

**HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
POLICIES IN ALBERTA:
CHARACTERISTICS AND CONDITIONS**

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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM
INTRODUCTION

Student attendance (or lack thereof) continues to be one of the most nagging and frustrating issues that school teachers and administrators have to confront. In response to rising absenteeism teachers, counsellors, and administrators find themselves devoting more time to chronic absentees and neglecting students who attend school regularly.

The frequently absent student is also a heavy loser. The continuity of the instructional process is seriously disrupted when a student is too often away from the regular classroom learning experience. The benefits of instruction are lost and cannot be entirely regained even with extra help from the teacher. Consequently, many students who miss school frequently experience great difficulty and achieve only mediocre success in their academic programs.

Although parents are legally responsible for their children until age sixteen, it is extremely rare for parents in Alberta to be held accountable by the court for their children's truancy. Instead, attendance is governed by provincial regulations, school board policies, rules set down by school staffs, and the expectations of classroom teachers. Clearly the primary responsibility for ensuring that students attend school regularly has been laid at the feet of educators.

The challenge is a formidable one. The public believes that schools should encourage "good citizenship". It is this good citizenship which is seen as the cure for such societal ills as low productivity and uncompetitive labour costs. Schools are expected to prepare students to be more productive, competitive, keen, and to value attendance. The expectation is that such values will be carried through to the work place. But everyone knows how difficult and contentious the teaching of values can be.

Another difficulty lies in developing an effective attendance policy that is accepted by staff. There are as many different attendance policies as there are schools, and there maybe as many different approaches to applying the policy as there are teachers in the school.

Nonetheless, there are strong reasons for coming to grips with the attendance issue. The frustration created by chronic student absenteeism is high among teachers, often higher than it is for administrators. Although some parents say that teachers should focus on teaching, the reality is that by default the responsibility for dealing with absenteeism falls to teachers. Schools are forced to do something about it even though there seems to be universal agreement that the problem of attendance should be shared by students and parents.

RATIONALE

With increasing concern over student drop-out rates in Alberta

schools there is more attention being given to developing attendance policies and procedures that work. Most studies that have been done in this area have dealt with the overall effectiveness of newly developed attendance policies as a whole, or student attendance rates. Few studies have examined the impact of the individual characteristics found in effective attendance policies.

If policies and practices are to be supported by staff and have a positive impact on student behavior they must be considered, fair, reasonable, and effective by both groups. Characteristics and conditions to be used in any new or revised attendance policy should have to pass this test before it is implemented.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is, first, to identify characteristics and conditions (sanctions and incentives) which are being used in attendance policies in the province of Alberta. A second purpose is to determine the differences in perception of students and teachers towards these characteristics and conditions.

QUESTIONS GUIDING THE STUDY

The questions that will be addressed in this study are:

1. What are the characteristics and conditions being used in attendance policies in Alberta High Schools?

2. What are teacher and student perceptions of these characteristics and conditions?
3. Should the characteristics and conditions of attendance policies differ from Grade Ten to Grade Twelve?
4. Should the characteristics and conditions of attendance policies differ from a rural school to an urban school?
5. Is it possible to develop an attendance policy that both teachers and students can support?

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are several limitations to this study:

1. The sample population included only students, teachers, and administrators. Perceptions and beliefs of other groups such as parents and trustees were not included in this study.
2. The survey was administered to only two schools.
3. The survey, in both schools, was administered to all students present at morning homeroom registration.

Students absent on that day missed doing the survey.
4. Participant bias may skew the survey results.

ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed in this study that if policies and practices are to be supported and followed by staff and are going to have an impact on

student behaviors they must be considered fair, reasonable and effective by both groups.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Attendance Policy is the local school policy laying down conditions of attendance at the school.

Attendance Policy Characteristics are those special qualities or features which distinguish one policy from others.

A Small Rural High School has less than one hundred students in grades ten to twelve and usually includes students in grades one to nine as well.

A Small Urban High School has a student population of between five hundred and one thousand in grades ten to twelve and may include grade nine students in the same building.

SUMMARY

Educators have long emphasized the importance of class attendance. Only in the classroom can the student hear the teacher's presentation, participate in class discussions, and enjoy the benefits of academic interactions between students and teachers.

As principal of a small rural high school I have implemented several different attendance policies with the intention of curbing excessive absences. In my experience positive changes in attendance rates take place

in the first term after implementation. However, by the second and third terms the absentee rate has slowly climbed back to its initial level. It is then time to start developing a new policy.

More perplexing than the problem of student absenteeism is the question of how to best deal with the problem. The American National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended in A Nation at Risk that "attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions should be used to reduce the amount of time lost through student absenteeism and tardiness" (U.S. Department of Education, 1983, p. 27). The question that remains is, which incentives and sanctions are most effective in getting today's high school student into the classroom?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

A literature review was conducted to identify research that has been done on attendance policies and practices. Through the use of different sets of descriptors in three separate ERIC searches, a number of relevant journal articles and studies were isolated. However, the literature available on this topic in Canada was limited, so this review includes several references based on American research.

According to much of the literature reviewed, the increase in high school absenteeism has become a universal problem. Rood in his article "Advice For Administrators: Writing The Attendance Policy" (1989) cites the following statistics, gleaned from different studies in the United States:

- Each school day, 2,500,000 students are absent from school
- On an average Monday, many urban high schools have an absence rate of more than 30 percent.
- It is common for many secondary students to miss 20 to 30 days of school in an academic year.

From the time of the first compulsory education laws, truancy has been earmarked as the most persistent problem that administrators face. In addition, teachers complain that it is unfair to be held accountable for

student progress when, too often, the student is not in class to be taught.

Research has shown that excessive absenteeism is directly related to students dropping out of school (de Jung and Duckworth, 1985). Their study found that overall rates of attendance of eventual dropouts had grown worse from two years before withdrawal from school to the year of withdrawal.

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT POOR ATTENDERS?

Any discussion of absenteeism must concern itself with determining if there is a group of students who can be classified as potential nonattenders. Identification can be a big help to educators who wish to take preventive measures instead of relying exclusively on an attendance policy that only takes effect after the fact.

Rood cites a study done by Hegner (1987) which identifies the following characteristics of nonattenders: (P.21)

- absenteeism increases as students progress through high school.
- in the first two years of high school, girls will have higher rates of absenteeism than boys.
- students with higher grades have better attendance.
- students from a one parent family have poorer attendance rates than those from the more traditional families.
- participants in a variety of co-curricular activities will generally be

in attendance more often than will nonparticipants.

- the truant student typically has low self-esteem, feels powerless in school, and, therefore, is resentful.

These characteristics could change depending on school climate and culture, but it would be surprising if these findings were not representative of most secondary schools.

According to fifty-five high school students surveyed by the Edmonton Journal (Oct. 15, 1993), the top five reasons for skipping are:

1. Peer pressure: "Your friends push you. Either they're skipping or they've got a spare. So, why not?"
2. Stress: "You've got problems with your homework or maybe your part-time job. Or you and your boyfriend are fighting. You're tired."
3. Don't like the teacher and the class is boring: "How can they expect us to be enthused when the teacher stands at the front of the room and just lectures for the whole class? And he doesn't even look like he's interested."
4. Just because they want to: "I want to be with my boyfriend. Or have a break. Sometimes I just need to get away."
5. Don't have their homework done: "Some teachers give you the third-degree in front of everybody. They humiliate you. You're just

better off not going."

About three-fifths of the students The Journal surveyed wanted the same freedom university students have. They thought they could police themselves and be in class more than eighty percent of the time. The problem is, eighty per cent of the time is not good enough in the minds of most educators, even if the students could do it.

ATTENDANCE AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Studies that correlate regular attendance and success in school as measured by grades, standardized test scores, and a positive attitude toward school are easily found. These studies point out that students who, because of various policies and procedures, begin to attend more often have better success. They also indicate that those students who attend less regularly earn lower grades and show less than expected gains (Craig, 1990).

In the face of this evidence there are many educators who believe that poor attendance is a matter of personal choice. They feel that it should be the business of the home, not of the school, to encourage or cajole students into better attendance. It seems ironic, however, that while school boards are demanding more accountability and Effective Schools literature is saying more learning engaged time is important, so many teachers do not see the school's obligation to ensure students' presence.

Administrators and staff members who take the opposite view, that the school has to do something, have several options available to them, including policy review. Before policy revision is undertaken Eastwold (1989) in his article, Attendance is Important: Combating Truancy In The Secondary School, suggests the following questions should be asked (p. 29).

- Have chronic truants been identified and counselled?
- When students are truant, is there an effort to contact the home?
- Is there consistent enforcement of the existing attendance policy by all teachers and administration?
- Is good attendance valued and rewarded in the classroom?
- Finally, and most important, is there an instructional incentive program for the student to be present on a regular basis?

If students feel they can miss class and still get a desired grade, there may not be an identified need to attend. Teachers should realize their classes must consist of critical instruction that cannot be "made up" by reading the text and doing the questions at the end of the chapter. A classroom environment that includes effective instruction and management techniques such as mastery learning, stated learning objectives, varied delivery, periodic evaluation and feedback, and critical thinking skills, for example, is more likely to draw students to class.

"They will either enjoy the class and not want to miss or they will

feel that they cannot afford to miss. In both cases, they may attend on a more frequent basis. Instruction either has a value or it does not. If a student can pass doing the make-up work, perhaps American high school students should all receive their diploma from correspondence schools." (Eastwold, p. 31)

TYPES OF POLICIES

If revision of the school attendance policy seems a necessary part of the solution, there is no shortage of literature providing advice on the subject. According to Rood (1989) schools generally implement one of three types of policies.

1. Policies that attempt to provide incentives for good attendance.
2. Policies that dispense punitive consequences, such as detention or suspensions.
3. Restrictive and punitive policies that penalize students academically by withholding credits or lowering grades when a number of predetermined absences is reached. (p. 23)

Incentive policies that reward students have had some success in increasing attendance rates. Rewards can include certificates and pins, exemption from final exams, and adding marks on top of grades already earned. Hoback (1976) concludes in his research regarding the problem of student absenteeism that, "a successful attendance policy needs to be based

on positive reinforcement -- making each student feel needed, wanted, and involved in his or her own education" (p. 20). These policies have their supporters, but some researchers question their effectiveness, as gifts do not generally motivate chronic truants.

Yet doling out detentions and suspensions to truants has not proven to be effective in controlling absenteeism either. Usually this type of policy does not provide for a final consequence. Although no research on the effectiveness of suspensions was found, the prevalent feeling is that this approach may just compound the problem by making an already poor attendance record even worse.

Punitive and restrictive policies have many adherents. Penalties can run from making up assignments to removal from courses, but withholding credit or lowering grades for excessive absence seems to be the most widely used type of restriction. This type of consequence came into vogue during the mid-1970's when absenteeism in high schools began its upward climb. Academic penalties were found to be successful in lowering absenteeism in some categories of truants (Brokowski, 1979).

The variables in restrictive policies are numerous. The number of absences that can cause loss of credit of grades will vary from district to district, but usually will fall between 7 and 12 per semester. Generally, once the maximum number has been reached, extensions will be granted

only for personal or family illness or a death in the immediate family.

"A traditional authoritarian approach to attendance problems can't work in today's schools", is the strongly stated opinion of Hoback (1976 p. 20). He goes on to cite several problems created by the punitive, authoritarian approach:

- It creates a climate of adversary game-playing between students and administration.
- It often penalizes the honest student or the student with honest parents, while the liars and the cheats beat the system.
- It encourages dependency and immaturity in the student. He feels no sense of commitment or responsibility and is eager to get away with whatever he can.
- An inordinate amount of staff time is spent in the "busy-work" of hassling all students instead of focusing major efforts on helping the student who has problems. (p.22)

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Regardless of the type of policy a district decides to use, the following considerations must be addressed: (see, for example, Eastwold 1989; Brokowski and Dempsey, 1978; Miller, 1986)

1. The policy should be written, with input from all affected groups.
2. It should provide for firm, fair administration of consequences.

3. Its purpose should be educational not punitive.
4. It should include a statement that attendance is the responsibility of the student and parents.
5. There must be an effective reporting and recording procedure.
6. It must be specific, but flexible enough to accommodate extenuating circumstances.
7. It must have strong support from the board of education.

Although these considerations are not meant to be inclusive, they provide a framework for use when beginning the task of policy revision.

CONCLUSION

It must be remembered that the school, through policy adoption and uniform enforcement, can only encourage students to attend. The final responsibility must fall to the students and their parents. Schools simply cannot be expected to expend the time and energy to be attendance detectives. The public has too many other expectations of schools. If an adequate education is offered, it is the student who must decide to what degree he or she is willing to accept it.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN
GENERAL METHOD

Superintendents, or their assistants, in the Public and Catholic School Systems of Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat were asked to identify the High School in their system with the best student attendance. All, but one of the schools identified provided a copy of an attendance policy and procedures. The policies were used to generate a list of different characteristics presently used in attendance policies in Alberta.

A questionnaire was developed from these characteristics and used as the primary instrument in this study to:

1. Examine student and teacher attitudes toward these characteristics.
2. Determine which of these characteristics were perceived as most effective by students and teachers.

RESEARCH POPULATION

Two schools were chosen in which to do the study. The rural school was from the Cypress School Division and had a student population of sixty students taught by ten teachers. The urban school was from the Medicine Hat Catholic School District and had a student population of five hundred and fifteen students taught by thirty-four teachers. The two

administrators in each school were included as part of each teaching staff.

At the rural school fifty-eight out of sixty students and eight out of ten staff completed the questionnaire. Four hundred and forty-five students out of five hundred and fifteen students and thirty-one out of thirty-four staff completed the survey in the urban school. Special Education students were not included in the survey. Students who did not have a class first period in the morning were also not included.

INSTRUMENTATION

Information from nine attendance policies collected from the ten school systems contacted across the province was used to generate a list of twenty characteristics. These characteristics were then used to develop the questionnaire items.

The questionnaire contained thirty items and was divided into three parts. Part A had twenty items to which participants were asked to respond, on a five point Likert scale. The choices of response were strongly agreed, agreed, not sure, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each item. In Part B, participants were asked to respond to ten items by indicating their opinion on a five point scale. The five possible responses were strong positive effect, a positive effect, not sure, little effect, or no effect. Part C asked respondents to identify a maximum of three items from the the ten in Part B that would have the most impact on improving

attendance of high school students. (appendix A)

The questionnaire was hand scored. Questionnaire items that did not receive a response from participants were scored as "not sure" in the calculation of the frequency distribution. A percentage score for each frequency was also calculated.

PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was done to determine if the survey instrument needed to be modified in any way to enable participants to answer the questions as honestly and accurately as possible. The questionnaire was given to three staff and fifteen students. Suggestions that were made by those respondents resulted in the following changes:

1. One item was changed in Part A and two items that were redundant were removed from Part B.
2. The response scale in Part A was changed from two choices (agree, disagree) to five choices (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree).
3. In Part B, the response scale was changed from agree-disagree, to strong positive effect, positive effect, not sure, little effect, no effect. It was determined in the pilot survey that students were agreeing or disagreeing with the item rather than indicating whether they believed the item would have an any effect on attendance rates.

4. The following note was added to help students answer items 8-10 more accurately. " A student is considered truant if he or she did not have parent or school permission to miss class."

DATA COLLECTION

In Part A, the twenty identified characteristics were formulated into statements. Responses to these statements determined those characteristics of attendance policies that were accepted by the most teachers and students.

In Part B, ten specific conditions were generated using the twenty characteristics from Part A. Responses to these items determined those conditions that were considered most effective in improving student attendance.

Finally, Part C identified the three most effective conditions out of the ten listed in Part B. Tabulation of the total population response determined the rank order of all ten conditions.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Nine out of the ten schools identified by Superintendents as having good attendance provided a copy of their policy. These nine, plus the attendance policy from the rural school that was to be surveyed, were analyzed and nineteen separate characteristics were compiled. The attendance policy of the urban school surveyed was used in this sample as well because it was one of the ten schools said to have good attendance.

There were five hundred and three student respondents (fifty-eight rural and four hundred and forty-five urban) to the questionnaire. The student population was made up of one hundred and seventy-four grade ten students (34.59%), one hundred and seventy-seven grade eleven students (35.19%), and one hundred and fifty-two grade twelve students (30.22%). Thirty-nine staff (eight rural and thirty-one urban) also responded to the same questionnaire. The staff sample population included thirty-one teachers, three counsellors, and four administrators.

The rural school was chosen for this study primarily because it is the grade one to twelve school at which I have been principal for several years. Overall percentage of attendance in the high school for the 1992-93 school year was 93%. This figure is calculated by taking attendance twice daily, at

morning and afternoon registration. The attendance policy, which has been in place for two years, sets out clear sanctions for students with excessive absences. There is no incentive program for good attendance.

The overall attendance rate at the urban school surveyed was 95% for the 1992-93 school year. Attendance records are kept by class period. Therefore, this percentage is an average of the attendance rate per class. A new attendance policy was introduced at the beginning of the 1992-93 school term. The significant change in the new policy was the introduction of an incentive program to complement the former sanctions-based policy.

ANALYSIS

Attendance Policy Characteristics

Listed below are the nineteen characteristics found in the ten attendance policies examined:

1. Parents are allowed to excuse any student absence.
2. The school determines which student absences are classified excused.
3. Students lose credit for courses and can even be removed from the educational program after a set number of unexcused absences.
4. A limit is placed on the total number of absences (excused and unexcused) a student can have.
5. Parents must contact the school by either telephone or written

message to excuse student absences.

6. The school contacts the parents of an absent student if they fail to contact the school.
7. Absences not excused within a specified number of days are classified as unexcused.
8. Students are required to attend a specific number of hours to receive credits for a course.
9. Suspensions from school are used to penalize students who are truant.
10. Students are not allowed to make up work missed due to unexcused absences.
11. Students are required to make up time missed due to unexcused absences.
12. Poor student attendance leads to poor academic achievement.
13. Attendance is the responsibility of the student and his/her parents.
14. Schools notify the home after the student has missed a specific number of days.
15. It is the student's responsibility to obtain work missed due to excused absences.
16. Special circumstances are considered before applying attendance policy sanctions.

17. Incentive programs are used to encourage good student attendance.
18. Bonus marks are issued to students with good attendance.
19. Teachers are encouraged to make their classes informative and interesting.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Part A: Characteristics

For the purpose of analyzing results from the questionnaire the following guidelines were used. Agreement was reported if 50% or more of the respondents chose the strongly agree or agree categories.

Disagreement with a questionnaire item meant that 50% or more of the respondents chose the disagree or strongly disagree categories.

Tables 1(A) and 2(A) summarize the student responses from the rural and urban schools respectively. Each table reports the frequency and percentage response by grade and by total school population.

TABLE 1 (A) FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE RESPONSES RURAL STUDENTS

	SA				A				NS				D				SD			
	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T
1	7	11	10	28	12	3	3	18	2	3	1	6	3	2	1	6	0	0	0	0
%	29	58	66	48	50	16	20	31	8	16	7	16	13	11	7	10	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0	5	4	4	13	6	3	2	11	11	7	7	25	2	5	2	9
%	0	0	0	0	21	21	26	22	25	16	13	19	46	37	47	43	8	26	13	16
3	1	3	1	5	13	3	3	19	2	2	1	5	6	8	8	22	2	3	2	7
%	4	16	7	9	54	16	20	33	8	11	7	9	25	42	53	38	8	16	13	12
4	4	4	4	12	5	8	7	20	5	0	0	5	8	7	3	15	2	0	1	3
%	17	21	27	21	21	42	47	34	21	0	0	9	33	37	20	31	8	0	7	5
5	6	0	3	9	12	14	7	33	3	1	1	5	2	3	3	8	1	1	1	3
%	25	0	20	16	50	74	47	57	13	5	7	9	8	16	20	14	4	5	7	5
6	8	4	3	15	10	9	8	27	2	2	2	6	3	3	2	8	1	1	0	2
%	33	21	20	26	42	47	53	47	8	11	13	18	13	16	13	14	4	5	0	3
7	3	0	0	3	9	2	4	15	2	3	2	7	7	7	5	19	3	7	4	14
%	13	0	0	5	38	11	26	26	8	16	13	12	29	37	33	33	13	37	27	24
8	2	0	1	3	4	5	2	11	3	2	2	7	8	8	6	20	7	4	5	16
%	8	0	7	5	17	26	13	19	13	11	13	12	33	42	40	34	29	21	33	28
9	5	2	2	9	5	5	5	15	2	3	1	6	9	5	4	18	3	4	3	10
%	21	11	13	16	21	26	33	26	8	16	7	10	38	26	27	31	13	21	20	17
10	3	2	3	8	9	4	6	19	0	1	0	1	8	7	5	20	4	5	1	10
%	13	11	20	14	38	21	40	33	0	5	0	2	33	37	33	34	17	26	7	17
11	1	0	0	1	2	5	3	10	2	1	1	4	17	6	5	28	4	7	6	17
%	4	0	0	2	8	26	20	17	8	5	7	7	71	32	33	47	17	37	40	29
12	8	6	4	18	15	10	10	35	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	0
%	33	32	27	31	63	53	67	60	0	5	7	3	4	11	0	5	0	0	0	0
13	7	5	8	20	14	13	7	34	3	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
%	29	26	53	34	58	68	47	59	13	5	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	8	6	3	17	12	11	10	33	4	1	0	5	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	2
%	33	32	20	29	50	58	67	57	17	5	0	9	0	0	7	2	0	5	7	3
15	8	2	5	15	8	12	6	26	3	2	2	7	4	2	2	8	1	1	0	2
%	33	11	33	26	33	63	40	45	13	11	13	12	17	11	13	14	4	5	0	3
16	3	1	3	7	9	8	6	23	2	0	1	3	8	7	4	19	2	3	1	6
%	13	5	20	12	38	42	40	40	8	0	7	5	33	37	27	33	8	16	7	10
17	2	1	1	4	12	12	10	34	7	2	1	10	2	2	2	6	1	2	1	4
%	8	5	7	7	50	63	67	59	29	11	7	17	8	11	13	10	4	11	7	7
18	10	10	15	35	3	8	6	17	0	0	2	2	2	1	1	4	0	0	0	0
%	42	53	100	60	13	42	40	29	0	0	13	3	8	5	7	7	0	0	0	0
19	4	7	8	19	7	7	8	22	2	4	4	10	2	0	4	6	0	1	0	1
%	17	37	53	33	29	37	53	38	8	21	27	17	8	0	27	10	0	5	0	2
20	1	2	5	8	5	7	9	21	1	4	4	9	6	4	5	15	2	2	1	5
%	4	11	33	14	21	37	60	36	4	21	27	16	25	21	33	26	8	11	7	9

TABLE 2(A) FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE RESPONSES URBAN STUDENTS

	SA				A				NS				D				SD			
	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T
1	66	82	71	219	61	57	41	159	10	0	7	17	13	14	15	42	0	5	3	8
%	42	55	52	49	39	38	30	36	6	0	5	4	8	9	11	9	0	3	2	2
2	10	2	0	12	24	24	20	65	24	22	15	61	54	61	59	174	38	52	43	133
%	6	1	0	3	15	14	15	15	15	15	11	14	34	41	43	39	24	34	31	30
3	16	2	6	24	17	12	14	43	19	18	6	43	44	24	35	103	102	54	78	234
%	10	1	4	5	11	8	10	10	12	12	4	10	28	16	26	23	68	34	37	53
4	40	61	37	138	57	70	72	199	10	13	10	33	36	9	20	65	9	7	0	12
%	25	41	27	31	36	47	53	45	6	9	7	7	23	6	15	15	6	5	0	3
5	33	26	19	78	62	63	53	178	15	13	16	44	16	4	35	55	24	15	16	85
%	21	17	14	18	39	42	39	40	9	9	12	10	10	3	26	12	15	10	12	19
6	42	60	36	138	69	57	69	195	6	22	8	36	25	13	16	54	8	6	8	22
%	27	40	26	31	44	38	50	44	4	15	6	8	16	9	12	12	5	4	6	5
7	18	28	22	68	25	46	38	109	20	21	13	54	49	32	38	119	38	31	27	96
%	11	19	16	15	16	31	28	24	13	14	9	12	31	21	28	27	24	21	20	22
8	12	3	3	18	28	24	14	66	18	29	17	64	51	54	67	172	41	48	36	125
%	8	2	2	4	18	16	10	15	11	19	12	14	32	36	26	39	26	32	26	28
9	8	12	8	28	50	43	35	128	19	21	9	49	41	52	53	146	32	30	32	94
%	5	8	6	6	32	29	26	29	12	14	7	11	26	35	39	33	20	20	23	21
10	36	26	23	85	65	60	55	180	9	9	6	24	30	29	38	97	12	34	15	61
%	23	17	17	19	41	40	40	40	6	6	4	5	19	19	28	22	8	23	11	14
11	15	16	17	48	46	42	31	119	23	16	8	47	45	45	55	145	21	39	26	86
%	9	11	12	11	29	28	23	27	15	11	6	11	28	30	40	33	13	26	19	19
12	53	75	53	181	84	71	68	223	4	3	9	16	6	9	7	22	3	0	0	3
%	34	50	39	41	53	47	50	50	3	2	7	4	4	6	5	5	2	0	0	1
13	41	73	48	162	90	63	75	228	10	11	7	28	9	9	7	25	0	2	0	2
%	26	49	35	36	57	42	55	51	6	7	5	6	6	6	5	6	0	1	0	4
14	33	64	48	145	95	70	72	237	16	15	10	41	4	7	7	18	2	2	0	4
%	21	43	35	33	60	47	53	53	10	10	7	9	3	5	5	4	1	1	0	1
15	32	27	21	80	57	79	61	197	18	20	23	61	35	28	25	88	8	4	7	19
%	20	18	15	18	36	53	45	44	11	13	17	14	22	19	18	20	5	3	5	4
16	24	29	11	64	85	73	92	250	13	20	8	41	22	20	16	58	6	6	10	22
%	15	19	8	14	54	49	67	56	8	13	6	9	14	13	12	13	4	4	7	5
17	22	33	13	68	74	71	61	206	21	21	24	66	21	29	30	80	12	4	9	25
%	14	22	9	15	47	47	45	46	13	14	18	15	13	19	22	18	8	3	7	6
18	75	71	105	251	62	61	49	172	5	2	4	11	6	3	0	9	2	0	0	2
%	47	47	77	56	39	41	36	39	3	1	3	2	4	2	0	2	1	0	0	4
19	74	51	91	216	61	74	44	179	13	6	10	29	2	7	11	20	0	0	12	12
%	47	34	66	49	39	49	32	40	8	4	7	7	1	5	8	4	0	0	9	3
20	33	35	37	105	28	37	35	100	31	13	42	86	40	40	27	107	18	12	17	47
%	24	13	27	24	18	25	26	22	20	9	31	19	25	27	20	24	11	8	12	11

Students in Grades Ten, Eleven, and Twelve differed in their perceptions on items #3 and #7. This was the case in both the rural and urban school populations. For example:

Item #3: "Excused and unexcused absences should count the same on your attendance record". Grade Tens disagreed (61%), Grade Elevens disagreed (78%), Grade Twelves agreed (74%).

Item #7: "The number of classes a student should be allowed to miss before credits are withdrawn should depend on the student's academic standing in the class". Grade Tens disagreed (56%), in Grade Eleven there were the same number of respondents who agreed and disagreed, and in Grade Twelve there was slight disagreement with the item (48% disagreed, 42% agreed).

Rural and urban students' perceptions were the same on all items except #10.

Item #10: "Truant students should receive 0% for any assignments or tests that they missed while they were away". Rural students tended to disagree with this statement (47% agreed, 51% disagreed). Urban students tended to agree with it (56% agreed, 36% disagreed).

Rural and urban teacher responses are compared in Table 3 (A). Their perceptions were the same on all items except #19. Urban teachers believe that incentive programs should be used to encourage student

attendance (69% agreed) whereas 64% of the rural teachers disagreed.

TABLE 3 (A) FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGE TEACHERS

	SA		A		NS		D		SD	
	RURAL	URBAN								
1	0	6	0	4	0	3	3	7	4	11
%	0	19	0	13	0	10	38	23	50	35
2	0	7	6	15	0	0	2	5	0	4
%	0	23	75	48	0	0	25	16	0	13
3	1	7	3	8	0	1	4	10	0	5
%	13	23	38	26	0	3	50	32	0	16
4	0	2	2	5	1	2	3	13	2	8
%	0	6	25	16	13	6	38	42	25	26
5	4	18	3	9	0	1	1	2	0	1
%	50	58	38	29	0	3	13	6	0	3
6	0	3	8	16	0	4	0	5	0	3
%	0	10	100	52	0	13	0	16	0	10
7	0	1	2	6	0	3	5	14	1	7
%	0	3	25	19	0	10	63	45	13	23
8	0	10	5	6	1	2	1	10	1	3
%	0	32	63	19	13	6	13	32	13	10
9	0	9	5	7	0	2	3	7	0	6
%	0	29	63	23	0	6	38	23	0	19
10	3	19	5	5	0	1	0	0	0	1
%	38	61	63	16	0	3	0	0	0	3
11	1	11	4	7	0	1	2	6	1	6
%	13	35	50	23	0	3	25	19	13	19
12	4	23	4	7	0	1	0	0	0	0
%	50	74	50	23	0	3	0	0	0	0
13	8	25	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
%	100	81	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0
14	5	25	3	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
%	63	81	38	19	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	3	25	5	5	0	1	0	0	0	0
%	38	81	63	16	0	3	0	0	0	0
16	4	23	4	6	0	0	0	1	0	0
%	50	74	50	19	0	0	0	3	0	0
17	2	8	6	13	0	4	0	3	0	3
%	25	26	75	42	0	13	0	10	0	10
18	3	11	3	11	0	3	1	2	1	4
%	38	35	38	35	0	10	13	6	13	13
19	1	7	1	12	1	3	4	2	1	7
%	13	23	13	39	13	10	50	6	13	23
20	0	4	1	3	0	2	4	10	2	11
%	0	13	13	10	0	6	50	32	25	35

Table 4 (A) summarizes the responses of the thirty-nine teachers and five hundred and three students who completed the survey.

TABLE 4(A) FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGE TOTALS (PUPIL / STAFF)

	SA		A		NS		D		SD	
	PUPIL	STAFF								
1	247	6	177	5	23	3	48	10	8	15
%	49	15	35	13	5	8	10	26	2	38
2	12	7	78	21	72	0	199	7	142	4
%	2	18	16	54	14	0	40	18	28	10
3	60	8	120	11	62	1	110	14	163	5
%	12	21	24	28	12	3	22	36	32	13
4	135	2	200	7	42	3	92	16	31	10
%	27	5	40	18	8	8	18	41	6	26
5	87	22	211	12	49	1	63	3	88	1
%	17	56	42	31	10	3	13	8	17	3
6	153	3	222	24	42	4	62	5	24	3
%	30	8	44	62	8	10	12	13	5	8
7	71	1	124	8	61	3	138	19	110	8
%	14	3	25	21	12	8	27	49	22	21
8	21	10	77	11	71	3	192	11	141	4
%	4	26	15	28	14	8	38	28	28	10
9	37	9	143	12	55	2	164	10	104	6
%	7	23	28	31	11	5	33	26	21	15
10	93	22	199	10	25	1	117	0	71	1
%	18	56	40	26	5	3	23	0	14	3
11	52	12	136	11	51	1	162	8	103	7
%	10	31	27	28	10	3	32	21	21	18
12	199	27	258	11	18	1	25	0	3	0
%	40	69	51	28	4	3	5	0	1	0
13	182	33	262	6	32	0	25	0	2	0
%	36	85	52	15	6	0	5	0	0	0
14	162	30	270	9	46	0	19	0	6	0
%	32	77	54	23	9	0	4	0	1	0
15	95	28	223	10	68	1	96	0	21	0
%	19	72	44	26	14	3	19	0	4	0
16	71	27	273	10	44	0	77	1	28	0
%	14	69	54	26	9	0	15	3	6	0
17	72	10	240	19	76	4	86	3	29	3
%	14	26	48	49	15	10	17	8	6	8
18	286	14	189	14	13	3	13	3	2	5
%	57	36	38	36	3	8	3	8	0	13
19	235	8	201	12	39	4	26	6	13	8
%	47	21	40	31	8	10	5	15	3	21
20	113	4	121	4	95	2	122	14	52	13
%	22	10	24	10	19	5	24	36	10	33

Teachers' and students' perceptions were the same on all items except; #1, #2, #3, #4, #8, #9, #11, and #20.

Item #1: "Parents should have the right to excuse all absences". Eighty-four percent of the students agreed while only twenty-eight percent of the teachers believed parents should have this right.

Item #2: "The school should have the right to determine if a student absence is excused or unexcused". Seventy-two percent of teachers agreed while only eighteen percent of the students believed teachers should have this right.

Item #3: "The school should have the right to determine if a student absence is excused or unexcused". Teachers were not sure on this issue (49% agreed and 49% disagreed). Students, on the other hand, tended to disagree with the statement (53% disagreed and 36% agreed). It should be noted that this is the item where students in Grade Twelve had a different opinion than students in Grades Ten and Eleven. Seventy-four percent of Grade Twelve students agreed that excused and unexcused absences should count the same, whereas seventy percent of students in Grades Ten and Eleven disagreed.

Item #4: "Only unexcused absences should count on your attendance record". Sixty-seven percent of students believed that only unexcused absences should count, whereas the same percentage (67%) of

teachers disagreed.

Item #9: "Truant students should be required to make up the time they missed at noon hour or after school". Neither group had strong feelings about this topic. Students tended to disagree (36% agree, 54% disagree) whereas teachers tended to agree (54% agree, 41% disagree).

Item #11: "Students should not be allowed to make up work missed due to unexcused absences". Fifty-nine percent of teachers agreed with this statement, while fifty-three percent of students disagreed.

Item #20: "Attendance is the responsibility of the student and his/her parents; schools should put no limits on a high school student's attendance". Sixty-nine percent of teachers disagreed with this statement, while forty-six percent of students agreed. It should be noted that nineteen percent of the students were not sure whether they agreed or disagreed.

Students and teachers shared the same perceptions on items #5, #6, #7, #10, and #12 to #19, inclusive. Students and teachers both agree that:

1. There should be a limit to the number of classes a student is allowed to miss in a course.
2. The number of classes a student should be allowed to miss before credits are withdrawn should depend on the reasons for the

absences.

3. Truant students should receive 0% for any assignments or tests that they missed while they were away.
4. Students should be expected to make up work missed due to excused absences.
5. It is the student's responsibility to obtain work missed due to absences.
6. Excessive absences will eventually adversely affect even the best student's performance.
7. Parents have the right to be aware of all student absences.
8. Parents should verify all student absences by notes or phone calls to the school.
9. Teachers with concerns regarding the validity or frequency of a student's absences should make a parental contact.
10. Teachers should seek ways to make their classes informative and interesting , and design their instruction to ensure that regular attendance is necessary for success.
11. Incentive programs should be used to encourage good student attendance.

Item #7 was the only characteristic the both groups disagreed with.

"The number of classes a student should be allowed to miss before credits

are withdrawn should depend on the student's academic standing in the class".

Part B: Sanctions and Incentives

For the purpose of analyzing the results in Part B the categories of strong positive effect and positive effect, were combined, as were the categories of little effect and no effect. The effect each sanction or incentive was perceived to have on student attendance was considered positive if the responses in the positive category were greater than in the little and no effect categories combined.

Tables 1(B) and 2(B) summarize the student responses from the rural and urban schools respectively. Students in grades ten, eleven, and twelve in both schools did not differ in their perceptions on any of the ten items.

TABLE 1 (B) FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE RESPONSES RURAL STUDENTS

ITEM	SP				P				NS				L				NE			
	10	11	12	T																
1	5	3	1	9	11	7	7	25	4	3	2	9	2	5	4	11	2	1	1	4
%	21	16	7	16	46	37	47	43	17	16	13	16	8	26	27	19	8	5	6	7
2	2	2	3	7	2	3	4	9	7	2	1	10	8	9	5	19	5	3	3	11
%	8	11	20	12	8	16	27	16	29	11	6	17	33	47	33	33	21	16	20	19
3	3	2	2	7	8	5	9	22	2	2	0	4	6	6	4	16	5	4	0	9
%	13	11	13	12	33	26	60	38	8	11	0	7	25	32	27	28	21	21	0	16
4	6	2	1	9	7	6	7	20	6	2	3	11	1	4	2	7	4	5	2	11
%	25	11	7	16	29	32	47	34	25	11	20	19	4	21	13	12	17	26	13	19
5	5	3	3	11	11	7	8	26	3	2	1	6	3	5	4	12	2	2	0	4
%	21	16	20	19	46	37	53	45	13	11	6	10	13	26	27	21	8	11	0	7
6	3	2	1	6	9	7	6	22	6	2	1	9	3	7	5	15	3	1	2	6
%	13	11	7	10	38	37	40	38	25	11	6	16	13	37	33	26	13	5	13	10
7	10	3	1	14	6	7	5	18	1	5	2	8	5	2	5	12	2	2	2	6
%	42	16	7	24	25	37	33	31	4	26	13	14	21	11	33	21	8	11	13	10
8	15	9	9	33	3	3	2	8	1	31	1	5	4	0	3	7	1	4	0	5
%	63	47	60	57	13	16	13	14	4	6	6	9	17	0	20	12	4	21	0	9
9	11	6	7	24	5	6	6	17	3	3	0	6	4	2	2	8	1	2	0	3
%	46	32	67	41	21	32	40	29	13	16	0	10	17	11	13	14	4	11	0	5
10	7	5	0	12	10	4	5	19	4	1	1	6	1	4	4	9	2	5	5	12
%	29	26	0	21	42	21	33	33	17	5	6	10	4	21	27	16	8	26	33	21

TABLE 2 (B) FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE RESPONSES URBAN STUDENTS

	SP				P				NS				L				NE			
	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T	10	11	12	T
1	37	37	26	100	45	68	51	164	28	24	24	76	28	25	31	84	12	4	5	21
%	25	23	19	22	30	43	37	37	19	15	18	17	19	16	23	19	8	3	4	5
2	26	29	25	80	41	53	33	127	17	11	18	46	35	22	33	90	31	43	28	102
%	17	18	18	18	27	34	24	29	11	7	13	10	23	14	24	20	21	27	20	2
3	26	29	39	94	53	61	33	137	16	14	12	42	27	27	21	75	28	27	32	87
%	17	18	28	21	35	39	24	31	11	9	9	9	18	17	15	17	19	17	23	20
4	41	37	28	106	35	29	29	93	18	33	16	67	24	19	22	65	32	40	42	114
%	27	23	20	24	23	18	21	21	12	21	12	15	16	12	16	15	21	25	31	26
5	35	39	25	99	50	56	47	153	13	15	15	43	31	31	38	100	21	17	12	50
%	23	25	18	22	33	35	34	34	9	9	11	10	21	20	28	22	14	11	9	11
6	26	28	18	72	60	48	47	155	16	20	25	61	26	44	32	102	22	18	14	54
%	17	18	13	16	40	30	34	35	11	13	18	14	17	28	23	23	15	11	10	12
7	68	46	42	156	41	75	45	161	5	2	10	17	23	16	29	68	14	19	10	43
%	45	29	31	35	27	47	33	36	3	1	7	4	15	10	21	15	9	12	7	10
8	103	109	82	294	29	30	29	88	6	5	21	33	6	6	4	16	6	8	1	15
%	69	69	60	66	19	19	21	20	4	3	15	7	4	4	4	4	4	5	7	3
9	64	92	74	230	61	51	37	149	9	4	9	22	16	7	14	37	0	4	3	7
%	43	58	54	52	41	32	27	33	6	3	7	5	11	4	10	8	0	3	2	2
10	51	58	46	155	51	48	43	142	10	10	13	33	18	22	22	62	20	20	13	53
%	34	37	34	35	34	30	31	32	6	6	9	7	12	14	16	14	13	13	9	12

All students in the urban school believed that the ten conditions listed in Part B would have a positive effect on attendance. The rural students agreed with their counterparts on all items except #2.

Item #2: "Students who have more than 4 unexcused absences in a course will be removed from the course". Only twenty-seven percent of rural students thought this would have a positive effect. Fifty-five percent felt it would have little or no effect.

Table 3 (B) compares responses of teachers in the rural school with those of teachers in the urban school. All teachers in the rural school believed that the ten conditions would have a positive effect on attendance.

The urban teachers agreed with their colleagues on all items except #3.

TABLE 3(B) FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGE TEACHERS

	SP		P		NS		L		NE	
	RURAL	URBAN								
1	3	11	5	13	0	4	0	2	0	1
%	38	35	63	42	0	13	0	6	0	3
2	2	11	6	12	0	3	0	4	0	2
%	25	35	75	39	0	10	0	13	0	6
3	2	7	4	4	1	4	1	7	0	8
%	25	23	50	13	13	13	13	23	0	26
4	3	7	4	9	1	5	0	4	0	6
%	38	23	50	29	13	16	0	13	0	19
5	2	11	5	12	1	3	0	3	0	2
%	25	35	63	39	13	10	0	10	0	6
6	1	9	7	13	0	1	0	7	0	1
%	13	29	88	42	0	3	0	23	0	3
7	2	12	2	11	0	1	4	3	0	4
%	25	39	25	35	0	3	50	10	0	13
8	6	7	2	11	0	6	0	4	0	3
%	75	23	25	35	0	19	0	13	0	10
9	4	7	4	14	0	2	0	2	0	5
%	50	23	50	45	0	6	0	6	0	16
10	3	8	3	8	0	5	2	5	0	5
%	38	26	38	26	0	16	25	16	0	16

Item #3: "Students will lose 2% from their mark in each course for each unexcused absence." Only thirty-six percent of urban teachers thought this would have a positive effect on a student's attendance, whereas seventy-five percent of rural teachers believed it would.

Rural teachers were split on item #7.

Item #7: "Students who have perfect attendance for the month will be eligible to have their names drawn for a prize at the end of that month." Half the rural teachers thought this would have positive effect

and half believed it would have little effect. Seventy-four percent of the teachers in the urban school, where they have an attendance incentive program, thought this would have a positive effect.

Table 4 (B) summarizes the responses of the thirty-nine teachers and five hundred and three students that completed Part B.

TABLE 4(B) FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGE TOTALS (TEACHERS/STUDENTS)

	SP		P		NS		L		NE	
	PUPIL	STAFF								
1	109	14	189	18	85	4	95	2	25	1
%	22	36	38	46	17	10	19	5	5	3
2	87	13	136	18	56	3	109	4	113	2
%	17	33	27	46	11	8	22	10	22	5
3	101	9	159	8	46	5	91	8	96	8
%	20	23	32	21	9	13	18	21	19	21
4	115	10	113	13	68	6	72	4	125	6
%	23	26	22	33	14	15	14	10	25	15
5	110	13	179	17	49	4	112	3	54	2
%	22	33	36	44	10	10	22	8	11	5
6	78	10	177	20	70	1	117	7	60	1
%	16	26	35	51	14	3	23	18	12	3
7	170	14	179	13	25	1	80	7	49	4
%	34	36	36	33	5	3	16	18	10	10
8	327	13	96	13	38	6	23	4	20	3
%	65	33	19	33	8	15	5	10	4	8
9	254	11	166	18	28	2	45	2	10	5
%	50	28	33	46	6	5	9	5	2	13
10	167	11	161	11	39	5	71	7	65	5
%	33	28	32	28	8	13	14	18	13	13

An analysis of total teacher and total student responses shows that both groups agree that all ten conditions could have a positive effect on student attendance. It is interesting to note that on the first six items in Part B, which are sanctions, the percentage of teachers' responses in the

strongly positive and positive effect categories is higher than that of the students. On the last four items, which are incentives, student responses are much higher in the positive effect categories.

Part C: The Conditions Rank-ordered

In Part C respondents were asked to choose the three conditions from Part B that they believed would have the most effect on improving attendance of high school students.

Tables 1 (C) compares the frequency and percentage responses by rural and urban students and teachers.

TABLE 1(C) FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGE

ITEM	STUDENTS		TEACHERS		TOTALS	
	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	STUDENTS	TEACHERS
1	12	49	3	6	61	9
%	21	11	38	19	12	23
2	4	35	0	10	39	10
%	7	8	0	32	8	26
3	7	53	2	2	60	4
%	12	12	25	6	12	10
4	12	50	2	4	62	4
%	21	11	25	13	12	10
5	16	48	0	8	64	8
%	28	11	0	26	13	21
6	7	35	1	8	42	9
%	12	8	13	26	8	23
7	14	120	0	10	134	10
%	24	27	0	32	27	26
8	48	350	6	12	398	18
%	83	79	76	39	79	46
9	39	281	3	10	320	13
%	67	63	38	32	64	33
10	17	196	0	11	213	11
%	29	44	0	35	42	28

Both groups of students identified items #8 as being most effective, item #9 as second most effective, and item #10 as third most effective.

Urban students chose item #7 as fourth whereas rural students had item #5 as fourth and item #7 as a close fifth.

Table 1 (C) also summarizes and compares the total teacher group to the total student group. Both groups ranked items #8, #9, #10, and #7 as the top four conditions for improving student attendance. These items were:

1. Item #8: Students with very good attendance (one or two absences) in a course will not be required to write the final exam if their yearly average is above 65%.
2. Item #9: Students with perfect attendance will receive 5 bonus marks in their course, with 1 absence 4 bonus marks in their course, with 2 absences 3 bonus marks in their course, and so on.
3. Item #10: Students with good attendance (3 or fewer absences) will have first choice in selecting their courses and teachers for their next year's program.
4. Item #7: Students who have perfect attendance for the month will be eligible to have their names drawn for a prize at the end of that month.

There was no correlation between the teachers' and students' rank order of items one to six. Teachers chose these items more than did students.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The results of this study did indeed relate to the purpose, which was to determine the characteristics of attendance policies used in high schools in Alberta, determine teacher and student perceptions of these characteristics and, finally, determine their opinions on conditions (sanctions and incentives) that would improve student attendance. Through a careful process of identifying the characteristics, developing a survey instrument, and then collecting and analyzing the results, the questions proposed in this study were answered. However, it must be noted that the answers and any conclusions, implications, and recommendations derived from it must be tempered by the assumptions and limitations cited earlier in this document.

The characteristics were tabulated using attendance policies from the nine largest school systems in the province and one small rural division. The questionnaire was developed from the nineteen characteristics identified. The questionnaire was broken into three parts and consisted of a total of thirty items. The items were scored on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree in Part A and from strong positive effect to no effect in Part B. Frequency and percentage responses

were calculated on all items.

In this study two schools were chosen in which to administer the survey; one small school from the Cypress School Division and a larger urban school from Medicine Hat Catholic School District. All students and staff present on the day of administration completed the questionnaire. This sample population included five hundred and three students (fifty-eight rural and four hundred forty-five urban), and thirty-nine staff (eight rural and thirty-one urban).

Based on an the analysis of the results in Part A of the questionnaire students and teachers share the following opinions:

1. Parents need to be aware of all student absences.
2. Parents should verify all student absences.
3. Teachers should contact parents if they are concerned about student absences.
4. Teachers should encourage regular attendance by striving to make their classes as interesting and informative as possible.
5. Excessive absences will adversely affect academic achievement.
6. Students should be expected to obtain and make up work missed due to all excused and unexcused absences.
7. Truant students should not have the right to make up assignments or tests.

8. There should be a limit to the number of classes a student is allowed to miss.
9. This limit should depend on the reasons for the absences, but not on the student's academic standing in class.
10. Incentive programs should be used to encourage good attendance.

The results show that students and teachers have one basic fundamental difference of opinion when it comes to attendance. Who should have the right to decide whether a student's absence is excused or not? Students say it should be their parents. Teachers believe it should be the school. This then leads to further disagreement over how excused and unexcused absences are treated on the attendance record. This is a major issue that needs to be addressed when new attendance policies are being developed.

There were no significant differences in opinion or belief of students in different grade levels or in different environmental settings (rural-urban) towards attendance policy characteristics. There appears to be no need to develop different attendance policies for different grade levels or educational environments.

Given that a solution can be found to the problem as to who should excuse an absence, it should be possible to develop an attendance policy that both teachers and students can accept.

Parts B and C of the questionnaire sought information pertaining to the conditions that would positively effect attendance. Based on the analysis of the results students and teachers agreed that all the conditions listed, whether they were sanctions or incentives, would have somewhat of a positive effect on a student's attendance. Incentives were rated much higher by both groups than were sanctions.

The sanction whereby students would lose 2% of their mark for every unexcused absence was thought to be one of the least effective conditions by both groups. On the other hand, when it came to receiving bonus marks for not missing class teachers and students agree that this condition would have a very positive impact on attendance. This would seem to imply that conditions that result in a positive consequence will have a much greater effect on student attendance than negative consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. A longitudinal study should be made to determine the effects an attendance policy, developed with the characteristics and conditions identified as effective in this study, has on student absences over a several-year period.
2. A study which includes a greater variety of subgroups for examination (including samples of administrators, counsellors,

parents, board members) would be useful.

3. Replication of this study, including all the schools that provided the attendance policies from which the characteristics were identified, in order to confirm or reject its findings would also be useful.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

An assumption made in this study was that if policies and practices are to be supported by staff and have a positive impact on student behavior they must be considered fair, reasonable, and effective, by both groups. Based on this assumption an effective high school attendance policy should include the following:

1. A clear limit as to the number of classes a student can miss, barring extenuating circumstances.
2. A system of communication between home and school that ensures parents and teachers are aware of every absence.
3. Guidelines which do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. An absence is an absence unless it is a truancy.
4. A system which allows the school, in consultation with the home, to deal with each truant student on an individual basis and outside the regular attendance policy. Suspension from school should not be one of the penalties imposed.
5. Clear guidelines as to when assignments are due and makeup exams

are to be written after an absence.

6. A homework "buddy system", or something similar, which will allow students who are absent a way of knowing what work they missed before their return.
7. Conditions that focus on rewarding students for good attendance rather than penalizing poor attendance. Incentives such as exemptions from final exams, bonus marks, and first choice of courses and teachers for the next term, are worth considering.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study I wasn't sure if there would be major differences between the perceptions of students and teachers in regards to attendance policy characteristics and conditions.

The results of the study have helped answer that question. There was a significant difference in student and teacher perceptions of attendance policy characteristics. Students and teachers disagreed on eight out of twenty items in the questionnaire. Yet, six out of the eight items where there was disagreement related to the uneasiness that students have with the school deciding which absences should be excused and which should not. School Boards would do well to set what they believe to be a fair and reasonable amount of time students can miss and still earn credits for a course and allow parents to excuse their students absences within

these limits.

The question as to whether suspensions and "make-up-time" should be employed as penalties for truancy was the other contentious issue between students and staff. It seems to follow that if parents should be given the right to excuse an absence they then also should be given the responsibility of administering what they believe is appropriate punishment for absences they don't approve. The school's main responsibility then is to ensure that parents are well informed of all student absences and then to apply their policy on maximum allowable absences fairly and consistently.

Finally, a successful attendance policy should have sanctions that hold students accountable for their education, but most of all the policy needs to be strongly based on incentives that will make each student feel needed, wanted and an important part the school.

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APPENDIX A

HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

GRADE: _____

AGE: _____

SEX: _____ (M/F)

PART A

The following is a list of characteristics found in a sample of attendance policies taken from Alberta high schools. After each characteristic indicate if you strongly agree, agree, are not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement. Please circle your appropriate response.

[SA-strongly agree, A-agree, NS-not sure, D-disagree, SD-strongly disagree]

1. Parents should have the right to excuse all absences. SA A NS D SD
 2. The school should have the right to determine if a student absence is excused or unexcused. SA A NS D SD
 3. Excused and unexcused absences should count the same on your attendance record. SA A NS D SD
 4. Only unexcused absences should count on your attendance record. SA A NS D SD
 5. There should be a limit to the number of classes a student is allowed to miss in a course. SA A NS D SD
 6. The number of classes a student should be allowed to miss before credits are withdrawn should depend on the reasons for the absences. SA A NS D SD
 7. The number of classes a student should be allowed to miss before credits are withdrawn should depend on the student's academic standing in the class. SA A NS D SD
- The following applies to questions 8, 9, and 10. Note: "A student is considered truant if he or she did not have parent or school permission to miss class."**
8. Suspension from school should be used to penalize students who are truant. SA A NS D SD
 9. Truant students should be required to make up the time they missed at noon hour or after school. SA A NS D SD
 10. Truant students should receive 0% for any assignment of tests that they missed while they were away. SA A NS D SD
 11. Students should not be allowed to make up work missed due to unexcused absences. SA A NS D SD
 12. Students should be expected to make up work missed due to excused absences. SA A NS D SD
 13. It is the student's responsibility to obtain work missed due to absences. SA A NS D SD
 14. Excessive absences will eventually adversely affect even the best student's performance. SA A NS D SD
 15. Parents have the right to be aware of all student absences. SA A NS D SD
 16. Parents should verify all student absences by notes or phone calls to the school. SA A NS D SD
 17. Teachers with concerns regarding the validity or frequency of a student's absences should make a parental contact. SA A NS D SD

18. *Teachers should seek ways to make their classes informative and interesting, and design their instruction to ensure that regular attendance is necessary for success.* SA A NS D SD
19. *Incentive programs (e.g. prizes, awards, extra privileges) should be used to encourage good student attendance.* SA A NS D SD
20. *Attendance is the responsibility of the student and his/her parent; schools should put no limits on a high school student's attendance.* SA A NS D SD

PART B

The following are conditions set down in various high school attendance policies in Alberta. Please indicate whether you believe these conditions would have a strong positive effect, a positive effect, little effect or no effect on your attendance if you were a student in that school. Please circle your appropriate response.

[SP-strong positive effect, P-positive effect, NS-not sure, L-little effect, NE-no effect]

1. *Students who miss more than 12 classes in a course will lose their credits in the course unless there are extenuating circumstances.* SP P NS L NE
2. *Students who have more than 4 unexcused absences in a course will be removed from that course.* SP P NS L NE
3. *Students will lose 2% from their mark in each course for each unexcused absence.* SP P NS L NE
4. *Students who are truant will be given a warning on their first offence, a one-day in-school suspension on the second offence, a two-day suspension on the third offence, and will be expelled from school on the fourth offence.* SP P NS L NE
5. *Students who are truant from school will be given a mark of zero for missed assignments and tests.* SP P NS L NE
6. *The school will inform parents of the time and dates of all students absences not verified by a parent.* SP P NS L NE
7. *Students who have perfect attendance for the month will be eligible to have their names drawn for a prize at the end of that month.* SP P NS L NE
8. *Students with very good attendance (one or two absences) in a course will not be required to write the final exam if their yearly average is above 65%.* SP P NS L NE
9. *Students with perfect attendance will receive 5 bonus marks in their course, with 1 absence 4 bonus marks in their course, with 2 absences 3 bonus marks in their course, and so on.* SP P NS L NE
10. *Students with good attendance (3 or fewer absences) will have first choice in selecting their courses and teachers for their next year's program.* SP P NS L NE

PART C

Of the 10 conditions that are listed in PART B, please circle the numbers of the three you believe would be most effective in improving attendance of high school students.

Note: You may wish to circle less than three but do not circle more than three. THANK YOU.

APPENDIX B

HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

PART A

The following is a list of characteristics found in a sample of attendance policies taken from Alberta high schools. After each characteristic indicate if you strongly agree, agree, are not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement. Please circle your appropriate response.

[SA-strongly agree, A-agree, NS-not sure, D-disagree, SD-strongly disagree]

1. Parents should have the right to excuse all absences. SA A NS D SD
2. The school should have the right to determine if a student absence is excused or unexcused. SA A NS D SD
3. Excused and unexcused absences should count the same on your attendance record. SA A NS D SD
4. Only unexcused absences should count on your attendance record. SA A NS D SD
5. There should be a limit to the number of classes a student is allowed to miss in a course. SA A NS D SD
6. The number of classes a student should be allowed to miss before credits are withdrawn should depend on the reasons for the absences. SA A NS D SD
7. The number of classes a student should be allowed to miss before credits are withdrawn should depend on the student's academic standing in the class. SA A NS D SD

The following applies to questions 8, 9, and 10. Note: "A student is considered truant if he or she did not have parent or school permission to miss class."

8. Suspension from school should be used to penalize students who are truant. SA A NS D SD
9. Truant students should be required to make up the time they missed at noon hour or after school. SA A NS D SD
10. Truant students should receive 0% for any assignment of tests that they missed while they were away. SA A NS D SD
11. Students should not be allowed to make up work missed due to unexcused absences. SA A NS D SD
12. Students should be expected to make up work missed due to excused absences. SA A NS D SD
13. It is the student's responsibility to obtain work missed due to absences. SA A NS D SD
14. Excessive absences will eventually adversely affect even the best student's performance. SA A NS D SD
15. Parents have the right to be aware of all student absences. SA A NS D SD
16. Parents should verify all student absences by notes or phone calls to the school. SA A NS D SD
17. Teachers with concerns regarding the validity or frequency of a student's absences should make a parental contact. SA A NS D SD

18. *Teachers should seek ways to make their classes informative and interesting, and design their instruction to ensure that regular attendance is necessary for success.* SA A NS D SD
19. *Incentive programs (e.g. prizes, awards, extra privileges) should be used to encourage good student attendance.* SA A NS D SD
20. *Attendance is the responsibility of the student and his/her parent; schools should put no limits on a high school student's attendance.* SA A NS D SD

PART B

The following are conditions set down in various high school attendance policies in Alberta. Please indicate whether you believe these conditions would have a strong positive effect, a positive effect, little effect or no effect on the attendance of high school students. Please circle your appropriate response.

[SP-strong positive effect, P-positive effect, NS-not sure, L-little effect, NE-no effect]

1. *Students who miss more than 12 classes in a course will lose their credits in the course unless there are extenuating circumstances.* SP P NS L NE
2. *Students who have more than 4 unexcused absences in a course will be removed from that course.* SP P NS L NE
3. *Students will lose 2% from their mark in each course for each unexcused absence.* SP P NS L NE
4. *Students who are truant will be given a warning on their first offence, a one-day in-school suspension on the second offence, a two-day suspension on the third offence, and will be expelled from school on the fourth offence.* SP P NS L NE
5. *Students who are truant from school will be given a mark of zero for missed assignments and tests.* SP P NS L NE
6. *The school will inform parents of the time and dates of all students absences not verified by a parent.* SP P NS L NE
7. *Students who have perfect attendance for the month will be eligible to have their names drawn for a prize at the end of that month.* SP P NS L NE
8. *Students with very good attendance (one or two absences) in a course will not be required to write the final exam if their yearly average is above 65%.* SP P NS L NE
9. *Students with perfect attendance will receive 5 bonus marks in their course, with 1 absence 4 bonus marks in their course, with 2 absences 3 bonus marks in their course, and so on.* SP P NS L NE
10. *Students with good attendance (3 or fewer absences) will have first choice in selecting their courses and teachers for their next year's program.* SP P NS L NE

PART C

Of the 10 conditions that are listed in PART B, please circle the numbers of the three you believe would be most effective in improving attendance of high school students.

Note: You may wish to circle less than three but do not circle more than three. THANK YOU.