

RUNNING HEAD: Effect of Divorce

THE EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON ATTENDANCE RATES AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

By

JOE BADALUCCO

Submitted to

Professional Education Faculty

Northwest Missouri State University Missouri

Department of Professional Education

College of Education and Human Services

Maryville, MO 64468

Submitted in Fulfillment for the Requirements for
61-683 Research Paper
Summer 2014

July 3, 2015

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if the attendance rate of secondary students residing in single parent homes and homes with blended families was significantly lower than students residing within traditional nuclear family homes. The study was conducted with the notion that attendance rate at the secondary level affects student performance. A group of 10th graders were selected at random for this analysis. These students were not identified as gifted or in need of special services, nor were they classified as students with medical needs. During the initial stages of the study, data was collected to confirm the notion that attendance rates have an effect on grade-point-averages (GPA). A t-test was performed and verified that a lower attendance rate generates a lower GPA. After collecting the initial data, further data was collected to compare single-parent students' attendance to traditional nuclear family students' attendance. A t-test was performed, and the results showed that there was not a significant difference between attendance of students from single-parent homes and attendance of students from traditional nuclear family homes. Additionally, data was collected to evaluate the possible difference in attendance rates of students living with blended families to students residing in traditional nuclear family homes. A t-test was performed, with the results showing there was no significant difference in the attendance of these groups of students.

INTRODUCTION

Background, issues and concerns.

As we progress into the 21st century, divorce rates continue to rise. What was once the traditional household for children and adolescents is no longer the norm. Many children now grow into their teenage years without the structure of a two-parent home. This loss of structure within the home environment has possibly contributed to low school attendance and increased the dropout rate.

The question at hand is how much of an effect the structure of the home has on attendance rate of high school students, if at all. The concern is that students who come from non-traditional home structures, specifically single-parent homes and homes with a stepparent, results in lower school attendance.

If single-parent homes and blended family homes do in fact contribute to a lower student attendance rate amongst teenagers, then schools need to find ways to combat this issue. This could mean building more structure in the school environment in some fashion, and the creative use of counselors and social workers to address the needs of these students.

Practice under investigation.

The practice under investigation is how much of an effect the structure of the home has on attendance rate of high school students, if at all. The concern is that students who come from non-traditional home structures may result in lower school attendance, which would consequently affect academic performance.

School policy to be informed by study.

The school policy to be informed by the study is whether the issue of structure in the home/low attendance rate (if found to be true) is being addressed properly by school

faculty/staff. Are schools building a proper foundation with these students as they transition to the secondary level? Are counselor and social workers being utilized with these students?

Conceptual underpinning.

The divorce rate in the United States has risen drastically over the past fifty years, which has changed the structure of the American home in the 21st century. For example, over the span of 36 years from 1960 to 1996, the divorce rate for married women nearly doubled (Raynish 2007). With the change in structure of the home for many adolescents, questions of what role the organization of the home can play in academic success have arisen. With attendance rate being a contributing factor in academic achievement, whether or not the increase in non-traditional two-parent homes contributes to lower school attendance by students within these homes needs to be evaluated.

Statement of the problem.

If students who come from single-parent and blended family households have lower school attendance, it is likely affecting their academic performance, which needs to be addressed by schools through guidance counselors and social workers.

Purpose of the study.

To determine if household structure is a factor in student attendance at the secondary level of education.

Research questions.

RQ#1: Is there a significant difference in grade point average between students with higher attendance rate to students with lower attendance rate?

RQ#2: Is there a significant difference in attendance rates between students who come from single-parent homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes?

RQ#3: Is there a significant difference in attendance rates between students who come from single-parent homes compared to students who come from blended family homes?

Null hypothesis.

Ho1: There is not a significant difference in grade point average between students with higher attendance rate to students with lower attendance rate.

Ho2: There is not a significant difference in attendance rates between students who come from single-parent homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes.

Ho3: There is not a significant difference in attendance rates between students who come from blended family homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes.

Anticipated benefits of the study.

If attendance rate is found to be an important factor in student success, it is critical that we understand why high attendance rate students attend school vs. low attendance rate students. Is household structure within the home a factor? If so, how can schools motivate and/or build structure for students to attend school who come from non-traditional homes?

Definition of terms.

Attendance Rate- the fact that a student is present or regularly goes the institution, reflected as a percentage.

Single-parent household- a parent, not living with a spouse or partner, who has most of the day-to-day responsibilities in raising the child or children.

Blended family- a family consisting of a couple and their children from this and all previous relationships; a family consisting of a step-mother or step-father living within the home

Traditional nuclear family- consists of a married couple and their biological child or children

Grade-point-average- an indication of a student's academic achievement at an institution, calculated as the total number of grade points received over a given period divided by the total number of credits awarded.

Summary.

A study was conducted to see if there is a significant difference in attendance rate between students who come from single parent and blended family homes and students who come from traditional nuclear families. An initial study was conducted to confirm that attendance rate is an important factor in student success, as it is widely considered. If confirmed, it is important to understand possible factors in high attendance vs. low attendance rate students. If structure of the household is found to be a significant factor in attendance rate of students, schools must find ways to help these students who come from single-parent households to want to attend school at a higher rate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What was once the traditional household for an adolescent has changed considerably over the past fifty years. With the rise in divorce rates, many students no longer live with their biological mother and father, but with a single parent or a blended family, which includes a stepparent. As reported by the Census Bureau in 1995, 27 percent of children under 18 lived with a single parent, 38 percent of which were from a divorce (Huffman 2013). Several studies in the last twenty years have established adjustment problems for students experiencing disruption in family cohesion (Huffman 2013). Recent studies have also shown that family problems, including divorce, affects student performance and attendance (Huffman 2013).

According to a study completed by Barry Ham (2011) in a Colorado high school, 12th graders from intact families outperformed students from other family structures. Additionally, students from single-parent homes are more likely to drop out of high school than students residing with an intact family structure (Goldschmidt 1999). In correlation with the dropout rate is low attendance, as middle school students who display an attendance rate below 80 percent are higher risk students for future dropout (Hirth 2011). This is disconcerting considering previous information regarding attendance problems of students who come from single parent homes.

If divorce is a factor in the struggle of some students, the question is how can it be rectified? Based on a Canadian study of a variety of high school students who endured high school from broken homes, the answer is simple: teachers. Many of these students, who were all at-risk for dropout, said they turned to adults and teachers they trusted when they felt like they could not count on their parents (Lessard 2009). As Lessard (2009) points out, "Teachers and school psychologists should be aware of the positive influence they can have on students through positive relationships. Prevention efforts can start with establishing positive relationships with

students.” (p. 4). Furthermore, guidance counselors should play an active role in seeking out students who come from divorced families and should specialize in techniques to help these students achieve more success (Gray 1990).

It also appears that older students are self-aware of how divorce and family issues impact them. When a group of middle school and high school adolescents from both divorced and intact families were asked to rate their parents' relationships and impact on them, students from divorce tended to rate them more negatively than adolescents from living together or married families (Gatins 2013). Secondary students are also more susceptible to the effects of divorce if the separation occurs while they are in high school. Studies have shown that divorce more negatively impacted children who experienced their parent's divorce at an older age than a younger age (Anthony 2014)

With more than 40 percent of marriages likely to end in divorce (Rayish 2007), the adverse effects it may have on adolescents remains an ongoing discussion. Statistics, such as the attendance rate of students who come from divorced families, is especially important because of their increased risk for dropout. It is apparent that reversing the negative academic effects of divorce on children takes a team effort, including teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and social workers. What used to be the traditional home is no longer, and educators of all types need to prepare themselves for students from a variety of domestic settings.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design.

A quantitative study was conducted to see if the structure of the household of a secondary student affects their attendance rate. The independent variable tested was the structure of the household (single parent, blended family, traditional nuclear family), while the dependent variable tested was the attendance rate. In the initial test run for the study, the independent variable of attendance rate was tested to see if there was a difference in the dependent variable of grade-point-average. This test was conducted to confirm or reject the idea that attendance rate affects academic performance. If attendance rates of students show significant differences pertaining to the household structures, specifically lower rates amongst students coming from single-parent homes and blended family homes, schools will have to address the issue.

Study group description.

For initial testing of attendance rate compared to grade-point-average, 40 male and female students were selected at random from the 10th grade of a secondary school in Missouri. Although selected at random, these students were not identified as gifted students or students in need of special services. For testing of single-parent household structure vs. traditional nuclear household structure attendance rate, 40 male 10th grade students from the same high school in the state of Missouri were selected at random. Although selected at random, these students were not identified as students with medical needs, gifted students, or students in need of special services. For testing of blended household structure vs. traditional nuclear household structure attendance rate, 28 male 10th grade students from the same secondary school in the state of Missouri were selected at random. Although selected at random, these students were not identified as students

with medical needs, gifted students, or students in need of special services. The attendance rate and grade-point-averages were for the most recent completed semester at the school.

Data collection and instrumentation.

Archived data was collected from the PowerSchool system of the selected Missouri high school, which yields attendance rates, grade-point-averages, and provides domestic information. Information was acquired from second semester of the 2014-15 school year.

Statistical analysis methods.

Three separate t-tests were conducted to find the following: 1) if there is a significant difference in attendance rate compared to grade-point-average; 2) if there is a significant difference in attendance rate with students from single parent homes vs. traditional nuclear family homes; 3) if there is a significant difference in attendance rate with students from blended family homes vs. traditional nuclear family homes. The mean, mean D, t-test, df, and p-value were concluded from these tests. The Alpha level was set at 0.25 to test each null hypothesis: Ho1: There is not a difference in grade point average between students with higher attendance rate to students with lower attendance rate. Ho2: There is not a difference in attendance rates between students who come from single-parent homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes. Ho3: There is not a difference in attendance rates between students who come from blended family homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes.

FINDINGS

An initial t-test was conducted to determine if attendance rate affects academic performance at the secondary level. Based on the anticipated study of household structure's effect on attendance rate, it was perceived that there would be a significant difference in students' grade-point-averages based on the level of their attendance at school. The following tables, graphs, and charts show the results of raw data taken from the PowerSchool system of the Missouri secondary school. The data was retrieved from second semester of the 2014-15 school year for all students.

Figure 1

t-Test Analysis Results for 2014-15 GPA/Attendance Rate

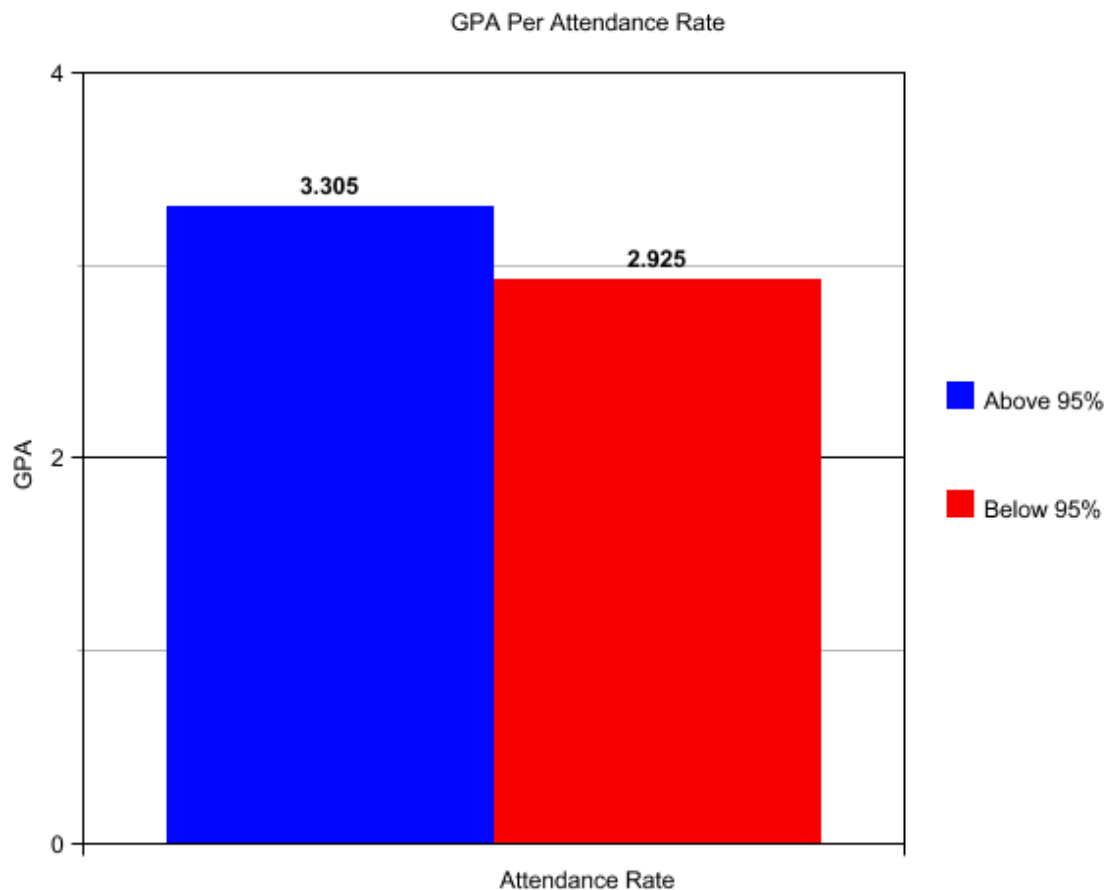
Source	Mean	Mean D	t-Test	df	p-value
>95% Attnd (n=20)	3.305				
<95% Attnd (n=20)	2.925	0.38	1.62	38	0.11

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.25$

40 students were chosen at random from the PowerSchool system of a Missouri high school, in which 20 qualified as having an attendance rate above 95 percent, while 20 qualified as having an attendance rate below 95 percent. The 95 percent mark represents the cutoff between Advanced attendance (attendance above what is expected) and Proficient attendance (attendance at the level that is expected). Both groups were compared to determine if there was a difference in their respective grade-point-averages. The mean of the group of students with an attendance rate above 95 percent was 3.305 (on a scale of 0-4), while the mean of the students with an attendance rate below 95 percent was 2.925. The Mean D, or difference between the two

groups, was 0.38. The t-test result was 1.61 and the df was 38. The null hypothesis states that there is not a difference in grade point average between students with higher attendance rate to students with lower attendance rate. This null hypothesis was rejected because the p-value, 0.11, is lower than the alpha level, 0.25. The results show that the attendance rate of a student does significantly impact GPA. Students with an attendance rate above 95 percent had a higher GPA than students below 95 percent.

Figure 2



The mean of the students' GPA with an attendance rate above 95 percent was 3.305. The mean of the students' GPA with an attendance rate below 95 percent was 2.925. This means that 20 students who were attending school at a 95 percent rate or higher during the second semester

of the 2014-15 school year maintained a GPA 0.38 points higher than the 20 students who attended at a rate lower than 95%.

Figure 3

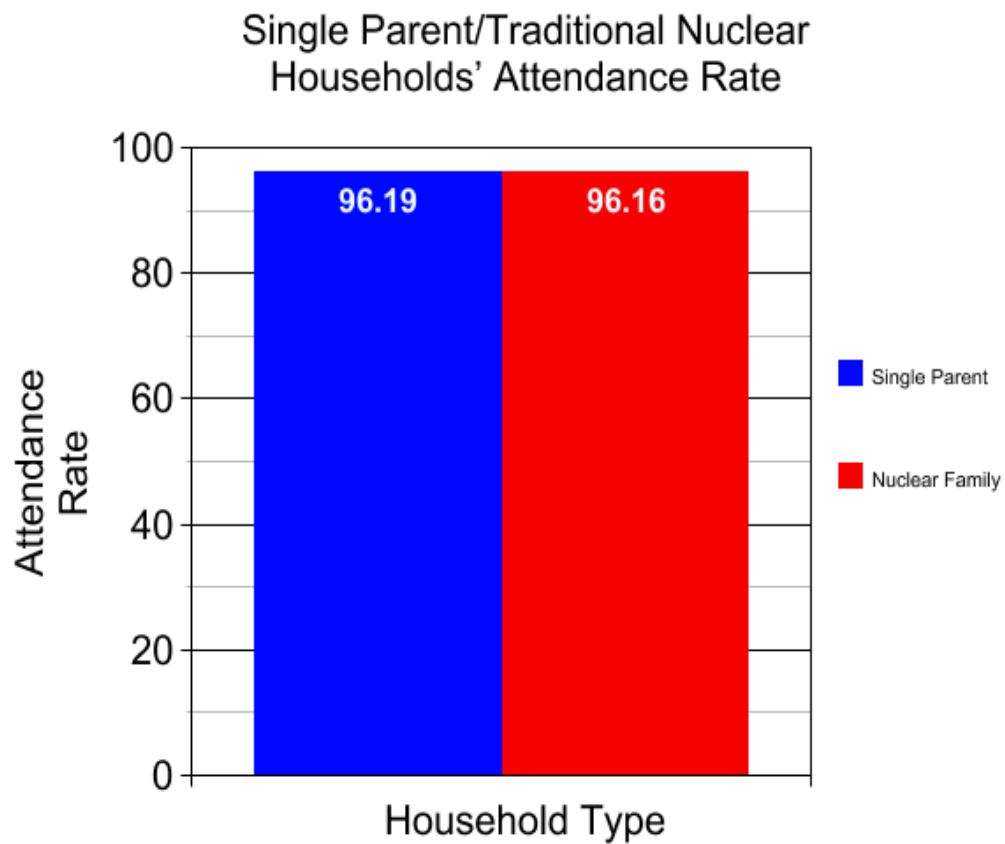
t-Test Analysis Results for Single Parent/Traditional Nuclear Households' Attendance Rate

Source	Mean	Mean D	<i>t</i> -Test	df	<i>p</i> -value
Single Parent (n=20)	96.19				
Nuclear Family (n=20)	96.16	0.03	0.03	38	0.98

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.25$

40 students were chosen at random from the PowerSchool system of a Missouri high school, 20 which reside in a single parent home, while 20 resided in a traditional nuclear family home. The data collected measures the attendance of these students reflected as a percentage (from 0-100). The mean attendance rate of the students residing in a single parent home was 96.19, and the mean attendance rate of students residing in a two parent nuclear home was 96.16. The Mean D, or difference between the two groups, was 0.03. The t-test result was 0.03 and the df was 38. The null hypothesis states that there is not a difference in attendance rate between students who come from single-parent homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes. This null hypothesis was not rejected because the p-value, 0.98, is higher than the alpha level, 0.25. This shows that the structure of the household when it pertains to single parent homes does not significantly impact the attendance rate of students. Students from single parent homes attended school at a similar rate to students who resided with both parents in a traditional nuclear household.

Figure 4



The mean attendance rate of the 20 students residing in single parent homes was 96.19. The mean attendance rate of the 20 students living in traditional nuclear family homes was 96.16. The Advanced level (above what is satisfactory) of attendance is 95 percent, meaning both groups of students reached this level. The small variance of the mean attendance rate of

both groups of students concludes that there is no difference in attendance rate of students based on living with a single parent or both of their biological parents.

Figure 5

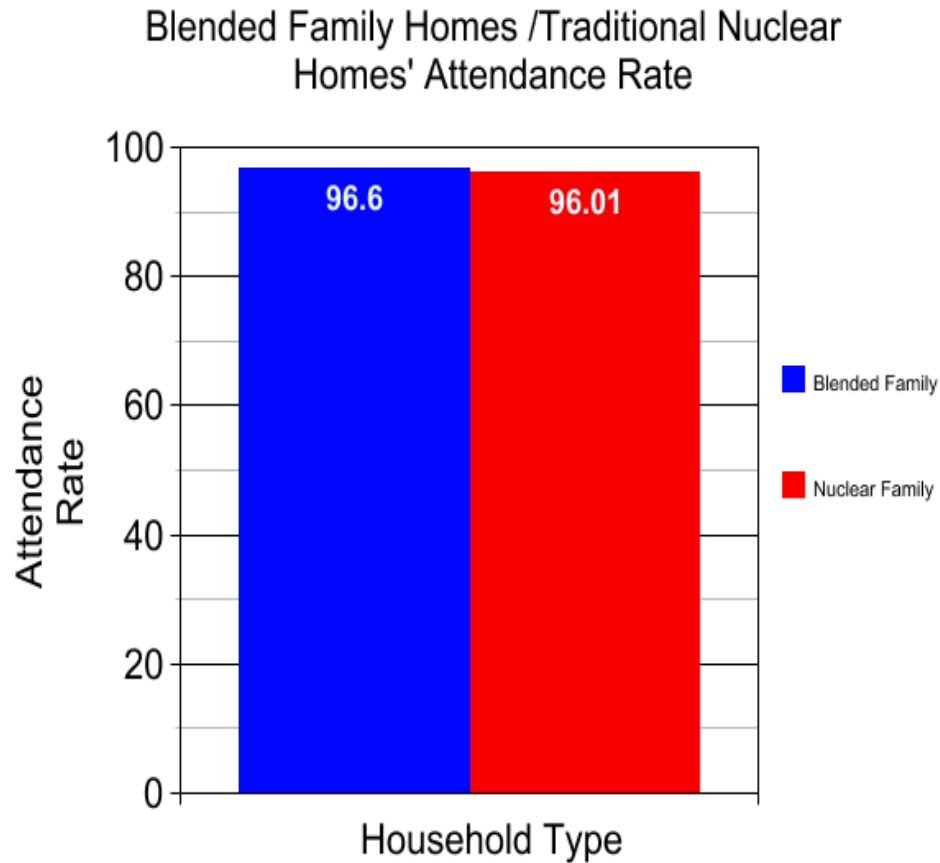
t-Test Analysis Results for Blended Family Homes/Traditional Nuclear Homes' Attendance Rate

Source	Mean	Mean D	<i>t</i> -Test	df	<i>p</i> -value
Blended Family (n=14)	96.60				
Nuclear Family (n=14)	96.01	0.59	0.61	26	0.55

Note: Significant when $p \leq 0.25$

28 students were chosen at random from the PowerSchool system of a Missouri high school, 14 which reside in a blended family home (step-parent in home), while 14 resided in a traditional nuclear family home. The data collected measures the attendance of these students reflected as a percentage (from 0-100). The mean attendance rate of the students residing in a blended family home was 96.60, and the mean attendance rate of students residing in a two parent nuclear home was 96.01. The Mean D, or difference between the two groups, was 0.59. The t-test result was 0.61 and the df was 26. The null hypothesis states that there is not a difference in attendance rate between students who come from blended family homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes. This null hypothesis was not rejected because the p-value, 0.55, is higher than the alpha level, 0.25. This shows that the structure of the household when it pertains to blended family homes does not significantly impact the attendance rate of students. Students with stepparents in the domestic environment attended school at a similar rate to students who resided with both parents in a traditional nuclear household.

Figure 6



The mean attendance rate of the 14 students residing in blended family homes was 96.60. The mean attendance rate of the 14 students living in traditional nuclear family homes was 96.01. The Advanced level (above what is satisfactory) of attendance is 95 percent, meaning both groups of students reached this level. The small variance of the mean attendance rate of both groups of students concludes that there is no difference in attendance rate of students based on living with a blended family or both of their biological parents.

The results of testing and Figures 1 and 2 answered the research question: “Is there a significant difference in grade point average between students with higher attendance rate to students with lower attendance rate?” Statistics showed that attendance rate had a significant

impact on GPA. Figure 2 showed that students with an attendance rate higher than 95 percent had a mean GPA of 3.305, while students with an attendance rate lower than 95 percent had a mean GPA of 2.925. The results of testing and Figures 3 and 4 answered the research question: “Is there a significant difference in attendance rates between students who come from single-parent homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes?” Statistics showed that the structure of the home, specifically single parent households, had no impact on attendance rate compared to traditional two parent households. Figure 4 showed that the mean attendance rate of students in single parent homes was 96.19, while the mean attendance rate of students in traditional two parent homes was 96.16. Both groups of students produced satisfactory attendance rates that were almost identical. The results of testing and Figures 5 and 6 answered the research question: “Is there a significant difference in attendance rates between students who come from blended family homes compared to students who come from two-parent homes?” Statistics showed that the structure of the home, specifically homes with a step-parent, had no impact on attendance rate compared to traditional two parent households. Figure 6 showed that the mean attendance rate of students in blended family homes was 96.60, while the mean attendance rate of students in traditional two parent homes was 96.01. Both groups of students produced satisfactory attendance rates that exhibited the structure of the home did not have an impact on attending school.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study show that despite the drastic increase in divorce rates over the past several decades, the diversity of the household has not had an impact on school attendance of secondary students within a Missouri high school. Based on the data tested, there is no significant difference in the attendance of students who reside with a single parent or step-parent compared to students who reside with their biological parents. The p-values of the t-tests comparing single parent and blended family students' attendance to nuclear family students' attendance were 0.98 and 0.55, respectively. These p-values were both higher than the alpha level set at 0.25, which allowed the null hypothesis of both tests not to be rejected. Based on the initial t-test performed to determine if attendance rate affected school performance (GPA), the null hypothesis was rejected with the p-value of 0.11 being lower than the alpha level set at 0.25. It is evident that higher attendance rates of students yield better academic results. It is assumed that because testing showed household structure did not impact student attendance, academic performance of these students would not be affected, as well.

Despite the fact that testing did not show a significant impact in attendance of students who derive from divorced parents, other studies should be conducted to continue to weigh the impact of increased divorce rate on adolescents. Although attendance rate is one factor in academic performance, there are clearly other impacts on students' grades at the secondary level. Research questions such as, "How often do students from non-traditional households access school counselors and social workers compared to their peers," and "How much structured study time do students from non-traditional households utilize in relation to students from traditional households," should be answered.

One aspect of the study that cannot be ignored is the fact that attendance rate is a crucial element in increasing student grade-point-average. At the secondary level, it can be further inferred that dropout rate would increase as the attendance rate of students decrease. Given this belief, it is significant that schools put a microscope on the attendance rate of their students to evaluate the possible factors contributing to low attendance. While household structure might not necessarily be the culprit, it is presumed there are other remediable factors that are going unnoticed by school personnel.

REFERENCES

- Anthony, C. J., DiPerna, J., & Amato, P. R. (2014). Divorce, approaches to learning, and children's academic achievement: A longitudinal analysis of mediated and moderated effects. *Journal Of School Psychology, 52*(3), 249-261. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2014.03.003
- Gatins, D., Kinlaw, C., & Dunlap, L. L. (2013). Do the Kids Think They're Okay? Adolescents' Views on the Impact of Marriage and Divorce. *Journal Of Divorce & Remarriage, 54*(4), 313-328. doi:10.1080/10502556.2013.780496
- Gray, L. A. (1990). *At-Risk Youth: A Compilation of Counseling Technique Papers*.
- Ham, B. D. (2004). The Effects of Divorce and Remarriage on the Academic Achievement of High School Seniors. *Journal Of Divorce & Remarriage, 42*(1/2), 159-178. doi:10.1300/J087v42n01_08
- Hirth, M. A., & Montgomery, G. T. Freshman Transition for At-Risk Students: Living With HEART. *NASSP Bulletin, 95*, 245-265.
- Huffman, A. M. (2013). Students at Risk Due to a Lack of Family Cohesiveness: A Rising Need for Social Workers in Schools. *Clearing House, 86*(1), 37-42. doi:10.1080/00098655.2012.731022
- Lessard, A., Fortin, L., Marcotte, D., Potvin, P., & Royer, E. (2009). Why Did They Not Drop Out? Narratives from Resilient Students. *Prevention Researcher, 16*(3), 21-24.
- Raynish, A. (2007, December 15). *The Price of Divorce*. Online Submission
- Sundius, M. J., Entwisle, D., Thompson, M., & Alexander, K. The Influence of Family Composition on Children's Conformity to the Student Role. *American Educational Research Journal, 29*, 405-424.

Wang, J., & Goldschmidt, P. When Can Schools Affect Dropout Behavior? A Longitudinal Multilevel Analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36, 715-738.