STUDENT ATTENDANCE: A SCHOOL’S INTERVENTION TO INCREASE ATTENDANCE

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Submitted in Fulfillment for the Requirements for
61-683 Research Paper

Fall 2014
April 23, 2015
Abstract

The education system, historically, has always faced new dilemmas as society has progressed and evolved. Education always strives for accountability of its teachers and students. This accountability has led to more enforced testing and data reporting from schools. In particular, attendance has become a hot focal point of school data reporting. Schools are under increased scrutiny in order to have students maintain a high attendance percentage. Due to these new regulations on attendance, one Midwestern high school has begun an initiative to increase student attendance. They have used both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in order to persuade students that attendance is an important part of them obtaining their high school diploma. Early findings show that during the year that the attendance was monitored some changes were met. There were significant differences found between when extrinsic and intrinsic motivators were present. During the first semester more of extrinsic motivators were used and during the second semester the school switched to more use of intrinsic motivators for attendance. Attendance was at a higher percentage during the first semester when extrinsic motivators were used. A drawback of the finding is that there will not be a four year follow up to see if the different intervention strategies have been successful. Also, it is hard to account for all of the other external factors that may play a role in whether or not students had a high percentage. It is vital, however, that in order for schools to meet the states requirements on attendance percentages they continue to try new intervention strategies on improving attendance.
INTRODUCTION

Background, issues and concerns.

Our education system seems to rely heavily on testing and their results in order to distinguish a “good” school from a “bad” school. Students are continually being tested throughout the school year to validate what they have learned during their school year. Due to the standardized testing policy, attendance concerns have become a problem for schools across the country. If students are expected to do well on standardized tests, they have to be coming to school on a consistent basis. Due to this state legislation has also begun to focus more on school attendance. According to the Missouri Department of Education (2014) student attendance is one of the major factors of high student achievement. Due to tight budgets, administrators must use all of their monetary fund’s properly.

It is important that any funds used to help motivate students produce positive results. Some faculty have concerns about “bribing” students to do well especially since those type of incentives will not be present after they graduate high school. In order to produce better citizens, schools need to be able to teach students that they need to have the motivation to succeed, not because someone makes them. Some research also contends that unless a student learns intrinsic motivation early than it will never be achieved. If a student comes to high school without those necessary skills than high schools must only provide extrinsic motivation.

One Midwestern school has taken the approach of incorporating extrinsic and intrinsic motivators to help their attendance stay above 95%. Throughout the school year, different methods are used to promote strong attendance. At the beginning of the school year, flyers are sent home with every student to show the importance of attendance. At the end of the first quarter those students who have achieved the 95% attendance or higher were given an attendance
card and a cookie. With this privilege, students could earn a free homework assignment or a free tardy pass from class. At the end of the third quarter, all extrinsic motivators were no longer present. Students were able to view their attendance that was posted in the hallway.

*Practice under review.*

The policy of rewarding students based on their attendance was looked at. There was a look at the different policies one school implements throughout the school year and the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators present.

*School policy to be informed by study.*

Due to the many changes by the state regarding attendance policies, many school districts have made attendance part of their Missouri School Improvement Plan initiative. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Missouri has placed expectations on schools to successfully have 90% of their students have an attendance rate of 90%. With these new expectations coming down from state legislation schools have had to take a hard long look at attendance and what motivates a student. After exploring the differences between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators the school can look at which policies actually work and move forward to next year.

*Conceptual underpinning.*

Each student learns differently. The same can be said about what motivates a person. The individual differences make it difficult to determine what best types of resources to use in schools. Some students learn intrinsic motivation at an early age and no longer need to be given anything in order to succeed. However, some students will never learn intrinsic motivation and need to be continually reinforced in order to be successful. It is still unclear to many high schools if they need to give extra funding to programs in order to provide extrinsic motivators to students
or if they should just expect students to have intrinsic motivation by the time they get into high school. Researchers believe that intrinsic motivation must be taught early in order to be successful. If a student is able to learn early that it is important to succeed they will have the necessary traits to be successful in life (Tyler, 2008). Researchers contend that if it is the job of the school to help prepare students for work than they need to create an environment that prepares them for the next stage of their life. If a school keeps giving rewards for behaviors that will automatically be expected of in the real world than they are not helping. Some researchers argue though that extrinsic motivation is a necessary part of education. If schools want something from their students they should not expect it to automatically happen. Our society is filled with instant gratification and students expect to see something from their hard work. If schools want students to succeed and maintain high attendance, than they need to have extra motivation incentives for them throughout the school year (Palardy, 2007). If students are properly motivated, than student attendance will continually fall above the 90% mark.

Statement of the problem.

The state of Missouri is requiring 90% of students to have 90% attendance rate. Schools need to find new ways to make sure students are coming to school on time and consistently. Many schools are trying new techniques to ensure high attendance. Schools need to know if extrinsic or intrinsic motivators work to keep high attendance.

Purpose of the study.

The research paper will look at whether or not students can maintain 90% attendance in high school with only intrinsic motivation or if extrinsic motivation is required.
Research questions.

RQ1: Do extrinsic motivators (prizes, awards) factor into a student’s attendance?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in student attendance between students who are given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation?

Null Hypothesis.

There is not a significant difference in student attendance between students who are given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation.

Anticipated Benefits of the study.

Benefits will include information that can be given to schools on how to help boost attendance. Previous attempts at making attendance better will also be looked at and whether or not it was successful.

Definition of terms.

Intrinsic Motivation: determination to excel in something without receiving rewards or benefits from an outside source, determination comes from within.

Extrinsic Motivation: receiving rewards, benefits, or recognition for excelling or doing something someone wants.

MSIP 90% Rule: 90% of a school’s student population will attend school at a 90% rate for the school year.

Summary.

A study was done to determine the significance of using intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to help students maintain 90% attendance. If the t-test were to show a significant difference between the two testing points used, than an argument could be made that schools need to look at modifying their current policies on attendance. Although it is hard to judge every individual
student and what motivates them, data could help determine what helps the majority of the students. Schools could begin to tailor their incentive programs to better help the students with their attendance if data shows one motivator (extrinsic or intrinsic) works better than the other one.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With the changes in a student’s attitude toward school, different strategies have to be used in order to make students see the importance of attending school. Numerous research has been done in order to determine how much of a student’s attendance can be influenced by extrinsic motivation. Does the will to succeed and attend school have to be an intrinsic value or can schools slowly begin to influence a student’s attendance with extrinsic motivators? Do schools even have a legitimate shot at influencing a student’s attendance?

Schoeneberger (2012), did a longitudinal attendance study on high school dropouts. He looked at students over a long period of time to see what factors may be present with the students who did not finish high school. Overwhelmingly, the number one factor was the students’ attendance rate. If they had low a low attendance rate in elementary they were more than likely to continue that trend.

Schoeneberger (2012), hypothesized that unless schools were able to develop the importance of why attendance was important when the student was younger, they would never be able to promote strong attendance no matter what extrinsic motivator was present. Some larger schools, though, do not have the luxury of having the same kids for their entire high school career like smaller K-12 schools. Instead, these larger high schools must find new and creative ways to motivate their students to attend school.

Palardy (1997), also hypothesized that schools realistically can only have so much influence in a student’s motivation to succeed in school. He does believe however that by starting early schools can begin to influence a student’s thoughts on schools attendance and behavior, even if they do not have the parents support. Palardy states that schools can no longer rely on parents to provide the motivating factors to their kids on why it is important to attend
school; instead it is the job of the school to begin fostering those traits early in order for the students to learn. There are fifteen different strategies that schools should utilize in order to help students begin to take ownership of their learning. He also believes setting concrete expectations and objectives for the students to learn at the beginning of the year is essential (Palardy, 1997).

Teachers must have an active part in letting students take part in their learning throughout their school year and let them set some of the class objectives at the beginning of the year. If a student feels that they have an active say in their education they will be more inclined to believe that they must be at school daily in order to be a full participant in the learning experience. The school must also create an open and welcome learning environment to the student. If a school can create a learning environment where students are unafraid to take risks without feeling they will be embarrassed, students are more willing to be open to their learning (Palardy, 2007).

Palardy (1997), does not shy away from using extrinsic motivators at the beginning of the school year and even believes it is vital to reward students who demonstrate good learning techniques and come to school daily. Palardy recommends slowly beginning to move away from these reinforces gradually so that students can begin wanting to learn and attend school for more intrinsic reasons and not to just obtain the rewards.

Froiland, Oros, Smith and Hirchert (2012), shared the same thought of Palardy of using extrinsic motivators to begin the motivation process for students. The researchers concur that sometimes it is necessary to begin with extrinsic motivators in students, especially those who are younger. They caution though about strictly relying on “items” to make students motivated. They believe that extrinsic motivators should only be used as a behavior changing reinforcer.

If the student is not truly learning to change any behavior for the long term, like their attendance, then the student is truly not gaining anything other than the knowledge of how to
obtain a “prize.” The researchers warn that too many schools usually fail at this. They become too consumed with providing a “prize” to the winners that they do not create life-long changes in their students. The researchers sited the Self Determination Theory states that only true gains in improving one’s behavior can be done with intrinsic motivators (Froiland et al., 2012).

The transition of moving students from wanting extrinsic motivators to succeed to solely wanting it themselves is an important step for schools to make. Without the withdrawing of students needing a prize to succeed, they may feel that they always need someone putting a “golden coin” in front of them to succeed even after high school. That is simply not how the real world works. Willie (2014), contends that schools must begin to make the change from intrinsic to extrinsic by late elementary school.

Due to our society and the movement in technology, Willie contends that students expect to have instant gratification when pursuing all endeavors in their life. Willie argues that the instant gratification epidemic is being seen in band/music classrooms across the country. It is becoming extremely hard for teachers to teach students to learn and perfect instruments due to their inability to focus on long-range goals. In his own classroom, he started to give extrinsic motivators to students to encourage learning and mastering music faster. By handing out “bucks” that students were able to turn into points, he saw vast improvement in the playing of instruments. As students gradually progressed and felt success, the extrinsic motivators eventually began to be taken away. Willie (2014), cautions it is important to wean students off the extrinsic motivators gradually and not to be abrupt. Students should not even be conscious that they are no longer receiving the rewards.

As schools have begun to push initiatives in their schools in order to meet state standards, there has been much debate on what initiative is the most productive. In particular, the case has
been raised on how schools are expected to get 90% of their kids here for 90% of the time. Tyler (2008), looked at the issue of student success and what students reported they felt was the most important part of them succeeding. His findings showed that the students, who were most successful in school, whether it is with attendance or grades, often were able to find a personal connection to the school.

Tyler (2008), hypothesized those students with high attendance and achievement succeeded not because they were given “tokens” for achieving well but because they felt a personal connection to their school and felt that they were an important part of the daily “life” of the school. Students were surveyed about how they began to feel that personal connection and many reported that when teachers gave more control to their students over their own learning objectives they began to take more of an interest.

Also with teachers who allowed students to form their own groups, determine their own rubrics, and own due dates students reported that they would make an extra effort to attend those classes as opposed to classes where that wasn’t present. Tyler places a huge importance to allow students to take charge of their own learning with teachers needing to maintain that facilitator role. Only when students take ownership of their learning will they show the motivation to succeed and put importance in school (Tyler, 2008). In turn with this type of ownership of their learning, students’ attendance rates would continue to be strong because they would feel that their presence would be missed if gone.

Mantell (2013), also researched the importance of students taking ownership of their learning. Mantell believes at the beginning of a school year it would be appropriate to offer some of the extrinsic motivators to help students succeed at school. However, as the school year progresses teachers should have put the foundation down to have students feel the importance of
their attendance every day in their class. The foundation of making students feel that they are an
important part of their learning is an essential part of what a teacher must do.

Proper data should be given on all phases of a school initiative to improve school attendance. Without the proper data, it is hard for administrators and teachers to see if any of the interventions are working. Mantell (2013), argues that it is counterproductive to keep throwing “awards” at students unless data has backed up that the reward is truly working. Also, it is important to define when extrinsic motivators have been taken away by the school and attendance is primarily being based on more intrinsic motivators.

Schools across the nation have their own ideas on how to increase student attendance. Some schools will promote attendance with strong extrinsic motivators while others rely on the student’s own initiative to be at school. Aarino, Nieminen, Pyoral, and Lindblom-Ylanne (2010), believe the most successful approach is one that incorporates both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. If a school wants to be successful they cannot be opposed to a little “bribery” in the beginning in order for students to attend school.

Data is also collected on the students who continually do not reach the 95% attendance. Those students who fall below the 80% rate are also given special teacher mentors who meet with them periodically to check in on their school work and attendance. At the end of first semester, class competitions are designed to see which class has the highest attendance percentage. At the end of the third quarter, individual students’ attendance (reported by their school number) is displayed in the hallway.
RESEARCH METHODS

Research design.

A descriptive study was done to see if there were any differences in student attendance when extrinsic and intrinsic motivators were being used. The independent variable was the type of motivator present during the school year. The dependent variable was the student’s attendance percentage. The two data collection samples were compared to see if any significant differences were found by using extrinsic and intrinsic motivators.

Sample group description.

All of the student body was involved in the sample collected on school attendance. The school size is roughly 800 students. Out of the sample size of 700 students, 60 students were randomly selected from each class. Many different ethnic backgrounds are represented in the school population with 79% of the population being Caucasian. The next two biggest ethnic populations are African Americans with a percentage of 12.6% and the Hispanic population with 6.10%. The school currently has a free and reduced lunch rate of 64.1%.

Data collection and instrumentation.

Attendance data from the current school year was used to the data collection. Data was taken to compare the end of first quarter attendance data to that of the end of third quarter attendance.

Statistical analysis method.

A paired t test was used to determine any significant significance between the two data points taken. The different strategies implemented throughout the school year were then evaluated to see what type of motivator was being used during those two samples.
FINDINGS

A paired samples t test was performed to compare the mean of the first semester attendance data and the second semester attendance data. First semester data was looked at because more extrinsic motivators were used (attendance cards, cookies) while in the second semester more intrinsic motivators were used (personal attendance posted). Significant differences from first semester to second semester were found in any of the grades. The means for all four grade levels also showed significant differences. Only attendance data from this year was used.

Figure 1

**t-Test Analysis Results for Freshmen First Quarter and Third Quarter Attendance Percentage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Quarter (n=60)</td>
<td>94.9012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second quarter (n=60)</td>
<td>92.5855</td>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>1.3358</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.1857</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant when p<=0.25

Sixty students from the freshmen class were randomly selected. The first testing point was taking from October attendance data. The second testing point was taken from the March attendance data. The mean of the first semester was 94.9012 and the mean of the second semester data was 92.5855. The freshmen paired samples t test showed no significance with,
t(60)= 0.1857, p>.05. The null hypothesis stated that there was not a significant difference in student attendance between students who are given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation. The null hypothesis was rejected because the p > .05. The p-value of 0.185 is less than the alpha level of 0.25, therefore the null is rejected. There is a significant difference. The t-test result was 1.3358 and the df was 75. This showed that there were significant differences in student attendance whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivators were used.

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean D</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Quarter (n=60)</td>
<td>91.8240</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second quarter (n=60)</td>
<td>88.8933</td>
<td>11.87</td>
<td>1.3321</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0.1740</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Significant when p<=0.25

Sixty sophomores were randomly selected. The two different testing points were from the first and second semester. The mean of the first semester was 91.8240 and the second semester mean is 88.8933. The sophomore paired samples t test showed no significance with, t(60)= 0.1740, p>.05. The null hypothesis stated that there was not a significant difference in student attendance between students who are given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation. The null hypothesis was rejected because the p > .05. The t-test result was 1.3321 and the df was 118. This showed that there were significant differences in student attendance whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivators were used.
Sixty juniors were randomly selected. The two different testing points were from the first and second semester. The mean of the first semester was 92.916 and the second semester mean was 89.840. The junior paired samples t test showed no significance with, $t(60)= 0.1740$, $p>.05$. The null hypothesis was rejected because the $p > .05$. The junior paired samples t test showed no significant with, $t(60)= 0.0958$, $p>.05$. The t-test result was 1.6954 and the df was 54. The null hypothesis stated that there was not a significant difference in student attendance between students who are given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation. The null hypothesis was rejected because the $p > .05$. This showed that there were significant differences in student attendance whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivators were used.
Sixty seniors were randomly selected. The two different testing points were from the first and second semester. The mean of the first semester was 91.118 and the second semester mean was 87.627. The null hypothesis stated that there was not a significant difference in student attendance between students who are given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation. The null hypothesis was rejected because the p > .05. The senior paired samples t test showed no significant with, t(60)= 0.1126, p>.05. The t-test result was 1.61.04 and the df was 59. This showed that there were no significant differences in student attendance whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivators were used.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research study was done to determine whether or not extrinsic and intrinsic motivators really influence individuals. There is much debate on whether or not the different types of motivators differ from each other and whether or not one is more successful than the other one. A sample was taken from a high school that was using these motivation techniques to help improve their attendance. The data collected was analyzed to see if any true differences do exist. The null hypothesis, the research questions, and the

Some research argues that by only teaching intrinsic motivation at an early age will lead to students developing that trait. However, if a student does not master this skill high schools are still having to strategize ways to keep their students motivated and coming to school. Researchers believe that if a student lacks the motivation to succeed on their own than schools must implement new strategies to promote high achievement. Like the Midwestern school, whose school data was analyzed, different interventions are often used to capitalize on high school attendance. The school began the school year with using more extrinsic motivators like attendance cards and rewards.

By the third quarter the school was using intrinsic motivators like displaying of attendance percentages. The results showed that there was a slight jump of higher attendance rates when extrinsic motivators were present. Attendance percentages were slightly down during the second semester while the school explored using more intrinsic motivators. The null hypothesis was rejected due to their being significant differences between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation used. This data shows that different types of motivators do work to encourage strong attendance. This data shows that if schools are going to expect high attendance than extra motivators need to be present.
The purpose of the study was to look at whether or not students can maintain 90% attendance in high school with only intrinsic motivation or if extrinsic motivation is required. The study had two research questions. The first question was whether or not extrinsic motivators truly factor into a student’s attendance. The results of the study showed that extrinsic motivators do factor into a student’s attendance. The null hypothesis stated that there was not a significant difference in student attendance between students who are given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation. The null hypothesis was rejected because the p > .05.

Attendance percentages were higher when extrinsic motivators were present. The second research question was whether or not there was a significant difference between student attendances and whether or not they received extrinsic or intrinsic motivators. The study collected two data collection points and compared the percentage at the different types of the year. There was a significant difference between students who were given extrinsic motivation for attendance and students who are not given extrinsic motivation. Due to this significant difference, the null hypothesis was again rejected. The null hypothesis was rejected because the p > .05. Percentages were higher for the students who received some type of “reward” for attending school.

The conceptual underlining discussed the differences in student learning and achievement. Every student learns differently. The same can be said for what motivates a student. There is a debate on whether or not students should be able to accomplish things based on internal motivation alone or whether or not there should be extra “encouragement” or “rewards” to help them want to succeed. Some researchers argue that if a school keeps giving “rewards” to students to be successful they will expect the same treatment when they enter the work force. However,
other researchers contend that we must shape internal motivation and cannot expect students to just automatically want to be successful. The data collected on this study showed that extrinsic motivation did play a part in whether or not students went to school consistently. The extrinsic motivators did prove to make a significant difference in the percentages as opposed to the percentages when just intrinsic motivators were present. Due to this finding schools would need to at least have some type of external motivator present during the school year in order to ensure that a high percentage of attendance was kept.

There are a number of limitations to the study. The research would benefit by having a more thorough study over an entire school year of attendance data. It would also be interesting to see if at the beginning of the next new school year if the same attendance percentages would be present. Would the same students have low attendance? Would different strategies need to be implemented? One extraneous factor that cannot be accounted for is that attendance at the beginning of the school year is just historically better than the end of the second semester. It’s hard to determine whether or not if the extra motivators were the true reason for the change in attendance. More data would need to be collected to see if the extrinsic and intrinsic motivators truly played a part.

In conclusion, there is no way that schools cannot expect to need some type of additional intervention to promote high school attendance. There should also be some type of extra motivator present for students to want to be present at school. Schools need to determine a full year program in order to ensure that students are attending school during first and second semester. After carefully collecting data for a full year, schools should then evaluate what they are using as motivators to determine what policies work better. In a tight school budget it is important to make sure if the school is spending money on motivators that it is actually working.
References


