really affect me cause it's based off how I just feel. • [On encouraging attendance] Like say coming to school and leaving early. Just get what you needed to get done and later you can leave early if it gets worse.

Table 22: Student Observations and Recommendations (Continued)

Participant	Observations and Recommendations
Derrick	• [On what DC does well in education] They got programs for you if you like, if you stayed back and like you need to finish high school. Yeah something like that. • [On what DC could do better in education] Make it so like it get easier and then not harder at the end of like when you bout to graduate. It starts off easy and then get real hard, Yeah I just want it be all easy so I can hurry up and pass. • [On what DC could do better with attendance] Make sure like, say if you missed a day and you had like a good reason but it aint on paper because like you aint go to the doctor, they should excuse it. • [If I were principal what I would change] Uh Less homework a little bit more with class work instead of homework. Make sure everybody get the help they need to pass. • [On encouraging attendance] Prizes. Like probably like snacks, candy or probably gift cards. Like if you come to school during like three weeks straight and not being absent at all then you will get the gift card. Just probably like Chick-Fil-A, McDonalds, Chipotle, or like a game gift card or like just the little Visa gift cards probably like 15, 20 dollars. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] Harassing them probably. Keep saying we gon call CPS if you don't come to school. Uh Uh won't work at all cause that's gon make me not come to school if you say that. Like I don't like being told what to do like stuff like that.
Fred	• [On what would be in my ideal school] Kind of want a little more diversity cause like I said, every school I've been to, I'm the only one who looks like this. Yes, and just I'm just kind of like... why is that? Why is every school I've been to been majority, been majority, well, darker skinned people? Why am I the only one who looks like this? • [On encouraging attendance] I don't know, I guess parents. Yeah or the parent talking to the kids about your- your attendance. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] Have the school come to your house and just yank you out, that's unrealistic but I think that does actually happen.
Jared	• [On what DC does well in education] They get their point across and help you understand. Also, this school has two teachers [in the classroom].That's one thing I like about this school. It gives two- it has two teachers so one teacher, the teacher doesn't have to stop the whole lesson to help one person while the other teacher could do that for you and that's like really good so it doesn't feel like you're interrupting the whole class and making everyone wait. • [On what DC could do better in education] Well, I think they could do better, could work on pacing a little bit more. Pacing as in OK, so I'll give an example. People who are on a subject, right, and like boom it's already over. Now, somebody might think we spent enough time or we don't have time to spend on this subject. I feel that there's no time on fractions. I always hated fractions. I never understood it at all but I feel like there's a poor sense of pacing because like we didn't really understand because we really did understand it, we didn't really like- how do I word this out. We didn't pace it that well and that caused it to be like I didn't get enough time to understand the whole topic to where I can regurgitate it and say what you have said …

Table 22: Student Observations and Recommendations (Continued)	
Participant	Observations and Recommendations
Jared (continued)	• …I'll need only more time to do so and more time on the subject and a reason. Maybe we can all get it down and remember it very well and that's probably why we can like, we can do tests better and all that other stuff. Pacing is the most important thing right now. • [On what DC could do better with attendance] I feel like you encourage kids more to attendance like you know the rewards. That feels like the best thing right now because I feel like kids like me would have this unknown determination to go to school. • [If I were principal what I would change] Change the lunch, change the lines. I'll probably be more lenient on some students that got sent ISS. If I was in control of ISS, I'll be more lenient on those kids because, you know, I don't really see kids as like, OK, they're doing bad, right, but they're probably just having a bad day. Maybe it is like, you know, something's going on at home. You really can't blame the kid. I mean, you can blame a kid for doing bad things at school but there has to be a reason of why they did it. You know, there can't be a reason why they just said that they just wanted to do it. I mean, there's probably a reason why they'll say that, but maybe they're just hiding out the fact that something's going on at home and they don't want to share with us. You know. • [On what would be in my ideal school] I'm gonna be real with you just one or two things. Nice teachers that know how to teach, they got more than a bachelor's degree in probably, their subject say where they feel comfortable. They feel safe. The teachers feel safe they don't have to worry about the kids causing harm to them because I accept kids that'll do harm to people. I'll probably check their history, if they got suspended all that stuff. You know? I want my school to be a good school. Probably like maybe a private school, maybe and then good lunch. I feel like the things that we serve to our kids here aren't the best situation. • [On encouraging attendance] You really can't convince a teenager. Only thing you can really convince them with is maybe money. It makes me sad because some kids, some kids like me are reasonable. Some kids they just like don't reason and they just don't want to listen to you and that's just some teenagers, you know. They go around thinking and you can't really convince that. Put something out there for them that like you're bribing them like a moth to a flame, basically. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] Threatening them… because you make them seem like you pull up that image that you're not that. You're a threat to them and like, I'm a call your mom, I'll call your dad. You want to build a relationship with the person you're talking to, with the kid with the teenager you talking to because, you know, it's always good if you have a relationship with a kid that you're trying to help. They might actually listen to you. So that's good. I don't think threatening them will work at all. That's making it worse.
June	• [On what DC does well in education] Their resources. This is what they have so much more to offer than some. Like a lot of the things that they can give a child, they did. Like they provide so much more to a regular school in [another school district] like even being a charter school like they provide way more than what any [school in another district] can provide. • [On what DC could do better with attendance] I feel like they do good. They're, the schools, sending notifications to our parents about school and kids coming to school. I feel like it's a good thing.

Table 22: Student Observations and Recommendations (Continued)	
Participant	Observations and Recommendations
June (continued)	• [If I were principal what I would change] The uniform thing. Like sometimes like I don't understand like sometimes it be getting hot outside it be getting real hot and sometimes it be getting hot in the school. No one wants to sit there and wear pants all the time. like I would change it to wearing, like girls wear skirts. I wouldn't be like, you can wear any skirts you want because like it's high school and we all know how high school gets but I like would allow them to wear skirts and shorts and stuff but like the school is too strict on the pants rule, and um all the time we get in school and out of school and all these referrals you get written up for and a detention. Like if you come to school late and stuff. I'm just like, that's too much. Y'all gotta understand. Everyone don't live close to the school. It takes time to get to the school, then sometimes it don't be us like I woke up early one day and the bus ran out of gas on the bridge so I had to get off on the bridge and walk across the bridge to get to the train station. That took time out of my day. How was I supposed to know the bus was going to run out of gas in the middle of the bridge? I didn't know that so like the referrals for coming to school late or for getting to school a certain time or getting to class late. I will probably extend that like, I don't, it would be so many things at this school that I would change because it's just I feel as though some of the rules are unfair or just crazy. • [On what would be in my ideal school] I would say I would- OK, well it's gonna be a big school. I feel like my school would have a swimming pool in it somewhere probably at the first level of the school. I don't know yet. But I feel like what most schools are missing is a swimming pool. But um yeah I would definitely put a swimming pool at our school, somewhere around our school, if not in the school. Um the basketball court, the gym would be bigger, way bigger so that, because I want a lot of kids to come to m- if I had a school, I would want a lot of kids come to my school and the school not be so packed and built up. Um the time you get in school, I would start school around 9:00 because I don't understand this time. We be waking up too early. I say 9:00 and I will probably end it at 4:00 because yeah I think four would be a good time to get out like usual. Everybody, doesn't matter what grade you're in, I would say five classes will be enough because I don't- we be having so many classes and then it's A day B day with them. We have homework and we have projects that we have to do and everything just gets thrown on top of each other, and I'm just like I don't understand that. And I feel like every Friday will be like a chill day, like a movie day or a catch-up day for everybody. That's, I don't know I feel like we get too much work and we don't get to finish it up and then they give us deadlines and we don't get to meet it because we're still working on something else. Lunch will be a little longer. I think we only got like 25 minutes to eat or so. It's about that time, but I would extend it at least 30 min, at least a solid 30 minutes cause we eat but we don't get to communicate with our friends and stuff and it's strict like no getting up, no, walking around and I get it, it's high school. People like starting drama, but everybody don't have their friends that they want to talk to in their classes at all. So the fact that we can't get up and walk around the lunchroom to communicate and say hey to our friends it's just, it's too strict. I don't understand that. Um what else? I think I would plan more trips like I don't know, I feel like we get two little trips or the trips that we do have like no one plans- like they don't give the students some times to pick which trips they would like to go to at least like the snowboarding one. I don't know who came up with that, but I'm like, it's too cold for that like no one wants to do that. All the kids were like is too cold. No one wants to go snowboarding like who picked that it too way to cold. I get it. The only time it's snow around, it's in the cold, but it was too cold. Like no one wanted to go. And um I don't know. I think it just would be more fun. I don't know.

Table 22: Student Observations and Recommendations (Continued)	
Participant	Observations and Recommendations
June (continued)	• [On encouraging attendance] I don't know. I just feel like, just make school more fun. I mean school it's always going to be some type of drama, so that's never going to stop but I don't know. I feel like the work since this is a college prep school, it's going to be a lot of work but I feel like if the work wasn't so much and the kids weren't so loud and annoying and like I feel like if it was a chill school, I feel like kids wouldn't mind going to school cause like they enjoy being there. But you come home with headaches and attitudes and always getting in fights and always getting in arguments with the teachers and no one really wants to go to school. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] Always telling their parents. I feel like that's the worst way it's like you're not making anything better by snitching. Basically, cause all that's going to do is put more pressure on the kid by you and their parents and it's just going to. If they get pressured by their parents and they do come to school, they're going to take their anger out on you because you were the one who told their parents. I don't feel like that makes anything any better. Like what are you doing, I'm already going through this at home and here and you make it worse by telling my parent I didn't get to school on time. So, I can go home. and hear what they have to say and some parents, some kids, that's worse than getting punished. Get yelled at by parents about not being a school I don't understand like why would you do that?
Kay	• [On what DC does well in education] Like the schools, like they provide stuff for school that they know kids need and all. • [On non-boring schools] Like they get out early, they get to wear whatever they want, and like they can voice their opinions about what they want • [If I were principal what I would change] We could wear regular clothes. Um, we could leave at 3:30. • [On what would be in my ideal school] Like kids would have more breaks. Like they classes wouldn't be so long like lunch-they lunch probably be like longer. • [On encouraging attendance] Um make it more like... like make it like ideas that they want to do like make it fun for them so they keep coming back. Better lunch and shorter classes. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] I feel like it's no worst way [to encourage students to come to school] to be honest. It's just the stuff they probably like. Say if kids don't really care like…
Miracle	• [On what DC could do better in education] I know people, like police officers and stuff, they'll see kids out of school knowing they need to be in school and they won't say anything. They could like if they see kids outside school, they could like, pull over and like talk to them and tell them like that's where they supposed to be or like offer him rides there. • [On what DC could do better with attendance] Encouraging kids. • [If I were principal what I would change] Um maybe metal detectors, because before we had metal detectors it was like people who had certain stuff with them like they carry like mace and stuff like that to protect them when they're not in school and with metal detectors if we have them, they confiscate them and take them so people have no way of defending theyselves outside of school now because they have, they're getting their stuff taken.

Table 22: Student Observations and Recommendations (Continued)	
Participant	Observations and Recommendations
Miracle (continued)	• [On what would be in my ideal school] A lot of academic programs and stuff. You're able to like wear anything you want to express yourself. Better lunch food and maybe like different rules. Like some of our rules are kind of like too strict and some I just feel like are kind of dumb. Like the cell phone plan because it's a lot of kids in my fifth period class that sit in the back and don't wear glasses so they use their phones to take pictures of classwork and stuff and if a teacher sees them on it, then they take it or like with deans if they take your phone away they have it for the whole day. So, there's no way for kids who like sit in the back or with glasses and stuff to get the work that they need. I think it's just dumb… like our sweaters. They say we can't wear zip down sweaters they have to be pullovers. Um I feel like maybe they could have zip down sweaters and pullover sweaters I feel like they should just be able to wear sweaters, period. And then with the cellphone plan, I don't really think they should be like on a - I feel like they don't have to necessarily be on a cell phone plan, but like they have to be monitored with their cell phone. So, like they using it for a certain class they'll get during that class and they'll be monitored with it. • [On encouraging attendance] I feel like maybe like talking to them more, giving them like advice and stuff and telling them like if they come to school more, they can be better at this and be better at that. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] Um trying to like give them awards and stuff. I feel like they just need like advice. • Well, I know that after school they'll have like teachers and police officers like down where the kids walk home from school. I feel like that's what… that's how it should be in the mornings to see where kids are at because most of the kids hang out like around where the school is.
Septembra	• [On what DC does well in education] They make sure that everybody learns. Like everybody is learning the same thing, but in a different way. • [If I were principal what I would change] I would change the dress code. I would like, like I would let people wear what they want as long as it's appropriate for school. I'll probably add more sports to the school like wrestling or tennis or something because, well , the sports that we have, not a lot of people do it because that's not what they like, well majority of them you know. People might like wrestling or tennis and other sports. • [On what would be in my ideal school] If I had my own school , there will be like, I would just make it where people would actually want to come to school every day and learn and you know, actually follow the rules that we're given. Well, I'll like I'll probably like take their suggestions on how to make the school better and how to make it fit for them, like get their opinions. • [On encouraging attendance] Maybe letting like saying if you come to school for a whole week . And not late to any classes you can .you can wear what you want for a whole week or two weeks ? Like you can wear ripped jeans or shorts or whatever , because we don't we don't get the opportunity to wear shorts

Table 22: Student Observations and Recommendations (Continued)	
Participant	Observations and Recommendations
Septembra (continued)	• [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] Well, let's say if a student is late to school, like just late to school and you're marked late and then you go to another class and you're late for that class so you automatically get detention at the end of the day. Then they leave and you remind them that they have detention the next day because they left, it's not going to make them not want to come to school .
Will	• [If I were principal what I would change] What time we leave, like instead of 4:00 I'd say probably like 3 or 3:30. • [On what would be in my ideal school] Like a food court, like a better… good food. Yeah like a weight room and all that. • [On encouraging attendance] Make school more fun. Let us have a little bit more freedom or something. Like for lunch. let us go get our own food cause it's like a McDonalds right down…there's uh Chipotle. Hang out for a second, come back for your next period. Cause I get like tired of staying in the building the whole time. We wanna go outside. • [On what doesn't work to encourage attendance] By like, giving them consequences for not coming to school. because I wouldn't want to come to school.

Overall suggestions from students can be categorized as: addressing funding disparities, improved transportation options, lunch reform, schedule adjustments, reduced punitive measures, increased incentives that are aligned with student expressed requests, extracurricular options, safety concerns, facilities upgrades, altering the dress code, increased academic engagement and support, positive parent engagement, relationship building, teacher development and increasing compassion and empathy. Students are capable of recognizing areas where their schools can improve and they should be encouraged to share their thoughts and have them be considered in meaningful ways. I offer these suggestions in their entirety and in the students' own words to highlight their insights and to demonstrate the importance of their voices on their own without interpretation and explanation. These recommendations should be thoughtfully considered by school leadership and in the spirit of transparency, reported back to students so they can share additional thoughts and areas where they agree and disagree with their peers. The sessions in which these recommendations are discussed with students can be used to gather additional thoughts, and to identify students that are interested in participating further and feel strongly about student opinions being valued.

Researcher Recommendations

Students clearly express a desire for their opinions to matter and these findings indicate that they are experts on their own high school experiences and can articulate their needs and solutions that address their concerns. The overarching and most important conclusion from the current study is the critical need for the voices of marginalized students to be amplified and regarded respectfully in the decision-making process. In order to achieve this goal, schools should create a student taskforce that can share their

opinions, represent their peers, collect and analyze data and be given the opportunity to vote alongside other key stakeholders. Key stakeholders should receive targeted development and training to shift their culture and decision-making process from current limited attempts at listening to student voices to strong collaborations with students that reduce the power differential. This work must be done before the taskforce is created to ensure that its creation doesn't feel perfunctory and the group actually has the power to influence decisions.

Every school has unique needs and the process of creating a student taskforce should be tailored to the specific needs of that school and evidence-based strategies of increasing student voice and participation. There can be multiple taskforces organized by specific issues students have expressed, but for ease of implementation at MXP/MLKP where there is little existing infrastructure for student participation in the decision-making process, this initial taskforce should be focused on creating a system by which student voice can be incorporated into school leadership decisions and shifting the culture along the spectrum from listening to leadership. It's important that this taskforce is made up of students representing different grade levels, different viewpoints, and different school experiences and thus organizers should limit exclusionary criteria to prevent students from being further marginalized. Students should also be given the training and resources to conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups in order to solicit feedback and additional opinions from their peers. Students should also have input on the rules of governance of their group. With the full support of school administration, this body should have an adult advisor and also receive guidance from trained alumni, school personnel, and community advocates in order to create and implement a strategic plan

outlining their goals and activities for the school year. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria can be determined before the group is formed and its impact on school culture, student engagement, school satisfaction, and attendance can be measured.

Recommendations for Improving Attendance

The additional five immediate recommendations specifically for improving high school attendance are (1) a reimagined curriculum including universal delivery of social emotional learning (SEL) and coping strategies, (2) family workshops focused on relationship building, (3) improved early attendance intervention with student input (4) school discipline reform, and (5) increased community engagement. These recommendations were chosen based on their ability to address student needs revealed in findings and how readily they can be implemented for more immediate impact. Each of these recommendations should also be shared with the student taskforce for their input and feedback.

Reimagined Curriculum

An immense opportunity exists to reimagine school curriculum and make sure that critical educational and life skills are being developed and the social emotional, cultural, and academic needs of students are being met. This must begin with an assessment of the current curriculum alongside student partners who are willing to share their feedback on their content delivered during their classes. In order to combat academic apathy, curriculum enhancements need to include more engaging content and increased opportunities for students to direct their own learning by finding topics that stimulate their minds and excite them. Teachers must find places in the curriculum to give students agency in deciding what they will study and connecting that research or those projects to

things about which they are passionate. These projects can then move beyond the classroom to experiential educational opportunities that expose students to different future careers and allow them to engage in enriching educational activities outside of the school setting. In addition to addressing apathy and high school- future alignment, students finding passion for the things they are learning can address the current culture around passing vs learning which impacts attendance behaviors. Teachers must also be creative in thinking about ways students can demonstrate mastery beyond traditional methods in order to reemphasize the importance and excitement of learning. Allowing students to play a role in determining how they will demonstrate mastery will also help demystify the process of achieving success at school and move students from success being defined broadly as "doing my work" to explicitly naming the skills, strategies and supports they may need to achieve success.

Each individual content area can also be enhanced by the inclusion of Afrocentric history, multicultural studies, and stories about activism. The promotion of cultural competence de-centers whiteness and allows students to learn the histories and traditions of many multi-cultural groups (including Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta fighting for farmworkers' rights, Japanese internment and civils rights violations, the Black Panther Party. Black Lives Matter, March for our Lives and many other lessons which will allow them to examine race and activism historically and contemporarily (Byrd & Hope, 2020). Students will be able to see models of youth activism throughout history that can connect to their current lives and help build their leadership skills and resistant capital. Students will also gain a better understanding of their own histories and that of others who don't look them which can address race-based perceptions students may hold about other racial groups and their own racial group.

This reimagined curriculum should also include universal delivery of an SEL curriculum that focuses on helping students reflect on their identity, identify and manage their emotions, improve coping strategies, make positive decisions, and emotional and social stability (Nance, 2016). Aside from the addressing individual level factors that impact absenteeism, SEL also helps students empathize with others, develop positive relationships, and appropriately handle challenging interpersonal situations effectively (Nance, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011). Universal delivery and integration of these lessons and strategies into the overall curriculum will reduce stigma around receiving mental health support, particularly for students who are hesitant or have had poor experiences with mental health professionals. This will serve as a baseline entry into mental health awareness and understanding for all students and any students that need additional support can be recommended to receive wrap around services best matched to their needs. Additionally, the curriculum can incorporate health classes that teach units on sleep and nutrition that are personalized to the students and their lived realities.

Family Workshops

Findings showed that ultimately, parents have a significant amount of control over their students' attendance behaviors. Parents are the ones taking students to school, making the final decisions about whether or not their student has to attend based on the reasoning that student provides, and sharing their values and lessons about education that help inform students own beliefs. Strong, positive relationships with parents are essential to improving student attendance behaviors. If teachers only have negatively focused interactions with parents of students who need attendance support, it will be difficult to build these strong, positive relationships. Parent workshops can offer teachers another

opportunity for relationship building with parents. Also, when communicating with parents, teachers can share the workshops as resources and highlight important information that was shared.

While parent involvement with the school looks different for each family unit, findings indicate that encouraging parents to talk to students about their school experiences can have a positive impact on attendance outcomes. Workshops can offer important information about attendance policies, school transportation options, descriptions of the reimagined curriculum, entry points for discussions with students about school, school discipline reform efforts, school specific data on health and wellness and many other useful topics. Parent workshops should happen at different times throughout the month to accommodate different schedules and encourage participation. These sessions should have a recorded element to ensure that parents can still access the information even if they are unable to attend. While these workshops should include some presentation of information, they should also encourage active participation as opposed to just passive receipt of information. Parents should have opportunities to share their opinions and raise any concerns. They should also be able to participate in panels, share information with their fellow parents, lead workshops, and be regarded as experts in navigating the experience of parenting a high school student. In addition to these workshops allowing parents to build positive relationships with teachers and school leaders, these workshops can allow parents to share their opinions. Family workshops can also be a place to encourage community engagement by inviting experts from student's communities to provide relevant information based on their expertise.

Early Attendance Intervention

Many students have a limited understanding of the school attendance policies and when they reach five absences, they are often not included in the attendance meetings or conversations about their attendance. While parent communication is vital, it's important that early attendance interventions include students in creating a plan for improving their attendance. Most essential to that plan is having a conversation with students about why they are missing school, what support they think they need, and what strengths they possess that we can build off of in order to encourage regular attendance. Findings indicate that there are a myriad of reasons for why students are missing school and each student has a unique combination of individual, interpersonal, school, and community factors impacting their attendance. A student with health issues, a student who has been suspended numerous times, and a student who stays home to catch up on sleep will all have very different needs from an attendance intervention plan and they will be best suited to inform the creation of that plan. Plans can be adjusted based on their effectiveness as the student goes through the school year but dedicating time, being intentional about understanding the student's attendance behaviors, and giving students an opportunity to have a say in what strategies will work best for them will ultimately have a positive impact on attendance behaviors.

School Discipline Reform

The school discipline system impacts school culture, school climate, students' individual behaviors, desire and motivation to attend school, interpersonal relationships, and ultimately attendance. Reforming the school discipline system involves cultural change which does not happen immediately. Schools must be prepared to "adopt a long-

term mindset and be prepared to exert sustained efforts for perhaps three to five years before they witness a visible cultural shift" (Nance, 2016) This process must begin with school leaders and teachers committing to changing the school culture and collaborating with students to create a long terms strategic plan for reforming the discipline system. However, as this cultural shift to practices more informed by restorative justice principles is occurring, there are some school discipline issues that can be addressed immediately. Students overwhelmingly report an overreliance on exclusionary practices, specifically sending students out of the classroom or sending students to ISS. Despite having a SWPBIS in place, students perceive being sent out of class as the most common form of discipline for themselves and their classmates and few mentioned any aspects of the SWPBIS. Schools have tried to reduce OSS but being sent out of class and ISS are still exclusionary practices; they are just not widely publicized measures. Exclusionary practices can make students feel unwelcome in the classroom and reinforce negative stereotypes about African American students. Moreover, while excluding "disruptive" students from class may temporarily quiet the environment, studies show that these punitive measures often impede the learning climate in the long run by alienating students, creating mistrust, and fostering anxiety, which may lead to more classroom disorder and reduced academic achievement for all students which can in turn impact attendance behaviors (Nance, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016).While curriculum changes including SEL and more engaging instruction should positively impact student behavior, schools must find a way to address misbehavior without excluding students from the learning process. Teachers must be retrained immediately on utilizing the SWPBIS to give students positive reinforcements, warnings and opportunities to re-engage in

learning, deescalating strategies to prevent students from reaching the point where they would need to learn in a separate environment, and resetting norms around teacher expectations so that excluding students from the learning environment is a very rare occurrence the happens only the most serious or dangerous situations.

Increased Community Engagement

Findings show that students with strong ties to their communities feel a sense of belonging in their neighborhoods that has not yet been recreated in the school setting. While efforts should be undertaken to increase student belonging at school, schools can also increase community engagement in order to leverage the relationships and networks that students already value. Further research needs to be done to better understand the role communities can play in improving attendance but increased community engagement can begin with collaborative community events held off campus in student neighborhoods and increased communication between school leaders and community advocates. These community leaders can share the specific ways schools can be more involved and support efforts to dismantle structural and systemic issues in student neighborhoods that impact attendance. These community members can also share their expertise at school events to supplement learning opportunities which has been shown to be an important contributor to academic achievement. (Wiggan & Watson, 2016). This increased collaboration can also help students feel a greater connection between the communities they love and the school that they currently attend. Also, if we expand the geographic location to include the entirety of Washington, DC, students at predominantly Black schools don't have many opportunities to interact with students from other races or ethnicities in collaborative opportunities where status and power is equal. Opportunities

for intergroup collaboration through extracurricular activities, community service events, and joint school projects will help address students' race-based perceptions and give them opportunities to gain experience working with people of other races and ethnicities towards a common goal.

Recommendations for Improving High School Transition

The three most essential recommendations specifically for strengthening the high school transition are (1) enhanced professional development for teachers, (2) early, targeted 9th grade orientation, (3) early, personalized post high school planning meetings.

Professional Development

Many students described positive relationships with certain teachers as helpful to their academic success and those relationships had some positive impact on student attendance. These positive relationships however take time to form and for students who are leaving behind strong teacher support systems cultivated over many years of middle and elementary school, the transition to a new school can leave them feeling isolated and unsupported. Specific professional development for ninth grade teachers will prepare them for the additional support they need to provide to students immediately for a smoother transition. Also, the proposed recommendations and enhanced role of student voice in the school setting must be coupled with professional development aimed specifically at preparing teachers for the culture shift. In addition to pedagogy, curriculum changes, and content delivery, professional development topics must include fostering more empathy and compassion for students, relationship building with students and parents, school discipline reform, addressing implicit bias, trauma informed care, internalized racism, listening to students, adult-youth partnership and collaboration, youth

leadership development, and relinquishing power in order to empower students. This process should begin with sharing a summary of the findings from this current study with salient quotes shared anonymously to illustrate the reasons these changes must occur. Students should also be invited to share their own experiences about the high school transition and the ways in which teachers can impact student experiences.

9th Grade Orientation

Ninth grade orientation typically happens anywhere from a week to 2 days before the start of the school year and is heavily focused on finding classrooms and navigating the physical space of the building. While these activities are helpful, they do not address many of the needs students have when transitioning to high school and there is an opportunity to augment pre-freshman orientation to better prepare students for the transition. The majority of students learn the high school they will be while still in the eighth grade. Instead of waiting until the start of the school year to engage incoming freshman, schools should start their relationships while students are completing the 8th grade. This can include scheduled visits to campus to spend a day in the life of a ninth grader and begin imagining what one's high school career will entail. Students can meet some of the teachers they will have next year and fellow classmates to encourage an early start relationship building in a safe, supportive environment. This can be facilitated by meaningful, low stress conversations around shared interests. Students should also be given the opportunity to have some choice in their class schedule for the next year. At minimum, students should be able to rank the possible elective classes based on their interest. Even if students don't receive their top choice ranking, the effort to include their

voice can make a difference in their perception of how much school leaders and teachers value their opinions.

Findings indicate that students who feel like high school is a new opportunity for them have better attendance outcomes. Regardless of a student's previous middle school, previous behaviors, or previous academic outcomes, starting high school should be framed as a fresh start and a new opportunity to decide the impact you want to have on your high school environment. These messages can be targeted based on the student's previous experiences. Activities during orientation can include panels with students who have just completed the 9th grade. These students will be able to impart wisdom and offer suggestions to help students have a successful school year. Students can contribute to a ninth-grade survival guide that students can peruse before attending school to prepare themselves for what will be expected of them in their freshman year.

Personalized Post High School Planning

Findings show that students have passions and future goals when they start high school and would benefit from guidance in planning for high school and beyond, earlier in their school careers. Whatever path students want to pursue directly following high school, this guided planning process will give them the opportunity to research what is necessary to achieve their future goals, identify who can support them along their journey, and explicitly tie their school learning plan to achieving those future goals. This process should begin with building rapport and getting to know students so that they feel comfortable sharing their values, personalities, passions and interests which will all be essential for planning. This personalized planning can happen with a specific advisor assigned to the student in their freshman year. After getting to know the student and their

future goals, both parties will work together to draft a high school and beyond plan. This plan should that project what classes students hope to take in the future, extracurriculars they hope to pursue, student taskforces they hope to join, service and educational opportunities outside of the school setting that may help prepare them for their future goals, and how their current choices connect to their future plans. This will allow students enhance their future planning, align their current studies with their future goals, and better understand the concrete steps associated with "getting an education" which can positively impact their motivation and desire to attend school. These plans will be revisited and updated as students grow and learn about themselves and as their plans evolve. These individual advisor meetings can also be supplemented with small group seminars where students are exposed to many different future pathways and get to envision their own future lifestyle. It's important that these conversations are not limited just to higher education and career options as this is the current model emphasized for students and feeds into the notion the school is just a means to an end as opposed to an opportunity for learning. These conversations can be more holistic and students can consider "What do I want to know?" "What skills do I want to have?" or "What type of person do I want to be?" as an adult to guide their learning journey.

Additional recommendations can be assessed by the newly formed taskforce and school leaders throughout the school year in order to strengthen the high school transition and improve attendance.

Recommendations for Policy

There are also policy implications from the findings in this current study. Findings reveal that students don't believe that punitive interventions encourage school

attendance. Strategies that involve overreliance on the legal or criminal justice system to address absenteeism should be transitioned to include partnerships with social workers, health departments, community advocacy groups, and other government agencies in order to better address underlying causes. In instances where absenteeism intersects with criminal justice, protocol should include immediately connecting students to support services and creating attendance plans in which they have input.

The Every Student Succeeds Act, implemented as federal education law in 2015, allows states to design and implement their own accountability measures (Bauer et. al., 2018). Accountability measures can help schools improve in areas where they are collecting data consistently and addressing needs they have deemed critical to student success. Chronic absenteeism and student voice are two indicators of school quality or success (SQSS) that states can choose to include in their state accountability plans. Unlike Australia, the United Kingdom, and many other European nations, the United States does not have a formal national policy mandating youth participation or student voice in the school setting (Mitra, 2018). While the implementation of youth participation in these contexts can still be improved, their inclusion in national policy signals that encouraging youth participation and including student voice in assessment and planning is a priority. More states should consider incorporating measurements of student input into their accountability plans.

Thirty-six states, DC, and Puerto Rico have chosen chronic absenteeism as a SQSS indicator (Baeur et al., 2018). States vary in the ways they conceptualize and measure chronic absenteeism and states have the opportunity to learn from one another about strategies used to improve attendance. Accountability measures can also lead to

schools trying to “game” the system and with regard to chronic absenteeism one of these strategies is the transition from OSS, which count as absence days, to ISS, which don’t count for chronic absenteeism measures but are still exclusionary policies that are harmful to students. ISS is not measured and tracked like OSS meaning there is little data on ISS rates, number of students with ISS days reaching chronic absenteeism numbers, differential rates based gender, race, school year, or reasons students received this consequence. Without collecting this data, there is little incentive to improve ISS policies even though there are clear benefits to keeping students in class and engaged. Formally collecting data on ISS and reframing the dominant narrative around ISS, especially in cases where students just sit in a room completing little work, to be one of absenteeism, will encourage schools to work towards reducing ISS rates or strengthening the policy.

Recommendations for Research

This current study has many implications for future research both in terms of methodology, measurements, study settings, and future avenues for research. Specifically, for chronic absenteeism research, these findings further support the field’s distancing from broad categories to differentiate between types of absenteeism as overreliance on these categories can assign negative intentions to students that impact the way they are viewed and the interventions that are implemented to support them. While schools should implement Tier 1 interventions aimed at increasing engagement, belonging, and attendance for all students, individual assessments of student attendance behaviors will be necessary to improve the attendance of those students who need additional support. Some of the measurements for these individual assessments of student behavior may need further adaptation for students of color. Specifically, further confirmatory factor analysis should be conducted on the measures on the Student Refusal

Assessment Scale among African American adolescents. Additional research in community-based settings as opposed to clinic-based settings is essential because anxious students from marginalized communities are less likely to receive mental health services and participate in clinic-based studies as compared to their White counterparts. Specifically, as schools in urban settings become more racially segregated, we need more qualitative research in predominately Black or Hispanic schools as findings have shown that there are additional racial and structural considerations in these school contexts that must be understood and addressed in order to improve student outcomes.

This particular research study also provides initial findings that can be used to justify further exploration of the topics with more advanced research methods. Quantitatively, potential research avenues include structural equation modeling (SEM) and latent class analysis. Building on these findings, SEM would allow researchers to further explore the underlying mechanisms and the relationships between constructs that contribute to attendance behaviors. Latent class analysis and latent profile analysis both align with the syndemics framework and can help determine student risk profiles with respect to absenteeism and further explore how factors at multiple levels interact and overlap to increase risk. These results would aid in improving early attendance interventions. Qualitatively, in addition to more thematic analysis to confirm findings and see what other themes emerge with additional participants, the current thematic analysis can inform future grounded theory research to create explanatory models for chronic absenteeism and regular attendance. These theories can offer additional guidance for students, families, teachers, school leaders, and districts to promote positive attendance behaviors.

Closing Reflexive Statement

My dissertation study has been a long journey and throughout the entire process, I was determined to keep my participants' voices front and center. I carried the weight of wanting to represent these students' stories accurately with the respect and honor that each story deserved and at times it was difficult. Every moment of pain, triumph, excitement, or disdain that they shared has stayed with me and while this research study has captured their thoughts and perspectives, it was impossible not to see glimpses of myself, my friends, my family, my former classmates, and former students within the stories each of my participants shared. Especially as a Black woman, I experienced moments of pain and joy that I was able to identify with that felt specific to being Black in America. I also experienced moments of shock and surprise when students' accounts revealed cracks in systems that I wasn't even aware existed. There was always a social justice lens fueling my work, but this research has made it even clearer that there are oppressive systems, overt and covert, that must be reckoned with and dismantled in order for Black students to thrive in the United States. I learned so much from these amazing young people and my greatest take away was that they are experts who have an immense amount of knowledge and insight to contribute to the decision-making processes that impact their lives. That involvement, while coupled with guidance and education, must be genuine as these students can tell when they are being placated and not truly heard. Young people still have a lot to learn but their experiences have already taught them so much and in order to honor their perspectives, we must allow them to participate fully and give them a seat at the table.

Conclusion

The transition to high school can be a daunting experience for many but particularly for African American students in low income, urban settings at predominately Black schools. Students' lives are incredibly complex and they must simultaneously navigate individual stressors, interpersonal relationships, attempting to fit into school and neighborhood cultures all while trying to understand their multiple identities. This challenging process necessitates an entire village behind them offering guidance and support. This guidance and support, however well intentioned, is inadequate without input from these students who are currently experiencing this transition to high school. Attendance, while incredibly important, is but one area of the high school transition that must be addressed immediately and with targeted interventions informed by student voices. We are at an unprecedented and critical moment in education where we have unlimited opportunities to reimagine what the school experience can look like for students and how it can meet all of their needs. In partnership with students, we can create a more equitable school environment that will lead to improved academic, attendance, and life outcomes for students from marginalized communities.

Appendix A

Definition of Variables

Absence- Missing more than 20% of school time in a day (Attendance Works &

Everyone Graduates Center, 2016)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)- Traumatic events in childhood related to child abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, socioeconomic hardships and other childhood stressors (Cronholm et al., 2015)

Antisocial Behavior- Delinquent behaviors such as theft, selling drugs, fighting (Arthur et al., 2002)

Anxiety- Symptoms of generalized anxiety, panic/agoraphobia, social phobia, separation anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and physical injury fears as measured by self-reported scales (Birmaher et al., 1997).

At Risk-"In the District, the at-risk classification includes students in families qualifying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and students who are homeless, in foster care, or over-age for their grade in high school" (Wolf, Armstrong, Ross, 2019).

Chronic Absenteeism- When a student accumulates more than 10% of school days absent, including suspensions, "excused" and "unexcused" absences (Cameron et al., 2018). For this study, this is approximately 14 absences for the entire school year First month chronic absenteeism is defined as more than 4 absences.

Family Risk Factors- A rating of family household management including clarity of family rules, parent awareness of student activities, whereabouts, and antisocial behaviors.

Family Protective Factors-A rating of family attachment, specifically mother and father attachment, measured by how close students feel to their parents and how willing they are to share their thoughts and feelings with their parents.

H/PBH schools- High-Poverty and mostly Black or Hispanic schools where 75% or more of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch and 75% or more of students are Black or Hispanic (US Government Accountability Office, 2016).

Neighborhood Climate: A community rating composed of student perception of community organization, their attachment to their neighborhood, opportunities for prosocial involvement and exposure to community violence,

Perceived Racism: A rating of perceptions of racism in children and youth measured by their experiences of discrimination based on their race.

Prosocial Peers- Peers that engage in prosocial behaviors including being involved in extracurricular activities, liking school, trying to do well in school, and committing to staying drug free.

School Climate- A school rating composed of student perception of physical disorder, social disorder, cohesion (school ties), shared expectations for control, and safety(Van Eck, Johnson, Bettencourt, & Johnson, 2017).

School Refusal: School non-attendance with underlying causes including anxiety, school avoidance, and school escape.

Tardy- When a student arrives at school after the first period school bell has rung.

Teacher Relationships- A rating of teacher student relationships based on student perception of teacher availability, how much teachers care about them, understand their problems, notice them, get along with them, and encourage them.

Truancy- When a student accumulates 10 or more unexcused absences in a given school year (Attendance Works & Everyone Graduates Center, 2016).

Victimization- A rating of treatment by peers including verbal victimization, physical victimization, and social manipulation.

Appendix B

Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations

Potential Risks and Protection Against Risks

There was minimal risk associated with participation in this research study. Primarily, the quantitative survey and qualitative interview guides included personal questions that could have triggered negative emotions. If a participant had experienced prior trauma or severe adverse events, there was the potential for psychological harm in recounting these experiences. We addressed these concerns by ensuring that if participants felt uncomfortable answering any questions on rating scales, they had the choice not to answer, to take a break, or to stop participating. Participants were also given the option to request an opportunity to speak with a mental health professional or other trusted adult of their choosing if any question caused them distress. We gave students a resource guide of individuals they could contact and services that were available to them if any negative feelings were brought up by participating in the study. Also, while responses were confidential, they were not anonymous and if students disclosed they were in danger, confidentiality would have been broken. Students were informed of this fact before they provided assent and the protocol would have been followed to alert the appropriate people and provide the appropriate resources if a student was danger. This disclosure procedure could place students at risk, but it is important to note that it the protocol went beyond the industry standard in place to protect students. Students would also have been involved in the disclosure process and empowered to make decisions on how the information is disclosed. The process did not include any non-essential stakeholders. No adverse events occurred during the course of the research study.

Potential Benefits to Participants and Others

The possible benefits to participants include playing a substantive role in assessing their school and neighborhood climates and informing the strategies used to promote regular attendance. In the future, other DC and US students may benefit from this study through improved understanding of the profiles of chronically absent students, the risk and protective factors for chronic absenteeism, and the cultural strengths that can be drawn upon to address absenteeism. This effort could lead to improved educational outcomes, mental health outcomes, and improvements to school climate. Specifically, students played a role in transforming the framing of chronic absenteeism among low income, African American children and thus challenging narratives that continue cycles of systematic oppression.

Confidentiality and Data Management Procedures

All participant survey information was linked to a Student ID number and Case ID number but not their names. The document that links Student IDs, Case IDs, and student names was only accessed by the PI. For qualitative interviews, students used pseudonyms exclusively and only those providing transcription services and the principal investigator (PI) had access to the audio files. The privacy policies for Qualtrics and transcription services were in effect to protect data privacy. In addition, all survey information, audio files, and transcripts were stored on a laptop or flash drive that was password protected and each file was encrypted. Additional paper files and password protected flash drives for the study were stored in a secure, locked filing cabinet with the Principle Investigator.

In any reports or articles written about this research project, participant identity and school identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Only pooled survey results will be documented and the school name, geographic location, or other identifying data will not be specified. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data on a password protected computer with encrypted files. For the qualitative component, we also used pseudonyms so that the information student participants shared could never be connected back to their names. Participant information may only be shared with governmental authorities if a participant or someone else is in danger or the disclosed information falls under the purview of mandated reporting.

Consent Procedures

The MXP/MLKP school leaders and general counsel reviewed informed consent documents giving permission for their students to participate in this research study. In addition, all parents were provided with detailed information about the study and given a refusal form that they could return if they did not want their child to participate in the quantitative survey. Parents also had the option to see the interview guides and survey materials (Appendices B-E) before deciding whether or not their student could participate. Students (n=216) provided assent electronically before taking the survey. For the qualitative component, parents discussed the informed consent documents with the PI prior to returning the signed forms and providing their consent. Written assent was also obtained from the students before the first interview and verbal assent was obtained before the second and third interviews.

Research Involving Children and Vulnerable Populations

Children are the priority population of the study because in addressing chronic absenteeism among high school students and understanding the necessary supports for a successful transition into high school, student input is essential. These children were treated with respect and as important partners in the data collection process and before obtaining their assent, we obtained informed consent from their parents/guardian and their school leaders. We also made sure to refer students to additional community resources that can address any services they may require.

Appendix C

Strengthening Transitions Survey

Today you have the opportunity to participate in the Strengthening Transitions Research Project. This research is being conducted by **Ms. Sharifah Holder** at the University of Maryland, College Park. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a DC ninth grader that can help us understand how to support students transitioning to high school. The purpose of this research project is to understand the factors that affect student attendance so that we can better support students getting to school every day. The questions contained in this survey are designed to get your opinion about a number of things concerning you, your friends, your family, your neighborhood and your community. In a sense, many of your answers will count as "votes" on a wide range of important issues.

In order for this survey to be helpful, it is important that you answer each question as thoughtfully and honestly as possible. You will fill out an online survey that will take the entire class period. You will not be providing your name, only a Student ID number and all of your individual answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be seen by anyone at your school. However, if you or someone else is in danger, Ms. Holder would need to ask someone outside of the study for help. Data will be stored on a password protected computer with encrypted files.

As a thank you for participating, you will be invited to a pizza lunch tomorrow and your name will be entered into a raffle to win a $25 Visa Gift Card. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which they otherwise qualify. After the survey, you will be given a document detailing all of this information and contact information in case you or your parents have any questions, concerns, or complaints.

Finally, sometimes, answering questions can be uncomfortable or bring up negative emotions. You can choose to not answer a question or you can stop the survey at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Also, we will have resources available if you'd like to speak to someone about how you are feeling. There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include a feeling of relief or accomplishment that comes with sharing your story for a meaningful purpose. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the high school transition and factors that affect attendance and better support services for students.

Be sure to read the instructions below before you begin to answer. If you don't find an answer that fits exactly, use one that comes closest. If any question does not apply to you, or you are not sure of what it means, just leave it blank. This is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Are there any questions?

Now that you have read through all of this information, please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "YES, I agree" button below indicates that:
• you have read the above information
• you understand the above information
• you voluntarily agree to participate in the research study

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "NO, I disagree" button and you will instead complete an alternative computer based English assignment.

- o YES, I agree
- o NO, I disagree

Student ID:

Individual

School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised (C)

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Half the Time	Usually	Almost Always	Always
1. How often do you have bad feelings about going to school because you are afraid of something related to school (for example, tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)?							
2. How often do you stay away from school because it is hard to speak with the other kids at school?							
3. How often do you feel you would rather be with your parents/guardians than go to school?							
4. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you leave the house and do something fun?							
5. How often do you stay away from school because you will feel sad or depressed if you go?							
6. How often do you stay away from school because you feel embarrassed in front of other people at school?							
7. How often do you think about your parents or family when in school?							
8. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you talk to or see other people (other than your family)?							
9. How often do you feel worse at school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad)							

compared to how you feel at home with friends?							
10. How often do you stay away from school because you do not have many friends there?							
11. How much would you rather be with your family than go to school?							
12. When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how much do you enjoy doing different things (for example, being with friends, going places)?							
13. How often do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) when you think about school on Saturday and Sunday?							
14. How often do you stay away from certain places in school (e.g., hallways, places where certain groups of people are) where you would have to talk to someone?							
15. How much would you rather be taught by your parents or guardians at home than by your teacher at school?							
16. How often do you refuse to go to school because you want to have fun outside of school?							
17. If you had less bad feelings (for example, scared, nervous, sad) about school, would it be easier for you to go to school?							
18. If it were easier for you to make new friends,							

would it be easier for you to go to school?							
19. Would it be easier for you to go to school if your parents or guardians went with you?							
20. Would it be easier for you to go to school if you could do more things you like to do after school hours (for example, being with friends)?							
21. How much more do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to other kids your age?							
22. How often do you stay away from people at school compared to other kids your age?							
23. Would you like to be home with your parents/guardians more than other kids your age would?							
24. Would you rather be doing fun things outside of school more than most kids your age?							

Anxiety

Below is a list of sentences that describe how people feel. Read each phrase and decide if it is "Not True or Hardly Ever True", or "Somewhat True or Sometimes True", or "Very True or Very Often True" for you. Then, for each sentence, choose the response that seems to describe you for the last 3 months.

	Not True or Hardly Ever True	Somewhat True or Sometimes True	Very True or Very Often True
1. I don't like to be with people I don't know well.			
2. I worry about other people liking me.			
3. I am nervous.			
4. I feel nervous with people I don't know well.			
5. I worry about being as good as other kids.			
6. I worry about things working out for me.			
7. I am a worrier.			
8. It is hard for me to talk with people I don't know well.			
9. People tell me that I worry too much.			
10. I feel shy with people I don't know well.			
11. I worry about what is going to happen in the future.			
12. I worry about how well I do things.			
13. I worry about things that have already happened.			
14. I feel nervous when I am with other children or adults and I have to do something while they watch me (for example: read aloud, speak, play a game, play a sport).			
15. I feel nervous when I am going to parties, dances, or any place where there will be people that I don't know well.			
16. I am shy.			
17. I have scary dreams about a very bad thing that once happened to me.			
18. I try not to think about a very bad thing that once happened to me.			
19. I get scared when I think back on a very bad thing that once happened to me.			
20. I keep thinking about a very bad thing that once happened to me, even when I don't want to think about it.			

*Behaviors/ Attitudes (*Substance Use Frequency Lifetime/30-Day Use

1. Have you ever smoked cigarettes?
    a. Never
    b. Once or twice
    c. Once in a while but not regularly
    d. Regularly in the past
    e. Regularly now

2. How frequently have you smoked cigarettes during the past 30 days?
    a. Not at all

b. Less than one cigarette per day
c. One to five cigarettes per day
d. About half a pack per day
e. About one pack a day or more

	Never	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-9 times	10-19 times	20-39 times	40 + times
1. How many times (if any) have you had alcoholic beverages (beer, wine or hard liquor) to drink in your lifetime-more than just a few sips?							
2. How many times (if any) have you used marijuana (weed, edibles, etc.) in your lifetime?							
3. How many times (if any) have you used e-cigarettes in your lifetime?							
4. On how many times (if any) have you had beer, wine, or hard liquor during the past 30 days?							
5. On how many occasions (if any) have you used marijuana during the past 30 days?							

Other Behaviors

1. How many times in the past year (12 months) have you …

	Never	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-9 times	10-19 times	20-29 times	30-39 times	40 + times
1. Been suspended from school?								
2. Carried a handgun?								
3. Sold illegal drugs?								
4. Stolen or tried to steal a motor vehicle such as a car or motorcycle?								
5. Been arrested?								
6. Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting them?								
7. Sold illegal drugs?								
8. Been drunk or high at school?								
9. Stolen something worth more than $5?								
10. Purposely damaged or destroyed property that did not belong to you (not counting family property)?								
11. Taken something from a store without paying for it?								

Perceived Racism in Children and Youth (PRaCY)

Read the following statements.

How often have any of the following situations happened to you because of your race/ethnicity?

	Never	Once	Twice	About Once a Year	About Once a Month	Weekly
1. Watched closely or followed around by security guards or store clerks at a store or the mall						
2. Got poor or slow service at a restaurant or food store						
3. Were treated badly by a bus driver						
4. Got poor or slow service at a store						
5. Were treated unfairly by a police officer						
6. Accused of something you didn't do at school						
7. Unfairly called down to the principal's office						
8. Got grades you didn't deserve						
9. Treated badly or unfairly by a teacher						
10. Watched more closely by security at school						

11. Someone didn't want to be friends with you						
12. You had the feeling that someone was afraid of you						
13. Someone called you an insulting name						
14. People hold their bags tight when you pass them						
15. Someone made a bad or insulting remark about your race, ethnicity, or language						
16. Someone didn't want to play or hang out with you						
17. Someone was rude to you						
18. People assume you're not smart or intelligent						
19. You didn't get the respect you deserved						
20. You weren't chosen for a sports team						
21. Teachers assume you're not smart or intelligent						
22. You're called on less in class by teachers						
23. Have you ever seen your parents or other family members treated unfairly or badly because of the color of their skin, language, accent, or because they come from a different country or culture?						

Interpersonal

Peer- Interaction

In the past year (12 months), how many of your best friends have…

	None of my friends	1 of my friends	2 of my friends	3 of my friends	4 or more of my friends
1. Participated in clubs, organizations or activities at school?					
2. Made a commitment to stay drug- free?					
3. Liked school?					
4. Regularly attended religious services					
5. Tried to do well in school					
6. Smoked Cigarettes?					
7. Tried beer, wine or hard liquor (for example, vodka, whiskey or gin) when their parents didn't know about it?					

Household Factors (Poor Family Management and Attachment)

	Very Untrue	*Untrue*	*True*	*Very True*
1. The rules in my family are clear.				
2. Parents ask if I've gotten my homework done.				
3. When I am not at home, one of my parents knows where I am and who I am with.				
4. Would your parents know if you did not come home on time?				
5. My family has clear rules about alcohol and drug use.				
6. If you drank some beer or wine or hard liquor (for example, vodka, whiskey or gin) without your parents' permission, would you be caught by your parents?				
7. If you carried a handgun without your parents' permission, would you be caught by your parents?				
8. If you skipped school, would you be caught by your parents?				
9. Do you feel very close to your mother?				
10. Do you share your thoughts and feelings with your mother?				
11. Do you feel very close to your father?				
12. Do you share your thoughts and feelings with your father?				

Interpersonal School Climate Measurements (*Parent Involvement & Teacher Relationships Subscale)*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My parents/guardians talk with teachers about what is happening at home.					
2. My parents/ guardians are involved in school activities.					
3. My parents/guardians are involved in discussions about what is taught at school.					
4. Teachers understand my problems					
5. Teachers and staff seem to take a real					

interest in my future					
6. Teachers are available when I need to talk with them					
7. It is easy to talk with teachers					
8. Students get along well with teachers					
9. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who notices when I'm not there					
10. Teachers at my school help us children with our problems					
11. My teachers care about me					
12. My teacher makes me feel good about myself					

Brief Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (MPVS)

Below is a list of things that some children do to other children. How often during the last school year has another pupil done these things to you?

	Not at all	*Once*	*More than Once*
1. Punched me			
2. Tried to get me into trouble with my friends			
3. Called me names			
4. Kicked me			
5. Tried to make my friends turn against me			
6. Made fun of me because of my appearance			
7. Hurt me physically in some way			
8. Refused to talk to me			
9. Made fun of me for some reason			
10. Beat me up			
11. Made other people not talk to me			
12. Swore at me			

School

School Climate Measurements (*School Connectedness, Academic Support, Order and Discipline, School Physical Environment, School Social Environment, Perceived Exclusion/Privilege, Opportunities for student engagement, Academic Satisfaction)*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Students can make suggestions on courses that are offered					
2. Students are publicly recognized for their outstanding performances in speech, drama, art, music, etc.					
3. This school makes students enthusiastic about learning					
4. Students are frequently rewarded or praised by faculty and staff for following school rules					
5. I usually understand my homework assignments					
6. Teachers make it clear what work needs to be done to get the grade I want					
7. I believe that teachers expect all students to learn					
8. I feel that I can do well in this school					
9. My teachers believe that I can do well in my school work.					
10. I try hard to succeed in my classes.					
11. Classroom rules are applied equally					
12. Problems in this school are solved by students and staff.					
13. Students get in trouble if they do not follow school rules					
14. The rules of the school are fair					
15. School rules are enforced consistently and fairly					
16. My teachers make it clear to me when I have misbehaved in class					
17. Discipline is fair					
18. The school grounds are kept clean					
19. My school is neat and clean					
20. My school buildings are generally pleasant and well maintained.					
21. My school is usually clean and tidy.					
22. I am happy with the kinds of students who go to my school.					
23. I am happy, in general, with the other students who go to my school.					
24. At my school, the same person always gets to help the teacher.					
25. At my school, the same kids get chosen every time to take part in after-school or					

special activities					
26. The same kids always get to use things, like a computer, a ball or a piano, when we play.					
27. Students have the same opportunity to speak, and be listened to, in class.					
28. Students can express their feelings and thoughts about school work and life.					
29. Students who are "different" in any way are treated with respect.					
30. Nobody in my school is excluded from being successful.					
31. Females and males are treated as equals at school.					
32. I can participate in a lot of interesting activities at school.					
33. I am happy about the number of tests I have					
34. I am happy about the amount of homework I have					

Neighborhood

Community Risk Factors- Community Disorganization, Low Neighborhood Attachment

How much do each of the following statements describe how you feel about your neighborhood?

	Very Untrue	*Untrue*	*True*	*Very True*
1. I'd like to get out of my neighborhood.				
2. If I had to move, I would miss the neighborhood I now live in.				
3. I like my neighborhood.				
4. There are lots of adults in my neighborhood I could talk to about something important.				
5. I feel safe in my neighborhood.				
6. How much do each of the following statements describe your neighborhood?				
a. Crime and/or drug selling				
b. Fights				
c. Lots of empty or abandoned buildings				
d. Lots of graffiti				

Exposure to Community Violence

7. How often, if ever, did you see or hear someone being beaten up, stabbed, or shot in real life?
    a. Never
    b. Once
    c. A few times
    d. Many times

Community Protective Factors: Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement

1. Which of the following activities for people your age is available in your community? Check all that apply.

   Sports teams
   Theater (Musicals/ Plays)
   Boys and Girls clubs
   Dance (All forms including Step or Drill teams)
   Service Clubs
   Music (Singing or Playing an instrument)
   Rec Center

Other Questions

1. How often do you attend religious services or activities?
   a. Never
   b. Rarely
   c. 1-2 Times a Month
   d. About Once a Week or More
2. Does your school provide a counselor, intervention specialist, or other school staff member for students to discuss problems with?
   a. Yes
   b. No
3. How many different schools have you gone to since kindergarten?
   a. 1 or 2
   b. 3 or 4
   c. 5 or 6
   d. 7 or more
4. How many different homes have you lived in since kindergarten?
   a. 0
   b. 1 or 2
   c. 3 or 4
   d. 5 or 6
   e. 7 or more
5. Your family sometimes cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money in the budget for food.
   a. Never True
   b. Rarely True
   c. Sometimes True
   d. Often True
   e. Very Often True
   f. I don't know or I'm not sure

6. Have you ever lived with anyone who was depressed or mentally ill?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I'm not sure or I don't know

Demographics

1. How old are you?
   a. 11
   b. 12
   c. 13
   d. 14

e. 15
f. 16 or older

2. Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Nonbinary
   d. Prefer not to say

3. Would you describe yourself as transgender?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. Race (Select one or more)
   a. American Indian or Alaska Native
   b. Asian
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   e. White
   f. Unknown/Other
   g. Prefer Not to Say

Ethnicity

5. Do you identify as Hispanic/ Latino/ Latina/Latinx?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not Sure/ Don't Know

6. Do you identify as West Indian/Caribbean? (Jamaican, Trinidadian, Haitian, etc.)
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not Sure/ Don't Know

7. Do you identify as African? (Nigerian, Ghanaian, Ethiopian, etc.)
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not Sure/ Don't Know

8. Beyond these, is there any ethnic group that you identify with?

9. What is the zip code where you live?

10. What neighborhood do you live in?

11. How many brothers and sisters, including stepbrothers, stepsisters, half-sisters, half-brothers, do you have?
    a. 0
    b. 1
    c. 2
    d. 3
    e. 4
    f. 5
    g. 6 or more

12. Think of where you live most of the time. Which of the following people live there with you? (Choose all that apply)
    a. Mother
    b. Father
    c. Sister(s)
    d. Brother(s)
    e. Stepmother
    f. Stepfather
    g. Foster Mother
    h. Foster Father
    i. Grandmother
    j. Grandfather
    k. Stepbrother(s)
    l. Stepsister(s)
    m. Other children
    n. Other adults

13. Highest level of school your mother completed
    a. Less than High School
    b. Completed High School/ GED
    c. Some College
    d. Completed College
    e. Graduate or professional school after college
    f. Don't Know
    g. Does not apply

14. Highest level of school your father completed
    a. Less than High School
    b. Completed High School/ GED
    c. Some College
    d. Completed College
    e. Graduate or professional school after college
    f. Don't Know
    g. Does not apply

15. How do you normally get to school? (Check All that Apply)
    a. Public Transportation- Metro
    b. Public Transportation- Bus
    c. Walk
    d. Driven by Parent/Guardian
    e. Drive yourself
    f. Bike/Skateboard/ Scooter
    g. Other:_____

16. How long does it take you to get to school?
    a. Shorter than 20 minutes
    b. Between 20 and 40 minutes
    c. Between 40 minutes and 1 hour
    d. Longer than 1 hour

17. How many years (including this school year) were you a student at a [MXP/MLKP] school?
    a. 1 year

b. 2 years
c. 3 years
d. 4 years
e. 5 years
f. 6+ years

18. On average, how many hours of sleep do you get each weekday night?
    a. <4 hours
    b. 4 hours
    c. 5 hours
    d. 6 hours
    e. 7 hours
    f. 8 hours
    g. 9+ hours

You are all done! Thank you for sharing all of these answers, they will be a big help in improving the attendance and high school transition for your fellow students. If you have more opinions or would be interested in talking more about attendance or high school transition, please let us know below. If you are eligible for the follow-up interviews, we will reach out to you and your parents. Eligible participants will be given more information and will receive $50 compensation if they are chosen to participate.

☐ I would be interested in continuing the discussion on high school transition and attendance.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Ms. Sharifah Holder at sholder3@umd.edu. This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Appendix D

Strengthening High School Transition Interview I

Semi-Structured Interview Guide:

[Obtain informed consent from parent before scheduling interview]

Pre-Introduction: Before we get started, I'm going to ask you to pick a pseudonym. A pseudonym is just a fake name that you get to choose. I will only call you by that name whenever I talk about you or share information about what we talk about today and that way no one will ever know your real name. That means that everything you say is confidential and nothing will be connected to your real name. What name would you like to use? [fill in below and use throughout interview]

_____

Introduction: Thank you so much for being here today. My name is Ms. Sharifah Holder and I'm doing a research project through the University of Maryland. The project is all about attendance and all the things that affect students going to school every day. We're going to do three interviews but today, I want to hear about your experiences in school so far and transitioning to high school. I want to hear from students because you guys are the experts. You know better than any adults what's going on in students' lives that helps them get to school or makes them miss school. What you share in these three interviews will be used to let adults know what factors are important to attendance so that we can help support other students. You get to have your voice heard so I'm really glad you're able to spend some time with me today.

I'm going to record this conversation just so I don't miss anything that you say. The recording will be kept safe so other people not involved with the study won't listen to it. The great thing is there is no pressure here today because there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Whatever you're thinking is important to us. After we finish talking, I will look at what you and other students say in order to help students who need to feel supported in getting to school every day.

Do you have any questions so far? [pause and answer any questions]

Ok, thanks. [Review assent form (including read aloud if necessary), get students to sign if they agree, collect all forms] Now that we've taken care of all of that I'm going to start recording.

[Recording Begins]

Ok, now that we've gotten all of our questions answered and have signed our forms, let's get started. Today's date is _____ and this is the High School Transition Interview I with _____ [pseudonym]

1. Thank you again for spending time with me today. Let's start by talking about how you're doing right now. How are things going for you?
    a. Prompts: living situation, school, family, peers

School History [This will serve as a guiding document]

I appreciate you sharing that with me. It helps me understand the context of your life right now. I'd like to talk about your school history. I'm providing a piece of paper to help us create a timeline of what you remember about your school experiences. You have a choice. You can take some time to fill this in with words and/or with drawings and then talk me through your educational history or we can go through the worksheet together out loud and I can fill in your school history while you talk. Which would you prefer?

[If student chooses to fill in the school history, provide them with colored pencils, crayons, pens, and pencils and the timeline worksheet (Appendix C)]

1a. Tell them that we will spend about 10 minutes on this activity. After 1-2 minutes of silent work time ask them about where they chose to start on the timeline and why? Continue prompting students throughout 5-7 minutes of work time.

[Prompts: Do you remember teacher or school names? How many different schools did you go to? Which school years were your favorites? Which school years were your least favorite? Why?]

2a. Describe your timeline and why you chose to include those words/ drawings

[Prompts: Ask any questions from B series that the student doesn't address]

[If a student chooses to talk about school history, begin this question series and fill in timeline]

1b. Describe your earliest memories of being in school.

[Prompts: How old were you when you started school? Did you do Headstart or Pre-k 3? What did you enjoy school when you started? What did you dislike about school when you started?]

2b. What was your experience like in elementary school [K-4th grade]?

[Prompts: How did you get to school? How close was your school to your house? Who were your teachers? What were your classmates like? How was elementary school different from early education? What was your transition like? What did you enjoy about school? What did you dislike about school? What were your grades like?]

3b. Describe your middle school experience [5th-8th grade]

[Prompts: How did you get to school? How close was your school to your house? Who were your teachers? What were your classmates like? How was middle school different from elementary school? What was your transition like? What did you enjoy about school? What did you dislike about school? What classes did you take? What were your grades like?]

4b. How has your ninth grade year been so far?

[Prompts: How do you get to school? How close is your school to your house? Who are your teachers? What are your classmates like? How has high school been different from middle

school? What has your transition been like? What do you enjoy about school? What do you dislike about school? What classes are you taking? What are your grades like?]

5b. What do you expect for the rest of your school career?

[Prompts: Do you plan to stay at the same school? Are you thinking about college? Grad school? What are you looking forward to? Is there anything you're nervous about?

6. Did you ever have to repeat a grade? If yes, which one(s) and what was that experience like?

7. Looking back at your school history, have your peers looked like you? [Race/Ethnicity] Describe the effect this has had on your school experience, if any.

8. Looking back at your school history, have your teachers or school leaders (principals) looked like you? [Race/Ethnicity] Describe the effect this has had on your school experience, if any.

Historical Attendance [Continue to use the timeline as a reference tool]

I appreciate you sharing that with me. It really helps me to understand the context of your school history. I'd like us now to talk about your attendance throughout the years.

1. Describe your attendance to school from elementary through high school.

[Prompts: Have you ever had perfect attendance for a semester? Have you ever had an adult talk to you or your parents about your attendance? How did your attendance change over time? Was there a year or time where you missed a lot of school? If so, what was going on to make you miss so much school? Has your attendance changed since you've started high school? (Is your attendance so far the same as usual?)]

2. What are some reasons for why you have missed school over the years?

[Prompts: What are the most common reasons? Are these absences/tardies usually excused? Have you ever been suspended or told not to go to school by an adult?]

3. Have you ever wanted to miss school but still came to school anyway? If yes, why did you still come to school?

4. Were there specific adults in your life who cared about your attendance (in or out of school) in middle or elementary school? Who were they? What did they do?

5. Do you think your attendance is better than, worse than, or the same as other students who look like you [Race/Ethnicity] in DC? In the United States? Why do you think that?

6. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your attendance?

Typical School Day

I appreciate you sharing that with me. It really helps me to understand your attendance over the years. We'll talk more specifically about attendance in the follow-up interview but right now, I'd like us now to talk about your typical school day.

1. Describe your typical morning before school

[Prompts: What time do you wake up? Does anyone wake you up or do you wake up by yourself? How long does it take you to get ready? Who else is home with you in the morning? How long does it take you to get to school? What's your usual mode of transportation? What do you do when you get to the school building? Who do you see before classes actually start? Do you normally eat breakfast?

2. How do you typically feel in the morning before school starts?

3. Walk me through your typical school day

[Prompts: What classes do you have and in what order? Who do you interact with during the day (students, teachers, school leaders) What are your favorite moments during the day? What are your least favorite moments during the day? Why? Are there specific times of day/lessons/activities that are difficult? Boring? Exciting?

4. How do you typically feel while at school?

[Prompts: What are 3 words or emotions that describe how you feel at school? Do you feel that way all day? Does anyone know how you feel while at school?

5. Do you think your school day is similar to other students in the US who look like you? [Race/Ethnicity] Why or why not?

6. What do you typically do after school?

[Prompts: Do you have any extracurricular activities or places you hang out after school? How do you get home? Who is home with you after school, if anyone? When/where do you eat dinner, if at all? What else do you do at home? What time do you usually go to sleep? About how much sleep do you get every night?]

7. How do you typically feel after school and in the evening?

Future Orientation

I appreciate you sharing that with me. We're almost done with the interview. Now, I'd like us to talk about your plans and hopes for the future.

1. What are your best hopes for the rest of your time at school/in education?

2. What would you like to do when you become an adult?

[Prompts: Work, Education, Family Life, Ambitions]

3. How can your hopes be made possible?

[Prompts: Is there anyone you need to help you in order to meet your goals? What are things you need to do now to reach your goal? Are your hopes for adulthood tied to education/school?]

Wrap-up

1. Thank you so much for sharing all of that. Is there anything else you'd like to add about what we've discussed today or anything else?

2. So, I've asked you a lot of questions today. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for talking with me today. I'm going to look at what you and other students have said and try to find some common themes. We will be in touch about scheduling your next interview. You can also get in touch with me, Ms. Sharifah Holder, through the phone number or email listed on your copy of the study assent form.

School Life History

School Starts

9th Grade Starts

Future

Appendix E

Strengthening High School Transition Interview II

Semi-Structured Interview Guide:

Introduction: It's great to see you again! Thank you so much for being here today. Again my name is Ms. Sharifah Holder and I'm doing a research project about attendance through the University of Maryland. Last time I got to hear all about your experiences in school so far and transitioning to high school. Thank you again for all of the information you shared. Today I want to talk about reasons you think students miss school and what supports you think students need to come to school everyday. Again, you get to have your voice heard and the information you share will help adults create programs to better support other students. Thank you again for spending time with me today.

Again, I'm going to record this conversation just so I don't miss anything that you say and there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Whatever you're thinking is important to us and no bit of information or idea is "bad," everything you say is extremely helpful.

Do you have any questions so far? [pause and answer any questions]

We're not going to go through the entire assent form again but we will review the last page just to make sure you still want to participate. Remember you can stop at any time. [Review last page of assent form and gain assent again. Now that we've taken care of all of that I'm going to start recording.

[Recording Begins]

Today's date is _____ and this is the High School Transition Interview II with _____ [pseudonym]

1. Thank you again for spending time with me today. Let's start by checking in about how you're doing right now. How are things going for you?
    a. Prompts: living situation, school, family, peers

School Climate

I appreciate you sharing that with me. It helps me understand the context of your life right now. I'd like to talk about your school year so far.

1a. I want to start by talking about what is going well for you at school right now. What do you
think is going well?
[Prompts: Favorite classes, favorite teachers, favorite part of the day, favorite activities and why?]

1b. Can you share some things that are not going well for you at school, if anything?
[Prompts: least favorite classes, least favorite teachers, least favorite part of the day, least favorite activities and why?]

2. If you had to use three words to describe your school, what words would you choose and why?

[Follow-up: Do you think most students at your school would agree with the words you chose? Why or why not?]

3. If you could be principal of your school, what changes would you make, if any?

[Prompt: What would you have at in your ideal school setting?]

Thank you for sharing that. I want to shift gears and start talking about attendance at your school.

Attendance Culture/ Knowledge/ Effective Strategies

1. What are some reasons students at your school miss school?

[Prompt: Do you think attendance is an important factor at your school? Do teachers/ students/ school leaders care about attendance? Do you think there's any time in the school year when students are more likely to be absent? Why?}
Follow-up: If you had to rank the reasons you just listed from most important for explaining why students miss school to least important, what order would you put them in?
[Prompt: What is the most important reason that students miss school? What is the most common reason?]

2. Do you think students have better or worse attendance in high school than in the earlier grades? Why do you think this?

[Prompt: How is your high school similar or different to your previous school? Has that affected your attendance?]

3. Describe the attendance policy at your school

[Prompts: What happens if you miss a day of school? 5 days? 10 days? Who keeps track? Who is notified when you are absent?]
[Follow-up: Do you think your school does a good job handling attendance?]

4. Some schools have programs or prizes for attending school to encourage students to come everyday, like an individual or a homeroom getting awards for perfect attendance or a prize for showing up to school. Does your school have anything like this?

    a. If so, please describe what your school does to encourage students to come to school.

    [Follow-up: Do these programs or strategies work for you and make you want to go to school? Do you think they work for all students?]

b. If not, would you like for your school to have something like that? Why or why not?

5. What do you think are the best ways to encourage students to come to school?

6. What do you think are the worst ways to get students to come to school?
[Prompts: Any strategies you've seen that were unsuccessful or that didn't work?]

7. What does truancy mean to you?
[Prompt: Have you ever heard the word truancy before? In what context? How would you feel to be labeled truant?]

Academic Considerations and Attendance

1. Describe how successful you've felt academically at school this year.
[Prompt: How do you define success? Do you wish you were more successful?]
[Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

2. Describe how supported you've felt academically this year.
[Prompt: How do you define support? Do you wish there was more academic support?]
[Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

3. How would you describe your classes?
[Prompt: Fun, Boring, Engaging, Exciting, Challenging? Are they different or the same as the classes at your previous school? Are you satisfied with the classes offered at your school? What could be done better?]
[Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

4. How do feel about testing at school?
[Prompt: Is there too much testing? Not enough? On testing days, how do you feel about going to school? Would you change anything about testing at your school?]
[Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

Social Environment and Attendance

1. How would you describe the other students at your school?
[Prompts: Do most of the other students at you school look like you (race/ethnicity)? Has that always been the case? How do you feel about that? What do you think would be different if you went to a school with people who didn't look like you, if anything?]

2. Describe how the students at your school treat each other?

[Prompts: Are students' kind to one another? Mean? Is this different to how students treated each other at your previous school?. Do you like spending time with people at your school? Do you ever feel targeted or disrespected by other students?]

3. Describe how the teachers at your school treat students.
[Prompts: Are teachers' kind to students? Mean? Fair? Do you think your teachers are well trained on dealing with students? Is this different to how teachers treated students at your previous school? Do you ever feel targeted or disrespected by teachers?]

4. Do you think the way people treat each other at your school has impacted your attendance or desire to go to school? How so?

Physical Environment and Attendance

1. How would you describe your school building?
[Prompts: Is it clean? Are the rooms big enough? Are the classrooms nice? Gym? Outdoor Facilities. Do you like the physical building of your school? Is it better or worse than your previous school?]

2. Do you like the food served at school?
[Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

School Safety and Attendance

1. Describe how safe you think your school is.
[Prompts: Do you feel safe in your classes? Are students ever harmed in school? Are you ever afraid of violence happening at school?]
[Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

School Discipline and Attendance

1. What has your experience been with discipline at your school?
[Prompts. What is the school discipline system like in your school? Do you think the school discipline system is fair? Harsh? Have you ever gotten in trouble at school? By a teacher? A principal? Have you ever been suspended?]
[Follow-up: Do you think the school discipline system affects whether or not students come to school? If so, how?]

Navigating School

1. What have your experiences with inequality been like at your school?
[Prompts: Describe any unequal treatment you've witnessed at your school. Discrimination? Racism?
[Follow-up: Have you ever done anything to challenge that inequality or resist? Have you ever seen anyone else? What did they do?]

1. How comfortable do you feel navigating through school?

[Prompts: Do you feel like you speak in the same style at school vs at home or out in the community? Do you feel like you can be successful in school?]

2. What are some skills you need to navigate through school setting?
[Prompt: What do the most successful kids do?]

Individual Factors

I know we've been talking for a while do you need a break or a snack? We've got a few more questions now that are more about you as an individual and your personal attitudes and beliefs relating to school attendance.

1. If you had to use three words to describe how you feel about going to school everyday, what words would you choose and why?
[Follow-up: Do you think most students at your school would agree with the words you chose? Why or why not?]

2. Why do you go to school?
[Prompts: What do you look forward to? What are you dreading?]

Agency and Attendance

1. Describe how much control you have over your own attendance
[Prompts: Who make the decision for you to go to school or stay home? When you do miss school, is it your choice or someone else's? If you wake up and don't want to go to school, who would you have to talk to? When you miss school what do you do? Where do you stay and with who?]

Mental and Physical Health

1. How would you describe your current health?
[Prompt: Are you in good health? Do you have asthma, diabetes, any other illnesses? Do you get the cold/ flu often?]
[Follow-up: How, if at all has your health impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

2. How would you describe your mental health?
[Prompt: Have you been to see someone to talk about your feelings? If so, how was that experience you? What are some of the other ways you cope with challenges, sadness, nervousness? *D*escribe a time when you were able to cope with a challenge.
[Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

Educational and Personal Attitudes/Values/Beliefs:

1. What are some things in your life that make you feel confident? What are you good at?

[Prompts: Do you enjoy telling stories? Where in your life do you have the opportunity to tell stories? Is this an important type of communication for you?

2. Do you think education is important? Why or why not?
[Prompts: Does this motivate you to attend school? What are you study habits like?]

3. Do you practice any religion or attend religious services?
[Follow-up: Describe your religion and how it affects your life. Does it affect your choices? Does it affect how you act or treat other people? Does it affect your attendance at all?]

Future Orientation and Resilience

1a. What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
[Follow-up: How does school fit into those hopes and dreams?]

1b. What do you think could get in the way of you achieving your hopes and dreams for the future?

1c. Are you still able to maintain those hopes and dreams despite those barriers?

2a.Have you ever heard the term resilience? What do you think it means? [Provide a definition if a student is unfamiliar]

2b. Describe any time you think you've been resilient in your life.

Appendix F

Strengthening High School Transition Interview III

Semi-Structured Interview Guide:

Introduction: It's great to see you again! Thank you so much for being here today. Again my name is Ms. Sharifah Holder and I'm doing a research project about attendance through the University of Maryland. Last time I got to hear more about your thoughts on school attendance. Thank you again for all of the information that you shared. Today I want to talk keep talking about reasons you think students miss school and what supports you think students need to come to school everyday. Again, you get to have your voice heard and the information you share will help adults create programs to better support other students. Thank you again for spending time with me today.

Again, I'm going to record this conversation just so I don't miss anything that you say and remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Whatever you're thinking is important to us and no bit of information or idea is "bad," everything you say is extremely helpful.

Do you have any questions so far? [pause and answer any questions]

We're not going to go through the entire assent form again but just like last time, we will review the last page just to make sure you still want to participate. Remember you can stop at any time. [Review last page of assent form and gain assent again. Now that we've taken care of all of that I'm going to start recording.

[Recording Begins]

Today's date is _____ and this is the High School Transition Interview III with _____ [pseudonym]

Thank you again for spending time with me today. Let's start by checking in about how you're doing right now. How are things going for you?
[Prompts: living situation, school, family, peers]

Interpersonal Factors
I appreciate you sharing that with me. It helps me understand the context of your life right now. I'd like to talk about your family, peers, teachers, and neighborhood

1. Describe the people in your life you are closest to and how they support you. [Prompts: Family, peers, teachers, community members. emotional support?]

2. How important is your school attendance to each of these people?

[Prompts: Do they encourage you to attend school? Discourage? Do they care about your attendance? How do you know? If you were going to miss school, would you talk to any of them/ let them know?

Peers

1. How would you describe your best friends' attendance?
   [Prompts: Do they go to school all the time? Do they miss a lot of school? If you or your best friends are absent, do you still talk to each other on that day? What do they do?]
   [Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

2. Do you have peers you don't get along with at school? Describe those interactions
   [Prompts: Has someone ever teased or bullied you? Has anyone ever made you feel unsafe?
   [Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

Parents/ Family

1. Describe your parent's relationship with your school. How involved are they in your education?
   [Prompts: Are they very involved with the school? How often do the talk to teachers or school leaders? Are the conversations positive or negative? Do they talk about attendance? Academic success/ challenges? Organizing details? Behavior?]

2. How do you think your parents feel about education? Why do you think that?
   [Prompt: Did your parents like school when they were younger? Do you all talk about school when you're at home? Do you talk about family history of education? What would happen if your parent found out you missed school? That you weren't going to finish high school?
   [Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

3. How would you describe your home life?
   [Prompts: Are there a lot of rules/ structure? Do you get in trouble a lot? Do you have a lot of responsibilities? Do you have fun at home? Do you feel comfortable at home? Supported? Do you find it hard or upsetting to be away from your family? What do you do at home on the weekends? In the summer?]
   [Follow-up: If you had a problem at school or didn't want to go to school would you feel comfortable telling your parents/ guardians. Why or why not?]

4. Does anyone in your house struggle with health challenges (mental health or physical health)? If so, what has that experience been like for you?
   [Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

Other Adults

1. Describe your relationships with your teachers
   [Prompts: Are they mostly positive or negative? Are there any teachers that would notice if you were not in school? Are there any teachers that would care? Does that matter to you? Do you trust your teachers? Do you feel like your teachers trust you? Why or why not?]

2. Do you have any adult mentors [people you look up to and speak to regularly] that don't live with you? If so, describe your relationship with these adults
   [Prompts: What kind of activities do you do together? Do they encourage you to attend school?]

Neighborhood Climate

Thank you for sharing all of that! We're going to switch gears and talk about your neighborhood/ community. Let me know if you need to take a break or get a snack.

1. Describe your commute to school.
   [Prompts: Do you use public transportation? Get dropped off? How safe is your route to and from school? How far away is your school from your house? How easy is it to get to school?]
   [Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

2. Has there ever been violent events near your school or home? If so, please describe those events.
   [Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

3. Has your family ever faced hardships? (Not enough money for something important, nowhere to live, not enough food to eat)
   [Prompts: Have those time periods lasted a long time? Did your parents or grandparents struggle with any hardships when they were younger?
   [Follow-up: How, if at all has that impacted your attendance or desire to go to school?]

4. Do you know of any resources in your community that would make attending school easier? If so, please describe them. If not, what do you think would be helpful in the community to encourage students to attend school?

5. Have you ever heard the term gentrification? Do you think you could explain what it means?

6. Gentrification is the process of rebuilding in areas (often urban areas) with brand new homes and businesses to replace older buildings . Gentrification can sometimes bring new people with more money to areas that used to have residents with less money. Have you seen examples of this in your neighborhood? In DC?

7. If so, how has it impacted your life?
   [Have you had to move because of new businesses or homes? Do you come into contact with more people that look like you or don't look like you on a daily basis? Has this affected your transportation options to school? Has this affected discrimination in your community? Racism? Safety of your neighborhood? How you are perceived? Police presence?

8. What have been your experiences discrimination based on your race/ ethnicity, if any?
   [Follow-up: How often has this happened? Why do you think it happened? How did it make you feel? How did you deal with it?

Closing Thoughts

1. Do you think DC does a good job with education?
   [Prompts: What do they do well or what could they do better? How do they do with attendance?]

2. Do you have anything else that you want to add or tell me about?

3. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for all of your help with this project! I will be reaching out to you later on after I've read everything over just to make sure that I correctly understood everything that you said. Also, when I've finished with my project I will come back and share with you what I found and how we can use it to help other students at your school and in DC. Thank you again!

Appendix G

Excerpts from Reflexive Journal and Analytic Decision Research Memos

Excerpts from Research Memo on Recruitment:

Eligible Students for CA Group in October
49 with 4 or more September absences
35 with 4 or more unexcused September absences

Students I was unable to recruit:
One student was unenrolled for attendance (parent described feelings of depression). Student is no longer living at home but rather in group home and is switching school to neighborhood school. I expressed that I would still be interested in speaking with them and including them in the study but it was difficult to follow-up and they were not successfully recruited.

I'm working to recruit a female student as so far only boys have been successfully recruited to join the study in the CA group. One mother seemed emotional and somewhat resigned about her daughter's attendance and said she would ask her if she wanted to participate. Her daughter said that she didn't want to do it and her mother said "she needs to worry about going to school first before doing stuff afterschool" Another mother asked "Does she have to?" and when she found out it wasn't mandatory said no.

Discussed Recruitment Challenges with School Attendance Coordinators, Dr. Green, and Dr. Aparicio and remained persistent without being coercive which meant a lot of waiting in between contact and giving parents/ students the space to reach out to me if they were interested.

Excerpt from Reflexive Journal on Recruitment
"Recruitment of students (in the CA group) has been difficult. Many students expressed interest in follow-up conversations but that doesn't always mean they'll remind their parents to reach out for more information. Also, parents may say yes via email and ask for the papers to be sent home with the student and then there is an additional layer to consider for getting those letters back."

Research Memos on Interviews:

Excerpts from Research Memos about Fred: "What to do with Fred?"
Of the 16 students who were already chronically absent by December, 3 of those students were students I had interviewed. Fred had perfect attendance from the time our interviews began and I wondered if I had somehow impacted the results. There was much discussion of is Fred in the right group. Were his absences in September an anomaly and thus is he more aligned with the regularly attendant group or did he have more protective factors as compared to other students and thus had better attendance outcomes? After discussion with Dr. Aparicio, we decided that Fred would just be an interesting case to examine and

see where he might fit on a spectrum of absenteeism. While the research has set up chronic absenteeism as a binary both qualitatively and quantitatively, as with most things it is more complicated than that.

Research Notes Interview 1: Fred
First School memory is the Earthquake
Anxious but not really is how he describes his feelings about transitioning
Reflects on a bad period of schooling as well as positive periods of schooling
Very detailed recollection of earlier grades including names of teachers, specific incidents
Uses the term "ghetto" in air quotes to describe some of his classmates
He is light skinned and interprets the question of "looks like me" as a way to be excluded and included from Blackness. (Colorism may have an impact on school belonging or perceived racism/ difference in predominately Black schools/ neighborhoods (how do we perceive difference? Is it Black and white?)
"Why is it always me"
Mother controls attendance (limited agency)
Consistency in terms of parent interaction with school/ transportation to school
Perceives illness as primary reason that students miss school
Tests are motivating for attending school
Perceives his own attendance as good
Eats breakfast and is driven to school (has a clear routine/pattern)
Detailed description of day/school pattern
NEUTRAL to describe feelings about school
No afterschool involvement
Feels relaxed at home

Research Notes Interview 2: Fred
Doesn't subscribe to the notion favorites and least favorites
Singles out moments that can be fun or not
Uses the word petty to describe a teacher interaction but feels uncomfortable elaborating
More aware of the "AESTHETICALLY PLEASING" nature of the building
He sees diversity within his school based on personality
Does he observe more because of his observational skills?
He also craves more diversity
Perceives that students miss school for HEALTH
Assumes attendance is better in HS because more responsibilities
Aware of the term Truancy
Hesitancy to critique current school
No safety concerns despite metal detectors (more seen as inconvenience)
Social landscape that students navigate and he feels like it can be navigated easily
Hasn't had behavior concerns recently
Work Completion as a theme (what are the goals of class/school)
OKAY< INDIFFERENT to describe feeling about school
I go to school cause I'm supposed to
Perception vs reality

Has a counselor at school that he speaks to that also helps him feel supported

Research Notes Interview 3:Fred
Missed no meetings and was able to get himself to the agreed upon location each day with no trouble (this is a skill as other participants needed additional assistance)
Friends and peer influence seems low
Never teased or bullied (yet earlier shared some students talk about him being white What is his definition of teasing/ bullying?)
Involved parent
Discussed Poverty/adversity hardship
He was hesitant to speak negatively about adults/experience (some underlying gratitude)
Had an understanding of gentrification but didn't see much of an impact on his life/ attendance

Discussed Fred's Case with Dr. Aparicio, and she assured me that he could be an interesting example in his own pseudo- category if he doesn't necessarily fit into one category perfectly.

Reflexive Journal on Transcription Process:
They are doing a much better job of catching certain students' words accurately and struggling with other students based on the clarity of voice/tone, accent. The accuracy rate was fairly good for some students (Alexis and Kay) but for other students it was much less accurate and required a lot of re-listening/ cleaning. Derrick was by far the most challenging and his interviews were basically transcribed by me because the original transcripts were filled with so many errors. This was daunting in many ways but also gave me an opportunity to become incredibly familiar with my data and stay connected to the students' words.

Research Memo Open Coding:
Herculean Effort Each interview has between 120 – 400 codes (not unique) for each interview.

Important implications for future narrative work and publications as each case reveals many potential themes.

Research Memo on Analysis across all Interview 1s
Decided to remove early childhood influences and indicators and will analyze those at a later date

Research Memo Theme Development:

<u>Individual</u>
Theme 1: School Ambivalence (Differentiation between school, education, and learning)→ School Ambivalence/ Nonchalance→ Academic Apathy

Composed of Open Codes

- Indifferent
- No favorite or least favorite class
- Don't like or dislike classes
- I don't care about the classes forreal
- Feel normal
- School normal

School ambivalence was narrowed to a focus on academics because there was more convergence along this theme for the chronically absent students as they all described academic apathy but they did not all describe apathy towards other social aspects of school while none of the regularly attending students described academic apathy. I struggled about the framing of this particular theme. Is this negative framing? Is the word apathy too far removed from the language students used? Is being apathetic about one's academic endeavor inherently bad or is that my own interpretation? I considered flipping this and instead framing this as engagement or academic passion but the data didn't support that. It wasn't just excitement, or engagement in academics because regularly attending students described being bored and hating certain classes as well. June spoke extensively about her dislike of English class, the teacher, the process of writing, the workload. While she was passionate about it, other students like Septembra weren't passionate but just indicated likes and dislikes as opposed to some of the chronically absent students who were truly dispassionate after lots of prompting and opportunities to share positive or negative opinions of the academic aspects of school. In future published papers, I may revisit and update this theme again.

Also, caring about passing and being apathetic about your classes seemed like opposing ideas even though there was evidence of both among participants in the CA group. The subtheme passing vs learning moved to Future-School Alignment. This decision was made after member checking and peer debriefing about the importance of passing being more closely connected to concerns about future school and life achievement as opposed to current feelings of enthusiasm or interest in academic content. While the description of learning among the regularly attendant group showed a lack of apathy, the desire to pass was described more as a goal not a feeling.

Theme 2: Future-School Alignment (Actionable steps/ Maturity/ Defined Goal) [Aspirational Capital] [Goal oriented vs Exploratory]→ High School- Future Alignment with subthemes Passing vs Learning, Future Stability, and Future Exploration and Planning.

Theme 3: Intrinsic Motivation→ ***"To Get an Education"→ Intrinsic Motivation***

While this theme was always described as intrinsic motivation I was always concerned with how academic and analytical that title sounded, particularly how none of the participants had used even a direct synonym to intrinsic motivation, whereas with apathy words like indifference used by participants made the comparison seem more grounded. I found that grounding the idea of intrinsic motivation in this notion of "getting an

education" and the different ways that students had operationalized getting an education, how students connected getting an education with going to school, how motivated they felt by that idea, and how that motivation was impacted by outside people and perceptions.

Theme 4: Wellness (Nutrition and Sleep)→ Health and Wellness (Nutrition and Sleep) → Health and Wellness with the subthemes Nutrition and Sleep

Theme 5: Resilience: Coping Strategies [resistant capital and linguistic capital]→ Resilience/Coping Strategies→ ***Coping Strategies "Get my mind off of it" subtheme Counseling***

Interpersonal

Theme 6: Staying to Myself (Besides My Ride or Dies)

This theme remained the same from inception to the final dissertation but it incorporated another theme being cool with everyone which had originally been exploring the active and passive nature of being cool with everyone either by avoiding them or by interacting slightly with everyone.

Theme 7: Othering (Internalized racism or Model Student Myth)→ Othering with the subthemes Attendance Behaviors and Race Based Perceptions.

This decision to remove the inclusion of internalized racism was a very intentional one. While this was my interpretation and there was some basis for that conclusion, it introduced my bias and was not rooted explicitly in the students' perceptions. My undergraduate research assistant and I spent time discussing this topic and if the designation of internalized racism went too far and made too many assumptions. I would have been telling my participants that they had internalized racist ideals as opposed to that being their perception of their own beliefs. I settled on race based perceptions and decided I can further explore the notion of internalized racism in future works.

Theme 8: Need of Instrumental and Emotional Support or School as an Individual Effort or Team Effort[social capital]→ School as an Individual Endeavor

This theme incorporated another earlier theme that was scrapped called (Navigation) specifically with respect to interpersonal relationships

Theme 9: Family Closeness/Bond (Separation Anxiety) [Familial Capital] Attachment→ Family Closeness/Cohesiveness→ Family Dynamics with the subthemes Parent Control over Attendance Behaviors and Parent-School Relationships.

School

Theme 10: School represents opportunity or inevitability→ ***"A New Slate": School Representing Opportunity*** An earlier theme school bonding/ transition was incorporated into this theme and into a late mixed method analysis.

Theme 11: System and Policy Awareness (Navigation of Individual) [navigational capital]→ School System and Policy Awareness—> Attendance Policy Awareness

This theme was too oversized at first in trying to understand the discipline system/ policies and the attendance system/ policies at the same time so it was split into two themes and the school discipline navigation portion was added to the normalization of oppression theme.

Theme 12: Normalization of Oppression→ Perception of School Discipline System with subthemes Getting Sent out of Class, Differential or Unfair Treatment and Normalization of Discipline.

Again, normalization of oppression put a distinct judgment and interpretation of the treatment students received with my own bias and was not grounded in how they perceived the treatment. While they used words like harsh or unfair, oppressive was not what they used and again discussion with my undergraduate research assistant revealed that disconnect between me providing a label for how students were feeling instead of letting their stories lead and be front and center. What I may deem oppressive is not an objective understanding of the school discipline system.

Community
Theme 13: Strong Community Cohesion and Ties (School choice vs Community Schools)→ Strong Community Ties
Theme 14: Perception outside of school walls mirrors or contrasts with perception inside school walls (Suspect or student)→ Mirrored Perceptions Within and Outside School Walls→ Perceptions of Criminality
Theme 15: Effects of Gentrification

Research Memo: Decision to shift from 5 Chapter Dissertation to 7 Chapter Dissertation

Despite, my dissertation committee's best efforts to warn me, I could have made three solid dissertations out of this one dissertation. I was so determined to not have a singular or limited view of the topic as I felt like a more comprehensive take would be my best contribution to the literature. After reading my initial behemoth draft, Dr. Green suggested increasing the number of chapters to improve organization. I was most concerned with separating the discussion of the qualitative data to a separate chapter but I was assured this follows the typical structure of results before discussion.

Meetings
Weekly then biweekly check-ins with undergraduate research assistant
Meeting with Attendance Coordinators at MLKP
Meeting with Attendance Coordinator at MXP
Presentation to School Partners

Meeting with QRIG group

Meeting/ Presentation with QRIG group

- Add into intersectionality the specific women focused counseling group which June was a part of

Meetings with Woodlawn Group

- Charlene Kuo, another doctoral student, offered insight and suggested looking at Racial Socialization literature when hearing about the othering and race based perceptions

Reflexive Journal Entry May 3rd

As I analyzed family dynamics and how parent involvement and racial socialization, impacted participants attendance and beliefs about education, I knew I would need to unpack how my parents had shaped my own educational beliefs. My parents placed a high value on education and as a result my sisters and I all have college and graduate school degrees and we were all first generation college students. My parents immigrated to the United States from Trinidad and Tobago before my eldest sister was born and while they had very different educational experiences, both stopped their schooling as high school graduates and often wondered "what could have been" if they had continued their schooling. My mom is incredibly bright but as one of 15 children she felt that as a young girl her education wasn't prioritized as compared to her brothers because of limited resources and societal beliefs about women's education. She was determined that her three daughters would have every educational opportunity no matter what sacrifices she had to make for them to achieve their goals. My father is also incredibly bright and as a result skipped grades in elementary school and was given a coveted position in a new Anglican school in the country. He struggled to adjust to this environment and rebelled and if he was eligible for my current study, he would have been in the chronically absent group of students as he often skipped school. He would often share these stories of his wild youth with us not as cautionary tales but for laughs or to provide historical context to further express his pride in our accomplishments. While higher education is the path we chose, I have always been very cognizant of not pushing that path on everyone because 1. My parents are some of the smartest people I know and neither of them completed college and 2. Through my work as a teacher I've seen there are so many pathways to a choice filled life and everyone should have agency in that decision. Knowing that I truly believed this, I was less concerned about my own values about education biasing my analysis of my student's stories. Whether they loved school or hated school, wanted to go to college or didn't care if they graduated high school, I felt confident that I wouldn't be judgmental of their choices. Throughout the interview process, I was able to listen openly and let their words and grouping exercises guide my interpretations. I also thought it was illuminating that there was no clear pattern between chronically absent students and regularly attending students in terms of what they wanted to do after high school. Post high school aspirations were varied and I was genuinely intrigued to hear the differing hopes and dreams for the future that students described.

With respect to racial socialization, my parents always instilled in all of us the importance of being lifelong learners and the value of education as a way to improve your station in life and combat the oppression that comes with being a Black person in an

often overtly racist world. My father has always been a pan-Africanist and I remember the Afrocentric art and sculptures that adorned our house. Every day we were greeted by a poster of Malcolm X that included his famous quote about achieving Black liberation by any means necessary. I learned about Stokely Carmichael, The Black Panther Party, Yasser Arafat, Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela as a supplement to the education provided at school. My first project in kindergarten was on the reelection campaign of Mayor Dinkins and I cried for days when Rudy Giuliani was elected instead. Race was never ignored or talked around in my house and being Black was a source of pride and the idea of white people being inherently superior was laughable and inconceivable in my household and I continue to hold those beliefs. Even though I know everyone has different views and received different messaging about race, one of the most surprising moments throughout the interviews was when Derrick said that if he went to a predominately white school, they would be smarter than him. I am completely aware of the narratives around inferiority with respect to intelligence that exist but again even after teaching at a predominately Black school, I reflected on my own practice and noticed that I rarely checked in about how students saw themselves in comparison to white students. This is DC, Chocolate City, home of Benjamin Banneker, why would I ever ask them to compare themselves to white students as though they were the standard or the norm? That seemed like it would be more damaging but in never asking the question, whether because of naivete, assumptions, or wishful thinking, these types of internalized thoughts were never revealed. I began to wonder how many students despite attending a predominately Black school, and seeing representation of intelligent Black people, felt the same way as Derrick. I also wondered how that belief was encouraged or supported even unintentionally by adults and systems in the school setting. I was able to remain neutral in the interview process and I followed up with Derrick about that particular quote to make sure that I had not misinterpreted it, but I also had to make sure I wasn't harping on it and making him nervous about what he had said because of how much it had impacted me.

Appendix H

Full Survey Data Results

Table 23

School Refusal Assessment Scale Results

School Refusal Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
How often do you have bad feelings about going to school because you are afraid of something related to school (for example, tests, school bus, teacher, fire alarm)?	
Never	112 (51.9%)
Seldom	45 (20.8%)
Sometimes	22 (10.2%)
Half the Time	19 (8.8%)
Usually	5 (2.3%)
Almost Always	7 (3.2%)
Always	5 (2.3%)
How often do you stay away from school because it is hard to speak with the other kids at school?	
Never	175 (81.0%)
Seldom	17 (7.9%)
Sometimes	13 (6.0%)
Half the Time	7 (3.2%)
Usually	2 (0.9%)
Almost Always	1 (0.5%)
Always	0 (0.0%)
How often do you feel you would rather be with your parents/guardians than go to school?	
Never	57 (26.4%)
Seldom	30 (13.9%)
Sometimes	49 (22.7%)
Half the Time	18 (8.3%)
Usually	16 (7.4%)
Almost Always	17 (7.9%)
Always	28 (13.0%)
When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you leave the house and do something fun?	
Never	28 (13.0%)
Seldom	23 (10.6%)
Sometimes	45 (20.8%)
Half the Time	37 (17.1%)
Usually	27 (12.5%)
Almost Always	30 (13.9%)
Always	25 (11.6%)

School Refusal Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
How often do you stay away from school because you will feel sad or depressed if you go?	
Never	150 (69.8%)
Seldom	29 (13.5%)
Sometimes	13 (6.0%)
Half the Time	10 (4.7%)
Usually	8 (3.7%)
Almost Always	2 (0.9%)
Always	3 (1.4%)
How often do you stay away from school because you feel embarrassed in front of other people at school?	
Never	176 (81.9%)
Seldom	18 (8.3%)
Sometimes	10 (4.6%)
Half the Time	8 (3.7%)
Usually	0 (0.0%)
Almost Always	1 (0.5%)
Always	2 (0.9%)
How often do you think about your parents or family when in school?	
Never	29 (13.4%)
Seldom	35 (16.2%)
Sometimes	58 (26.9%)
Half the Time	26 (12.0%)
Usually	16 (7.4%)
Almost Always	17 (7.9%)
Always	33 (15.3%)
When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how often do you talk to or see other people (other than your family)?	
Never	22 (10.2%)
Seldom	19 (8.8%)
Sometimes	26 (12.0%)
Half the Time	42 (19.4%)
Usually	37 (17.1%)
Almost Always	19 (8.8%)
Always	49 (22.7%)
How often do you feel worse at school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to how you feel at home with friends?	
Never	112 (51.9%)
Seldom	45 (20.8%)
Sometimes	22 (10.2%)
Half the Time	19 (8.8%)
Usually	5 (2.3%)
Almost Always	7 (3.2%)
Always	5 (2.3%)

School Refusal Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
How often do you stay away from school because you do not have many friends there?	
Never	116 (53.7%)
Seldom	40 (18.5%)
Sometimes	22 (10.2%)
Half the Time	19 (8.8%)
Usually	5 (2.3%)
Almost Always	7 (3.2%)
Always	6 (2.8%)
How much would you rather be with your family than go to school?	
Never	185 (85.6%)
Seldom	11 (5.1%)
Sometimes	11 (5.1%)
Half the Time	6 (2.8%)
Usually	0 (0.0%)
Almost Always	2 (0.9%)
Always	0 (0.0%)
When you are not in school during the week (Monday to Friday), how much do you enjoy doing different things (for example, being with friends, going places)?	
Never	17 (7.9%)
Seldom	24 (11.1%)
Sometimes	55 (25.5%)
Half the Time	29 (13.4%)
Usually	15 (6.9%)
Almost Always	18 (8.3%)
Always	56 (25.9%)
How often do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) when you think about school on Saturday and Sunday?	
	13 (6.0%)
Never	9 (4.2%)
Seldom	16 (7.4%)
Sometimes	24 (11.1%)
Half the Time	24 (11.1%)
Usually	41 (19.0%)
Almost Always	88 (40.7%)
Always	
How often do you stay away from certain places in school (e.g., hallways, places where certain groups of people are) where you would have to talk to someone?	
Never	128 (59.3%)
Seldom	31 (14.4%)
Sometimes	20 (9.3%)
Half the Time	15 (6.9%)
Usually	10 (4.6%)
Almost Always	8 (3.7%)
Always	3 (1.4%)

School Refusal Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
How much would you rather be taught by your parents or guardians at home than by your teacher at school?	
Never	134 (62.0%)
Seldom	26 (12.0%)
Sometimes	20 (9.3%)
Half the Time	17 (7.9%)
Usually	6 (2.8%)
Almost Always	6 (2.8%)
Always	5 (2.3%)
How much would you rather be taught by your parents or guardians at home than by your teacher at school?	
Never	86 (39.8%)
Seldom	39 (18.1%)
Sometimes	19 (8.8%)
Half the Time	31 (14.4%)
Usually	7 (3.2%)
Almost Always	8 (3.7%)
Always	25 (11.6%)
How often do you refuse to go to school because you want to have fun outside of school?	
Never	83 (38.4%)
Seldom	34 (15.7%)
Sometimes	30 (13.9%)
Half the Time	18 (8.3%)
Usually	22 (10.2%)
Almost Always	9 (4.2%)
Always	18 (8.3%)
If you had less bad feelings (for example, scared, nervous, sad) about school, would it be easier for you to go to school?	
Never	75 (34.7%)
Seldom	14 (6.5%)
Sometimes	24 (11.1%)
Half the Time	28 (13.0%)
Usually	18 (8.3%)
Almost Always	17 (7.9%)
Always	36 (16.7%)
If it were easier for you to make new friends, would it be easier for you to go to school?	
Never	62 (28.7%)
Seldom	22 (10.2%)
Sometimes	30 (13.9%)
Half the Time	30 (13.9%)
Usually	16 (7.4%)
Almost Always	10 (4.6%)
Always	41 (19.0%)

School Refusal Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
Would it be easier for you to go to school if your parents or guardians went with you?	
Never	164 (75.9%)
Seldom	20 (9.3%)
Sometimes	8 (3.7%)
Half the Time	11 (5.1%)
Usually	3 (1.4%)
Almost Always	4 (1.9%)
Always	4 (1.9%)
Would it be easier for you to go to school if you could do more things you like to do after school hours (for example, being with friends)?	
Never	43 (19.9%)
Seldom	22 (10.2%)
Sometimes	24 (11.1%)
Half the Time	33 (15.3%)
Usually	17 (7.9%)
Almost Always	23 (10.6%)
Always	52 (24.1%)
How much more do you have bad feelings about school (for example, scared, nervous, or sad) compared to other kids your age?	
Never	129 (59.7%)
Seldom	31 (14.4%)
Sometimes	18 (8.3%)
Half the Time	19 (8.8%)
Usually	6 (2.8%)
Almost Always	5 (2.3%)
Always	7 (3.2%)
How often do you stay away from people at school compared to other kids your age?	
Never	106 (49.1%)
Seldom	45 (16.7%)
Sometimes	22 (9.7%)
Half the Time	19 (8.8%)
Usually	5 (5.1%)
Almost Always	7 (6.5%)
Always	5 (3.7%)
Would you like to be home with your parents/guardians more than other kids your age would?	
Never	68 (31.5%)
Seldom	46 (21.3%)
Sometimes	29 (13.4%)
Half the Time	29 (13.4%)
Usually	6 (2.8%)
Almost Always	9 (4.2%)
Always	28 (13.0%)

School Refusal Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
Would you rather be doing fun things outside of school more than most kids your age?	
Never	25 (11.6%)
Seldom	22 (10.2%)
Sometimes	27 (12.5%)
Half the Time	30 (13.9%)
Usually	21 (9.7%)
Almost Always	29 (13.4%)
Always	61 (28.2%)
Primary School Refusal Cause includes Avoidance	
Yes	15 (6.9%)
No	200 (92.6%)
School Avoidance Subscale	Mean: 2.2075 SD: 1.13720
Primary School Refusal Cause includes School Escape	
Yes	12 (5.6%)
No	203 (94.0%)
School Escape Subscale	Mean: 1.9889 SD: 0.87139
Primary School Refusal Cause includes Attention Seeking	
Yes	63 (29.2%)
No	152 (70.4%)
School Attention Seeking Subscale	Mean: 3.1171 SD: 1.26443
Primary School Refusal Cause includes Tangible Rewards	
Yes	176 (81.5%)
No	39 (18.1%)
School Tangible Rewards Subscale	Mean: 4.2013 SD: 1.21681
Multiple School Refusal Causes	
Yes	43 (19.9%)
No	172 (79.6%)

Table 24

Screen for Childhood Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders Results

Anxiety Factors	Full Sample N=216
I don't like to be with people I don't know well.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	33 (15.3%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	120 (55.6%)
Very True or Very Often True	58 (26.9%)
I worry about other people liking me.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	157 (72.7%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	37 (17.1%)
Very True or Very Often True	17 (7.9%)
I am nervous.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	112 (51.9%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	73 (33.8%)
Very True or Very Often True	26 (12.0%)
I feel nervous with people I don't know well.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	94 (43.5%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	88 (40.7%)
Very True or Very Often True	29 (13.4%)
I worry about being as good as other kids.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	167 (77.3%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	25 (11.6%)
Very True or Very Often True	19 (8.8%)
I worry about things working out for me.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	68 (31.5%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	80 (37.0%)
Very True or Very Often True	63 (29.2%)
I am a worrier.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	96 (44.4%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	72 (33.3%)
Very True or Very Often True	42 (19.4%)
It is hard for me to talk with people I don't know well.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	74 (34.3%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	85 (39.4%)
Very True or Very Often True	52 (24.1%)
People tell me that I worry too much.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	159 (73.6%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	36 (16.7%)
Very True or Very Often True	15 (6.9%)

Anxiety Factors	Full Sample N=216
I feel shy with people I don't know well.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	84 (38.9%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	83 (38.4%)
Very True or Very Often True	44 (20.4%)
I worry about what is going to happen in the future.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	53 (24.5%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	71 (32.9%)
Very True or Very Often True	86 (39.8%)
I worry about how well I do things.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	52 (24.1%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	91 (42.1%)
Very True or Very Often True	68 (31.5%)
I worry about things that have already happened. CA timing 28.021 p=0.005	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	82 (38.0%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	85 (39.4%)
Very True or Very Often True	42 (19.4%)
I feel nervous when I am with other children or adults and I have to do something while they watch me (for example: read aloud, speak, play a game, play a sport).	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	89 (41.2%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	79 (36.6%)
Very True or Very Often True	41 (19.0%)
I feel nervous when I am going to parties, dances, or any place where there will be people that I don't know well.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	97 (44.9%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	78 (36.1%)
Very True or Very Often True	35 (16.2%)
I am shy	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	92 (42.6%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	74 (34.3%)
Very True or Very Often True	44 (20.4%)
I have scary dreams about a very bad thing that once happened to me.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	156 (72.2%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	38 (17.6%)
Very True or Very Often True	16 (7.4%)
I try not to think about a very bad thing that once happened to me.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	112 (51.9%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	59 (27.3%)
Very True or Very Often True	39 (18.1%)

Anxiety Factors	Full Sample N=216
I get scared when I think back on a very bad thing that once happened to me.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	126 (58.3%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	53 (24.5%)
Very True or Very Often True	31 (14.4%)
I keep thinking about a very bad thing that once happened to me, even when I don't want to think about it.	
Not True or Hardly Ever True	118 (54.6%)
Somewhat True or Sometimes True	58 (26.9%)
Very True or Very Often True	34 (15.7%)
General Anxiety Disorder	
Yes	53 (24.5%)
No	156 (72.2%)
General Anxiety Disorder Subscale	Mean: 2.2075 SD: 1.13720
Social Anxiety Disorder	
Yes	61 (28.2%)
No	148 (68.5%)
Social Anxiety Disorder Subscale	Mean: 1.9889 SD: 0.87139
Traumatic Stress Disorder	
Yes	37 (17.1%)
No	152 (80.1%)
Traumatic Stress Disorder Subscale	Mean: 3.1171 SD: 1.26443
Overall Anxiety Disorder ($\geq$17)	
Yes	81 (37.5%)
No	127 (58.8%)
Anxiety Disorder Subscale	Mean: 4.2013 SD: 1.21681
Overall Severe Anxiety ($\geq$25)	
Yes	28 (13.9%)
No	180 (83.3%)

Table 25

"Antisocial" Behaviors Results

Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
Cigarette Use (Lifetime)	
Never	195 (90.3%)
Once or twice	7 (3.2%)
Once in a while but not regularly	3 (1.4%)
Regularly now	2 (0.9%)
Cigarette Use (Past 30 days)	
Not at all	199 (92.1%)
Less than 1 cigarette per day	3 (1.4%)
1 to 5 cigarettes per day	1 (0.5%)
About half a pack per day	2 (0.9%)
About one pack a day or more	1 (0.5%)
Alcohol Use (Lifetime)	
Never	146 (67.6%)
1-2 times	40 (18.5%)
3-5 times	10 (4.6%)
6-9 times	3 (1.4%)
10-19 times	5 (2.3%)
20-29 times	1 (0.5%)
30-39 times	1 (0.5%)
40+ times	1 (0.5%)
Marijuana Use (Lifetime)	
Never	139 (64.4%)
1-2 times	23 (10.6%)
3-5 times	17 (7.9%)
6-9 times	7 (3.2%)
10-19 times	8 (3.7%)
20-29 times	3 (1.4%)
30-39 times	2 (0.9%)
40+ times	7 (3.2%)
Heavy Marijuana Use >10 times (Lifetime)	
Yes	20 (9.3%)
No	186 (86.1%)
E-cigarette Use (Lifetime)	
Never	198 (91.7%)
1-2 times	3 (1.4 %)
3-5 times	1 (0.5%)
6-9 times	1 (0.5%)
10-19 times	1 (0.5%)
20-29 times	1 (0.5%)
30-39 times	1 (0.5%)
40+ times	1 (0.5%)
Alcohol Use (Past 30 days)	
Never	187 (86.6%)
1-2 times	12 (5.6%)
3-5 times	3 (1.4%)
6-9 times	4 (1.9%)
10-19 times	0 (0.0%)
20-29 times	0 (0.0%)
30-39 times	0 (0.0%)
40+ times	1 (0.5%)

Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
Marijuana Use (Past 30 days)	
Never	173 (80.1%)
1-2 times	13 (6.0%)
3-5 times	4 (1.9%)
6-9 times	6 (2.8%)
10-19 times	6 (2.8%)
20-29 times	3 (1.4%)
30-39 times	0 (0.0%)
40+ times	2 (0.9%)
Heavy Marijuana Use >10 times (Lifetime)	
Yes	11 (5.1%)
No	196 (90..1%)
Suspension (Past Year)	
Never	115 (53.2%)
1-2 times	59 (27.3%)
3-5 times	19 (8.8%)
6-9 times	5 (2.3%)
10-19 times	1 (0.5%)
20-29 times	3 (1.4%)
30-39 times	2 (0.9%)
40+ times	3 (1.4%)
Handgun (Past Year)	
Never	182 (84.3%)
1-2 times	12 (5.6%)
3-5 times	4 (1.9%)
6-9 times	2 (0.9%)
10-19 times	1 (0.5%)
20-29 times	1 (0.5%)
30-39 times	0 (0.0%)
40+ times	5 (2.3%)
Illegal Drugs (Past Year)	
Never	196 (90.7%)
1-2 times	2 (0.9%)
3-5 times	1 (0.5%)
6-9 times	2 (0.9%)
10-19 times	1 (0.5%)
20-29 times	0 (0.0%)
30-39 times	1 (0.5%)
40+ times	3 (1.4%)
Steal Car (Past Year)	
Never	189 (87.5%)
1-2 times	6 (2.8%)
3-5 times	3 (1.4%)
6-9 times	4 (1.9%)
10-19 times	1 (0.5%)
20-29 times	2 (0.9%)
30-39 times	0 (0.0%)
40+ times	2 (0.9%)

Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
Arrested (Past Year)	
Never	179 (82.9%)
1-2 times	15 (6.9%)
3-5 times	4 (1.9%)
6-9 times	5 (2.3%)
10-19 times	3 (1.4%)
20-29 times	0 (0.0%)
30-39 times	0 (0.0%)
40+ times	0 (0.0%)
Attack (Past Year)	
Never	144 (66.7%)
1-2 times	33 (15.3%)
3-5 times	11 (5.1%)
6-9 times	5 (2.3%)
10-19 times	5 (2.3%)
20-29 times	3 (1.4%)
30-39 times	0 (0.0%)
40+ times	5 (2.3%)
Illegal Drugs (Past Year)	
Never	196 (90.7%)
1-2 times	2 (0.9%)
3-5 times	2 (0.9%)
6-9 times	2 (0.9%)
10-19 times	1 (0.5%)
20-29 times	0 (0.0%)
30-39 times	1 (0.5%)
40+ times	2 (0.9%)
Drunk or High (Past Year)	
Never	196 (90.7%)
1-2 times	2 (0.9%)
3-5 times	1 (0.5%)
6-9 times	2 (0.9%)
10-19 times	1 (0.5%)
20-29 times	0 (0.0%)
30-39 times	1 (0.5%)
40+ times	3 (1.4%)
Stole (Past Year)	
Never	144 (66.7%)
1-2 times	32 (14.8%)
3-5 times	11 (5.1%)
6-9 times	7 (3.2%)
10-19 times	6 (2.8%)
20-29 times	2 (0.9%)
30-39 times	1 (0.5%)
40+ times	3 (0.9%)
Damage Property (Past Year)	
Never	151 (69.9%)
1-2 times	26 (12.0%)
3-5 times	12 (5.6%)
6-9 times	5 (2.3%)
10-19 times	4 (1.9%)
20-29 times	2 (0.9%)
30-39 times	1 (0.5%)
40+ times	5 (2.3%)

Behaviors	Full Sample N=216
Steal from Store (Past Year)	
Never	107 (49.5%)
1-2 times	54 (25.0%)
3-5 times	18 (8.3%)
6-9 times	7 (3.2%)
10-19 times	8 (3.7 %)
20-29 times	5 (2.3%)
30-39 times	7 (3.2%)
40+ times	3 (1.4%)
Binary Alcohol Lifetime	
Never	146 (%)
Yes	61 (28.2%)
Binary Marijuana Lifetime	
Never	139 (64.4%)
Yes	67 (31.0%)
Binary Alcohol Past 30	
Never	187 (86.6%)
Yes	20 (9.3%)
Binary Marijuana Past 30	
Never	173 (80.1%)
Yes	34 (15.7%)
Antisocial Behavior Total	Mean: 16.2304 SD: 8.512

Table 26

Perceived Racism in Children and Youth Results

Perceived Racism Factors	Full Sample N=216
Watched closely or followed around by security guards or store clerks at a store or the mall	
Never	102 (47.2%)
Once	28 (13.0%)
Twice	36 (16.7%)
About Once a Year	3 (1.4%)
About Once a Month	12 (5.6%)
Weekly	13 (6.0%)
Got poor or slow service at a restaurant or food store	
Never	75 (34.7%)
Once	36 (16.7%)
Twice	32 (14.8%)
About Once a Year	25 (11.6%)
About Once a Month	20 (9.3%)
Weekly	6 (2.8%)
Were treated badly by a bus driver	
Never	152 (70.4%)
Once	17 (7.9%)
Twice	13 (6.0%)
About Once a Year	5 (2.3%)
About Once a Month	1 (0.5%)
Weekly	6 (2.8%)
Got poor or slow service at a store	
Never	93 (51.9%)
Once	45 (20.8%)
Twice	22 (10.2%)
About Once a Year	19 (8.8%)
About Once a Month	5 (2.3%)
Weekly	7 (3.2%)
Were treated unfairly by a police officer	
Never	131 (60.6%)
Once	20 (9.3%)
Twice	18 (8.3%)
About Once a Year	12 (5.6%)
About Once a Month	6 (2.8%)
Weekly	7 (3.2%)
Accused of something you didn't do at school	
Never	46 (21.3%)
Once	29 (13.4%)
Twice	38 (17.6%)
About Once a Year	15 (6.9%)
About Once a Month	23 (10.6%)
Weekly	42 (19.4%)

Perceived Racism Factors	Full Sample N=216
Unfairly called down to the principal's office	
Never	103 (47.7%)
Once	31 (14.4%)
Twice	23 (10.6%)
About Once a Year	15 (6.9%)
About Once a Month	9 (4.2%)
Weekly	12 (5.6%)
Got grades you didn't deserve	
Never	51 (23.6%)
Once	38 (17.6%)
Twice	38 (17.6%)
About Once a Year	22 (10.2%)
About Once a Month	12 (5.6%)
Weekly	32 (14.8%)
Treated badly or unfairly by a teacher	
Never	89 (41.2%)
Once	27 (12.5%)
Twice	24 (11.1%)
About Once a Year	15 (6.9%)
About Once a Month	13 (6.0%)
Weekly	26 (12.0%)
Watched more closely by security at school	
Never	
Once	156 (72.2%)
Twice	10 (4.6%)
About Once a Year	11 (5.1%)
About Once a Month	6 (2.8%)
Weekly	2 (0.9%)
	8 (3.7%)
Someone didn't want to be friends with you	
Never	95 (44.0%)
Once	30 (13.9%)
Twice	25 (11.6%)
About Once a Year	21 (9.7%)
About Once a Month	9 (4.2%)
Weekly	14 (6.5%)
You had the feeling that someone was afraid of you	
Never	80 (37.0%)
Once	34 (15.7%)
Twice	36 (16.7%)
About Once a Year	18 (8.3%)
About Once a Month	9 (4.2%)
Weekly	17 (7.9%)

Perceived Racism Factors	Full Sample N=216
Someone called you an insulting name	
Never	79 (36.6%)
Once	25 (11.6%)
Twice	29 (13.4%)
About Once a Year	15 (6.9%)
About Once a Month	15 (6.9%)
Weekly	31 (14.4%)
People hold their bags tight when you pass them	
Never	150 (69.4%)
Once	16 (7.4%)
Twice	9 (4.2%)
About Once a Year	10 (4.6%)
About Once a Month	1 (0.5%)
Weekly	8 (3.7%)
Someone made a bad or insulting remark about your race, ethnicity, or language	
Never	118 (54.6%)
Once	23 (10.6%)
Twice	13 (6.0%)
About Once a Year	13 (6.0%)
About Once a Month	10 (4.6%)
Weekly	15 (6.9%)
Someone didn't want to play or hang out with you	
Never	118 (54.6%)
Once	23 (10.6%)
Twice	25 (11.6%)
About Once a Year	13 (6.0%)
About Once a Month	7 (3.2%)
Weekly	8 (3.7%)
Someone was rude to you	
Never	71 (32.9%)
Once	35 (16.2%)
Twice	26 (12.0%)
About Once a Year	16 (7.4%)
About Once a Month	17 (7.9%)
Weekly	29 (13.4%)
People assume you're not smart or intelligent	
Never	100 (46.3%)
Once	35 (16.2%)
Twice	16 (7.4%)
About Once a Year	15 (6.9%)
About Once a Month	7 (3.2%)
Weekly	21 (9.7%)

Perceived Racism Factors	Full Sample N=216
You didn't get the respect you deserved	
Never	83 (38.4%)
Once	32 (14.8%)
Twice	28 (13.0%)
About Once a Year	18 (8.3%)
About Once a Month	14 (6.5%)
Weekly	19 (8.8%)
You weren't chosen for a sports team	
Never	142 (65.7%)
Once	20 (9.3%)
Twice	18 (8.3%)
About Once a Year	10 (4.6%)
About Once a Month	2 (0.9%)
Weekly	1 (0.5%)
Teachers assume you're not smart or intelligent	
Never	152 (70.4%)
Once	16 (7.4%)
Twice	8 (3.7%)
About Once a Year	8 (3.7%)
About Once a Month	7 (3.2%)
Weekly	3 (1.4%)
You're called on less in class by teachers	
Never	118 (54.6%)
Once	25 (11.6%)
Twice	19 (8.8%)
About Once a Year	12 (5.6%)
About Once a Month	7 (3.2%)
Weekly	13 (6.0%)
Have you ever seen your parents or other family members treated unfairly or badly because of the color of their skin, language, accent, or because they come from a different country or culture?	
Never	111 (51.4%)
Once	33 (15.3%)
Twice	13 (6.0%)
About Once a Year	17 (7.9%)
About Once a Month	9 (4.2%)
Weekly	11 (5.1%)
Would you rather be doing fun things outside of school more than most kids your age?	
Never	112 (51.9%)
Once	45 (20.8%)
Twice	22 (10.2%)
About Once a Year	19 (8.8%)
About Once a Month	5 (2.3%)
Weekly	7 (3.2%)

Perceived Racism Factors	Full Sample N=216
Perceived Racism (Cutoff 1 SD above)	
Yes	41 (19.0%)
No	147 (68.1%)
Perceived Racism	Mean: 2.1924 SD: 0.94174

Table 27

Correlation of Interpersonal Factor Means

	Prosocial Peers	Antisocial Peers	Family Manage	Mother Attachment	Father Attachment	Parental Involvement	Teacher Relationship	Peer Victimization	Verbal Victimization	Physical Victimization	Social Victimization
Prosocial Peers		0.082	0.247**	0.060	0.035	0.077	0.144	-0.001	0.028	-0.014	-0.036
Antisocial Peers	0.082		-0.179*	-0.095	0.054	0.060	-0.027	0.268**	0.241**	0.234**	0.222**
Family Management	0.247**	-0.179*		0.396**	0.143	0.286**	0.434**	0.158*	0.199*	0.017	0.155*
Mother Attachment	0.060	-0.095	0.396**		0.227**	0.184*	0.198*	-0.043	-0.042	-0.044	-0.026
Father Attachment	0.035	0.054	0.143	0.227**		0.209**	0.178*	-0.115	-0.186*	-0.019	-0.057
Parental Involvement	0.077	0.060	0.286**	0.184*	0.209**		0.395**	0.268**	0.191*	0.234**	0.263**
Teacher Relationship	0.144	-0.027	0.434**	0.198*	0.178*	0.395**		0.132	0.110	0.011	0.140
Peer Victimization	-0.001	0.268**	0.158*	-0.043	-0.115	0.268**	0.132		0.895**	0.792**	0.899**
Verbal Victimization	0.028	0.241**	0.199*	-0.042	-0.186*	0.191*	0.110	0.895**		0.533*	0.696**
Physical Victimization	-0.014	0.234**	0.017	-0.044	-0.019	0.234**	0.011	0.792**	0.533*		0.627**
Social Manipulation	-0.036	0.222**	0.155*	-0.026	-0.057	0.263**	0.140	0.899**	0.696**	0.627**	

** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level
* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level

Table 28
Correlation of School Climate Subscale Means

	Academic Support	Order and Discipline	School Physical Environment	Academic Satisfaction	Perceived Exclusion	School Connectedness	School Social Environment	School Opportunities
Academic Support		0.804**	0.590**	0.230**	0.218**	0.661**	0.614**	0.739**
Order and Discipline	0.804**		0.536**	0.437**	0.267**	0.580**	0.612**	0.741**
School Physical Environment	0.590**	0.536**		0.278**	0.249**	0.477**	0.575**	0.616**
Academic Satisfaction	0.230**	0.437**	0.278**		0.378**	0.214*	0.413**	0.503**
Perceived Exclusion	0.218**	0.267**	0.249**	0.378**		0.311**	0.419**	0.305**
School Connectedness	0.661**	0.580**	0.477**	0.214*	0.311**		0.477**	0.553**
School Social Environment	0.614**	0.612**	0.575**	0.413**	0.419**	0.477**		0.639**
School Opportunities	0.739**	0.741**	0.616**	0.503**	0.305**	0.553**	0.639**	

** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level
* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level

Table 29:
Correlation of Neighborhood Subscale Means

	Neighborhood Violence	Neighborhood Attachment	Community Disorganization
Neighborhood Violence		0.094	0.228*
Neighborhood Attachment	0.094		-0.153
Community Disorganization	0.228**	-0.153	

* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level

Appendix I

Quantitative Missing Data Analysis

Missing data analyses

Table 30 displays the available data for all 306 eligible students which included gender, school, attendance, tardies, out of school suspensions (OSS), and GPA gathered by school records as well as the unadjusted logistic regression results demonstrating how these factors predict End of Year Chronic Absenteeism. Of the entire ninth grade cohort, 26.8% had missed more than 10% of school and were considered chronically absent by the end of the school year. Table 30 shows that age, gender, and school were not predictive of End of Year chronic absenteeism. As expected, students who were chronically absent in September were more likely to be chronically absent for the entire school year [OR=10.24 CI=5.495- 18.774]. Students who were suspended for even one day during ninth grade, (mean days suspended=1.163), were over 4 times as likely to be chronically absent as compared to students who had never been suspended [OR=4.386 CI=2.549–7.547]. Students with higher GPAs in all four grade periods were less likely to be chronically absent as compared to their peers with lower GPAs. This relationship is bidirectional as students with more absences may miss more assignments that in turn lower their GPAs. Students who did not participate in the baseline assessment were over three times as likely to be chronically absent as compared to students who did participate in the survey. [OR=3.271 CI=1.898–5.635]. Of those 224 students, 96.4% (n=216) provided assent and this sample is used for subsequent analyses.

Table 30

Demographic Characteristics of Eligible Ninth Graders and the Association of these Characteristics with End of Year Chronic Absenteeism (N=306)

	Total Eligible Participants (N= 306)	Unadjusted OR	95% CI
MXP	61 (19.9%)	0.935	0.499-1.750
MLKP	245 (80.1%)		
Female (reference)	164 (53.6%)	1.592	0.957-2.649
Male	142 (46.4%)		
Age	Mean: 14.6 SD: 0.48	1.199	0.714-2.012
September Chronic Absenteeism (4+ days absent)		**10.124**	**5.459-18.774**
Yes	65 (21.2%)		
No	241 (78.8%)		
Total Days Absent pre 9/30	Mean: 2.16 SD: 3.319	**1.807**	**1.543-2.117**
September Unexcused Absences	Mean: 1.27 SD:1.852	**1.768**	**1.475-2.118**
September Number of Days Tardy	Mean:9.08 SD: 7.973	**1.054**	**1.022-1.087**
End of Year Number of Days Unexcused	Mean: 7.79 SD:9.08		
End of Year Number of Days Tardy	Mean:40.74 SD: 29.594	**1.014**	**1.005-1.023**
Out of School Suspension (OSS)		**4.386**	**2.549-7.547**
Yes	88 (28.8%)		
No	218 (71.2%)		
Number of Days on OSS	Mean: 1.163 SD: 2.4773	**1.365**	**1.212-1.538**
Q1 GPA	Mean: 2.42 SD: 0.86	**0.370**	**0.265-0.518**
Q2 GPA	Mean: 2.24 SD: 0.90	**0.312**	**0.220-0.443**
Q3 GPA	Mean: 2.32 SD: 0.87	**0.328**	**0.230-0.468**
Q4 GPA	Mean: 2.29 SD: 1.22	**0.516**	**0.408-0.654**
Missing (Did not take quantitative survey)			
Yes	82 (26.8%)		
No	224 (73.2%)	**3.271**	**1.898-5.635**

Bolded results at p< 0.05 level

Table 31 shows the differences between students who were presented the quantitative survey and those who were not. Students who did not participate in the quantitative survey were significantly different from the participants based on gender, September absences, September unexcused absences, end of year chronic absenteeism, end of year absences, end of year unexcused absences, out of school suspension and GPA all four quarters.

Table 31

Missing Data Results

	Missing (N=82)	Not Missing (N=224)	Chi Square or T-test
High School 1	19 (23.2%)	42 (18.8%)	χ^2= 0.735, p=0.391
High School 2	63 (76.8%)	182 (81.3%)	
Female	35 (42.7%)	129 (57.6%)	**χ^2 =5.363, p =0.21**
Male	47 (57.3%)	95 (42.4%)	
Age	Mean: 14.8 SD: 0.70	Mean: 14.6 SD. 0.45	t=-1.421, p=0.168
September Chronic Absenteeism			
Yes	33 (40.2%)	32 (14.3%)	**χ^2=24.177, p<.001**
No	49 (59.8%)	192 (85.7%)	
			t=-2.599, p=0.016
Total Days Absent before 9/30	Mean: 3.70 SD: 4.150	Mean 1.41 SD: 1.934	
September Unexcused Absences	Mean: 1.87 SD: 2.546	Mean: 0.84 SD. 1.262	t=-1.909, p= 0.068
September Tardies	Mean: 9.13 SD: 5.755	Mean: 8.96 SD. 8.193	t=-0.093, p = 0.926
End of Year Chronic Absenteeism			
Yes	37 (45.1%)	45 (20.1%)	**χ^2=19.175, p<.001**
No	45 (54.9%)	179 (79.9%)	
			t=-2.009, p =.056
Total Number of Days Absent	Mean: 15.61 SD: 16.522	Mean: 8.58 SD: 7.282	
End of Year Unexcused	Mean: 10.87 SD: 13.360	Mean: 5.43 SD. 5.233	t=-1.929, p=.066
End of Year Tardies	Mean: 57.26 SD: 20.820	Mean: 41.38 SD. 31.505	**t=-3.119, p=0.003**
OSS			
Yes	33 (40.2%)	55 (24.6%)	**χ^2=7.213, p=.007**
No	49 (59.8%)	169 (75.4%)	
Number of Days on OSS	Mean: 2.217 SD: 3.4339	Mean: 0.943 SD. 1.9693	t=-1.734, p= 0.096
Q1 GPA	Mean: 1.56 SD: 0.87	Mean: 2.67 SD. 0.75	**t=6.412, p <.001**
Q2 GPA	Mean: 1.45 SD: 0.87	Mean: 2.48 SD. 0.81	**t=5.606, p =.001**
Q3 GPA	Mean: 1.60 SD: 0.73	Mean: 2.63 SD. 0.78	**t=5.731p <.001**
Q4 GPA	Mean: 1.59 SD: 1.09	Mean: 2.67 SD. 1.16	**t=4.055 p <.001**

Bold results at p≤0.05 level

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