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An exploratory study: school social workers' perceptions of effective truancy interventions for African American high school students

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY: SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF
EFFECTIVE TRUANCY INTERVENTIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS.

Advisor: Sarita K. Davis, Ph.D.

Dissertation dated July 2009

This embedded mixed methods study explored school social workers’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of current truancy interventions, which truancy interventions are most effective in reducing truancy among African American high school students, and what makes the truancy interventions effective. The study population included school social workers from the state of Georgia who had at least one year of school social work practice with African American high school students. The independent variables were parental involvement, professional development for teachers, mentoring, collaboration with community partners and filing truancy petitions with the juvenile courts. To carry out the study, a questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data and focus groups were facilitated to collect the qualitative data. Descriptive analysis (mean, central tendency) was used to analyze the quantitative data with a paired t-test to
determine any significance between the degree of importance and effectiveness of the truancy interventions in general. Discussion was used to analyze the qualitative results of the study. The findings of the study reveal that all of the truancy interventions were generally rated as important and effective truancy interventions. However, mentoring was rated specifically, as the most effective truancy interventions to reduce truancy among African American high school students. Implications for policy and social work practice are discussed.
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY: SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE TRUANCY INTERVENTIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
GARRICK WHITE

WHITNEY M. YOUNG, JR. SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JULY 2009
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PROLOGUE

WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

My friend Jay was 14 when he started missing school. He lived two levels above me in my apartment building in a Chicago housing project community. Jay resided with his “on the go” mother, his younger brother and her “off and on” boyfriends. Before Jay began missing school, he had perfect attendance and he was always on the honor roll. I admired him for his great study habits and his aspirations to be successful in life. If anybody could be successful, I thought it would have been Jay. However, when Jay entered the ninth grade in high school, he began to lose interest in school and that is when he began skipping.

Jay would get up every morning, prepared to go to school, so I thought. However, when he arrived to the school campus, he would eat breakfast and then leave school to hang out with new associates that he met at the school. Overtime, Jay’s truancy got worse and he became more detached from school. One day I told Jay’s mother that he was skipping school and she replied “that is his education and if he does not want to go to school than he will be like the rest of my family”. His mother continued to say that none of her siblings or parents finished high school. I realized after talking with Jay’s mother, that he had no support at home. I thought to myself, my mother only has an eighth grade education, but at least she cared enough to make me go to school. Needless to say, Jay continued skipping school until he decided to dropout and join a gang at the
age of 16. Despite Jay’s level of intelligence, attending and completing school was a major challenge. Eventually, at the age of 17, Jay was arrested and incarcerated for distributing drugs, which became a pattern every time he was released from jail. Jay’s life spiraled out of control, not only because he began skipping school. His life spiraled out of control because he did not have the support systems in place to help him cope with the pressures of adolescence during his high school years. This story reveals how urgent it is to find the best possible strategies to address the problem of truancy among African American youth. The problem of truancy, coupled with the lack of literature from the perspectives of school social workers regarding truancy interventions lead me to ask “which truancy interventions are the most effective to reduce truancy among African American high school students”.

I first became interested in this topic in 2001 when I began working as a school social worker in Atlanta. One aspect of a school social workers job is to ensure that students attend school regularly. I am still interested in finding the best solutions to the problem of truancy for African American students who struggle to attend school like my friend Jay. The best possible strategies must be pursued, if we expect to save our youth.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Truancy continues to be a major problem among adolescents, including African-American high school students in the United States (GDOE, 2006). In fact, students who do not attend school are more likely to leave school before obtaining a high school diploma (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazon, 2005). The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) noted that there was a 10.7% dropout rate among African-American high school students sixteen years of age and older compared to their White counterparts who had a 5.8% dropout rate nationally. Because students do not complete their high school education, many of them find themselves unemployed, underemployed, and often incarcerated because of their involvement in unlawful criminal activity (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001, Wolma, Bruininks, & Thurlow, 1989). The above potential consequences of truancy and dropping out of school has made this social issue a federal priority because it represents a major debt to society.

George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) to ensure that students who are at risk of dropping out of school, especially the populations who are considered disadvantaged because of their social economic status, receive the necessary support to help them complete their high school education. No Child Left Behind mandates that individual states and local school districts meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which includes a 95% graduation rate for high school students every
year. To accomplish such a task, school social workers are usually the experts who are
called upon to address the issue of truancy, which is the first indicator of dropping out of
school (Teasley, 2004). Therefore, this research explores school social workers
perceptions regarding which truancy interventions are effective in general and
specifically for African-American high school students; which truancy interventions are
the most effective for African-American high school students; and what makes the
truancy interventions effective for this population. This type of research is important
since the No Child Left Behind Act mandates individual states and school districts to find
alternate ways to support the academic progress of students, including African
Americans. This process starts with developing interventions to help this population
attend school daily.

Chapter 1 describes the problem of truancy as a national, state, and local
phenomenon while introducing the dissertation topic. The background of the problem of
truancy is discussed from a historical perspective to demonstrate why truancy is an
important social concern that is worth researching, a statement of the problem is provided
and the purpose of the study is briefly presented. In addition, chapter 1 includes a
discussion of the significance of the current study as it relates to the issue of truancy
interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students. Chapter
1 also includes the nature of the study, research questions, theoretical frameworks,
definitions, assumptions, limitations, and chapter summary.
Background of the Problem

The problem of truancy is linked to the early Compulsory Attendance laws that were pass by individual states. Compulsory Attendance laws are defined as statutes that require parents to send their children to school beginning and ending at an age determined by each state (Encyclopedia of Everyday Law, 2005). Massachusetts enacted the first modern Compulsory Attendance Law that prevented parents from causing their children to be truant from school. The act was followed by New York in 1854 and by 1918; all states had passed a Compulsory Attendance Law (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002).

There were many views on the passing of the laws. Some felt that it was a violation of parent’s rights (Woodruff, 2001) and others felt that the laws were valid and that children needed to be in school. Proponents of compulsory attendance hoped that the new laws would close the gap between the rich and poor and that regular education would "Americanize" the great waves of immigrants. The debates continue over whether the laws should exist and whether children should be educated in public institutions or at home. The earlier goal for passing the laws were said to nationalize immigrants and bridge the gap between the rich and poor. However, the current laws focus on the prevention of dropout, delinquency and economic problems in the future (United States Department of Education, 2006). Although policies were in place years ago to address the issue of truancy, continuous research is needed to address the current problem today.

Statement of the Problem

According to Fantuzzo, Grim and Hazon (2005), truancy seems to be a major issue for students, parents, schools, communities and society. As the problem of truancy
becomes chronic, students from around the nation put themselves at risk for dropping out, getting involved in delinquent activities, and performing poorly in the area of academics (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The U.S. Department of Education has identified several factors that contribute to truancy. School factors include safety, school size, and attitudes of staff, failure to communicate with parents, failure to meet the academic needs of the students, and the failure to consistently, follow the attendance policy. Other factors noted by the department include family background and systemic issues in the family, transportation, employment, teen pregnancy, truant friends, unaware of the attendance law as well as other emotional and social issues.

Vanderslice (2004) noted that between 347,000 and 544,000 tenth through twelfth grade students, dropped out of school each year over the past decade. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2007) indicated that in October 2005, approximately 3.5 million 16-24-year-olds were not in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential such as a GED nation wide. The center also indicated that the southern region of the United States had a higher incidence of students skipping or dropping out of school compared to other regions. Among Blacks, there was a 10.4 percent dropout rate in 2005. Despite a decrease in the dropout rate from 1972 to 2005, among African-American youth, dropout rates are still high. In addition, approximately 49.8% of African American students who enter the ninth grade in the United States do not graduate on time with a regular diploma, which represent 17.8% of the national average (Paulson, 2006). Males ages 16-24 were more likely than females to be high school dropouts in 2005 (10.8 percent compared to 8.0 percent). According to Fantuzzo,
Grim, and Hazan (2005), many students who drop out struggled with daily attendance earlier in their educational process.

School Social Workers often get referrals from teachers and administrators when students are having emotional or behavior issues or when they are chronically absent from school (Teasley, 2004). Therefore, the professionals are in need of research that might offer solutions to address the problem of truancy and dropout among high school students, especially African-American high school students.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this embedded mixed methods study is to explore school social worker’s perceptions of the most effective truancy interventions for African-American high school students. The identified independent variables are parent involvement, professional development for teachers, mentoring, collaboration with community partners, and the filing of truancy petitions with the juvenile court system. The dependent variable is truancy.

Significance of Study

The research that focuses on truancy and truancy interventions from the views of school social workers are limited concerning decreasing truancy among African-American high school students. This study benefits school social workers by emphasizing relevant interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students. Knowing and implementing relevant truancy interventions is important if school social workers expect to address the problem of truancy more effectively.
The study is important because federal regulations like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(2002) mandates that school systems find ways to address the problem of truancy because it is viewed as the best predictor of high school students dropping out of school, a problem that is being addressed on the federal level. This type of research is also important because attending school for children between the ages 6-16 was made mandatory in Georgia by the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law. In addition, school social workers are responsible for ensuring that students are attending school daily. Research that results in the awareness of more effective truancy interventions might help school social workers become more prepared to address the issue in a way that results in a decrease in truancy.

This study provides an alternate understanding of the problem from an Afrocentric perspective. This is important because the research allows African American school social workers to share their perceptions in their own words since it is assumed that this group of professionals share aspects of similar cultural experiences as that of African-American high school students. The assumption is that because this group shares similar cultural experiences, they have something unique to offer that might lead to a better understanding of the problem.

This study not only expands the body of literature related to truancy and school social work, the results could be of value to school social workers and other professionals interested in helping African-American high school students began to connect to their educational processes in a way that motivates the group to attend school daily. The results of this research also informs policy and school systems practices related to truancy
and the Compulsory Attendance Law of Georgia to ensure that future policies are current, relevant and clear enough for school social workers to follow and implement strategies that are backed by policy and best practices.

Nature of Study

This exploratory study utilizes an embedded mixed methods design, which is appropriate to answer the research questions. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), an embedded design is a mixed methods design in which one data set provides a supportive, secondary role in a study based primarily on the other data type. The authors indicate that the premise of the design is that one data set alone is not sufficient, that different questions need answering, and that each question requires different types of data. This is the case with the current study, which explores the perceptions of school social workers regarding effective truancy interventions for African-American high school students.

The Level 1 data provides the quantitative results, while the Level 2 data (qualitative) provides detailed information about school social workers perceptions of truancy interventions in their own words. Previous research utilized quantitative designs (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazon, 2005) to evaluate interventions to decrease truancy. However, the qualitative views of the participants were not present. Hall-Haynes (2007) is an example of a researcher who used a mixed-method approach to research truancy and truancy interventions from the perceptions of students and educational leaders. The mixed methods approach in this example seemed to be more appropriate than the quantitative approach alone because it allowed for a more scientific way of knowing
while affording participants to speak from their own voices which could be perceived as added value to the understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2007).

The selected design allows for the use of questionnaires to collect the quantitative data. In addition, the design allows for the collection of data via focus groups. Both collection strategies afford the researcher the opportunity to capture meaningful information that support accomplishing the research goals.

Research Questions

The current study explores School Social Workers perceptions of effective truancy interventions for African-American high school students. The following are the research questions for the study:

RQ1: How effective are current truancy interventions?

RQ2: Which interventions are most effective for African-American youth?

RQ3: What makes the truancy interventions specifically effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students?

Theoretical Framework

This section of the paper provides a brief description of the theoretical frameworks used in this study. The three frameworks are discussed in more detail in chapter two. The three frameworks used to guide this study are Systems Theory (Minuchin, Colapinto, & Minuchin, 1998), Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988), and the Afrocentric Perspective (Asante, 2003, & Schiele, 2000). Systems theory was chosen because it is identified as an organizational theory that allows school social workers to
view and organize the way that they carry out their interventions for various systems since students are impacted by the various systems that surround them. Social Capital theory was chosen because it suggests that students who have access to resources and social networks (people) who are willing to assist them academically, have better academic outcomes (Coleman, 1988). Finally, the Afrocentric Perspective was chosen because it considers the lived experiences and opinions of African American school social workers when developing strategies to address the issues of African-American high school students (Schiele, 2000).

Definitions

1. Collaboration with Community Partners. Collaboration with Community Partners refers to school social workers actively working with organizations, businesses, groups and individuals from the neighborhood or city where their school is situated to develop and implement strategies to support the effort of children attending school daily (Reimer & Dimmock, 2005).

2. Filing Truancy Petition. Filing truancy petitions refers to the paper work that school social workers complete and submit to juvenile courts after a student misses a number greater than five unexcused absences from school. The actual number above five unexcused absences is determined by individual school districts. In addition, petitions are not filed after a student reaches his or her sixteenth birthday.
3. Mentoring. This term refers to a relationship between a child and a supportive adult that involves the provision of guidance to the child regularly (Karcher, 2005).

4. Parental Involvement. This term refers to school social workers making contact with parents via telephone calls, letters, conferences at home or at school. In addition, parental involvement refers to school social workers involving parents in volunteer opportunities that results in support for their children at school (Hall-Haynes, 2007).

5. Professional Development for Teachers. Professional development refers to the training that teachers receive to help enhance their knowledge and skills to accomplish the goal of educating students (Guskey, 2000). In the context of school social work, this refers to the trainings that school social workers provide to inform educators about policies related to truancy and the truancy protocol, to help them learn and implement effective strategies to assist African American students academically. This includes training on how to infuse culturally relevant and multicultural content in the curriculum (Kunjufu, 1989).

6. Truancy. This term is defined as the habitual engagement of unexcused absences from school (Zhan, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Wilson, 2007).

Assumptions

The assumptions are that MSW school social workers are certified by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and that they have at least one year of experience working with African American students at a high school. The study question also assumes that the school social workers have a unique perspective based on proximity and
ethnicity, their responses are honest and that school social workers are experts in Georgia who are responsible for addressing the problem of truancy.

Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations

This study is limited to school social workers in the state of Georgia. The results of the study are not generalizable outside of the state of Georgia because social workers have different ways of practicing depending on their unique regions, environments and policy mandates. The qualitative results are also not generalizable. The researcher expects the responses from focus group participants to provide richer insight that answers the questions more comprehensively.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the problem of truancy among high school students and introduced the current research, which explores the most effective truancy interventions for reducing truancy for African-American high school students. Since other studies noted the importance of understanding the effectiveness of school social workers interventions (Teasley, 2004), this research is aligned with the scholarly literature and expands the literature related to truancy and school social work practice. This study uses an embedded mixed methods design, which allows for both quantitative and qualitative methods and results (Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2007). The independent variables were introduced as parental involvement, professional development for teachers, mentoring, collaboration with community partners, and the filing of truancy petitions with the court
system. The dependent variable is truancy. Systems Theory, Social Capital Theory and the Afrocentric Perspective were introduced as the frameworks that guide the study.

The significance of this study is linked to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) which mandates schools and school districts to find alternate ways to increase the dropout rate, which starts with ensuring that students attend school daily. In addition, the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law mandates students between the ages 6-16 to attend school.

Chapter 2 includes a discussion and synthesis of the literature about the historical and present reality of truancy among high school students, with emphasis on African-American high school students in Georgia public schools. The chapter also provides detailed information about truancy, school social work interventions to address the issue, the marginalization of African-American youth, as well as the theoretical frameworks that guide the study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this embedded mixed methods study is to explore from the views of school social workers, which truancy interventions are most effective in reducing truancy among African-American high school students. According to the National Center for School Engagement (2007), truancy is defined as any unexcused absence from school. For the purpose of this study, truancy is defined as the habitual engagement of unexcused absences from school (Zhan, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Wilson, 2007). Truancy should not be confused with excused absences, which are documented for reasons of illness, medical appointments, court appointments, family deaths, and other absences that can be substantiated (GDOE, 2006). This is important to understand for purposes of clarity in the discussion.

Truancy is a complex social issue that must be addressed among high school students, including African American students. School social workers are responsible for addressing the problem of truancy (Teasley, 2004) and they usually develop strategies toward decreasing the problem. Chapter 2 provides a historical perspective of truancy including relative policies, examines literature related to factors that lead to truancy, reasons why children are absent from school, the difference between excused and unexcused absences (truancy), and researched based interventions carried out by school social workers and others to address the problem of truancy. In addition, the chapter
discusses the truancy trend in Georgia and examines the current protocols that eleven schools in Georgia follow to address the problem of truancy.

African-American youth are discussed as a marginalized group in the context of their educational experiences and existence in the United States. Parental involvement, mentoring, professional development for teachers, collaboration with community partners and the filing of truancy petitions with the juvenile courts are discussed because the literature identified the five independent variables as interventions to decrease truancy (Teasley, 2004). Systems Theory, Social Capital Theory, and the Afrocentric Perspective are discussed as the frameworks that guide this study because of the potential of the three frameworks to help the researcher understand the issue of truancy as a systemic issue that may be addressed by truancy interventions that include connecting students with additional social networks or resources. In addition, the Afrocentric perspective was offered because it considers the lived experiences of the students and the African American social workers who serve them.

Historical Background

The problem of truancy among students in general has existed for many years (Woodruff, 2001). Truancy is linked to the early Compulsory Attendance laws that were enacted by individual states. Compulsory Attendance laws are defined as statutes that require parents to send their children to school beginning and ending at an age determined by each state (Encyclopedia of Everyday Law, 2005, Fantuzzo, Grim & Hazon, 2005, Mogulescu & Segal, 2002, &Woodruff, 2001). Massachusetts enacted the first modern Compulsory Attendance Law in 1852 that prevented parents from causing
their children to be truant from school. By 1918, all states had passed a Compulsory Attendance Law (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002). Figure 1 illustrates the actual dates that each state initially enacted a Compulsory Attendance Law that mandated school attendance for children.

According to figure 1, the state of Georgia and the remainder of the southern states were among the last to enact a compulsory attendance law. This does not come as a surprise, since many of the southern states were not as progressive during that time. In fact, education for African Americans was not a major concern for the representatives of government until Brown vs. the Board of Education (Watson, 2001).
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*Figure 1. Initial Dates of Compulsory Attendance Laws by State, Source:*

http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A011261

Although there were differing perspectives on the validity of compulsory attendance laws, proponents of compulsory attendance hoped that the new laws would
close the gap between the rich and poor and that regular education would "Americanize" the great waves of immigrants (Woodruff, 2001). The debates continue over whether the laws should exist and whether children should be educated in public institutions or at home (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazon, 2005). The rationale for establishing the laws was to nationalize immigrants and bridge the gap between the rich and poor. Today, the laws focus on dropout prevention, delinquency and economic problems in the future (U.S. Dept of Education, 2006).

**Compulsory Education in Georgia**

The first attendance law in the state of Georgia was passed in 1916 for the same reasons other states passed their laws (State of Georgia). Today, Georgia Code 20-2-690.1 (2007) indicates that mandatory attendance in a school or home school program is required for children between the ages six and sixteen. In addition, the Compulsory Attendance Law in Georgia also applies to children who are five years of age who have attended school more than 20 days. According to the law, parents or guardians who violate the Georgia Code, by causing their children to miss more than five unexcused absences from school will be found guilty of a misdemeanor. In addition, parents, upon conviction, shall be subject to a fine not less than $25.00 and not greater than $100.00, imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, community service, or any combination of such penalties, at the discretion of the court having jurisdiction.

County court magistrates who deal with truancy complaints were mandated to work with school districts and community organizations to develop protocols for school districts in their county to follow before referring matters of truancy to the courts
(GDOE, 2006). Although the protocols are in place to address truancy, the problem still exists and often lead to high school students dropping out of school. The relationship between truancy and high school dropout is discussed in the next section.

_Truancy and High School Dropouts_

Truancy is identified as one of the major predictors of high school students dropping out of school (Attwood & Roll, 2006, High School Dropouts in America, 2007, Paulson, 2006, & Reid, 2005). According to Vanderslice (2004), between 347,000 and 544,000 tenth through twelfth grade students, dropped out of school each year over the past decade. The NCES (2007) indicated that in October 2005, approximately 3.5 million 16-24-year-olds were not in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential such as a GED nation wide. The NCES indicated that the southern region of the United States had a higher incidence of students skipping or dropping out of school compared to other regions.

Among Blacks, there was a 10.4 percent dropout rate in 2005 (NCES, 2007). Despite a decrease in the dropout rate from 1972 to 2005, among African-American youth, dropout rates are still high. In addition, approximately 49.8% of African American students who enter the ninth grade in the United States do not graduate on time with a regular diploma, which represent 17.8% of the national average (Paulson, 2006). Males ages 16-24 were more likely than females to be high school dropouts in 2005 (10.8 percent compared to 8.0 percent). According to Fantuzzo, Grim, and Hazan (2005), many students who drop out struggled with daily attendance earlier in their educational process. The author indicated that professionals like school social workers could address
the problem more effectively if they are aware of the many truancy risk factors. This topic is discussed in the next section.

_Truancy Risk Factors_

Research has revealed that school absenteeism or truancy is a complex issue that is affected by many risk factors (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Cnaan & Seltzer, 1989; Evans, 2000, Levine, 1984; Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, 2008; Stickney & Miltenberger, 1998; & Strykowski et al., 2001). These risk factors are identified in the literature as poor interaction between parents and school personnel, unsupportive teachers, unchallenging class and homework assignments, student’s academic ability, family background, systemic issues in the family, transportation, employment, teen pregnancy, and truant friends (Dougherty, 1999; Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, 2008; Epstein & Sheldon 2002). Other factors that contribute to truancy are the school environment, safety, boredom, school size, attitudes of staff, failure to meet the academic needs of the students, and the failure to follow the attendance policy (Reid, 2005; Sommer, 1985; Zieman & Benson, 1981).

A study by Bennett (2001) revealed that a student’s desire to socialize with his or her peers plays a significant role in his or her decision to attend school. The use of alcohol and drugs was also perceived to be a risk factor for students skipping school. The respondents in the study noted an unsupportive school environment and pressure from delinquent peers as reasons for their truancy.

Students function within many systems that interact with each other. In an effort to understand the reasons why the above risk factors lead to truancy, one must understand
how the various systems affect the decision making of students regarding attending
school. For example, students who may not have support at home from a parent who
value education may look to teachers and other staff for support to help them succeed
academically. However, if the students are met with disrespect and the lack of care from
their teachers and other adults in the school setting, they may lose all motivation for
education and begin skipping school and eventually dropping out (Dougherty, 1999;
Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, 2008; Epstein & Sheldon 2002; &
Reid, 2005).

Students who may have serious learning difficulties may need the support of
competent teachers and intelligent peers to help them enhance their learning. However,
many African American students reside in low-income areas where schools are not
funded appropriately, their classmates perform below average academically, and many of
the teachers are not competent enough to educate students who perform extremely below
their white counterparts (Attwood & Croll, 2006; Reid, 2005).

The above risk factors often hinder high school students from obtaining a quality
education because they often result in students not attending school. Therefore, school
officials must begin to address the risk factors in a way that motivates students to attend
school. Many researchers have indicated that quality programs and other supportive
networks that are collaborative and multimodal and that target individual, peer related,
family, school, and community risk factors are needed (Bell et al., 1994; Cnaan &
Seltzer, 1989; Strykwoski et al., 2001; Teasley, 2004). Supportive staff at the school
level, which includes School Social Workers, often implement such programs.
In addition to student’s purposely missing school because of the above risk factors, there are other reasons that explain why some students miss school legitimately. Various reasons are discussed in the next section to provide more insight into the issue of student absenteeism and truancy.

*Reasons Students Miss School*

There are many reasons why high school students miss school. Dougherty (1999) noted that students miss school because of poor health or occasional illness. For example, students who suffer from Asthma were reported missing a combined total of 14 millions days of school annually in 2001 (Levey, Heffner, Stewart, & Beeman, 2006). In fact, asthma was considered the leading cause of school absenteeism. Students are also absent from school to attend medical appointments, court hearings, and other religious activities (Dougherty, 1999).

Dougherty (1999) and Borzych (2005) indicated that students are absent from school because of deaths in the family and other family related emergencies. Students, who are made to provide care for their younger siblings or guardians at home, miss school often (Reid, 2005). This type of absence is more prevalent among low-income families where some families depend on older children for the survival of the family. Such a practice afford parents an opportunity to work or to be cared for when there is an absence of a supportive adult for the family or when childcare is not available for younger siblings because of economic hardship. Although such a practice helps the family in some respect, it leads to academic failure for the student. In addition, such an absence is viewed as a form of educational neglect in the state of Georgia (GDOE, 2006).
Other reasons that explain why students miss school are related to specific risk populations like homeless students, students in foster care, and students who are incarcerated for delinquent behavior like truancy. Interestingly enough, African American adolescents make up a large percentage of students who are homeless or incarcerated for delinquent behavior (Dryfoos, 1996, & Reid, 2005). The next section includes a discussion of truancy as it relates to the above-mentioned at-risk populations with emphasis on African American adolescents.

*Truancy and Populations At-Risk for Academic Failure*

Young people are located in very different risk environments depending on their gender, race, ethnicity, social status, family strengths, employment opportunities, and other determinants (Dryfoos, 1996). Because of the perpetual marginalization of African-American youth, many families lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to escape poverty. The inability to escape often results in the daily struggle to survive. Although survival is the goal, many families continue to experience homelessness and incarceration. Concerning the education of African American students in the above situations, Dryfoos (1996), indicated that this population is at greater risk for dropping out of school because of long periods of school disengagement.

Reid (2005) indicated that homeless students struggle to attend school because they do not have a stable home and that they are often in transition (moving from place to place). This is a major problem in many urban school districts that are populated by students from low-income public housing. Many of the students are forced to live on the streets, with relatives or friends because of their parents’ inability to pay rent, violation of
their leases or gentrification. One of the issues noted by the Georgia Department of Education (2006) is that homeless students often lack resources for transportation to get to school. The other issue is that homeless students who are out of school for long periods begin to lose interest in their education. Interventions geared toward this population may require intensive social services to ensure that students, who are engaged in their educational processes, remain engaged and that those who are disengaged are reconnected and supported in their educational processes. School social workers are the perfect professionals to support this population (Teasley, 2004).

Students incarcerated for a status offense like truancy or other criminal behavior as minors, often become disengaged from school and sometimes learn new behaviors that are risky and potentially harmful for the students and others (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Wilson, 2007). The authors noted that when truants are out of school for long periods, they are more likely to drop out and enter into a life of crime. This should be of great importance to school social workers (Reid, 1999) because many of the students who are incarcerated are not tracked and social workers are not aware of the student’s educational status once the students are released. If the students are not tracked, many of them will remain disengaged and eventually reenter the juvenile justice system and eventually an adult prison (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Wilson, 2007).

Special attention should be given to students at-risk for failure. School social workers need to consider their unique circumstances and implement strategies accordingly. Doing so should make addressing the issue of truancy and dropping out of school a less difficult task.
School Social Work Interventions

School social workers are responsible for interventions that address the above-mentioned truancy risk factors for high school students, especially at-risk populations. In fact, many state and local school officials have placed greater demands on school social workers to come up with interventions that support regular school attendance as well as a student’s ability to complete high school (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazon 2005, GDOE, 2006, Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, 2008). Such an emphasis on high school completion is directly related to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which mandates school districts to find ways to decrease the amount of students who dropout of school.

Traditionally, school social work interventions consisted of counseling for students, phone calls to parents, sending letters to parents, home visits to encourage parental involvement while interpreting the compulsory attendance law, and referrals to outside agencies like the juvenile courts (Fantuzzo, Grim, Hazan, 2005). School social work interventions also include the implementation of incentive programs (Reid, 2005) to encourage students to attend school. Although the above delivery of services occurred for many years, interventions that connect students to resources and social networks such as family members, teachers, and mentors to support their educational process are in great demand (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Nay, 2003). School social work interventions have been successful to address many of the risk factors that lead to truancy (Franklin, 2001). However, very little is known about the degree of utility and effectiveness of such interventions that school social workers
implement to support school attendance among African-American high school students. The most effective interventions, from the perspectives of school social workers are unknown as well.

One of the strategies that is noted as being successful in the literature is to engage African American students by tailoring education to meet their needs since the lack of engagement has been cited as the principle reason this population skips or drop out of school (Davison, 1996; Mann, 1986; Miller-Cribbs, Cronen, Davis, & Johnson, 2002; Rumberger, 1987; & Teasley, 2004). School social workers engage students individually and in groups to increase the likelihood of the students attending school regularly. However, time does not seem to permit the consistent provision of services to the students. To address this problem, school social workers often collaborate with internal and external sources to implement programs or activities to ensure that students are engaged in a way that is beneficial to their education. For example, very few social workers use mentoring as a strategy to increase school attendance in high school. However, those that implement mentoring programs to engage students are in alignment with the literature that acknowledges mentoring as an important intervention for truant and non-truant students (Hall-Haynes, 2007).

Thompson (2001) conducted a quasi-experimental study using two groups, one with mentors and the other without mentors. The study found that mentoring had a positive effect on student attendance and student achievement. School social workers should examine mentoring programs more closely to determine if such programs should be used as interventions more often in the school setting.
Some school social workers work with students in small groups to support regular school attendance and academic success. Using groups as a strategy to decrease truancy, allow school social workers to make better use of their time by working with students with similar issues in a format that afford students the opportunity for support from a helping professional and peers with similar problems. School social workers can also monitor the progress or outcomes of group work interventions for individual members by consulting attendance records for students in the group on a weekly basis (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 2000).

Another example from the literature of a collaborative strategy to reduce truancy is noted in the evaluation of Project START. Although the study population consisted of a diverse group, African Americans represented the majority (63%) of the population. Fantuzzo, Grim, and Hazon (2005) conducted an evaluation of a citywide implementation of Project START, a community-wide school-based intervention to reduce truancy. The study took a community-based intervention approach that focused on collaboration with the courts, human services, and indigenous community service organizations. The total sample of 567 included 63% of African Americans, 15.3% of Caucasian, 17.7 Hispanics, and 3.9% Asian. The dependent variable was the reduction of truancy and the independent variable was the court-based interventions. To proceed with the study, the researchers integrated court data with school district data using students’ identification numbers as a linking variable. Three periods were identified for data collection and data was collected in the same manner.
The findings indicated that truancy levels remained high for non-referred truants throughout the study. Both cohort groups showed a significant drop in absences 30 days post court. The groups maintained the reduction during the other periods. No significant effects were found between court groups and sex, age group, or ethnic categories. Significant lower levels of unexcused absences were seen among the community – based group compared to the other groups at the one-year follow up period. The evaluation proved that the intervention was effective. The intervention seems to be effective because of collaboration from many entities. Therefore, professionals should not expect the same results from other court related interventions that may be more punitive than supportive and such professionals are encouraged to implement their programs with caution. School social workers should be cognizant of this fact and begin to implement and report on programs or strategies that work for African Americans high school students.

Although School social workers provide individual, group, family and academic services to support the regular school attendance and high school completion among students, especially African American students, there are not many studies that focus on interventions that were implemented specifically for this population. Therefore, School social workers must consider the above-mentioned examples of what works from other educators or partners who continue to combat truancy while researching to find the most effective strategies to address the problem.

This study focuses on the perceptions of school social workers in Georgia regarding the most effective truancy interventions for reducing truancy among African-
American high school students. Therefore, the next section provides insight into the current practices of eleven school districts regarding their truancy protocols and practice to address the issue.

Current School Social Work Practices to Address Truancy in Georgia

School social workers in Georgia address the issue of truancy according to the school policies and protocols that guide their practice. Therefore, every county involve their social workers at different times to intervene with social services to address the truancy issue. The following discussion reveals the current practices of eleven school districts as they relate to school social workers addressing the problem of truancy. The information concerning the practices of the school districts is discussed to provide the reader with insight only. Research will not be conducted at any of the school districts. All of the information about the school districts was obtained from the Georgia Department of Education’s website (2008). The school districts were chosen because they represent the systems with the largest number of African American students. In the order of discussion, the school systems are Bibb County School district, Chatham County Schools, Clayton County Schools, Cobb County Schools, DeKalb County Schools, Fulton County Schools, Henry County Schools, Muscogee County Schools, Richmond County Schools, Gwinnett County Schools, and the Atlanta Public Schools.

Bibb County Schools involve their school social workers when a student misses three unexcused absences from school. The school social workers work with the Macon Police Department to address the issue, beginning at the school level. School social workers monitor the attendance until a student reaches five unexcused absences from
school. The school social worker then contacts the parent or guardian via letter, phone calls, home visits or parent conferences to interpret the school policy and the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law as well as to determine what issues are causing the problem. Based on the needs of the student and family, services are provided at the school level and referrals are made to outside agencies for additional support to assist in solving the problem. If the issue of truancy is not resolved after working with the student and family, a petition is made to the juvenile court for truancy or the state court for the parent if educational neglect is the issue. In addition, the school social workers refer all names and social security numbers of truants to the State Board of Education to begin the process of getting the drivers licenses of truant students suspended or to make students ineligible to receive their driver's licenses.

School social workers in Chatham County receive referrals for attendance after a student misses seven days of unexcused absences from school. According to the school districts protocol, school social workers work with the student and family to help them understand the law and to help them comply with the school policy and law. When a student misses ten unexcused absences from school, the school social worker begin steps to file a complaint with the juvenile court for the student or coordinate a warrant in the Chatham County Recording Court for the parent or guardian for educational neglect. Although the school district does not mandate more school social work services after the referral to the school social worker, the system has a better way of addressing the problem the following year for identified truants. School social workers collaborate with school staff and partners to support school attendance for its truant students. Such
services include helping a student identify a school based mentor and community supports through a church or other agency. In addition, school social workers implement a rewards program to encourage the truants to attend school.

School Social Workers in the Clayton County School System receive referrals after seven unexcused absences. School social workers intervene by communicating with students and parents via phone calls, letters, home visits, meetings with students and parents to interpret the law and identify barriers that inhibit school success for students. School social workers provide individual and family counseling, refer students or their families to school and community resources for support that may lead to the student attending school more often. School social workers also participate on Student Attendance Committees and Student Support Teams to provide information about the student that may assist the school in developing strategies to decrease a student’s truant behavior. If students continue to be truant from school after school staff interventions and social work interventions, school social workers will file a petition with the juvenile court for truancy.

School social workers in the Cobb County School System receive referrals after a student misses fifteen unexcused absences from school. Intervention strategies carried out by school social workers in this district include sending letters to parents regarding absences to interpret the law and to find out reasons for the absences. School social workers then assess the circumstances of the students and families related to poor attendance and provide school based services like counseling and collaborating with school staff in a School Support Team Meeting to develop specific strategies to assist
students. School social workers provide referrals to students and families for outside resources that may eliminate barriers to students attending school. If the above-mentioned strategies do not work, school social workers file truancy petitions to the juvenile court for assistance in ensuring that students are complying with the Compulsory Attendance Law of Georgia.

School Social workers in Dekalb County receive referrals regarding student absenteeism when a student misses eight unexcused absences from school. School social workers intervene by communicating with parents and students via U.S. mail, phone calls, home visits and conferences to interpret the school policy on attendance and the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law and to determine why students are absent from school. School social workers also intervene by collaborating with the Student Truancy Attendance Review Team (S.T.A.R.T) to develop strategies to combat the issues related to the student’s truancy. The S.T.A.R.T members include the school social workers, the Solicitor General’s office representatives, juvenile court officials, school staff and parents. If strategies and interventions by all parties fail, the social worker may file a truancy petition to the juvenile court for further assistance to force the student to comply with the law and school policy.

The school social workers in the Fulton County School System receive referrals regarding truancy when a student misses seven unexcused absences from school. The intervention strategies carried out by school social workers include conferencing with students and parents, mailing letters to parents to interpret the law and school policy and to determine reasons for absences. School social workers also advocate for students at
the school to ensure that students are being serviced according to their academic ability. Referrals are also made to outside agencies to assist the parents and students with other resources that may be needed to eliminate barriers to students attending school. If the strategies fail, school social worker file truancy or educational neglect petitions in the juvenile court for additional assistance to force students and parents to comply with the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law.

The Henry County School System does not specify the strategies of school social workers, other than working with families and filing truancy or educational neglect petitions with the courts. However, communication with school social workers in this district, revealed that strategies to decrease truancy include sending letters to parents, phone calls, home visits, individual and family conferences and advocacy at the school level to ensure that students are served according to their academic needs. Referral to the juvenile court is the final strategy carried out by school social workers to get the students and parents to comply with the attendance law.

School social workers in Muscogee County Schools receive referrals after students miss five unexcused absences from school. School social workers in this district intervene by calling parents, sending letters and making home visits to interpret the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law, determine reasons for absences, and to solicit their support in encouraging their children to attend school daily. School social workers, after assessing the problem, make school based and outside referrals to assist students with issues that cause them to miss school. Other innovative strategies include referring children to after school programs for educational support, interpreting the law via local
newspapers, television and radio announcements. If students continue to miss school without a legal excuse, school social workers may involve the Department of Family and Children Services or the Juvenile courts to force the students and parents to comply with the attendance law.

The Richmond County School System does not wait long before involving students with the courts who are truant. School social workers receive referrals after a student misses two absences from school. The school social worker notifies the parents about the absences, interprets the law and encourages the parents to comply with the law. After a student misses five unexcused absences from school, school social workers file truancy or educational neglect petitions with the appropriate authorities. Although they respond quickly to students who are truant, there is no mention of school based or community based support for students or their families to address any barriers that may hinder a student from attending school.

School social workers receive referrals after students who miss five unexcused absences from school. School social workers intervene by making phone calls, sending letters, and making home visits to parents or legal guardians to interpret the attendance law and to determine reasons for absences. If attempts to reach parents fail, school social workers must send a letter to parents via certified U. S. mail with return receipt requested for evidence of communication. School social workers advocate for the academic needs of students at student support team meetings, conference with students and parents to provide services to address issues that result in students missing school without a legal excuse. School social workers refer families to outside agencies for assistance with
nonacademic issues that impede the student’s ability to attend school daily. If all of the strategies fail, the professionals file petitions to have the juvenile court mandate students and parents to comply with the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law.

The Gwinnett County School System does not specify exactly when teachers make referrals to the School social worker like other school systems. However, the district's attendance protocol indicates that the Student Attendance Review Committee is responsible for developing strategies to assist students before referring students to school social workers. School social workers, after receiving referrals, intervene by conferencing with students and parents to encourage daily school attendance and to address barriers that impede student success. School social workers make referrals to outside resources to assist parents or legal guardians in addressing other family-related problems so that the parents can focus on their children and to ensure that they attend school.

The majority of the school systems that are discussed above tend to engage in similar practices to address truancy. Although the experts intervene at different times, the general practice today to decrease truancy among high schools students is to contact parents, send letters and conduct home visits to interpret the Compulsory Attendance Law. School social workers also conference with parents and teachers to develop strategies to help students overcome barriers that impede their success in school. Finally, all school social workers refer students to the juvenile court as a last resort if students do not improve their attendance. School districts in Georgia do not seem to have many supportive programs or initiatives as a part of their protocols to address the issue of
truancy. This may explain why absenteeism, in general exists. The next section
discusses the absentee rates of high school students in Georgia since the rate of truancy is
not tracked on the state or federal level (GDOE, 2006).

Absentee Rates in Georgia

Truancy has been identified as a major problem in the United States, especially in the
southern region of the country (NCES, 2007). In the state of Georgia, schools are not
required to report truancy data by the Georgia Department of Education-GDOE (2008).
However, the GDOE (2008) has available data regarding the number of absences that
students miss in Georgia. This information is discussed to provide the reader with insight
about the historical school absentee trend in Georgia as well as a comparative analysis of
the absenteeism based on race and gender. Figure 2 illustrates the absentee rates for all
students in the state of Georgia. During the 2001-2002 school year, there were a total of
1,652,984 students enrolled in school at any time during that school year. Out of the
total population, 35.5% of the student population missed between six and fifteen absences
from school compared to 14.3% who missed more than fifteen days of school. There
were 1,638,638 students enrolled in school during the 2002-2003 school year. Out of that
number, 36.2% of the students missed between six and fifteen days of school while
13.8% missed fifteen or more absences.

During the 2003-2004 school year, 1,712,433 students were enrolled in a school
in the state of Georgia. Figure 2 indicates that approximately 35.4% of that number
missed between six and fifteen absences while 12.1% missed fifteen or more absences
from school. There were 1,752,188 students enrolled in a school in Georgia the
following school year (2004-2005). The table indicates that 35.3% of the students were absent between six and fifteen absences while 10.6% of the students were absent more than fifteen days from school. During the 2005-2006 school year, there were a total of 1,794,430 students enrolled in school. The figure reveals that 33.8% of the students missed between six and fifteen absences while 9.8% missed more than fifteen days from school. The final year that was reviewed was the 2006-2007 school year. During that year, there were 1,844,798 students enrolled in a Georgia school. From that number, 35% missed between six and fifteen absences from school while 10% of the students missed more than fifteen days of school. According to the GDOE (2008), the percentage of students that missed between six and fifteen absences from school during all of the
identified school years were deemed unacceptable according to their standards (Greater than 5% but less than 15% of the students missing between six and fifteen days). However, the percentage of students missing more than fifteen days of school during that same time span were deemed acceptable according to the standards (less than 15%).

Figure 3 illustrates the rate of absences for African American students in the state of Georgia. The GDOE (2008) reported that during the 2001-2002 school year, there were 641,498 African American students enrolled in school at any time during the year. Out of the total population, 32.3% of the student population missed between six and fifteen absences from school compared to 13.9% who missed more than fifteen days of school. There were 636,590 African American students enrolled in school during the 2002-2003 school year. Out of that number, 31.9% of the students missed between six and fifteen days of school while 13% missed fifteen or more absences.

![Figure 3: GeorgiaAbsentee Rates for African-American high school students](source: Georgia Department of Education Website)

**Figure 3.** Georgia Absentee Rates for African-American high school students

Source: Georgia Department of Education Website
According to the GDOE (2008), the percentage of African American students that missed between six and fifteen absences from school during all of the identified school years were deemed unacceptable according to their standards (Greater than 5% but less than 15% of the students missing between six and fifteen days). However, it is important to note that the absentee rates for African American students were lower than the entire state’s absentee rates. The percentage of African American students missing more than fifteen days of school during that same time span were deemed acceptable according to the standards (less than 15%). The absentee rates for African Americans in this category were also lower than the states absentee rates. In addition, the percentage of African Americans who missed more than fifteen absences from school decreased approximately 3.7% and the percentage of African Americans in the state of Georgia missing between six and fifteen absences from school decreased by 1.3%.

Figure 4 illustrates the rate of absences for students in the state of Georgia by race and gender during the 2007 – 2008 school year. The information from the Figure was obtained from the Georgia Department of Education (2008). The Figure illustrates that 28% of 53,888 Asian students in Georgia were absent more than six days of school. The figure indicates that 39.9% of 731,929 African American students missed more than six days as well. There were 39.7% of the 181,821 Hispanic or Latino student population who missed six or more days from school while 42.4% of the 2,973 Native American students missed the same amount of absences. The percentage of the total White student population (823,596) to miss six or more days from school was 48.1 while 43.8% of the students classified as multiracial fell into the same category. Concerning gender, 43.2%
of 951,092 males who attended school in Georgia missed six or more days of school while 43.4% of 901,087 females who attended school in Georgia missed six or more days from school.

Figure 4. Georgia Absentee Rates by Race and Gender for 2007-2008 School Year

Source: Georgia Department of Education

Figure 4 clearly indicates that the percentage of African American students in the state of Georgia who missed six or more days of school was less than their White and Native American counterparts during the 2007-2008 school year. However, this rate could be partially due to students who classified themselves as multiracial. Hispanic and Asian students had a slightly lower percentage of students missing six or more days of school. More males missed six or more days of school than females. However, the difference in the percentage of students missing six or more days of school between the genders is only 2%. This suggests that absences and truancy is a student issue overall.
and that interventions should be catered to all students. However, this study focuses on
the issue of truancy among African-American high school students only.

In the state of Georgia, certain areas have higher concentrations of absenteeism
than others. Figure 5 describes the counties with the highest concentration of
absenteeism in relation to the other counties in Georgia. This information is important
for the qualitative aspect of the study, which will consist of focus groups with school
social workers from the counties with the highest concentrations of absenteeism. For the
purpose of clarity, the following map focuses on absenteeism in each county. However,
discussion covers the counties with the highest concentrations of absenteeism. School
districts that are not considered county schools were combined with the county where the
actual headquarters of the school districts are located. For example, the data from the
City of Atlanta Schools is reported with the Fulton County data. In addition, it is
important to note that the map does not give an account of absenteeism by race, gender or
age, which limits the understanding of absenteeism in Georgia. The GIS map does not
explain absenteeism by school districts, which could provide a more accurate picture of
the problem. This is important to note because each system calculates absenteeism
following school year (2004-2005). Approximately 27.5% of the students were absent between six and fifteen absences while 10.3% of the students were absent more than fifteen days from school. During the 2005-2006 school year, there were 53,108 African American students enrolled in school. The figure reveals that 26.6% of the students missed between six and fifteen absences while 11.7% missed more than fifteen days from school. The final year that was reviewed was the 2006-2007 school year. There were 52,858 African American students enrolled in school. From that number, 25.3% missed between six and fifteen absences from school while 9.5% of the students missed more than fifteen days of school.
The information from figure 6 indicates that there was a 7.4% decrease in the absentee rate between the 2001-2002 school year and the 2006-2007 school year among African American students missing between six and fifteen absences from school. In addition, there was an 8.7% decrease for that same period for African Americans missing fifteen or more days from school.

The data from the state of Georgia and the Atlanta Public Schools indicate that the overall absentee rate for African Americans has decreased, which implies that African Americans are attending school more often. The information could also be indicative of interventions that could be working to decrease truancy among African American students. The targeted interventions, which represent the independent variables, are discussed in the next section.

Targeted interventions (Variables)

School social workers implement various strategies to combat the problem of truancy among high school students (Teasley, 2004). This section of the paper discusses the targeted interventions (independent variables) that are examined in this study. The interventions are parental involvement, professional development for teachers, mentoring, collaboration with community partners, and filing truancy petitions with the courts.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in the education of African-American high school students is critical, since parents play a very important role in their children’s education and their
overall growth and development (Barton, 2005, Dryfoos, 1997, Eccles and Harold, 1993). Barton (2005) noted that when one parent is absent from the home, the other parent can serve as a major support system for their children. This is important since many African American students, for multiple reasons, are cared for by one parent, who is usually a female (Kunjufu, 2006).

Parental involvement, when spoken of, is often vague in the educational arena depending on the context in which it is used. In the context of school social workers combating the problem of truancy in the high school setting, and for the purpose of the current study, parental involvement is defined as communicating with parents by phone, letters, conferences at the home or school as well as school visits and volunteering for school activities (Hall-Haynes, 2008).

Research has revealed a correlation between an increase in parental involvement and decreased truancy (Barton, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Olmstead & Rubin, 1983). The same authors indicated that parental involvement leads to fewer discipline problems at the high school level. Therefore, schools should examine if involving parents in the educational processes of their children would lead to improvement at their schools. This is important and one of the many mandates of No Child Left Behind (2002). In addition, students can benefit from their parents support, especially during adolescence.

The high school years are critical and very confusing times for students who are transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood (McNeil, 1999). Therefore, the students depend on the adults in their lives to support them academically, emotionally, psychologically, and socially (Fischer, & Kmeč, 2004). The assumption is that the parent
Figure 5. GIS Map of Students Absent from School 15 or more days in 2008
differently. For example, the Atlanta Public Schools considers a student who misses more than one hundred and eighty minutes from school on any given day, absent for that entire day. According to figure 5, the darker shaded counties have the largest number of students missing 15 or more days of school. Those counties are Gwinnett, Fulton, Clayton, Dekalb, and Cobb. Each of the counties has between 5,533 – 15,006 students missing 15 or more days from school. The majority of the population of the students is African American, which justifies the need for this research, especially, facilitating focus groups with social workers from areas with high rates of absenteeism.

The Atlanta Public Schools is one of the larger school systems in Georgia with a majority African American population. Figure 6 illustrates the absentee rate of African Americans in that school district. During the 2001-2002 school year, there were 60,043 African American students enrolled in school at any time during the year. The figure illustrates that approximately 32.7% of the African American student population missed between six and fifteen absences from school compared to 18.2% who missed more than fifteen days of school. There were 56,662 students enrolled in school at any time during the 2002-2003 school year. Out of that number, 29.2% of the students missed between six and fifteen days of school while 13.4% missed fifteen or more absences.

Figure 6 indicates that in the 2003-2004 school year, 53,401 African American students were enrolled in school at any given time. Approximately 28.8% of that number missed between six and fifteen absences while 15% missed fifteen or more absences from school. There were 54,219 African American students enrolled in school during the
is the number one support system in the lives of children. However, depending on the socioeconomic backgrounds of many students, including African-American high school students, the assumption is false. Not all parents are involved in the lives of their children. For example, some parents who struggle with substance abuse addictions often abandon their children. Other parents have their children removed from the home because of child abuse and neglect. Many parents are involved in the lives of their children. However, they may not understand what type of involvement is needed to support their children, especially in the context of their education. For example, parents who are illiterate, those who dropped out of school, and those who have never been engaged in their children’s educational process, find it difficult to contribute to the process, and often disengage very quickly. This suggests that school social workers, and other staff members in schools work with parents so that they are aware of their roles and are supported as they become involved at their children’s school and at the home.

School social workers communicate with parents concerning the issue of truancy regularly (Teasley, 2004). However, an examination of the truancy strategies of eleven schools in Georgia did not reveal active involvement of parents where they are volunteering, participating in parent and teacher conferences or ensuring that their children receive the needed resources to succeed academically. This is disturbing since active participation of parents in their children’s education was noted as a strategy to mediate positive academic outcomes for high school students. Understanding from school social workers, why such interventions do not focus on active involvement of the parents in their children’s education is worth researching especially since no literature
was found that indicated what school social workers perceptions are regarding the degree of importance and effectiveness of parental involvement to decrease truancy among African-American high school students. This is an area that must be explored since a parent can represent one system that has the ability to influence a student’s behavior, like truancy while serving as an important social resource or network (Coleman, 1988).

**Professional Development for Teachers**

Teachers are the professionals who are responsible for educating African-American high school students. According to Kunjufu (1989), teachers and their expectations are major factors that influence the academic achievement of African-American high school students. The author also indicated that curriculum, student self-esteem, learning styles and peer pressure are major factors. If that is the case, one could ask if teachers who are responsible for educating African American students are aware of the above-mentioned factors, and if they have received the necessary professional development to accomplish the task of addressing the factors in a way that would lead to academic success, which includes increased school attendance for African American students.

Professional development in the context of schools for teachers refers to training that teachers receive to help them enhance their knowledge and skills to accomplish the goal of educating students (Guskey, 2000). Such training is needed if schools are expected to decrease truancy among high school students, including African American students. School social workers can contribute by facilitating workshops and activities to help teachers learn more about the issue of truancy as it relates to the Georgia
Compulsory Attendance Law, how to develop better relationships with students and parents, to better understand the importance of infusing culture in the curriculum, and helping teachers become more collegial as a professional team. These are activities that might offset some of the problems of No Child Left Behind as noted by Noguera (2003) who indicated that No Child Left Behind does not include enough funding to support its goals (Noguera, 2003).

Systems theory suggests that individuals are affected by various other systems in their lives. The literature (Teasley, 2004) indicates that one of the ways that school social workers can support school attendance is by helping the teachers develop better relationships with students and their parents. According to Kunjufu, 1989), ensuring that students and teachers have a working relationship is critical if students are expected to remain engaged in their educational processes. School social workers can provide training for teachers on how to bond and communicate with their students effectively to accomplish this task. This strategy could support teachers in the effort to encourage students to attend school. Such a strategy is also needed because strong relationships with a caring adult enable at-risk youth to make life-altering changes (Kunjufu, 2006). In addition to learning new ways to develop relationships with students, teachers can benefit from learning to include culturally relevant substance in their classroom subject matter (Kunjufu, 1989).

Kunjufu (1989) noted the importance of a multicultural curriculum to enhance the learning process of African American students. He indicated the importance of students learning from different perspectives so that they could embrace not only lessons from
their own cultural experiences but the cultural experiences of others as well. School social workers can assist schools in the implementation of a multicultural curriculum or a more culturally relevant curriculum for African American students at the high school level by advocating for changes at the school level as well as the district level. For individual schools, school social workers can facilitate Professional Learning Communities (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005) to create a collegial environment that would allow for the exploration of a multicultural or culturally relevant curriculum. In addition, school social workers can host trainings for teachers so that they could learn from curriculum experts who are familiar with the importance of including culture in the school curriculum. The type of curriculum implemented for the education of African-American high school students can be an important factor that determines the degree of student engagement (Kunjufu, 1989). This makes it necessary to explore professional development for teachers as a strategy to decrease truancy.

*Mentoring*

Mentoring is used as an intervention to assist youth who are considered at-risk for failing in the area of education (Karcher, 2005). Rhodes (2002) indicated that as many as 2.5 million youth receive some form of mentoring in the United States annually. Karcher (2005) indicated that mentoring refers to a relationship between a child and a supportive adult that involves the adult providing guidance to the child in regularly scheduled meetings. Freedman (1993) described mentoring as older men assisting boys with learning a trade or skill. Bronfenbrenner defined mentoring as a one-on-one relationship between a pair of unrelated individuals who are different ages.
According to Hamilton, Hamilton, Hirsch, Hughes, King, & Maton (2006), all mentoring enhances young people’s social capital, their knowledge of, and contacts with, a network of people who may be able to help them meet their goals. The authors indicated that mentoring programs often add “bridging” social capital, for youth. For example, linking poor and minority youth to more advantaged people than they know in their families and neighborhoods. The authors indicated that mentoring in neighborhood contexts could also build “bonding” social capital, which refers to links with others who are similar and build group identification and solidarity. This is important for African-American high school students, especially African-American high school students who are considered at-risk for academic failure, which includes becoming truant or dropping out of school.

The idea of mentoring has been in existence for years. However, in recent years, research has focused on programs designed to facilitate both formal and informal mentoring relationships, with practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and funders all looking to mentoring as a promising type of intervention for children and youth. Reports suggest that there are at least 4,500 agencies providing mentoring (DuBois & Karcher, 2005), including 500 Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America agencies. Karcher, Kupermic, portwood, Sipe, & Taylor (2006) noted that popular national initiatives, such as America’s Promise, and federal legislation promoting mentoring, including the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which provides funding for the Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program, reflect the widespread belief that the presence of a mentor in the life
of a young person not only supports healthy growth and development, but also serves as a protective factor against many of the risks facing today’s youth.

Hall-Haynes (2007) indicated that there are two types of mentoring: natural and planned. Natural mentoring refers to relationships between a child and a counselor, teacher or a coach. Such mentoring relationships or programs are carried out in churches, families and schools. However, because times have changed and people are more isolated in their neighborhoods or communities, natural mentoring has decreased and planned mentoring has increased (Hall-Haynes, 2007). Planned mentoring opportunities occur through structured programs where adults are matched with youth. The process is usually formal and the relationships are guided by rules of host agencies (Hall-Haynes, 2007). Because of the policies in placed in the school setting, planned mentoring is usually the type of mentoring that occurs. However, natural mentoring is carried out as well.

Employees who are not school social workers usually carry out mentoring programs that are implemented at high schools. However, since mentoring programs provide support to high school students, it is important to explore if school social workers consider mentoring effective as a truancy intervention to reduce truancy among African-American high school students. This is worth exploring because school social workers are responsible for providing supportive services in the school context to ensure that students attend school regularly and complete their high school education.
Collaboration with Community Partners

The interventions of School Social Workers to support regular school attendance among students vary from school to school. However, some interventions are similar across the board. Research supports the collaboration process where school social workers and other educators work with outside partners to support school attendance among high school students (Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, 2008). Reimer and Dimmock (2005) indicated that truancy programs that include a broad-based collaborative as part of their approach are stronger and may last longer. One of the examples noted by Reimer and Dimmock (2005) about a collaborative effort that support student success at the high school level includes the partnership between the Atlanta Public Schools and the Communities In Schools.

The Communities In Schools was contracted to assist the school system with increasing the rate of attendance and high school completion among a predominantly African American population from low-income communities. The organization has developed a model for increasing school attendance, reducing school dropout, and increasing high school graduation. The model assumes that youth at risk of dropping out have academic and nonacademic issues that must be addressed to improve the likelihood of successful high school completion. To support successful high school completion which includes regular school attendance; the Communities In Schools operates in school settings and coordinates with various community agencies to deliver needed services to youth and their families (Reimer & Dimmock, 2005).
The Communities In Schools (2008) indicated that between 2002 and 2006, the graduation rate at one of their schools increased by 44%. In addition, the organization indicated that 39 students who would have otherwise dropped out of school earned high school diplomas because of the services that the organizations provided to the students. The organization also indicated that 100% of their schools met Annual Yearly Progress, which is a mandate by the state and federal government because of the No Child Left Behind Policy. The collaboration between the Communities In Schools Program is evidence that collaborative efforts to support school attendance and high school completion works. The Communities In Schools is staffed by degreed social workers and other helping professionals in the Atlanta Public Schools.

School social workers intervene to support school attendance in other collaborative ways as well. For example, Teasley (2004) noted the importance of school social workers working with teachers and school counselors to determine whether the instruction in the classroom and the curriculum are appropriate for achieving optimal environment for teaching and learning. For African American students, the author indicated that school social work assessments should include teacher expectations of the student population and the pedagogical approaches to meeting the cultural needs of the African American students and other ethnic minorities in the classroom. This collaborative effort is important because it supports student success, which includes regular school attendance. School social workers participant on various student support teams as student advocates to provide school staff with more insight into the lives of students as it relates to home and school environments. Collaboration in this way afford
the professionals in the school setting opportunities to provide more comprehensive assessments and services for youth which leads to positive outcomes (Teasley, 2004, Reimer & Dimmock, 2005).

*Filing Petitions with the Juvenile Courts*

Filing petitions with the juvenile court for reasons of truancy and educational neglect is common practice on the national, state and local levels (GDOE, 2006). In the state of Georgia in particular, students who miss five unexcused absences from school are in violation of the Georgia Compulsory Attendance Law and may have to report to court for a hearing to determine if the charges are accurate. Although the practice of filing petitions is common for school social workers, research does not indicate if school social workers view the filing of petitions as an effective approach to decrease truancy among African-American high school students.

An examination of eleven school districts protocols in Georgia indicated that school social workers file petitions after a student misses five or more unexcused absences from school. However, the Georgia Department of Education does not have data regarding the petitions from each school. This information is important to inform policy and best practice. Therefore, the filing of petitions is examined with other independent variables (interventions) to obtain the views of school social workers regarding their effectiveness.
Marginalization of African American Students in Education

African-American youth have been marginalized in the United States for many years (Watkins, 2001). According to Webster’s Dictionary (2008), to be marginalized is to be relegated to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group. History has shown that this was and still is the case for African-American youth. For example, among African Americans, there was a 10.4 percent dropout rate in 2005 (NCES, 2007). Despite a decrease in the dropout rate from 1972 to 2005, among African-American youth, dropout rates are still high. In addition, approximately 49.8% of African American students who enter the ninth grade in the United States do not graduate on time with a regular diploma, which represent 17.8% of the national average (Paulson, 2006). The unfortunate statistics above are the effects of a system that continues to relegate African Americans to a lower socioeconomic status position in this country. Evidence of such marginalization of African-American youth has been documented since the arrival of Africans by way of their capture and forced enslavement.

Mbulu and Sekou (1993) noted that Africans were brought to the United States against their will to be exploited as free labor for the means of white economic gain. The statutorily allowed system of chattel slavery in the United States did not include the education of the enslaved Africans. In fact, those Africans who were identified as readers were often brutally harmed or killed to send the message to other enslaved Africans that they were not permitted to obtain an education (Billingsley, 1992). Although this type of inhumane treatment of Africans, now African Americans, was brutal, it did not stop African Americans from pursuing knowledge. Billingsley (1992) noted that for more
than a hundred years, each generation of Blacks has been more educated than the one before. The author indicated that this was the case for every area of education, including basic literacy, school attendance, highest-grade level achieved, and percentage going on to and graduating from college.

The involvement of parents, churches and civic organizations in the education of black children was prevalent after slavery leading up to the supreme courts decision to desegregate schools (Billingsley, 1992). This proves that parents want their children to learn. In fact, many poor parents considered education as the path that the poor and lower class pursued for purposes of upward mobility (Glasgow, 1993). One could raise the question “What occurred that caused a major shift in the educational trend line for African Americans youth in the United States?”

Jones (1996) indicated that there have been many theories proposed to explain the problem of academic underachievement, which include truancy among African American students. Historically, the author noted that many explanations focused on home background, motivation, and socioeconomic status, while ignoring the role of the school, the entity that is responsible for educating Black children for at least 180 days a year for thirteen years. The notion that children are not learning or attending school just because of their background, motivation, and socioeconomic status is far from the whole truth. One must consider the history of slavery, the political agenda of the architects of public education in the United States and capitalism which demands that the majority of citizens in the country function at the bottom economically (Watkins, 2001).
Watkins (2001) noted the historical intent of White Americans to dominate all aspects of society, including the institution of education that is responsible for educating African Americans. Through politics, the author noted that the education of Blacks were controlled by Whites after the civil war to ensure that Blacks were prepared to function in their new subservient roles in the so called new way of life in America. According to Tyack (1974), while African Americans had the desire to uplift themselves, join the social mainstream of American life, and break forever with past bondage they lacked the resources to achieve either education or their larger freedom. In addition, Whites, especially those heavily involved in the politics of white domination, collaborated to pass laws to keep Blacks in what they perceived to be an inferior position (Watkins, 2001).

The Freedmen worked hard to establish public school systems to have the schools to be forced into segregation that were mandated by the 1896 Plessy versus Ferguson decision (Fleming, 1996). Such political decisions halted progress for African Americans in this country. Although school systems were forced into separate but equal, they were never equal. In fact, the author noted that separate but equal politics and practices led organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to oppose such policies and practices in the courts as early as 1930. Their involvement led to the 1954 Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka decision, which outlawed segregation. Although segregation was outlawed because of this decision, the country continues to follow the mandates of the courts that indicated that school systems desegregate the schools with “all deliberate speed” which meant very slowly (Watkins, 2001, & Billingsley, 1992). One could argue the case that the country is still moving
slowly to integrate schools in an effort to provide equal education for all citizens including African Americans.

Historically, African Americans were discouraged from pursuing an education by the dominate culture. There were laws in place to ensure that Africans Americans saw themselves as inferior to whites. Coupled with the programming from slavery, many Africans Americans, although the group continues to struggle, gave in to the dominant white culture. The truth of the matter is that many Blacks, especially the poor who are served in schools where the curriculum and approaches are set up to benefit the Whites, will function minimally in school because of poor schooling practices and the disconnect that exist at the school level. In addition, the funding of schools in the United States, especially Georgia is not equitable.

The funding of public schools, on the surface, seems to be equitable to the uninformed observer. However, when you view the outcomes of test scores, graduation rates, and the disproportionate amount of children in special education classes, it raises the question: Does educational equity exist in public schools? The uninformed person may answer “yes” to the question because of their limited understanding of what makes public schools equitable. Equity in education to many people refers to the equal provision of funds or services to schools for each student (Brimley & Garfield, 2005). However, equality does not guarantee that African American students will receive the appropriate education that is necessary to perform on levels that are equal to their white peers, as the group have experienced on a collective level. For starters, the curriculum in schools, ignore the contributions of African Americans while heavily promoting
European excellence (Davis-Adeshote, 1995). This practice alone could explain why some African Americans skip school, drop out of school, or view education as a process that is reserved for Whites. School systems and government officials should do more to help those who are left behind, catch up. This has not occurred for most students who are continually, left behind their white counterparts.

Today, African Americans, especially those in the inner city, struggle to connect to the educational system for reasons that are similar to the past. Although African Americans continue to struggle in educational arenas, schools are still mandated to ensure that all barriers to their success and the success of others are minimized (Noguera, 2003). Noguera (2003) noted that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was legislation that was supposed to ensure that all children are educated appropriately. The author also noted that No Child Left Behind is another piece of legislation that was implemented without adequate funding and resources. Not only is No Child Left Behind underfunded, its focus on high stakes tests are flawed and morally irresponsible (Noguera, 2003). This has been a historical theme behind educational policies in the United States, especially such policies related to African Americans and other oppressed groups.

The current status of the graduation rate for African-American high school students is evidence of the effects of policies that promoted segregation and poor schooling for African Americans and the many failed educational policies that promise that no child would be left behind. Figure 7 illustrates the overall graduation rate for high school students in general in the state of Georgia as well as the rate for African-American high school students. During the 2001-2002 school year, 61.8% (102,477) of Georgia’s
students graduated from high school. African Americans represented 38,708 of the students, which is 51.6% of all African American students to graduate for that school year. In the 2002-2003 school year, 63.3% (103,107) of all of Georgia’s high school students graduated from high school. African Americans represented 38,661 of that number which is 52.6% of African Americans to graduate. During the 2003-2004 school year, 65.4% (99,535) of Georgia’s students graduate from high school. African Americans represented 37,158 of the students, which is 56.8% of all African American students to graduate for that school year. In the 2004-2005 school year, 69.4% (97,359) of all of Georgia’s high school students graduated from high school. African Americans represented 36,100 of that number which is 61.9% of African Americans to graduate. During the 2005-2006 school year, 70.8% (102,372) of Georgia’s students graduated.

Figure 7. Georgia Graduation Rates for High School Students

Source: Georgia Department of Education

represented 36,100 of that number which is 61.9% of African Americans to graduate. During the 2005-2006 school year, 70.8% (102,372) of Georgia’s students graduated
from high school. African Americans represented 38,397 of the students, which is 63.6% of all African American students to graduate for that school year. In the 2006-2007 school year, 72.3% (104,123) of all of Georgia's high school students graduated from high school. African Americans represented 39,153 of that number which is 65.5% of African Americans to graduate from high school.

Figure 7 clearly shows that from the 2001-2002 school year to the 2006-2007 school year, there was a 10.8% increase in the graduation rate for the state of Georgia. For African American students, there was a 13.9% increase in the graduation rate for that same year span. This is an indication that African Americans are graduating at a faster rate than the overall state of Georgia student population. However, there are still many students left behind, which indicates that school systems across the state must continue to address the problem of truancy and dropping out in a way that considers the marginalization of the group. Such consideration is useful if school social workers use the information to help them make decisions about interventions to decrease truancy among African-American youth.

Theoretical Framework

Systems Theory, Social Capital Theory and the Afrocentric Perspective are the lenses used to guide this embedded mixed method study of school social workers perceptions of the most effective interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students.
Ludwig von Bertalanffy is credited with being the originator of systems theory (Friedman, 1997). According to Friedman, Bertalanffy was a theoretical biologist born and educated in Australia who was dissatisfied with the way that linear, cause-and-effect theories explained growth and change in living organisms. Bertalanffy's introduction of systems theory changed that framework to look at the system as a whole with its relationships and interactions with other systems as a mechanism of growth and change (Broderick, 1993, & Friedman, 1997). Bertalanffy saw systems theory as a method of organizing the interaction between the component parts of a larger organism (Friedman, 1997). Therefore, since systems theory was a way of organizing information rather than explaining observations, it was adaptable to other fields, like social work (Friedman, 1997).

Systems theory is an organizational theory that looks at interactions between systems (Friedman, 1997). The author noted that how a field defines the system determines the interaction. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (1990) defines a system as a set of elements, which form an orderly, interrelated, and functional whole. The authors noted that a system, as a set of elements could be composed of things as long as the things have some relationship to each other. In the case of social work practice, people represent elements.

Kazemek, C. and Kazemek, F. (1992) indicated that systems theory is a conceptual framework, which allows social workers to perceive individuals as integral parts of larger systems such as families, schools and communities. The idea that people
are integral parts of their families, schools and communities suggests that families, schools and communities can also affect them. This is important for school social workers to consider if they wish to effectively, help students who struggle with truancy. When school social workers engage students who have problems with skipping school, systems theory would suggest that social workers view the students as a part of a system or several systems (Friedman, 1997, & Broderick, 1993) such as the student’s family, school, peers, or community. This is important because school social workers may have to address the needs of the other systems that may affect the behavior of students.

There are many concepts in systems theory that help explain the theory more. Homeostasis is the first concept, which refers to the tendency for a system to maintain a relatively stable, constant state of equilibrium or balance (Friedman, 1997, Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman 1990). Changes in student’s lives that result in negative behavior like cutting class or skipping school may indicate that something is not in order in the child’s life, which includes the family, community or school. For example, a student who has severe academic deficits may not feel comfortable in a classroom because of the fear of embarrassment. The negative behavior should indicate to school social workers that a part of the child’s system or systems was experiencing dysfunction. In addition, the negative behavior should prompt the social worker to intervene so that the student could achieve a level of equilibrium in his or her life.

A subsystem is a secondary or subordinate system. An example of a subsystem would be the relationship between a mother and child or the relationship between two children who may bond to survive in a dysfunctional and violent situation (Friedman,
Nichols (1984) indicated that the concept of boundaries refer to invisible barriers which surround individuals and subsystems, regulating the amount of contact with others. Boundaries inform people who is and is not a part of a system. According to Friedman (1997), the more permeable the boundary, the greater the extent of interaction that the system has with its environment.

Two concepts in systems theory that involves some sort of action or work on the part of members of a system or systems are the notion of Inputs and Outputs. An Input is defined as the energy, information, or communication flow received from other systems (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1990). The educations that students receive, as well as the support from social networks like mentors and parents, are examples of inputs. The authors define an output as the energy, information, and communication that is emitted from a system to the environment or to other systems. An example would be a student attending school regularly and completing school assignments.

According to Wolman (1973), feedback is any kind of direct information from an outside source about the effects and or results of one’s behavior. This information can be received from family members, school staff and other supportive networks like mentors. Friedman (1997) indicated that the concept of entropy refers to a state of disorder or gradually becoming disorganized or dysfunctional (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1990). People change over time and they have the tendency to lose balance. The loss of balance results in undesirable behaviors like truancy. Negative entropy, according to the authors refers to the state of system growth. School social workers must understand that achieving homeostasis involves continuous growth and development.
School social workers work with clients to help them solve problems or cope with their circumstances. Understanding the concept of equifinality or the fact that there are many different means to an end is critical in social work practice. When school social workers work with clients, they must consider various alternatives to help their clients achieve homeostasis. However, figuring out the strongest strategy would probably help clients get to the result quicker and ensure that results are sustained longer.

Differentiation in systems theory refers to a system’s tendency to move from a more simplified state to a more complex one (Friedman, 1997). School social workers are reminded that people change over time, which suggests that when problems occur, relevant inputs, which include interventions, could help them achieve homeostasis again.

Bertalanffy (1968) differentiated between open and closed systems. According to the author, an open system exchanges matter with its environment while closed systems are isolated from their environment. An example of closed systems would be students not interacting or communicating with teachers who they feel have wronged them in the past. When the students shut down and withdraw from the educational process, they become truant, which could lead to academic failure. In order for the system to be restored, it must be open for interaction between its environment and others.

The above-mentioned concepts provide information that informs the reader about systems theory as a framework for understanding individuals in the context of their many systems (i.e., families, schools, organizations, and communities). In the context of schools, the systems theory is helpful in helping social workers organize and assess the relevant issues that are related to African-American high school students skipping school.
The systems that are of interest in this study are parents, teachers, mentors, and community partners and the juvenile court. The above-mentioned systems represent the micro, mezzo, and macro aspect of social work practice to help clients, which is aligned with the Systems. Systems theory is used to guide the quantitative aspect of the study. This is important if school social workers are to address the problem of truancy in a manner that decreases the issue among African-American high school students.

**Social Capital Theory**

Social Capital Theory provides a conceptual model for understanding how positive outcomes are mediated in a social context through interpersonal, associational, and cultural social ties (King, & Furrow, 2004). Coleman (1988) is known for applying Social Capital Theory to the study of educational outcomes of youth. Coleman posited that developmental benefits are mediated by social capital. Hemmings (2007) defines social capital as the social resources and networks that enable people to promote their own or others’ educational achievement and attainment. Social capital theory is used in this study because it best explains the importance of having supportive resources or networks in the lives of students to help them achieve academic success. In addition, it offers a framework for understanding the behavior of students regarding truancy in the context of their social relationships (Coleman, 1988).

Social Capital Theory stresses the need for social networks and resources to support a change in the lives of people who struggle because of their lack of resources or social networks (Coleman, 1988). African-American Students who have been marginalized in this country could benefit greatly from such networks or resources. In
fact, Social Capital Theory provides a framework for understanding the issue of truancy in relations to the presence or absence of social networks in the lives of the African-American high school students.

Parents, teachers, and mentors are important and excellent social networks for students to help them mediate positive outcomes, like a decrease in truancy and an increase in high school completion (Coleman, 1988). McNeil (1999) indicated that parent involvement is an important aspect of social capital in the context of schools, which is essential for many African-American students who struggle to attend school daily and who are at-risk for dropping out of school.

Mentors and tutors are considered added social capital for those who lack the necessary supportive networks or resources to help them navigate through adolescence while trying to complete their high school educational process (Coleman, 1988). Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000), found in a study that sought to understand the pathways through which mentoring relationships influenced adolescent’ academic adjustment, that mentoring led to reductions in unexcused absences and improvements in perceived scholastic competence. This is evidence that when students receive the necessary support from the adults in their lives, they can improve academically as well as become excited about attending and finishing school.

Teachers at the high school level have a major impact on the educational processes of students (Kunjufu, 1989). In fact, the teacher and student relationship is one of the most important relationships in education because of the teacher’s responsibility to educate his or her students. When teachers engage their students to help them enhance
their academic knowledge and skills, they are in fact, proving to be powerful social networks and resources for their students. This is an excellent form of social capital (Coleman, 1988).

The community, which consists of churches, social organizations, and other governmental agencies that exist to provide a service to adolescents represent additional social capital (Coleman, 1988) in the form of social networks and resources that could support academic achievement for African-American high school students. Discussion of the above-mentioned social networks and social capital takes place during the analysis of the qualitative data, to further the understanding of the importance of the social networks. To discuss the qualitative data, the Afrocentric perspective is used and is discussed next.

 Afrocentric Perspective

The traditional theories in social work practice are framed in a very Eurocentric and linear manner that makes it non-applicable to people who are not of European decent (Schiele, 1997). Therefore, alternate ways of viewing, researching and finding solutions to social problems like truancy among African-American high school students are needed. One framework that is appropriate, considers the lived experiences of African American people, and affords researchers the opportunity to view and understand problems like truancy among African-American high school students is the Afrocentric Perspective (Asante, 2003, & Schiele, 2000).

The Afrocentric perspective offers an alternate way of understanding the problem of truancy among African American students by giving voice to African American professionals who work as school social workers. This approach, allowing school social
workers to share their experiences is aligned with the original goal of the perspective, which seeks to place the experiences of African Americans at the center of discussion and academic inquiry (Asante, 2003). An Afrocentric perspective is defined as a frame of reference wherein phenomenon is viewed from the perspective of the African person and their culture (Asante, 1987, & Schiele, 2000). Although, the idea of the perspective existed before the creation of the phrase (Adeleke, 2001), Molefi Asante is considered the father of Afrocentricity or the Afrocentric perspective.

The current study seeks to understand “which interventions are most effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students and what makes them effective”. For example, parental involvement is often viewed as a strategy for addressing problems at the school level (Barton, 2005, & Teasley, 2004). However, it is not clear if parental involvement is an effective strategy to reduce truancy for African-American high school students. The case is the same for the other measures like professional development for teachers, mentoring, collaboration with community partners and filing petitions with the juvenile court, which are implemented to reduce truancy for this population. If deemed effective, the literature does not indicate what makes the above-mentioned truancy interventions effective for African-American high school students.

Social workers who practice from an Afrocentric Perspective are viewed as Afrocentric Social Workers (Schiele, 1996). According to the author, Afrocentric Social Work is defined as a method of social work practice based on the traditional African philosophical assumptions that are used to explain and to solve human and societal
problems. For example, in the context of solving problems like truancy, school social workers practicing from this perspective would consider the historical practices of the educational systems that serve African-American youth to make their assessments and to make decisions regarding culturally relevant interventions that might lead to solutions. This is important because African-American youth have been marginalized in the United States since their ancestors were kidnapped and forced into slavery in this country (Kunjufu, 2006, & Watson, 2001).

According to Schiele (1996), one of the assumptions of Afrocentric Social Work is that the affective approach to knowledge is justifiably valid. In other words, the author is implying that understanding by way of the experiences, voices and feelings of social workers and the clients who are served are just as valid and meaningful as learning from a scientific approach to knowing. This is important to understand in the context of the current study that seek to understand more about the effectiveness of truancy interventions for African-American youth from the perspective of African American school social workers.

Two questions that are raised by this researcher from an Afrocentric Perspective are “Do school social workers consider the past educational experiences and the marginalization of African Americans when making decisions about interventions to solve the problem of truancy and Do school social workers believe that the interventions that they implement are cultural relevant. History is important because it provides you with clues about the present. Hilliard (1997) indicated that in order to understand what is happening to African American people currently, practitioners must understand the
groups past. In the tradition of the Akan, the author suggested a Sankofa experience, which essentially means to go back and fetch it, reflect or study the past (Hilliard 1997). This should be a prerequisite to the development of interventions for African-American youth. Culturally relevant interventions are important if social workers and educators expect students to embrace their education in a way that reduces truancy and lead to academic success (Kunjufu, 2006).

The Afrocentric Perspective is used to obtain a more culturally relevant understanding from African American school social workers about their practice considerations and the effectiveness of parental involvement, professional development for teachers, mentoring, collaboration with community partners and filing petitions with the juvenile court as interventions to reduce truancy for African Americans. The assumption is that this professional group has unique information because of their cultural connection to the clients who they serve.

The three frameworks (Systems Theory, Social Capital Theory, and the Afrocentric Perspective) combined, offer a more comprehensive and grounded understanding about the effectiveness of interventions to decrease truancy. This is the first time that all three frameworks are used collectively in studies on school social work practice as it relates to truancy interventions. According to Schiele (1997), from an Afrocentric Perspective, African Americans exist as a part of the larger collective of Africans. This implies that individuals are connected in a way that may lead to an individual being affected by others who are part of the collective. This assumption is related to systems theory’s assumption that individuals exist among other systems, and
therefore can be affected by other systems. In addition, because African Americans are viewed as a collective unit, it is believed that the adults are responsible for raising the children (Hilliard, 1997). The village represents the much-needed social capital networks (Coleman, 1998) that are crucial to help African-American youth succeed academically. Finally, the use of the three frameworks contributes to the literature and adds to the profession, an alternate way to understand, assess and address social problems in the field, like truancy.

Current Findings

Much of the literature on truancy discussed the history of the enactments of the Compulsory Attendance Laws in the United States, factors that contribute to truancy, truancy as a factor that contribute to students dropping out of school and evaluation or reports of programs that have been effective to address the problem of truancy for students in general. In addition, parental involvement, mentoring, and collaboration were noted as effective interventions to support academic achievement (Reimer & Dimmock, 2005). The literature discussed the need for relevant professional development for teachers who are expected to support African-American students in obtaining academic success. Although the literature includes much discussion regarding the above-mentioned areas, limitations exist. For example, the literature does not include much research about what school social workers view as the most effective truancy interventions to reduce truancy among African-American high school students. In addition, the literature does not consider the unique experiences of African-American students or the professionals who serve them. To address the limitations in the literature,
the current study is conducted to close the gap regarding effective truancy interventions as it pertains to African-American high school students from the perspectives of school social workers. In addition, the Afrocentric perspective is used to add to the literature, the unique perspective of African-American school social workers from their own lived experiences.

Chapter Conclusion

The literature review concerning truancy and truancy interventions that are used by school social workers and others to reduce truancy among African-American high school students is relevant to the best practices for school social workers because school social workers are responsible for finding effective strategies to decrease truancy (Tcaslcy, 2004). Truancy has been an issue for many years (Reid, 1999) and has led to the development of policies such as the Georgia Compulsory Attendance law and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which mandates that school districts use staff like school social workers to find strategies to address the truancy issue.

Current findings have revealed that many interventions that are used by school social workers can lead to positive results (Barton, 2005; Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hamilton, Hamilton, Hirsch, Hughes, King, & Maton, 2006; Karcher, 2005; Kunjufu, 1989; Olmstead & Rubin, 1983; & Rhodes, 2002). Although school social workers have previously carried out interventions that include parental involvement, professional development for teachers, mentoring, collaboration with community partners and the filing of truancy petitions, the effectiveness of the interventions from their perspectives are unknown. More research is needed to determine
which truancy interventions are most effective in reducing truancy among African-American high school students.

Chapter Summary

The literature review discussed the issue of truancy in relations to school social workers addressing the problem with effective interventions (Teasley, 2004). A historical overview was provided, and included discussion related to truancy and high school dropouts, truancy risk factors, and school social work interventions to address the problem. The independent variables discussed as targeted interventions were Parental Involvement, Professional Development for Teachers, Mentoring, Collaboration with Community Partners, and Filing Petitions with the juvenile court system. Information regarding the absentee rates in the state of Georgia was discussed with emphasis on African-American high school students. The researcher also discussed African-American youth as a marginalized group in the context of their educational experiences. Finally, systems theory, social capital theory and the Afrocentric perspective were identified as the theoretical or conceptual frameworks that guide the study.

Chapter 3 describes the use of the embedded mixed methods design to answer the research questions related to the most effective truancy interventions to reduce truancy among African-American high school students. The researcher discusses why the design is appropriate for this study. In addition, chapter 3 describes the study population, the sample and data collection procedures, internal and external validity, and the use of descriptive analysis to analyze the quantitative data and discussion to analyze the qualitative data.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore the views of School Social Workers regarding the most effective truancy interventions to reduce truancy among African-American high school students. This chapter provides an explanation of the research method that was used in the study and the appropriateness of the embedded mixed methods design. The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the study population, the sampling technique, data collection procedures and rationale. The chapter also addresses the issue of internal and external validity and discusses descriptive analysis as the appropriate procedure for data analysis. The chapter ends with a summary of the overall information presented in the chapter.

Research Design and Design Appropriateness

The current study uses an embedded mixed method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) because it is appropriate to answer the research question. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), an embedded design is a mixed methods design in which one data set provides a supportive, secondary role in a study based primarily on the other data type. For example, Simoes, Matos, and Batista-Forguet (2008) conducted a mixed methods study to analyze risk and protective factors in juvenile delinquency. The authors noted that the quantitative aspect of the study was conducted using a
questionnaire in order to develop an explanatory model of delinquency. The qualitative aspect of the study used focus groups to understand the participant’s perceptions regarding risk and protective factors for delinquency. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) indicated that the premise of the embedded mixed methods design is that one data set alone is not sufficient, that different questions need to be answered, and that each question requires different types of data. This is the case with the current study. The level one data provides the quantitative results, while the level two data (qualitative) provides more insightful information about school social workers perceptions of truancy interventions from their own voices.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) indicated that the strengths of the embedded mixed methods design are that it is useful when researchers do not have enough time or resources to commit to extensive quantitative or qualitative research. The authors indicate that the embedded design could be more manageable for graduate students because one method requires less data than the other. Finally, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) indicated that the embedded design might appeal to funding agencies because of the quantitative data. One of the challenges that exist when using the embedded research design is explaining the purpose of collecting one form of qualitative data as a part of a larger quantitative study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The authors indicated that the researcher stating which level is primary or secondary for the overall study could mediate this.

Hall-Haynes (2007) employed a mixed methods design in which both quantitative and qualitative data were utilized (Creswell, & Plano-Clark, 2007). This is one example
of a study that used a mixed methods design to explore the phenomenon of truancy and truancy interventions that exist in a Mid-Atlantic high school. The purpose was to discover from students and educational leaders their perceptions about truancy and truancy interventions that are used to increase student attendance. Online and paper/pencil surveys were administered to two participant groups (N=55); they were a student group (n=50) and an education leader group (n=5). Follow-up interviews were conducted for both groups. The findings indicated that leaders did not indicate that they fully understood how students perceived current truancy interventions. The interviews revealed that parent involvement is the most important intervention that is used in this school.

The above example demonstrates how effective mixed methods designs are for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, & Plano-Clark, 2007). The current mixed methods study allows for the collection of level one data (quantitative) using questionnaires. In addition, the level two data (qualitative) is collected via focus groups, which takes place after the level one data is analyzed and new questions are developed by the researcher as a result of the quantitative analysis. This method is appropriate because it allows for a much richer examination of school social workers perceptions regarding the most effective truancy interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students.

Population

The study population consists of school social workers from the state of Georgia who are certified by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and were
previously or currently hired or contracted by a public school district to practice school social work. This assumes that the social workers have a Master of Social Work degree from an accredited institution. The school social workers must have at least one year of previous or current work experience with African American students in a high school environment. The process of selecting the participants for this study included securing a directory from the School Social Workers Association of Georgia, which listed the names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of all certified school social workers in the state of Georgia by school district. Initially, a letter was emailed asking school social workers to participate in the study by completing an online-questionnaire regarding the most effective truancy interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students. The questionnaires of the respondents who met the criteria were considered the study population which consists of approximately three hundred (N=300) school social workers.

Sampling

School social workers from the state of Georgia (N=300) are solicited to select the participants for the quantitative part of the study. This affords the researcher an opportunity to generalize to other school social workers in Georgia only. A convenient sample of African American school social workers (N=21) participate in focus groups so that the researcher can collect the qualitative data (Level 2). This is important to allow African American social workers the opportunity to share their views regarding the most effective truancy interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students. The assumption is that the group has a unique perspective, given the cultural
and ethnic background that they share with African American students. The researcher solicited school social workers from the state of Georgia to participate in the focus groups. The first twenty-one social workers to agree were considered the participants for the focus groups.

Data Collection and Procedures

To collect the data for the current study, the priority or level 1 data (quantitative) was collected using the online survey format. The researcher developed the questionnaire and secured a survey account with Survey Monkey, a software package and company that allows research data to be collected via an internet website. Participants were invited to connect to the website to complete the questionnaire. According to Lazar & Preece (1999), the response time is reduced when researchers use online surveys. This is important because it allows researchers to receive data quickly. Online surveys are also beneficial because researchers can use the e-mailing method to drive respondents to the online survey multiple times to ensure a greater response rate (Granello & Weaton, 2004). The level 2 data were collected in three focus groups with seven participants in each group. A room was secured at Clark Atlanta University’s School of Social Work to collect the focus group data. The researcher responsible for this study facilitated the focus groups. A recorder was used to ensure that the researcher documents the participant’s responses.
Rationale

The data collection procedures were appropriate for the study because they allow the researcher to collect data that was more comprehensive, providing both depth and breadth regarding school social workers perceptions of the most effective truancy interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students. Researchers who previously studied the problem of truancy used a variety of methods that included quantitative, qualitative or mix methods.

One such quantitative study used a quasi-experimental design by Fantuzzo, Grim, and Hazon (2005) who conducted an evaluation of a citywide implementation of Project START, which is a community-wide school-based intervention to reduce truancy. The researchers integrated court data with school district data using students' identification numbers as a linking variable. Three periods were identified for data collection and data was collected in the same manner.

Rosenfield (2005) conducted a quantitative correlational research study to determine whether a particular population shared certain characteristics. According to the researcher, the methodology was appropriate in order to determine whether participation in the Truancy Intervention Program (TIP) at the elementary and middle school levels affected attendance patterns in the ninth grade. Data were collected from the M-DCPS mainframe computer system, ISIS, to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship existed between two quantifiable variables; TIP participation prior to high school and student attendance in middle school and ninth grade.
Quantitative research can serve the purpose of answering the closed ended questions about the most effective truancy interventions that are perceived by school social workers to decrease truancy (Yegidis, & Weinbach, 2006). However, quantitative data collection methods are less effective when trying to gain deeper insight about the reasons school social workers do or do not use certain interventions to address the issue of truancy or a deeper understanding about why they believe that certain interventions are more effective, while others are not.

Unlike the quantitative approach, qualitative research allows participants to answer questions in their own words. This is important to gain a deeper understanding of the most effective truancy interventions for African-American high school students and information regarding what makes the interventions effective for this population. Mixed methods data collection that includes both approaches (quantitative and qualitative) supports the goal of obtaining a more comprehensive answer to the research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Internal and External Validity

This study was carried out in Georgia with School social workers from different school districts and schools. Although there may be concerns of external validity regarding the quantitative approach, the researcher ensures that surveys were received from a representative sample population so that the results are generalizable to the population from which it was drawn only.
Data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis (means and central tendency) and a paired t-test were used to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive analysis was appropriate because it reduced the whole collection of data to simple and understandable terms without distorting or losing too much of the variable information collected (Weinbach & Grinnell, 2001) related to the effectiveness of the truancy intervention in general and specifically for African-American high school students. The t-test was appropriate because it informs the level of significance between two paired items like the importance and effectiveness of specific truancy interventions (Weinbach & Grinnell, 2001). Participant’s responses from the focus groups were discussed to analyze what school social workers believe makes certain truancy interventions effective. This is not only consistent with most studies of a qualitative nature, it is a sure way to understand a problem from the voices of the experts who work to addressed the issue on a regular basis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Hall-Haynes, 2007; Simoes, Matos, & Batista-Forguet, 2008).

Chapter Summary

Chapter three included a discussion of the methods used to conduct this study. Included were sections related to the research design and its appropriateness, the characteristics of the study population, sampling, data collection procedures, rationale, validity, and data analysis. The following chapter provides a detailed description of the characteristics of the participants as well as the results of the study.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to explore school social workers perceptions of the most effective truancy interventions to reduce the incidence of truancy in general, then as it specifically pertain to African-American high school students. The three research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How effective are current truancy interventions?
RQ2: Which interventions are most effective for African-American youth?
RQ3: What makes the truancy interventions specifically effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students?

An embedded mixed methods design is utilized to capture both quantitative (level one) and qualitative (level two) data. The level one data was collected via an online survey. Data obtained from the surveys were used to inform the qualitative focus group questions posed by the researcher to obtain a much richer understanding from African American school social workers about the most effective truancy interventions for African-American high school students.

Chapter 4 addresses the findings of this study in three sections. Section one presents the quantitative data analysis and section two consists of discussion of the participants responses from the focus groups to provide qualitative analysis of the level two data.
Quantitative Data Analysis and Procedures

The data for this study were collected in survey monkey and transferred into SPSS to allow for a more accurate analysis of the data. Descriptive analysis (frequency and measures of central tendency) are presented and discussed to determine the participants’ perceived degree of importance and effectiveness of truancy interventions for African American high school students.

Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Variables

Demographic variables entered into the analysis included: ethnicity, highest level of education, gender, currently working as a school social worker, certification status, and previous experience working with high school students, current grade levels served by the school social worker, and the total number of years worked as a social worker. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the participants of the study. There are 105 participants in the current study. The majority of the participants (71.4%) identified their ethnicity as African American, while 26.6% indicated White, 1% indicated Latino/Hispanic and 1% indicated Native American. No other ethnicities were reported by the participants. The gender composition was 15.2% male and 84.8% female. In order to participant in the study, all participants had to have an MSW degree. One hundred and two participants (97.0%) indicated that their highest degree level was the MSW, while 3% indicated PhD or DSW. All of the participants (100%) indicated that they currently work as school social workers and that all (100%) of them are certified as school social workers by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The participant’s responses indicated that 94.3% had previous experience (more than one year of school social work experience
Table 1

*Descriptive Data for the Survey Sample (N=105)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<td>(71.4)</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>(26.6)</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td><strong>Currently work as School Social Workers</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>All participants</td>
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<td>(100%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Participants</td>
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<td>(100%)</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Previous School Social Work experience with High school students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>(94.3%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>(5.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Currently work with the following grade levels</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
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<td>(21%)</td>
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<td>Middle School</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>(21.9%)</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>High School</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>(57.1)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>(32.4%)</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>(21.9%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or more</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>(34.3%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with high school students in a high school setting), while 5.7% indicated that they did not have more than one year of school social work experience with students in a high school setting. The data indicated the current school settings where the participants are employed. The survey did not allow participants to choose more than one setting. Therefore, the statistics only include the setting that the participants chose. The data show that 21% of the participants currently work at an elementary school, while 21.9% work at a middle school and 57.1% currently work in a high school setting. The average number of years that participants worked as social workers in general is 12.07. Regarding the number of years worked as a social worker, the participants indicated a minimum of two years and a maximum equal to or more than twenty.

Analysis of the Effectiveness of Truancy Interventions

The 21 specific truancy interventions are related to the five-targeted interventions: Parental Involvement, Professional Development for Teachers, Mentoring, Collaboration with Community Partners, and Filing Petitions with the juvenile courts. After presenting the 21 interventions, the five-targeted interventions are analyzed according to their combined averages for the degree of importance and effectiveness generally, as well as to understand what school social workers rated as the most effective truancy intervention for African-American high school students. The first question to be answered is “how effective are the current interventions”. To answer the question, participants had to rate in Likert Scale format whether the 21 specific truancy interventions were 1) Never important, 2) Almost never important, 3) Sometimes important, 4) Important almost All
the time, or 5) Important all the time. In the same manner, participants had to rate whether the 21 specific truancy interventions were 1) Never effective, 2) almost never effective, 3) Sometimes effective, 4) Effective almost all the time, or 5) Effective all the time. That information is calculated according to the measures of central tendency and is presented in this chapter.

Table 2 presents the mean scores for truancy interventions according to their degree of importance and effectiveness. The table is located at the end of the document (Appendix A) because of its length and will only be discussed in this chapter. On average, school social workers rated phone calls to parents as generally important (3.31). However, phone calls to parents, was rated higher for effectiveness (4.02). On average, sending letters to parents was generally, rated higher for importance (4.06) but lower for its effectiveness (3.14). The participants also rated conferences with parents generally higher for importance (4.00) but lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.43). Home visits with parents were generally rated as being important (3.86) but lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.36). On average, facilitating parent groups was rated as an important (3.23) intervention generally, but lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.23) as a truancy intervention. On average, involving parents as volunteers was generally rated as being important (3.42) and rated slightly lower for effectiveness (3.01).

Training for teachers regarding truancy protocols was generally, rated by the study participants as an important intervention (4.02) but rated lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.17). On average, training teachers to communicate effectively with parents was generally, rated as being important (3.96) as a truancy intervention but rated
slightly lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.22) as an intervention. Training teachers
to create supportive environments for students was generally, rated as being an important
truancy intervention (4.05) but rated lower for its degree of effectiveness as an
intervention. On average, training for teachers regarding developing positive
relationships with students was generally, rated as being an important intervention (4.02)
but rated lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.30). Table 2 indicates that on average,
training for teachers regarding infusing culturally relevant material in curriculum was
generally, rated as being important (3.70) as an intervention but rated lower for its
effectiveness (3.11). Helping teachers develop and implement incentive programs in
their classrooms for attendance was generally rated on average as being important (3.77)
and slightly lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.13) as an intervention.

Table 2 indicates that on average, one on one mentoring between an adult and
African-American high school student was generally, rated higher for its degree of
importance (4.12) as an intervention and rated slightly lower for its degree of
effectiveness (3.92). Group mentoring on average was generally, rated as being
important (3.92) as an intervention and rated slightly lower for its degree of effectiveness
(3.74).

On average, table 2 indicates that the participants generally, rated collaboration
with churches as being important (3.33) as an intervention and rated lower for its degree
of effectiveness (3.05). Collaboration with community centers was generally, rated as
being important (3.51) as an intervention and rated slightly lower for its degree of
effectiveness (3.28). On average, collaboration with civic and social groups was
generally, rated as being important (3.42) as an intervention and rated lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.18). Collaboration with social service agencies was generally rated as being an important (3.84) intervention but rated lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.32). On average, collaboration with the department of family and children services was generally, rated by the participants as being important (3.65) as a truancy intervention but lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.16).

Filing truancy petitions with the juvenile courts was generally, rated on average as being an important (3.70) intervention but rated lower for its degree of effectiveness (2.93). Filing educational neglect petitions against parents, on average was generally, rated by the participants as being important (3.52) as an intervention but lower for its degree of effectiveness (3.05).

Table 2 reveals that many of the truancy interventions are important but only sometimes effective. A paired t-test revealed no statistical significance between the degree of importance and the degree of effective of the 21 interventions. In the following ladder graph, the 21 interventions are collapsed into their five-targeted categories and are presented according to their degree of importance and effectiveness. The interventions are rated according to the averages above that are collapsed.

Figure 8 indicates the averages of the five targeted truancy interventions regarding their degree of importance and effectiveness. According to figure 8, mentoring was rated the highest for degree of importance (4.02) which indicates that the participants perceive it as an important intervention almost all the time. Professional development for teachers (3.92) was rated second best for being important ‘sometimes’, which is the same
category for parental involvement (3.79), filing court petitions (3.61), and collaboration with community partners (3.55). According to figure 8, mentoring was rated the highest for its degree of effectiveness (3.83) as perceived by the participants. The average, rounded up is perceived in the same light as the average for degree of importance, which means that mentoring is rated on the lower end as an effective intervention almost all the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Importance</th>
<th>Degree of Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.02 (4.02) Mentoring</td>
<td>3.83 Mentoring (3.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.79) Parental Involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.61) Filing Court Petitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.55) Collaboration with community partners</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8.* Means for the Importance and Effectiveness of Five-Targeted Interventions (N=105)

time. professional development (3.21) was rated as effective ‘sometimes’ followed by parental involvement (3.19), collaboration with community partners (3.19), and filing court petitions in the same category (effective sometimes).

The above averages represent the findings about the importance and effectiveness of the truancy interventions generally. The following diagram illustrates the averages of
the participant’s responses to the most effective truancy interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high school students. The 21 truancy interventions were collapsed into the five-targeted intervention categories for analysis.

Figure 9 illustrates that school social workers on average, rated mentoring as the most effective (4.77) truancy intervention to decrease truancy among African-American high school students followed by parental involvement (8.00), Professional development

![Figure 9. Means for the Most Effective Truancy Intervention for African Americans](image-url)
for teachers (10.47), and filing court petitions for truancy and educational neglect (13.71). The participants rated collaboration with community partners as the least effective intervention with an average score of 14.54. Mentoring is positioned the closer to the center of circle which represents African American students because it is rated as the most effective truancy intervention for this population. As the interventions move outwards from the center of the circle, means that they means that they were rated as less effective by the school social workers.

Social Capital theory provides a framework for understanding the issue of truancy in relationship to the presence or absence of social networks in the lives of the students in general and African-American high school students specifically. Social capital theory is used in this study because it best explains the importance of having supportive resources or networks in the lives of students to help them achieve academic success, which includes a decrease in truancy. The findings in the study on average, points to mentoring as the most effective intervention generally and specifically for African-American high school students to help reduce truancy among this population. Mentors are considered added social capital for those who lack the necessary supportive networks or resources to help them navigate through adolescence while trying to complete their high school education (Coleman, 1988). Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch (2000) found in a study that sought to understand the pathways through which mentoring relationships influenced adolescent academic adjustment, that mentoring led to reductions in unexcused absences and improvements in perceived scholastic competence. This is evidence that when
students receive the necessary support from the adults in their lives, they can improve academically as well as become excited about attending and finishing school.

Parental involvement is indicated as an important aspect of social capital in the context of schools, which is essential for many African American students who struggle to attend school daily and who are at-risk for dropping out of school (McNeil, 1999). The findings indicate that the participants view parental involvement as the third most important and effective truancy intervention generally. However, for African-American high school students, parental involvement is rated the second most effective truancy intervention, which suggests that school social workers view parents as important social capital networks for students.

The literature suggests that teachers who engage their students to help them enhance their academic knowledge and skills on a daily basis are proving to be powerful social networks and resources for their students, which is an excellent form of social capital (Coleman, 1988). However, the professional development for teachers was rated as the third most effective truancy intervention to help reduce truancy among African American students.

Filing court petitions for truancy and neglect was the fourth most important truancy intervention on average. This is understandable given the consequences of the courts are more punitive and less supportive like most social capital networks. The community, which consists of churches, social organizations, and other governmental agencies that exist to provide a service to adolescents represent additional social capital
(Coleman, 1988). However, Collaboration with community partners was rated as the least effective generally and specifically for African Americans.

School social workers were asked to indicate if parents, teachers, and mentors were effective support systems for African American students who struggle with truancy by responding Yes (1) or No (2). To understand the findings better, the ratings closer to the number 1-represent greater efficacy while ratings closer to the number 2, represent lesser efficacy. Table 3 describes the findings. On average, the participants rated parents (1.10) as effective support systems. In addition, the table identifies teachers (1.10) and mentors (1.04) as effective support systems as well.

Table 3

Effective Support Systems for African American high School Students (N=105)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Systems</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Systems theory is helpful in helping social workers organize and assess the relevant issues that related to African-American high school students skipping school (Friedman, 1997). In addition, students exist among many systems (i.e. parents and teachers) that have the potential to affect their behavior in the academic arena. Participants were asked if providing parents and teachers with interventions as a strategy to help reduce truancy among African Americans is important. On average, the participants rated the provision of interventions for parents (1.02) and teachers (1.05) as an important strategy to help reduce truancy among African-American high school
students. The findings indicate that school social workers understand the importance of providing services to those who have the ability to affect their students. This is important to know since parents and teachers are necessary inputs in the education of students that could assist with helping students achieve academic success.

Social workers are often, trained from a Eurocentric framework (Schiele, 1997) and such training is sometimes detrimental to groups like African-American high school students who have been historically marginalized. Therefore, to understand more about the interventions that school social workers carry out for African-American youth, the researcher asked the participants if they considered the experiences and marginalization of African Americans when making decisions about truancy interventions. On average, most participants indicated yes (1.27), which indicates that the average of all participants consider the experiences and marginalization of African Americans when making decisions about truancy interventions for this population. When asked if their truancy interventions were culturally relevant for the African American high School population, the majority of the participants rated their interventions, as culturally relevant (1.30) truancy interventions for African-American youth.

The level one data analysis revealed that the most effective truancy intervention for reducing truancy among African-American high school students was mentoring followed by parental involvement, professional development for teachers, filing court petitions, and collaboration with community partners, which is rated as the least effective truancy intervention. The qualitative analysis of the data collected in two focus groups is presented in the next section. The objective of the qualitative section is to learn from
school social workers exactly what makes the above-mentioned truancy interventions the most effective interventions to reduce truancy among African-American high school students.

Qualitative Data Analysis and Procedure

The qualitative data was collected in two focus groups that were conducted in private conference rooms on the campuses of two public schools in the metro Atlanta area. There were eight participants in one of the groups, and five participants in the other. Three had not participated in the quantitative part of the study. The participants volunteered to participate in the study after being, invited by the researcher or another participant who was familiar with the study. To thank the participants for volunteering for the study, the researcher provided the school social workers with lunch. Both focus groups were recorded with a digital audio recorder and were professionally transcribed.

Demographics of Focus Group Participants

This section describes the demographics of the focus group participants as identified in figure 10. All participants identified themselves as African Americans (9 females, 4 males) and were all certified school social workers who work in the state of Georgia. The average number of years worked by the social workers is 12 while the minimum number is 4 and the maximum is 26 years.
Focus Group Participants | Ethnicity            | Gender | Certified | Employment location and # of years worked as a School Social Worker |
--------------------------|---------------------|--------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
June                     | African American    | Female | Yes       | 19                                                             |
Carey                    | African American    | Female | Yes       | 2                                                              |
Sir                      | African American    | Male   | Yes       | 17                                                             |
Tina                     | African American    | Female | Yes       | 6                                                              |
Mister                   | African American    | Male   | Yes       | 16                                                             |
Bree                     | African American    | Female | Yes       | 10                                                             |
Rachel                   | African American    | Female | Yes       | 26                                                             |
Jennifer                 | African American    | Female | Yes       | 13                                                             |
Kierra                   | African American    | Female | Yes       | 14                                                             |
Erica                    | African American    | Female | Yes       | 9                                                              |
Stephanie                | African American    | Female | Yes       | 11                                                             |
Tyrone                   | African American    | Male   | Yes       | 4                                                              |
Omari                    | African American    | Male   | Yes       | 9                                                              |

Figure 10. Focus Group Demographics (N=13)

The participants all work in the following areas: Dekalb County, Fulton County, and the City of Atlanta. The aforementioned geographic areas are significant because data from the Georgia Department of Education (2008) identifies these areas as having the highest absentee rates in the state of Georgia. The counties had between 5,533 to 15,006 students missing fifteen or more days from school in 2008.

Analysis of the Most Effective Truancy Interventions

The theoretical framework that is used for the qualitative analysis is the Afrocentric perspective, which offers an alternate way of understanding the problem of truancy among African American students by giving voice to African American professionals who work as school social workers. This approach, allowing school social
workers to share their experiences, is aligned with the original goal of the perspective, which seeks to place the experiences of African Americans at the center of discussion and academic inquiry (Asante, 2003). African American school social workers were chosen to participate in the focus group because of their shared cultural experiences with African-American high school students and they might have something significant to share regarding what makes certain interventions effective for African American students.

The researcher utilizes the narrative format to analyze the data collected in the two focus groups. David and Sutton (2004), indicated that narratives sometimes consist of the relative chronology of epiphanies and events. This study uses this format to answer the question: What makes the most effective truancy interventions specifically effective for African-American high school students? The use of this format allows for a better understanding of the quantitative findings in a much richer way because the voices of the participants are heard. The targeted interventions that were identified and will be analyzed are mentoring, which is identified in the quantitative aspect of the study as the most effective intervention for this population, parental involvement, followed by professional development for teachers, filing court petitions and collaborating with community partners.

Mentoring

Rhodes (2002) indicated that as many as 2.5 million youth receive some form of mentoring each year in the United States. In this study, mentoring has been identified as the most effective truancy intervention to decrease truancy among African American high
school students. The purpose of this qualitative analysis is to understand from the perspective of school social workers, what makes truancy interventions specifically effective for African-American high school students. To begin, the participants were asked what they perceive to be the most effective truancy intervention for African-American youth and their reason for selecting a particular intervention. The majority of the participants in both focus groups selected mentoring. However, the participants provided different reasons for their choice. For example, Jennifer had this to say:

“I think mentoring is the most effective because the relationship that the students develop with other people have the most impact on them and so even if it’s not a parent, if they developed a good relationship with maybe the staff person at the school or someone who they look up to, that person is going to have a strong influence on getting them to come back to school.”

Whereas Jennifer focused on the mentoring relationship having a positive impact on students, other participants selected mentoring for different reasons. Tina focused on the ability of mentors to fill the void that some students have when the students feel like there is an absence of adults to share their problems. In her own words, she wrote:

“mentoring is the most effective because once you get someone involved in a student’s life and they talk to that person about why they are absent, and what’s going on with them, what I found is that students often have things going on and they won’t share it or they don’t feel like they don’t have anybody to share it with and so as a result they are just absent and
they are just out and they don’t know I can go to miss so and so or mister
so and to talk to them about it. So mentoring is the most effective.”

Having someone to communicate with is important for high school age students. Therefore, parental involvement in a child’s education is very important, especially during adolescence (Rhodes, 2002). One other participant indicated that he selected mentoring as the most effective because of his experience with the lack of parental involvement at his schools. Omari stated:

I would say mentoring because the biggest problem that I’m finding is the
lack of parental involvement and in an attempt to get parents involved, the
success rate is minimal. I find if you work with the child directly, and try
to build a relationship, that’s your best bet.

Omari’s explanation speaks to the experiences of many students whose parents have not been involved in their education. Mentors who are usually teachers, counselors, and social workers, and even peers sometimes fill the void (Rhodes, 2002).

There were many reasons why participants chose mentoring as the most effective truancy intervention. Many participants focused on mentoring relationships between an adult and one student while others focused on group mentoring between an adult and two or more students. The focus on group mentoring was somewhat connected to youth development or extracurricular programs which are cited in the literature (Kunjufu, 1989) for its role in assisting adolescents in becoming responsible individuals. Tyrone had this to say to defend mentoring as his choice:
Yeah, I agree with the mentoring piece too and I’m thinking of it in terms of sports. Those kids that are involved on the basketball team, the football team, the band, FBLA, step team. Those are the ones that make it to school. That’s a type of mentoring that they get from their involvement with those school professionals or those adults that help them become attached to the school. I think that’s been more effective with truancy.

Tyrone’s response was informative because it highlighted the mentoring relationships that exist between coaches and players, or band members and leaders, which are often overlooked as types of mentoring. This is important to consider when considering mentoring as an intervention.

The participants provided some very enlightening information pertaining to their reasons for choosing mentoring as the most effective. Many of their reasons are also restated somewhat in their responses to what makes mentoring the most effective for African-American high school students. Some of the participants indicted that mentors are caring people and that children respond well to such. In his own words, Omari stated:

Often times the mentors are really the only person in the child’s life that really cares about them to succeed. When those kids come to school and they look for you and they usually come just trying to find you. So, it’s not even about the academic piece of even realizing the importance of school, so much initially, as it is the bonding with that particular individual, somebody that cares about you, somebody that’s going to listen to you.
Omari stressed that mentors are usually individuals that students believe care for them and make them feel special. Carey added to Omari’s words when she indicated that mentors make students feel special when other parents and teachers do not. In her own words, Carey stated:

they (students) feel like someone cares, someone is interested in them particularly if they are not getting that from their home or from other teachers. And that’s the most important thing we all want to feel special. So mentoring, you know if it’s just coming from the social worker or from counselors or from a teacher, children are lot more effective if someone is showing them interest.

Tyrone focused on attachment and bonding:

The attachment and bonding piece of the mentoring- as a result of the mentoring, students become bonded to the school, attached to individuals or they are a part of the school and that makes them want to come.

Mentors often fill the void in the life of students with absentee parents and by having such a relationship; many children are able to remain focused on their academics and attending school. Erica shared that mentors, as role models are what make mentoring effective:

Students have a positive role model, unlike at home. They have someone who is kind of keeping track of them and encouraging them. Sometimes they have been raised by extended family members who do not have the time to just stay on them or provide the structure that they need, but the
mentor is there. It is a lot of different components that a mentor offers, support, role model, professionalism and all those other things that they are lacking, so they encourage them to continue on through high school to get what they need. That is what I see as far as what makes mentoring more effective in their truancy.

Sir suggested that mentors ability to be examples for the students, support the student and motivate them, makes mentoring effective:

Most mentors have a positive influence and most mentors are somewhat higher achievers, you know-background, and job and things like that. I think when the mentor is there, that mentor makes that child feel that if he or she does these particular things, he or she can be where the mentor is professionally and it kind of keeps the child focused. As long as that mentor is there-and stays there and stays with the kid, I think that positive experience pays off.

The mentoring activities are often carried out in the communities where students live. Some participants highlighted mentoring activities that occur in such community environments as elements that make mentoring effective for African Americans. One element focused on the relationships that are developed between students and adults in the community. June spoke sincerely about outside relationships in relation to mentoring when she said:

I think outside relationships, what happens with high school students when they begin to work with other organizations and adults doing certain
things for example Zoo Atlanta had a project you know where high school students go and volunteer. I am not sure if it’s actually like the experience of going to the zoo that helps but more so, the relationship that they developed with the person who they work with at the zoo, which is more, like a mentoring relationship. So, in the sense that they introduce them to more adults who can serve as mentors, I will say it is effective.

Rachel focused on students being exposed to different aspects of life outside of their neighborhoods as an element that makes mentoring the most effective interventions for African American students. In her own words, she said:

I would think that what makes mentoring effective is their being from the outside because students in high school can get to go see them in their environment. The environment is often totally different from what the students are used to. They see a different perspective or a different world and they may say oh, I want to do that and I want to go there. Many never have an opportunity to go anywhere that is different, except through mentoring.

Rachel’s explanation painted a picture of the possibilities that mentors can help students imagine when students are exposed to new things. This is especially important for students who have never been exposed to life outside of their communities.

School social workers have voiced their opinions about what makes mentoring effective for African-American high school students. Mentoring, according to the professional is effective, because mentors are caring role models who support and
encourage students to attend and be successful in school. Mentors also expose students to different aspects of life and activities that sometimes mediate their academic success. For those children who do not have stable parent guidance, mentors serve as surrogates to help them develop and cope during adolescence. From an Afrocentric perspective, mentoring is a strategy that is kin to the African American community, a community that knows that it takes a village to raise itself, the youth included (Hilliard, 2006, Kunjufu, 1996). The next section discusses what the participants voiced in the focus group concerning what makes parental involvement effective for African-American high school students.

**Parental Involvement**

Involving parents in the educational process of their children is necessary. The quantitative aspect of this research indicates that parental involvement is the second most effective truancy intervention to reduce truancy among African American students. Other research has revealed a correlation between an increase in parental involvement and decreased truancy as well. (Barton, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Olmstead & Rubin, 1983). However, no research was found that explained from the perspectives of school social workers “what makes parental involvement an effective truancy intervention for African-American high school students. This research gives voice and hopefully answers the question from the voices of African American school social workers in Georgia.

When asked “what makes parental involvement an effective truancy intervention for African-American high school students, participants responses were not always
aligned with each other. Tina indicated:

I would say just the very involvement of the parents coming up to the school, getting involved, talking to the teachers, talking to the staff and faculty members finding out what’s going on with the students. I don’t often see that and I don’t see a lot of it in high school. Actually, at our last PTA meeting, we only had 15 parents and we have over 800 kids. So it seems like parents stopped coming and being as active and as involved as possible after their children leave the elementary age.

When answering the above question, June implied that parent’s expectations make parental involvement an effective truancy intervention:

I think it has a lot to do with the parent’s expectations about what education means to the family. And I know we are talking about it comparing to truancy but when education has always been a part of the fabric of a family where the expectation is that you go to school, you finish school, you do this and it’s constantly communicated throughout a child’s educational life, then you rarely see truancy because that’s the kid who is going to be talking about what’s going on in the school every day with that parent or family members. It’s not necessarily a parent but family members. So there is ongoing discussion and communication about that educational process and so they are less likely I think to be truant when there is an expectation already set up in their family.
Many of the participants indicated that parental involvement is more effective in elementary school and not at the high school level. Tyrone offered a slightly different time when parental involvement is effective. Tyrone stated this:

When you catch parents at the middle school level, parental involvement is effective. However, when you involve them in high school, it is not that effective.

Carey responded to the notion of involving parents at the high school level being ineffective by indicating that:

“IT’s kind of hard to get parents in high school because by the time they get to high school, the parents only get calls about what their children has done wrong and not what they’ve done right.”

The consensus in both groups was that parental involvement is more effective when the involvement starts earlier in their children’s educational experience. One major thing that is often overlooked and was pointed out by participants was welcoming parents and being positive with them. Kierra had this to say:

“The school has to open the door to make the parents feel welcomed and do incentive programs to draw the parents in early because again, once they get in high school, it’s difficult because many believe that their children are grown and that their parental involvement in not necessary.”

Kierra underscored the importance of making parents feel welcomed and getting them involved earlier in their children’s education. Another participant who provided an example of what happens when you welcome parents supports this. Stephanie shares her
experience with involving parents:

“I did this program at Market Mitchell Elementary School called “Families and Schools Together” and it pulled together those parents who had little to no involvement with the school but it was a program that just encompassed the entire family. If grandma lived in the house, grandma came. It did not matter if they had toddlers, if they didn’t have transportation; we went and picked them up. They were served dinner. I mean it was a family activity but it was to help not only the identified the child improve but it was also to pave a way so that as that child continued in school these parents no longer felt like the school was a threat or they had no voice you know. Once they got in that building and they had a positive experience through the group experience, they started becoming more involved and that’s something that could be carried on as these kids went to middle school and high school.”

Stephanie hinted at something that is important, especially in the African American community and that is including other family members in the process (Billingsley, 1993). This is important when considering the African American tradition. One participant’s statement supports Stephanie’s response. Tyrone had this to say about parental involvement in relation to the family:

“We’re using the word parent involvement but we recognize that for us (African Americans), it really is extended. We’ll settle for a biological parent, we’ll settle for a stepparent. We’ll settle for a grandparent or uncle,
a sister, a brother, or whoever we can get and I think that’s something that we do as African-American school social workers that you don’t necessarily find occurring among non-African-American school social workers.”

Parental involvement is indeed an effective truancy intervention for African Americans. The participants have shared that, involving parents earlier in their children’s education, the high expectation of parents concerning education; and welcoming parents at the school level makes parental involvement effective for African-American high school students. In addition, working with parents to decrease the threat that the school and school staff sometimes pose and recognizing from the African American tradition, that including the extended family is what makes parental involvement specifically effective for African-American high school student as well.

Professional Development for Teachers

Kunjufu (1989) indicated that teachers and their expectations are major factors that influence the academic achievement of African-American high school students. Therefore, in order to correct the problem of truancy, school social workers must work with teachers so that they understand the law and can engage their students and families and a way that leads to positive results. In the quantitative aspect of this study, school social work participants indicated that professional development for teachers was viewed an important and sometimes effective truancy intervention. However, many of the participants in the focus group disagreed. Tina had this to say:

professional development with teachers, it’s just not effective. I mean
teachers today; they are so inundated with test scores. They got to do this or the principal wants them to do this and so I think the order of importance for them, regarding the professional development activities is very low.

Tina focused on professional development being ineffective because teachers focus more on test scores and assignments from teachers. However, Carey focused more on principal support when she stated, “it’s not effective because principals do not support it.” One participant’s response focused on the attitudes of teachers when speaking about the ineffectiveness of professional development at the high school level. Sir had this to say:

I have not seen any of the trainings that I have done with teachers work at the high school level because the attitude is more or less if they want to participate, they will and if they do not, they won’t.

Sir’s comments emphasizes that the decision making of teachers participation in professional development trainings is dependent on their attitudes about the training. This is important to know because it underscores a previous statement by Carey who indicated that principals do not support professional development for teachers. While the majority of the participants felt that professional development for teachers was ineffective, one participant (Mister), indicated that professional development can be effective, but not if conducted with an entire group. When asked, what makes it effective, Mister stated, “I think if the workshops are broken into smaller groups, it makes it more effective.”
Other participants were asked, what makes professional development effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students. One participant focused on the individual training that she has with her teachers. In her words, June said this:

When I think of the effective professional development trainings that I do, it is more one on one with teachers when I consult with them. That makes it personal and effective, especially when trying to get them to deal with the issue of truancy.

Although individual consultation with teachers is not the focus of this research, knowing that social workers work better with teachers in a consultation capacity, school social workers should give attention to this aspect of training because of the perceived effectiveness. One of the issues raised is the lack of support from administration and one participant indicated this concerning what makes professional development for teachers effective:

Carey: Every year since I have worked in the school system, I have done professional development with the teachers both in the fall and in the spring about attendance. As I said earlier, it’s not effective. It will be effective when there is support from administration. When there is no support from administration, it is not effective because everything else is more important to the teacher- making sure that their grades are in or their lesson plans are in or whatever else, but until you get that piece into place it’s not effective. Case in point, we just had another attendance meeting
this past week in faculty meeting and it wasn’t until the principal verbalized the importance of attendance to the teachers that they have taken it seriously. In the last week, I have received tons of referrals every single day after the principal was there in the meeting and supported it. Now I mean even in the small community meetings okay, unless they know what’s coming from their boss they hear you, but they are still not doing what they are supposed to be doing.

According to the participant, if principals held teachers responsible for participating in professional development activities, the intervention would be effective. This information is helpful to consider as it relates to implementing professional development activities.

Professional development for teachers is a very important intervention that must be implemented in an effort to correct the truancy problem. However, valid points were made about the ineffectiveness and effectiveness of the intervention. Participants also provided some answers regarding what makes it effective: smaller group workshops, support from administration and one on one consultation between school social workers and teachers. This information should be considered if teachers are to be included in the battle to decrease truancy among African American students.

Filing Truancy and Educational Neglect petitions

The filing of truancy and educational neglect petitions is common practice in the state of Georgia (GDOE, 2006). In fact, school social workers in Georgia file petitions
when a student misses five or more unexcused absences to more than seventeen unexcused absences from school. The quantitative aspect of this study reveals that this intervention is only important and effective sometimes. Participants were asked if the filing of petitions was an effective intervention to decrease truancy for African-American high school students. The few people who responded indicated that it usually is not. One participant had this to say:

June: As far as filing truancy petition being effect, it is probably not very effective at the high school level. The only times that I have seen it to be really effective is when truancy is actually new to the student coming to high school. That’s when I seen it effective but if high school is not new to them and then it is not effective.

Two participants indicated that the lack of fear of the courts drives their decision to say that filing petitions is ineffective. One participant stated:

Carey: If a child does not have a fear of even the police that come on school grounds and if their parents don’t have a fear of law enforcement, then juvenile court does nothing for them.

The information provided by the participants speaks to the need to find out what makes filing petitions an effective truancy intervention for African Americans during the times that it is effective. The participant’s responses varied. For example, Carey shared this:

the juvenile court has a lot of resources and what’s helped with some of my truant kids that have never been referred to me, and that were unruly because of their attendance is when they have other people like therapists
that come to visit them at the school to provide counseling with them outside the home so that they could find out what really is going on. Another participant underscored what Carey shared about the resources but also focused on probation officers actually supervising students. In his own words, Sir had this to say:

Supervision from the probation officers and the provision of resources makes it effective for African Americans because of the needs of the low-income families that we serve.

The common theme concerning the filing of petitions is that the intervention is not that effective for African-American high school students. However, some participants indicated that when a petition is filed right before or at the beginning of the high school years, petitions could be effective. In addition, participants noted that the supervision by probation officers and the provision of resources to help the students work through their issues are the essential elements that make filing petitions effective. One participant indicated, “relationships are still the key”.

Collaboration with Community Partners

The collaboration process where school social workers and other educators work with outside partners to support school attendance among high school students is supported by research that indicates that it is an effective strategy (Newsome, Anderson-Butcher, Fink, Hall, & Huffer, 2008). However, the data in the first phase of this study indicates from the views of school social workers that it is only sometimes important and effective to reduce truancy among African-American high school students. In fact, out of five-targeted intervention, collaboration with community partners was viewed as the least
effective. The findings in this instance seem to go against the village concept (African American tradition) where the community work together to help raise children. To understand this phenomenon from the perspective of African American social workers, the participants were asked if collaboration with community partners is an effective truancy intervention for African-American high school students. Carey had this to say:

I think it is an effective tool for preventing truancy. Even with churches, there are churches that have group-mentoring programs. There were some churches in the past that have programs that prevent high school dropout. They take them away like for example one of the churches in the community took the students away to what was called project redirection. The students went away to a rural area and stayed there for a weekend and it was very helpful for them so I think it is, it’s a very effective intervention. it’s another way to provide group mentoring.

Carey’s response provided a different perspective of collaboration with community partners that focuses on the use of the partners in the community for much-needed resources like mentors, which was rated as the most effective intervention. Carey also gave examples of the type of activities that exist to support regular school attendance for African-American youth.

Bree provided an example of what is effective for reducing truancy among African American students when she said this:

With community collaboration, things like extracurricular sports that students are involved, in sports-basketball, there are a lot of community
agencies and recreational centers, and churches that have basketball leagues and other athletic leagues and we see a lot of reduction. I think working with those entities would result in a reduction of truancy because they are involved with the coaches or the volunteer staff. They are mentoring the students as well.

Bree’s example of what works concerning collaborating effectively with partners reminds us of the importance of community agencies that serve youth. The partners, according to what is understood by the researcher from the participant’s responses, are helpful allies in helping students see the importance of attending school.

Some participants underscored that the relationships provided as a result of collaborating with community partners are important and that the relationships actually makes collaboration with partners more effective than the tangibles that the partners give to the students. Kierra had this to say regarding this matter:

That stuff works. I mean, I am just saying like, giving kids these tickets we get, that doesn’t matter but when we get the kids involved with A.K.A (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.), they come up to the school and they do things for the kids and they have a big party for the kids. However, I think that’s based on relationships that those children are developing with those people that are in that organization that are coming to help them and do those activities with them.

Many of the participants indicated that collaboration is an effective intervention to decrease truancy among African American high school student. What was interesting is
that many of the participants saw collaboration with community partners as a way to secure mentors and various types of mentoring relationships through extracurricular activities that are provided by the community partners. Another interesting thing is the fact that a couple of people indicated that the more tangible items that are provided by the partners are less important than the relationship. Jennifer had this to say:

I don’t think tickets from the partners and giving them to the kids is effective at all to deter truancy and I think even those gifts to the students I don’t think that works at all to help them come to school.

When asked why, Jennifer said:

because I haven’t seen any type of reduction in truancy since giving them out and I have given them out in different ways I told the students that they can earn these incrementally. So, you don’t have to be present a whole year but is you are present for 20 days straight, I will give you tickets and they still don’t come. It’s not effective. So I don’t think they care. I think the relationship to people are just more important than things that they get from us and I think we spend a lot of energy giving them things and that’s not what they want.

Jennifer made a point that should prompt other school social workers to think about as practitioners and that is social workers should not waste their time on something that does not work. Although Jennifer is sharing from her own experience, her thoughts were shared by some of her colleagues. The participants answered the question “what makes the intervention effective and the overwhelming response was the relationship
opportunities that the students have with partners and the mentoring that is offered by the mentors through extracurricular activities.

The five-targeted interventions were indeed perceived as effective for African Americans on some level. However, as the findings from the focus groups indicated, there are certain aspects of the intervention that makes them effective. Those elements should be highlighted and focused on by other school social workers. African-American social workers were provided an opportunity to share their views and their responses provided insight about each intervention. Many aspects of what they shared are consisted with other Afrocentric professionals in education (Kunjufu, 2007, & Hilliard, 1997) who stressed the importance of understanding the educational issue from the lenses of African Americans. One thing shared throughout is that mentoring and other forms relationships are important and that the cultivation of such in school social work practice to decrease truancy among African-American high school students is necessary. The same is true for parental involvement and the less effective interventions. However, focus must be placed on that which works and the causal factor that makes the interventions effective.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

This study grew out of a commitment and deep desire to identify the best strategies to address the problem of truancy among African-American high school students. This is important because many African American students do not complete their high school education; they are forced into survival mode, which could sometimes lead to a life of crime and incarceration for youth. Addressing this problem was extremely important and exploring from the perspectives of the experts (school social workers in Georgia), what are the most effective truancy interventions generally and specifically for African-American high school students was necessary.

This chapter discusses the findings of the study and concludes with implications for policy and practice. The purpose of this study was to explore from the perspectives of school social workers in Georgia the most effective truancy interventions to reduce truancy for African-American high school students. The study used an embedded mixed method design to answer the following questions concerning five targeted interventions: mentoring, parental involvement, professional development for teachers, filing truancy and educational neglect petitions and collaboration with community partners:
RQ1: How effective are the current truancy interventions?

RQ2: Which interventions are the most effective for reducing truancy among African American high school students?

RQ3: What makes the truancy interventions specifically effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students?

To answer the first two questions, the data were collected via an online survey to determine if the truancy interventions were effective, and specifically what are the most effective truancy interventions for African Americans. To answer the third question, data were collected in two focus groups from African American school social workers on two Atlanta metropolitan school campuses. Question 1: How effective are the current truancy intervention was answered by obtaining data from survey participants regarding the degree of importance and effectiveness of 21 truancy interventions that were related to the five-targeted interventions. Next, the 21 interventions were collapsed into their five-targeted intervention categories, and were measured the same way. The mean averages of the responses were rated accordingly, allowing the first question to be answered.

Question 2 asked, "Which interventions are the most effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students? To answer this question, participants were asked to rank the aforementioned 21 truancy interventions that were related to the five-targeted interventions to determine which intervention was the most effective for African-American high school students. Next, the 21 interventions were collapsed into the five-targeted intervention categories and were analyzed according to the measures of central tendency. Finally, the mean averages of the responses were rated
accordingly, which allowed the researcher to answer the second question.

Question 3 asked, “What makes the truancy interventions specifically effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students. To answer this question, the responses of the focus group participants were discussed concerning what makes the interventions effective. The results of the level one and level two data were presented in the previous chapter.

Discussion

The findings of this study include what truancy interventions are generally effective, followed by what is most effective for African-American high school students. Of the five types of truancy interventions, mentoring, professional development for teachers and parental involvement were generally ranked as effective. However, mentoring followed by parental involvement was rated as the most effective for African-American high school students. The least effective interventions, according to the participants were the filing of petitions and collaboration with community partners. The five-targeted interventions are discussed in the following sections in their ranked order of effectiveness. The most effective is discussed first.

Figure 11 indicates the average rates for the most effective truancy interventions for African Americans. Social capital theory promotes quality social networks and resources to support students academically (Coleman, 1988). Consistent with social capital theory, figure 11 identifies social capital networks and resources that are the most effective concerning decreasing truancy for African American high school students. For example, mentors, parents, teachers and community partners represent such networks that
could serve as beneficial resources for African American students. The above-mentioned social capital networks are important because of their ability to help African American high school students embrace their educational process in a way that results in increased attendance rates. At the center of the circle is African-American youth who are affected by the type of interventions implemented. Mentoring is listed in the next section of the circle because it was rated as the most effective intervention for African Americans. As the interventions move away from the center of the circle, they are perceived as less effective. This is also important to know before discussing the findings to help explain what should take place now that the findings are revealed. This is important to note before discussing the implications of the findings for social workers in the school setting.

Figure 11. Means for the Most Effective Truancy Intervention for African Americans.
Mentoring

Mentoring was on average, the most effective truancy intervention in this study. The findings are consistent with studies that indicated that all mentoring enhances young people’s social capital, their knowledge of, and contacts with, a network of people who may be able to help them meet their goals (Hamilton, Hamilton, Hirsch, Hughes, King, Maton, & 2006, & Rhodes, 2002). The authors indicated that mentoring programs often add “bridging” social capital, for youth. The two types of mentoring included in the research were one on one mentoring between an adult and one student as well as group mentoring between an adult and two or more students. In both instances, the two types of mentoring were on average, rated as being important interventions and slightly lower for effectiveness.

The two types of mentoring above are usually found at schools or in the community. Hall-Haynes (2007) indicated that both types of mentoring are effective and are carried out in the family, school and the community contexts. Because the participants in the study identified mentoring as the most effective intervention, it was important to find out what made the intervention effective. Participants in the focus groups felt that mentoring was effective because mentors are caring people who support and encourage students to attend school and excel academically. Kunjufu (2007) indicated that mentoring programs are one of the much-needed interventions to begin the process of helping African American students get back on track academically. This is important since many African-American youth are fatherless or parentless, and need the support to help them perform well academically and generally in life. The participants
also described mentoring as the most effective because mentors expose students to new and diverse aspects of life, which sometimes mediate their academic success. Mentors, according to the participants serve as surrogates for students who do not have a stable parent to help them navigate through their adolescent years. This is supported by research from Hall-Haynes (2007), and is discussed in the literature by Kunjufu (1989).

School social workers are responsible for ensuring that students attend school regularly (Teasley, 2004). However, the current policies and protocols on average do not include mentoring as an intervention that is regularly used by school social workers in Georgia. This means that school social workers and administrators need to rethink and make changes to the policies and protocols so that they are inclusive of this strategy, that the experts who work with truancy daily identified as the most effective. To defend school social workers in Georgia, one of the focus group participants indicated that there is a ratio of 1 school social worker to every 2475 students in the state of Georgia which makes it difficult to spend time focusing on interventions that are more beneficial to students overall. If the goals of No Child Left Behind are to be realized, best practices, like mentoring need to have more of a focus to ensure that more high school students are graduating from high school and not dropping out.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is one of the many mandates of No Child Left Behind (2002), since the legislators identified the parent as a major factor in making sure that students remain in school until they graduate from high school. In this study, parental involvement was ranked on average, the second best effective truancy intervention to
decrease truancy among African-American high school students. This is consistent with research that revealed a correlation between an increase in parental involvement and decreased truancy (Barton, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Olmstead & Rubin, 1983).

There were six items on the online survey related to parental involvement: phone calls, sending letters to parents, conferencing with parents, home visits with parents, facilitating parent groups, and involving parents as volunteers. On average, all but one of the parental involvement related interventions was generally, rated as being effective interventions. Additionally, the facilitation of parent groups was generally, rated as the least effective. Collapsed, parental involvement was generally, rated higher for importance as an intervention, than for its effectiveness. Parental involvement was ranked second best concerning effectiveness to reduce truancy for African Americans.

Findings from the focus groups shed light on the nuanced level of efficacy of parental involvement. Focus group participants indicated that parental involvement is generally not that effective at the high school level. However, they indicated that there are elements that make parental involvement useful such as involving parents earlier in their children’s education, parent’s high expectations concerning their children’s education and welcoming parents at the school level. Other elements included working with parents to decrease the threat that the school and school staff sometimes pose and recognizing from the African American tradition, that expanding the definition of parent to include the extended family is critical. The findings from the focus group are supported by the literature that calls for the involvement of parents in the education of their children (Mcneil, 1999) and for schools to find ways to make parents feel less
threatened and more welcomed to get involved with their child’s education.

The literature on parental involvement in education reveals a relationship between increased parental involvement and better academic outcomes (Barton, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Since this is the case, it is important for school social workers to involve parents in other ways more often since the high school years are critical and very confusing times for students who are transitioning from adolescence to young adulthood (Mcneil, 1999). Early involvement of parents should be a preventative measure, but parents must not be left out of the educational process of their children during the high school years, since NCLB mandates that parents be included in their child’s education. Involving parents affords school social workers an opportunity to help parents develop expectations for themselves and their children concerning education and will make parents feel welcomed to come to the school more often.

Professional development for teachers

School social workers are sometimes responsible for providing professional development training via in-services for teachers to help them develop the knowledge and skill set to effectively support the education of high school students, which includes getting them to attend school regularly (Teasley, 2004). In this study, professional development for teachers was rated on average as the third most effective truancy intervention by the survey participants (n=105). There were six items on the survey: training regarding truancy protocols, communicating effectively with parents, creating supportive environments for students, infusing culturally relevant material in the
curriculum, and helping teachers develop and implement incentives in the classrooms for attendance.

On average, participants generally, rated professional development interventions higher for its degree of importance than its degree of effectiveness as a truancy intervention. The majority of the focus group participants did not find professional development for teachers as an effective intervention because principals did not support the activities or hold teachers accountable. In addition, participants indicated that teachers were inundated with activities that focused on students passing standardized tests and that they rarely have time to focus on anything else. When asked what makes it effective, some participants stated when trainings occur in small groups, when individual consultation occur with teachers and when the administrators support the professional development for teachers.

The findings indicate that professional development is minimally effective when the elements described above are in place. School social workers can assist in the effort to train teachers concerning the psychosocial and cultural development of students, like African-American youth (Teasley, 2004). If supported, this strategy could lead to students attending school more often and embracing their education in a way that makes graduating from school inevitable. This is also an important strategy since the teacher is a major system in the life of a student. Although this strategy is important, teachers must be allowed to engage their students and families more holistically without focusing strictly on test scores. When government officials and school administrators realize and act on this matter, social workers might find it easier to work with teachers to increase the
bonding between the teachers, students and parents. This could also support the mentoring and parental involvement efforts.

_Filing Truancy and Educational Neglect Petitions_

School social workers in Georgia file petitions with the juvenile court for truancy and educational neglect on a regular basis (GDOE, 2006). This study sought to understand if school social workers viewed this intervention as an effective one to decrease truancy in general and specifically among African-American high school students. Regarding decreasing truancy among African Americans, filing petitions with the juvenile court was generally, rated the second least effective truancy intervention. The two items on the survey that were related to filing petitions were filing truancy interventions and filing educational neglect petitions. On average, the survey participants generally, rated filing truancy petitions with the juvenile court higher for its degree of importance than its effectiveness. In fact, this intervention was rated ineffective. Filing educational neglect petitions were generally, rated as an important intervention but lower for its effectiveness. The majority of the participants in the focus groups deemed the filing of petitions as ineffective for high school students because students and parents were not afraid of law enforcement and that probation officers did not follow up with students. When asked what makes it effective, the participants indicated the amount of resources that the court has, when probation officers follow up with the students regularly, and when cases are filed before a child enters high school or at the beginning of a student's high school experience.
Filing petitions with the juvenile court is not that effective according to school social workers in Georgia. However, school social worker’s file truancy and educational neglect petitions as an intervention more often than they do the more effective interventions. If this intervention is indeed not that effective in reducing truancy, policy makers and administrators need to consider updating their policies and practices in a way that will allow school social workers to engage in best practices in an effort to decrease truancy among African American students. In addition, school social workers need to find ways to focus on what is effective since it is our ethical obligation to ensure their clients receive the best services possible.

**Collaboration with Community Partners**

Collaboration with Community Partners was generally, rated by the survey participants as an important truancy intervention but rated lower for its effectiveness. For decreasing truancy among African Americans specifically, this intervention was rated as the least effective truancy intervention. Because this intervention scored low, the focus group participants were asked if they viewed the intervention as effective and the majority indicated yes. When asked what made it effective for African-American high school students, participants indicated that collaboration allows for mentoring opportunities and other opportunities for African-American youth to develop supportive relationships through extracurricular activities while navigating through adolescence.

The findings from the focus groups are consistent with research that calls for multimodal collaboration between school staff and community partners (Reimer & Dimmock, 2005). This is something that has also been a part of the African American
tradition (Billingsley, 1993) for years. Since the research, including this study indicates a connection between collaboration with partners and mentoring, the relationship should be pursued in future research. Social capital theory posits that students with increased social capital networks and resources like, parents, teachers, and mentors have their likelihood of being successful academically increased (Coleman, 1988). The results of this study revealed that the experts who work with these social networks have identified that the social networks are important and effective at helping to reduce truancy among African-American high school students.

Teachers and parents were also identified as important systems in the lives of students who have the potential to affect their lives tremendously. Systems theory suggests that because a person has multiple systems in their lives, when one system is dysfunctional, it may cause issues for another person like a student. Involving parents and training teachers (inputs) were viewed as important interventions to ensure that the systems are stable and equipped enough to serve as much-needed inputs in the lives of students to help them become reengaged in their educational process (output) in an effort to achieve homeostasis (i.e. attending school regularly). The next section consists of a discussion of the findings from an Afrocentric Perspective.

Discussion from an Afrocentric Perspective

For African Americans, education has historically represented a vehicle for the growth and development for African Americans (Billingsley, 1993). In fact, the author indicated that African Americans had a thirst for learning that even slavery could not quench. What then explains the current trend of African American students skipping and
dropping out of school before they received their high school education? In addition, what are the solutions to the problem for African-American high school students? This issue must be looked at from an Afrocentric perspective.

An Afrocentric perspective allows for an alternate way of viewing problems of African Americans. From an Afrocentric perspective, one must consider the historical marginalization of African Americans in this country (Watsom, 2001). According to Jones (1996), one must consider the history of slavery, the political agenda of the architects of public education in the United States and capitalism which demands that the majority of citizens in the country function at the bottom economically. Understanding the historical marginalization of this group places the issue of truancy into context. For example, the Afrocentrist would question the notion that African Americans who have embraced education for many years, somehow do not want to learn. The Afrocentrist would question this notion because of the very challenges to access and resources like community partners and quality curriculum that African Americans have currently (Kunjufu, 2007). The Afrocentrist would also thoroughly consider what is best for African-American youth to address the problem. In the case of this study, the researcher wanted to understand from African American school social workers what makes the interventions effective for African-American high school students. This was important because of the shared cultural experiences that this group of school social workers have with African-American youth. Participants were able to provide some insightful information that was absent from the literature from the perspective of this unique group.
The results of this study reveal that on average, mentoring, professional development for teachers, parental involvement, filing truancy interventions, and collaboration with community partners are generally effective truancy interventions. However, mentoring was rated the most effective truancy intervention for decreasing truancy among African-American high school students followed by parental involvement, professional development with teachers, filing truancy and neglect petitions, collaboration with community partners. This is consistent with the literature that indicates the need to provide the necessary support systems like mentoring for African-American youth to support their academic success (Kunjufu, 1989, Mcneil, 1999, & Hall-Haynes, 2007).

From an Afrocentric perspective, mentoring related programs are supported as an important intervention to assist African-American youth in there growth and development (Kunjufu, 2007, & Hilliard, 1997) because it is a natural process that all children need during adolescence. Tyack (1974) indicated that while African Americans had the desire to uplift themselves, join the social mainstream of American life, and break forever with past bondage they lacked the resources to achieve either education or their larger freedom. Mentors, parents, teachers, and community partners are just the village participants who are needed as resources to help African-American youth make smarter decisions about their education.

When implementing interventions, school social workers, should consider the past and make decisions pertaining to truancy interventions that are not only culturally relevant but also effective. African American school social workers in this study
indicated that the most of effective interventions that are priority concerning implementation, relates to mentoring and parental involvement. Focus group participants identified community partners as a resource for mentors and other services to assist parents in the effort to help their children learn.

Limitations to the Study

This study explored the most effective truancy interventions for decreasing truancy among African-American high school students. Because of the sample size (N=105) and the region in which the study was conducted, the researcher can only generalize to the population from which it was drawn. In addition, the researcher assumed that the participants responded honestly to the questions and statements. Therefore, no promises can be made regarding the accuracy of the participant’s beliefs.

Absentee data from the state of Georgia (GIS map) was used to justify the need for targeting potential focus group participants in areas where absenteeism is highest. However, the data may not be accurate because each county calculates absenteeism differently. In addition, the focus of this study was on truancy. However, school districts were not mandated to report truancy data to the state of Georgia, which makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of truancy in Georgia. The state of Georgia has rectified this problem by mandating the reporting of truancy data beginning in 2009.

The qualitative aspect of the study consisted of two focus groups. The researcher relied on a digital recorder and professional transcriptionists to transcribe the audio material into text form. Therefore, the possibility of errors could have occurred in
reporting exactly what the participants shared. One of the questions that arose was can individual consultation with teachers be considered a professional development related truancy intervention. This study did not include consultation in the operational definition but it could offer more insight to further, understand ways in which school social workers provide professional development activities for teachers.

This study was conducted with strict time constraints that did not allow the researcher to facilitate three focus groups as intended. However, the participant’s information from the two focus groups was appropriate enough to answer the question, because the participants represented areas with high concentrations of absenteeism. However, because of the sample size for two focus groups (N=13) the findings are not generalizable to other populations.

Implications for Policy and Social Work Practice

There are several implications for policy and social work practice concerning effective truancy interventions for African Americans. School social workers continue to be the agents who are responsible for addressing the problem of truancy. Therefore, the professionals need assistance from the local, state, and national levels. In addition, school social workers need to work harder to use the most effective truancy interventions for their students.

Implications for Policy

The findings of the study indicated that mentoring and parental involvement were the two most effective interventions to decrease truancy among African-American high
school students. This suggests that states and schools take an active role when working to address the problem of truancy by following the advice of school social workers in Georgia. This could be done by mandating schools to implement mentoring programs that support African American students who struggle to attend school daily. To make this happen, changes should be made to the truancy policy and protocols that allow social workers to utilize most of their time implementing the most effective interventions to address the problem and less time on ineffective interventions like filing truancy petitions with the juvenile court to address the matter. Doing so, should support the school districts and state’s goal of making sure that no child is left behind by meeting Annual Yearly Progress, which includes ensuring that students graduate from high school. One of the major issues hindering this from happening is chronic truancy. Federal, state and school districts should also support the mandate with the necessary funding since that was the main criticism of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The federal government already mandates increased parental involvement. However, the funding and oversight of the efforts of the schools to involve parents are limited. The policy makers and school districts should fund efforts to involve parents on the elementary, middle and high school levels to ensure that students are getting support from their families. Funding could be used to increase the amount of school social workers on staff so that such workers can focus strictly on getting parents involved with their children’s education. In addition, as one focus group participant indicated, the language of truancy policies should include extended relatives since non-parental family members care for many African American students.
No Child Left Behind has a huge focus on standardized testing which is not the intent of the educational process (Noguera, 2003). The actual intent of traditional education is to help students develop the necessary knowledge and skills to function appropriately within their own social group (Asanta, 2003). Teachers are the professionals who are charged with this task. This suggests a change in policy that allows for transference of the power back to teachers who are responsible for educating children in a more holistic manner. This also suggests a change in policy that mandates that school districts and school administrators support the professional development of teachers that is provided by school social workers so that teachers learn how to be effective in the classroom setting and are more effective at building relationships with their parents and students. This affords the teachers an opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills in a way that lead to better academic outcomes for their students. This also addresses one of the main concerns of the focus group participants who indicated that professional development for teachers by school social workers is ineffective because of the lack of support from administrators.

The federal, state, local governments and school districts need to revisit their policies and protocols to ensure that the best interventions are included and are maximally funded. In addition, school districts and principals should support school social workers efforts to reclaim truant students in a way that encourages them to embrace their education. One way of supporting social workers is listening to them about what is working to address the problem and what is not working. In addition, school social workers should be included in the decision-making process regarding strategies to
address the problem of truancy since focus group participants identified this as an issue. The participants also shared an alarming fact about the funding formula for school social workers in the State of Georgia. The participants indicated that there is a ratio of 1 school social worker to every 2475 students (GDOE, 2008). The ratio of school social workers to students is an example of failed policy and no support for one of the goals of No Child Left Behind, which is increased graduation rates. For example, in the metro Atlanta area schools, like the Atlanta Public Schools, it is unimaginable that quality services could be provided when approximately 29 school social workers serve a population of more than 48,000 students (GDOE, 2008). Although some schools fund school social workers above the state formula, state and school districts must revisit their funding formulas and practices for hiring social workers, with this research in mind. This is important to allow for additional school social workers, especially in the metro Atlanta area schools to address the problem of truancy more seriously by implementing the most effective truancy interventions for African American students who populate those areas. If schools and policy makers do not want to continue, leaving children behind, such entities should take the aforementioned suggestions seriously.

Implications for Social Work Practice

School social workers carry out truancy interventions daily (Teasley, 2004). Therefore, school social workers need to ensure that they are implementing best practices to assist African American students. One suggestion from the research is the need for school social workers to focus more on interventions that involve relationships between students and supportive adults. For example, since mentoring was rated the most
effective truancy intervention for African-American youth, school social workers should implement mentoring related programs or activities more often than the less effective interventions like filing truancy petitions. This is important since mentoring is already identified in the literature as an effective strategy to help youth achieve academic success (Karcher, 2005).

One such organization, the 100 Black Men have developed a model for effective mentoring for African-American youth. According to the organization’s website, Mentoring the 100 Way is one of the signature programs of the 100 Black Men of America (2009). Their mentoring program addresses the social, emotional and cultural needs of children ages 8-18. Their members are trained and certified to become mentors, advocates, and role models for the youth within their communities. The mentoring model that is carried out at the chapter level of the organization consists of one-on-one and group mentoring efforts that allow their members to forge relationships that positively affect youth. The modeled program focuses on building essential skills needed to become productive, contributing citizens. Through the two types of mentoring, the members develop relationships with youth while helping them develop a positive self-image and personal vision (100 Black Men of America, 2009). The youth also learn to enhance their life, social and emotional skills, moral character, work ethic and the importance of embracing lifelong learning. The organization’s programs are usually carried out in schools and community centers.

School social workers should review the literature to identify other effective mentoring programs and begin taking steps to determine how school social workers can
partner with such organizations to implement such programs in their high schools. Once implemented, school social workers should evaluate the outcomes of the program to ensure that it is accomplishing the task of helping African-American high school students embrace school in a way that results in a decrease in truancy and an increase in high school graduation rates.

School social workers should advocate for change regarding the policies and protocols to encourage the implementation of more supportive interventions while taking the focus away from addressing the problem in a legal manner. School social workers should also prioritize the amount of time spent on all interventions to ensure efficacy of their practice. For example, filing petitions should not be one of the focal interventions in metro Atlanta school districts since it was rated minimally effective for African-American high school students that attend school in Georgia. School social workers should work more effectively with parents, teachers, and community partners to ensure the best possible services are provided, especially mentoring for students who struggle to attend school.

Regarding research, this study focused on perceived effectiveness. Future research should focus on actual effectiveness of school social workers practice concerning truancy interventions, especially mentoring since it was perceived as the most effective. In addition, this research should be conducted with other age groups and ethnic populations to further the quantitative and qualitative research from the perspectives of school social workers.
The purpose of this study was to explore the most effective truancy interventions to reduce truancy among African-American high school students. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: How effective are the current truancy interventions?

RQ2: Which interventions are the most effective for reducing truancy among African American high school students?

RQ3: What makes the truancy interventions specifically effective for reducing truancy among African-American high school students?

This study adds to the expanding body of truancy literature concerning African-American high school students. It explored this issue from the perspective of school social workers. As a result of the study, the five targeted truancy interventions (professional development for teachers, parental involvement, collaboration with community partners, filing court petitions, and mentoring) were generally rated on average as effective truancy interventions. Mentoring was generally rated more effective as a truancy intervention. In addition, the participants rated mentoring as the most effective truancy intervention to reduce truancy among African-American high school students, followed by parental involvement. Focus group participants provided there insight concerning what makes the interventions effective. This information was discussed in detail in chapter four and five. The findings of this study represent a step forward in the struggle to reduce truancy among African-American youth, like my
childhood friend Jay. Hopefully, this information is useful to help school social workers decrease the problem of truancy and dropping out of school for African-American youth.
APPENDIX A

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Truancy Interventions</th>
<th>Importance Mean</th>
<th>Effectiveness Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Phone Calls to Parents</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sending Letters to Parents</td>
<td>4.06</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Conferences with Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Home Visits with Parents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Facilitating Parent Groups</td>
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<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Involving Parents as Volunteers</td>
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<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Training for Teachers Regarding Truancy Protocols</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Training Teachers to Communicate Effective with Parents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Training Teachers to Create Supportive Environments for Students</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Training for Teachers Regarding Developing Positive Relationships with Students</td>
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<td>3.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Training for teachers regarding infusing culturally relevant material in curriculum</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Helping teachers develop and implement incentives programs in their classrooms for attendance</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. One on one mentoring between a supportive adult and an African American high school student</td>
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<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Group mentoring between an adult and two or more African-American high school students</td>
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<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Collaboration with churches</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Collaboration with community centers</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Collaboration with Civic and social groups</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Collaboration with social service agencies</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Collaboration with the Dept. of Family and Children Services</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Filing truancy petitions with the juvenile courts</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Filing educational neglect petitions against parents</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.05</td>
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APPENDIX B

Electronic Invitation Letter

School Social Workers,

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores school social workers perceptions of effective truancy interventions for African-American high school students. Your input will help expand the knowledge base concerning effective approaches to address the problem of truancy among African-American youth.

This study grew out of my experience as a school social worker interested in finding out what other social workers in Georgia believe are the best truancy interventions for this population. The literature on truancy currently indicates that many truancy interventions are effective. However, the views of school social workers who are usually the experts who work to solve the problem are limited. In addition, the literature does not specify if the interventions are effective for African-American youth and it does not specify what makes certain interventions effective for this population.

The online survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. After analyzing the data, 21 participants will be solicited to participate in three focus groups. To ensure confidentiality, your email address will not be stored and you will not be identified by the researcher or the public.

To be eligible for this study, you must:
• Be certified as a School Social Worker by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, and
• Have at least one year of current or previous school social work experience with African American students in a high school setting.

Your responses are greatly appreciated. If you meet all the criteria and wish to participate, please access the survey through this link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=tPoUB_2bseYS3ebQnJdDxRJA_3d_3d

Feel free to share this link with other school social workers in Georgia.

Thank you,

Garrick White, Doctoral Candidate
Whitney M. Young, Jr., School of Social Work
Clark Atlanta University
APPENDIX C

Focus Group Consent Form

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY:
School Social Workers Perceptions of Effective Truancy Interventions for African-American high school students

I, __________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled "An Exploratory Study: School Social Workers Perceptions of Effective Truancy Interventions for African-American high school students", conducted by Garrick White, a doctoral student from the Whitney M. Young, Jr. School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University (telephone: 678-358-3486; email: Garrick.white@student.cau.edu), under the direction of Dr. Sarita Davis, School of Social Work, Clark Atlanta University. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore how which truancy interventions are the most effective for African-American high school students as well as what makes the interventions effective.

If I volunteer to take part in this study I understand that:
- I will participate in a 30-minute to 1 hour-long focus group session.
- The researcher will ask open-ended and close-ended questions regarding the most effective truancy interventions for African-American high school students and what makes them effective.
- The focus group will be audio taped and pseudonyms will be used in an effort to keep my identity confidential. The audio tapes will be locked in a secure file cabinet located in the researcher's on campus office, and will be only accessible to the researcher. All audio tape recordings will be retained only until the completion of the study and will be destroyed immediately following its completion (April 15, 2009).
- I may be contacted by the researcher to participate further in the study if additional information is needed. My decision to participate would be strictly voluntary.

Although there are no tangible benefits associated with my participation in this study, the researcher is hopeful that my participation in the study will in some way inform the participant about what their school social work colleagues in Georgia believe are the most effective truancy interventions for African-American youth. This information could be useful when developing strategies to address the problem. Low to no risk is expected because the questions asked are not of a sensitive nature. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (678-358-3486). No information identifying me will be shared with others without my written permission. All information concerning me will be kept confidential.

I understand that by signing this consent form, I am agreeing to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy for my records. Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant: __________________________________________ Date: ____________________

Garrick White (Investigator) Date: ____________________
(678-358-3486) Garrick.white@student.cau.edu
APPENDIX D

Truancy Questionnaire

Questionnaire: School Social Workers Perceptions of Effective Truancy Interventions

INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore the perceptions of school social workers in Georgia regarding effective truancy interventions for reducing truancy for African American high school students. Participants are asked to complete each section to the best of their ability.

PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND

* 1. Please indicate your ethnicity below
   ○ African American or African Descend
   ○ White
   ○ Latino
   ○ Asian
   ○ Nat-ve American
   ○ Other

* 2. Please indicate your gender
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

* 3. I have earned the following degrees in social work (choose all that apply)
   ○ BSW
   ○ MSW
   ○ PhD or DSW

* 4. I am certified by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission to work as a school social worker in the state of Georgia
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

* 5. I am currently employed as a school social worker
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

* 6. I have previously worked as a school social worker with high school students for at least one year
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

* 7. I currently work with the following grade levels (Check all that apply)
   ○ Elementary
   ○ Middle
   ○ High School
16. Training for teachers regarding communicating effectively with parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Importance</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost At the Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
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17. Training for teachers regarding creating a supportive school environment for students

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<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
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18. Training for teachers regarding developing positive relationships with students

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<th>Degree of Importance</th>
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<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
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19. Training for teachers regarding infusing culturally relevant material in curriculum

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<th>Degree of Importance</th>
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<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
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20. Helping teachers develop and implement incentive programs in their classrooms for attendance

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<th>Degree of Importance</th>
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<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
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21. One on One mentoring between a supportive adult and an African American high school student

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22. Group mentoring between an adult and two or more African American high school students

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23. Collaboration with churches

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<tbody>
<tr>
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24. Collaboration with community centers

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### 25. Collaboration with civic and social groups

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
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### 26. Collaboration with social service agencies

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<th>Sometimes</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 27. Collaboration with the Department of Family and Children Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Importance</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost A. the Time</th>
<th>All the Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 28. Filing truancy petitions with the juvenile courts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Importance</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost A. the Time</th>
<th>All the Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 29. Filing educational neglect petitions against parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Importance</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Almost A. the Time</th>
<th>All the Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 30. Please prioritize the following truancy interventions according to your perceptions of which intervention is the most effective in general (#1 represent most effective and #21 represent least effective -- You cannot use the same number for more than one item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority according to level of effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls to parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send-up letters to parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visits to parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating parent groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving parents as volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for teachers regarding truancy protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training teachers to communicate effectively with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training teachers to create supportive environments for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for teachers regarding developing positive relationships with students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
31. Please prioritize the following truancy interventions according to your perceptions of which intervention is the most effective for African American high school students (#1 represent most effective and #21 represent least effective - You cannot use the same number for more than one item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Priority according to level of effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone Calls to parents</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending letters to parents</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences with parents</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visits to parents</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating parent groups</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving parents as volunteers</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for teachers regarding truancy protocols</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training teachers to communicate and solve problems with parents</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training teachers to create supportive environment for students</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for teachers regarding developing positive relationships with students</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for teachers regarding integrating culturally relevant material in curriculum</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping teachers develop and implement incentive programs in the classroom for attendance</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-on-one mentoring between a supportive adult and an African American high school student</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group mentoring between an adult and two or more African American high school students</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with churches</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with community centers</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with civic and social groups</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with social service agencies</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with the Dept. of Family and</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Providing interventions for parents to help reduce truancy among African American high school students is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Providing interventions for teachers to help reduce truancy among African American high school students is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Are mentors effective support systems for A.A. students who struggle with truancy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Are parents effective support systems for A.A. students who struggle with truancy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Are teachers effective support systems for A.A. students who struggle with truancy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I consider the past educational experiences and the marginalization of African American youth when making decisions about interventions to solve the problem of truancy for African American high school students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I believe that the truancy interventions that I implement are culturally relevant and appropriate for African American youth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

IRB Approval Letter

CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs

February 14, 2009

Garrick White  <garickwhite@comcast.net>
School of Social Works
Clark Atlanta University
Atlanta, GA 30314

RE: An exploratory Study: School of Social Workers Perceptions of Effective Truancy Interventions for African American High School Students.

Principal Investigators: Garrick White

Human Subjects Code Number: HR2009-02-301-1

Dear Mr. White:

The Human Subjects Committee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your protocol and approved of it as exempt in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Your Protocol Approval Code is HR2009-02-301-1/A

This permit will expire on February 17, 2010. Thereafter, continued approval is contingent upon the annual submission of a renewal form to this office. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Georgianna Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs (404) 880-6979 or Dr. Paul I. Musey, (404) 880-6829.

Sincerely:

Paul I. Musey, Ph.D.
Chair
IRB: Human Subjects Committee

cc. Office of Sponsored Programs, “Dr. Georgianna Bolden” <gbolden@cau.edu>

223 James P. Brawley Drive, S.W. * ATLANTA, GA 30314-4391 * (404) 880-8000

Formed in 1988 by consolidation of Atlanta University, 1865 and Clark College, 1869
REFERENCES


