

**GETTING STUDENTS TO “BE THERE” IN SCHOOL: THE BE THERE CAMPAIGN  
AND A NETWORK APPROACH TO ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN  
PITTSBURGH**

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**GETTING STUDENTS TO “BE THERE” IN SCHOOL: THE BE THERE  
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ABSENTEEISM IN PITTSBURGH**

Joshua Childs, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2015

Due to the assumption that students are in class everyday barring illness or extreme life circumstances, chronic absenteeism is often referred to as a problem hidden in plain sight (Chang & Romero, 2008). Chronic absenteeism has been well documented as a persistent problem that impacts student achievement and long-term life success. In 2013, the United Way spearheaded the first use of an attendance campaign in Western Pennsylvania: the “Be There” campaign (BTC). The BTC was launched in Pittsburgh, an urban city with a predominantly Black student population, as an effort to address chronic absenteeism and improve student attendance across the city and the greater Allegheny County. Using social network analysis and semi-structured interviews, this dissertation investigates how the BTC inspired the emergence of an inter-organizational network to tackle chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

The analysis suggested that the emerging “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) has promoted a number of collaborations between organizations with different expertise and resources that could be activated to address chronic absenteeism. Main partners within the BTIN have considerable influence on the coordination of the BTC as it has sought to raise awareness throughout Allegheny County on the importance of having students attend school

every day. To date, the BTC has produced a variety of products and implemented a number of strategies in several districts and schools; however after only two years of the campaign, it is too early to see the results in regards to reducing chronic absenteeism in local schools. Nonetheless, this study provides evidence to suggest the future use of county-wide attendance campaigns as a means for organizations to collaborate to reduce chronic absenteeism in local schools.

This study adds to education policy research by conceptualizing chronic absenteeism as a “wicked problem” and applying an inter-organizational network framework to investigate organizations working to reduce chronic absenteeism. Further, this research contributes to education and public policy literature by demonstrating the value of social network analysis to map an emerging inter-organizational network involved in a county-wide effort to address an education issue.

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## **PREFACE**

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Jude for reminding me what was really important in life and that having three letters after your name is a responsibility. You kiddos made this all worth it.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*“America’s education system is based on the assumption that barring illness or an extraordinary event, students are in class every weekday. So strong is that assumption that it is not even measured. Indeed, it is the rare state education department, school district or principal that can tell you how many students have missed 10 percent or more of the school year or in the previous year missed a month or more of school...”*

-Balfanz & Byrnes, *The Importance of Being in School*, 2012

Five million to 7.5 million students are chronically absent each school year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). A student who is chronically absent has missed 10% or more of the school year for any reason, excused or unexcused (Bruner, Discher, & Chang, 2011). Students who are chronically absent miss valuable instructional and learning time, which impacts their academic achievement, engagement in school, and social development. Research has shown that students who are chronically absent in the early years of their schooling experience (K-3) are likely to drop out of high school (Chang & Romero, 2008). In recent years, realizing that average daily attendance (ADA) was not capturing the students who were chronically absent, schools, districts, and communities around the country began to investigate the role chronic absenteeism was having on the learning environment and overall achievement of their students. Many communities, for example Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, have developed policies, programs, and systems to specifically address chronic absenteeism and improve overall school attendance for all students.

This dissertation will investigate a county-wide school attendance campaign for curbing chronic absenteeism. The “Be There” campaign (BTC), a school attendance initiative in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania<sup>1</sup>, focuses on raising community awareness of the importance of going to school and galvanizing organizations to work collaboratively to address chronic absenteeism. Using an inter-organizational networks framework, I will examine the organizations involved in the BTC and how they are both formally and informally connected to one another. Also, I will examine the resources embedded within the network as a result of organizations working collaboratively, the extent to which the BTC contributes to the coordination of the network, and the BTC's strategy for reducing chronic absenteeism. The first chapter will briefly describe the local policy context that contributed to the emergence of a campaign focused on chronic absenteeism, introduce the BTC itself, and present the framework and research questions inherent to this study.

## **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Every day in the United States, approximately 10% of public school students are absent (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008). These student miss school for a variety of reasons, including illness, medical appointments, bereavement, family emergencies, lack of transportation, lack of child care, vacationing during the school year, missing school intentionally, clothing and dress issues, and school-imposed absences. Regardless of the reason, students who are out of school frequently miss valuable instructional time (Eastman, Cooney, O'Connor, & Small, 2007).

---

<sup>1</sup> "Be There" is considered a county-wide initiative (Allegheny County), but this study mainly refers to Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Public School students. However, where applicable the study will differ between Allegheny county municipalities and school districts. One should view the discussion on Pittsburgh as also relating to other parts of Allegheny County.

Furthermore, chronic absenteeism disproportionately affects students of color and those living in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty (Gottfried, 2014).

Over the years, various strategies have been used to decrease chronic absenteeism. These have included: a) criminalizing students (and/or parents) who are chronically absent, b) offering social-emotional supports to students, and c) creating school-community partnerships.<sup>2</sup> These strategies have been implemented in different locales, to different levels of scale, and with varying degrees of success. In recent years, several cities have coordinated with governmental agencies, community organizations, businesses, foundations, nonprofits, and other stakeholders to reduce chronic absenteeism through cross-sector collaboration (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2012). These citywide attendance campaigns not only involve collaborative efforts, but also “involve a multitude of prevention and intervention strategies, and create new ways to connect schools to local resources and services” (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2012, p. 4). For example, New York City implemented a citywide attendance campaign that relied on providing mentors and incentives to students to improve their school attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013).

Although existing research has examined various collaborative approaches to reducing chronic absenteeism, it is also important to examine how such efforts draw in a range of partner organizations to build civic capacity to address chronic absenteeism. Prior work has focused primarily on the effects of these collaborative approaches and their impact on reducing chronic absenteeism (e.g., Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Nauer, White, & Yerneni, 2008; Sundius & Farneth, 2008); however, these studies have not directly investigated *how* partnering organizations are working collaboratively to improve school attendance. Organizations may choose to participate

---

<sup>2</sup> Chapter two provides more information on each of these strategies, as well as the benefits and limitations of each strategy as it relates to improving school attendance.

collaboratively with other organizations to varying degrees, ranging from providing human or financial capital to delivering professional development or training activities (Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein, & Prine, 2015). Few studies have investigated the collaborative work of organizations when it comes to addressing chronic absenteeism (for exceptions, see Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Nauer et al., 2008), and to date, none have used social network analysis to “map” the collaboration relationships that emerge among partnering organizations.

## **1.2 EMERGENCE OF THE “BE THERE” CAMPAIGN**

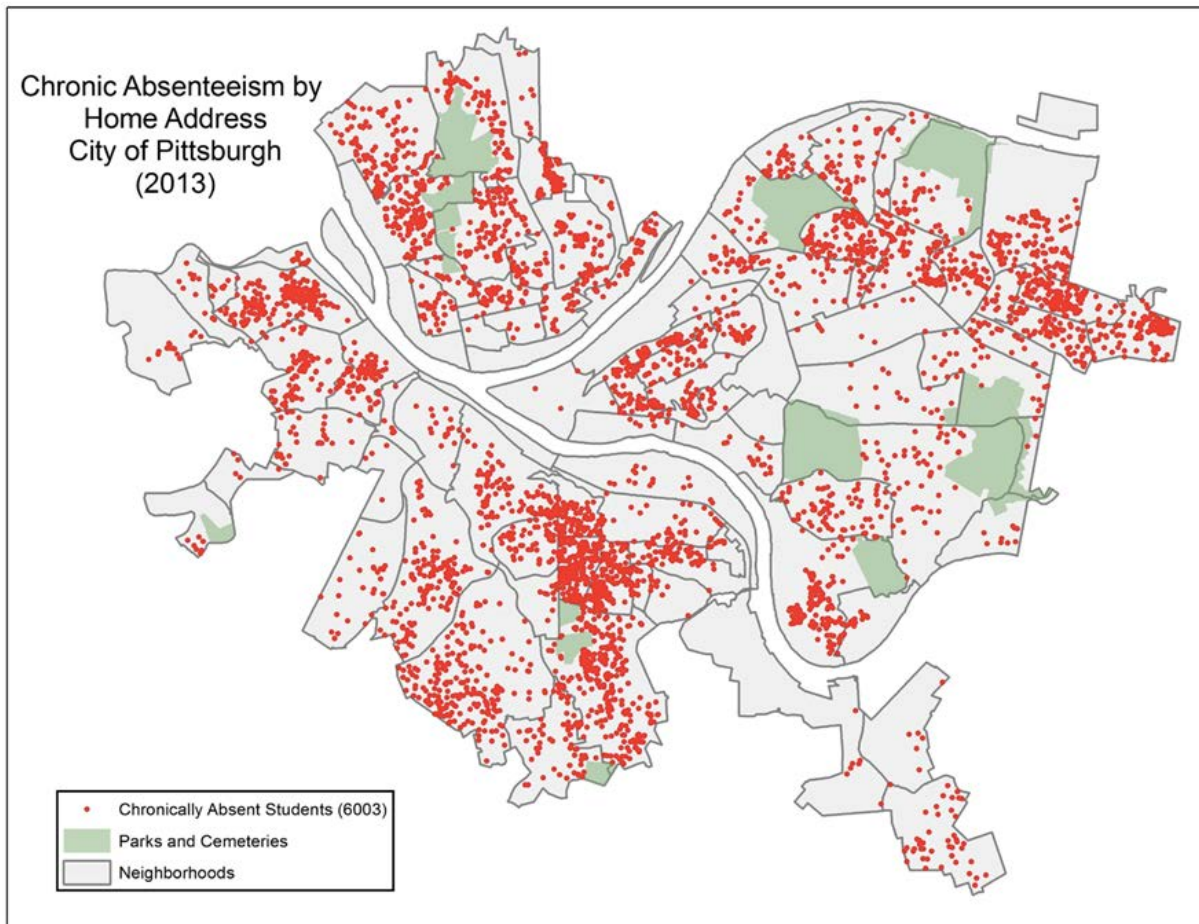
In 2013, recently released school attendance data showed troubling student attendance rates in Pittsburgh. A significant number of students had been chronically absent the previous school year, and in some of the local schools, more than 50% of students were identified as chronically absent (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2013). Figure 1 shows a map of Pittsburgh indicating chronic absenteeism by home address in 2013.

Pittsburgh is located in Allegheny County of Western Pennsylvania, and is composed of at least 90 adjoining, yet distinct neighborhood communities. Neighborhoods that are close in proximity can differ significantly in regards to racial demographics, socio-economic indicators, and cultural dynamics. This diversity is reflected in the schools within these neighborhoods For example, Homewood and Squirrel Hill are separated by only a few blocks, but they radically differ in racial demographics.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Homewood has an African American population that is 95% Black, while Squirrel Hill is 80% White (Miller, 2012).





**Figure 1.** Chronic Absenteeism by Home Address in the City of Pittsburgh (2013)

During the past decade, Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) has faced many challenges related to student performance, school attendance, and meeting state and federal standards. The district has cycled through multiple reforms to improve curriculum and instruction, school leadership quality, building facilities, assessments, and student achievement (Miller, 2012). While some of the schools in the PPS system have improved, many continue to struggle. In 2013, PPS reported that nearly 25% of their students were chronically absent (Allen & Lavorini, 2013). Table 1 provides the chronic absenteeism rates for all K-5 schools in PPS. Unsurprisingly, schools with the highest percentage of students receiving free and reduced are located in some of

Pittsburgh’s most distressed neighborhoods, and chronic absenteeism is highly correlated with free and reduced lunch ( $r=.69, p<.01$ ; see Table 2). Additionally, schools with a high percentage of students who are Black also have high rates of chronic absenteeism ( $r=.55, p<.01$ ). This correlation could indicate that students who attend these schools face numerous obstacles that prevent them from attending school regularly.

**Table 1.** Percentages of Chronically Absent Students, Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch, and Black

Students within Pittsburgh Public Schools

School Name	% Chronic Absent	% Eligible Free and Reduced	% Black
Liberty	5.1	70	70
Dilworth	5.4	75	61
Linden	6.2	70	65
Phillips	8.1	66	33
West Liberty	10.8	64	19
Beechwood	10.8	75	17
Banksville	11.2	70	13
Allegheny	14.7	87	71
Fulton	17.6	83	83
Woolslair	18.1	92	65
Concord	18.1	84	15
Westwood	19.1	85	43
Arsenal	19.2	88	72
Miller	19.4	88	96
Minadeo	19.7	70	51
Roosevelt	21.4	77	27
Grandview	21.9	80	71
Faison	23.0	86	95
Spring Hill	25.1	84	43
Weil	27.3	85	95
Lincoln	29.6	88	94

**Table 2.** Correlations Between Percentages of Chronic Absenteeism, Free and Reduced Lunch, and Black Students

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Chronic Absenteeism	16.75	7.15	--		
2. Eligible Free and Reduced Lunch	79.38	8.41	0.69**	--	
3. Percentage Black	57.10	28.31	0.40**	0.55**	--

\*\*  $p < .01$

Recognizing that the importance of attending school every day was a message not consistently articulated within the Pittsburgh community, the United Way of Allegheny County<sup>4</sup> launched the BTC in the summer of 2013. The BTC is a multifaceted initiative that encourages organizations to make school attendance a priority for school-aged youth and rallies the Pittsburgh community around the importance of kids being in school. The BTC “blends a county-wide messaging campaign with a community-based, data-driven approach to ensure that fewer students fall behind academically because of chronic absenteeism” (Attendance Works, 2014, para 2). Also, the BTC is a partnership effort that focuses on mobilizing community organizations to be invested in improving school attendance. To date, 22 school districts and more than 75 organizations have formally partnered with the United Way to educate, support, and collaborate on the chronic absenteeism issue and support methods to improve school attendance in Pittsburgh. At its onset, these initial BTC partner organizations signed a pledge card stating that they would support the efforts of the campaign to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Multiple strategies were developed and initiated by the United Way and organizations affiliated with the campaign in order to improve school attendance. Strategies that have supported the BTC have included creating and broadcasting positive messages, interventions, data sharing and accountability, kindergarten transition programs, advocating policy change,

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<sup>4</sup> Referenced in the document as United Way, unless otherwise noted.

building community awareness, and providing resources to schools (Attendance Works, 2014). These strategies have been largely successful in bringing 22 districts together around attendance, encouraging organizations to incorporate the BTC into their own work, recruiting volunteers to serve at over 30 BTC attendance events, and providing intensive interventions at two targeted PPS 6-8 schools. Additionally, organizations involved in the BTC, such as Allies for Children, have conducted studies to understand the impact chronic absenteeism is having on students and the necessary policy changes that could improve school attendance (Allies for Children, 2014).

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS**

This study examines the “Be There” campaign (BTC), specifically investigating the network of organizations affiliated with the BTC as it is involved in reducing chronic absenteeism. Also, the study explored the perceptions of leaders from seven organizations in the BTC, the relationships apparent in the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN), and the potential impact of the BTC on reducing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. Four research questions guided this study and the investigation of the BTIN. These questions are:

1. What organizations are involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County/Pittsburgh?
2. In what ways are organizations connecting and collaborating to address chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County/Pittsburgh?
3. What resources (tools, expertise, interventions, etc.) exist among the network of organizations that can assist efforts to address chronic absenteeism?

4. What is the relationship between organizations and the “Be There” attendance campaign?  
To what extent does the BTC contribute to the coordination of the network?

#### 1.4 DATA COLLECTION

By building on existing qualitative studies and incorporating social network analysis (SNA), this study will document the role of resources, collaborations between organizations, and the potential influence of the “Be There” campaign (BTC) on reducing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh was an ideal location for this study due to the concentrated effort by Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) and local organizations to measure and address chronic absenteeism. Existing empirical work has been constricted to only a few locations launching city-wide campaigns around chronic absenteeism (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2012). Within these campaigns, only a handful of organizations were doing the work to reduce chronic absenteeism. Therefore, this study will examine how the theoretical assumptions of an inter-organizational network played out in an area that had launched a city-wide attendance campaign with a number of organizations *actively* involved in implementing the work.

Russell et al.’s (2015) conceptual framework on inter-organizational networks in education will direct the data analysis of this study. Developed from an extensive review of the networked governance literature and analysis of states’ Race to the Top applications, this conceptual framework offers a guide for understanding collaborative reform efforts like the

BTC.<sup>5</sup> While the study of inter-organizational networks has been used to examine child and adult mental health services (Davis, Koroloff, & Johnsen, 2012), natural disaster responses (Kapucu & Demiroz, 2011), and education reform networks (Russell et al., 2015), the application of the inter-organizational network framework to examine a local education policy context is limited.

Data will be collected through surveys administered to organizations with an affiliation to the BTC in Pittsburgh. The survey (see Appendix A) will ask respondents questions related to their organization's activities, connection to the BTC, and focus area(s) to reduce chronic absenteeism. A key portion of the survey will involve a set of questions asking about an organization's relationship with other known organizational partners in the BTC. This will enable analysis of the network of collaborative connections among organizations working to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

Organizations involved in the BTC will be selected for survey solicitation based on two main criteria. First, organizations named as initial BTC partners will be sent surveys. Surveys will include a request for these initial BTC partners to identify other organizations with whom they work to address chronic absenteeism. These collaborating organizations will encompass the second criteria for survey selection; hence, they were also sent surveys. Survey data will be examined to understand organizations' efforts to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh and the depth of their connections to one another.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, this research will incorporate semi-structured interviews with seven key organizational partners in the BTC. The purpose of the interviews will be to test the utility of visualizing the network data. In other words, I will investigate whether visualizing the data in

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<sup>5</sup> The characteristics of the conceptual framework are described in detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> This process will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

this way enables network leaders to see things about the emergent data that might guide their ongoing work. Additionally, interviews will serve as an extra probe into these key organization's efforts to combat chronic absenteeism and will seek a deeper understanding of their organization's connection to the BTC.

## 1.5 POLICY RELEVANCE

When it comes to improving student achievement in today's education policy environment, most efforts tend to focus on creating new standards and assessments that could lead to increased student test scores (Matsumura, Slater, & Crosson, 2008), turning around low-performing schools (Carpenter, 2011; Hamilton, Heilig, & Pazey, 2014), and improving teacher quality (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). However, as researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have attempted numerous strategies to improve students' educational experiences, structural and systemic inequities persist (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). These strategies often are implemented with the underlying assumption that students are *present and engaged* each day in the learning process (Chang & Romero, 2008). If stakeholders continue to overlook the importance of chronic absenteeism and its impact on student learning, then districts across the country will continue to struggle with improving student performance as they enact policies and reforms that do not address *why* students are not in school and engaged in learning. Furthermore, until districts begin to measure chronic absenteeism and not just rely solely on average daily attendance (ADA) as the criterion for school attendance, districts across the country will continue to be unaware of the effect of chronic absenteeism on their students.

While only in existence for two years, the “Be There” campaign (BTC) has offered an opportunity to investigate an emergent inter-organizational network aimed at decreasing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. The BTC’s collaborative approach to addressing chronic absenteeism is distinct from traditional approaches, such as criminalizing students and their parents for missing school. Also, the BTC has put chronic absenteeism at the forefront of education policy conversations and decisions within Pittsburgh. While past efforts to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh resulted in organizations either working independently or partnering with a limited number of other organizations, the BTC is the first large-scale, city-wide campaign in the area to focus solely on chronic absenteeism, hence allowing for the examination of the potential for city-wide education campaigns and inter-organizational networks to tackle difficult educational issues.

In an effort to uncover both formal and informal connections between organizations, this study will employ social network analysis (SNA). Over the past several years, education research has drawn upon SNA to understand and explore education policy (e.g., Daly, Liou, Tran, Cornelissen, & Park, 2013; Finnigan & Daly, 2012; Song & Miskel, 2007). In these instances of policy network analysis, researchers “aim to construct the network governance structures through which organizational and individual actors shape educational policies and reform movements” (Au & Ferrare, p. 11, 2015). Numerous policy network analysis studies in education have focused on the role of outside organizations (i.e., organizations that are outside of the formal education system hierarchy) and the degree to which these organizations are involved in education policymaking actions and decisions (Kretchmar, Sondel, & Ferrare, 2014; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). Studies utilizing policy network analysis have focused on the nature of



relationships within a particular network and the constraints or affordances of those relations on individuals or organizations (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

This investigation of the BTC will align with other policy network analysis by using SNA graphing techniques (Ball & Junemann, 2012). As this study plans to examine the organizational connections within the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN), the shift towards prioritizing chronic absenteeism as an educational issue in Pittsburgh, and the different types of organizations working on improving school attendance, the use of SNA is supported by the methodological designs and findings of prior lines of inquiry in policy network analysis studies. As a supplement to SNA, this study’s interviews will provide insight on *how* these connections can help reduce chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh and illuminate potential policy changes that could result due to BTC.

## **1.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter illuminated the pervasive issue of chronic absenteeism, discussed the emergence of the “Be There” campaign (BTC) as one city’s response to this issue, and outlined the proposed study, including a brief overview of the conceptual framework that will guide future data collection and analyses. Additionally, it provided some insight on the policy relevance of the study at hand and emphasized the importance for districts to be aware of chronic absenteeism. The next chapter will provide a thorough review of the relevant literature in regards to chronic absenteeism, thus constructing the detailed conceptual framework that guided this study.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Students who are chronically absent (i.e., those missing an extended period of school when both excused and unexcused absences are taken into account) lose out on quality learning opportunities (Chang & Romero, 2008). Poor attendance in the beginning month(s) of the school year can predict chronic absence for the rest of the year (Olson, 2014), and students who are chronically absent in kindergarten exhibit lower levels of academic readiness by the time they reach the first grade (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Additionally, a strong relationship exists between regular school attendance and high school graduation (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; 2013). Low-income children are especially affected by chronic absenteeism, as it has a greater impact on their academic gains in literacy and mathematics (Ready, 2010).

Chronic absenteeism is a complex societal issue, otherwise known as a *wicked problem*. With Rittel and Webber originally coining the term in 1973, wicked problems are described as being complex, unpredictable, difficult to define, and challenging to solve once and for all (Agranoff & McGuire, 1998, 2004; Head & Alford, 2015; Weber & Khademian, 2008). The term has since been used to define many large-scale societal issues, and it serves as a useful conceptual tool to unpack the complexity of chronic absenteeism. By understanding chronic absenteeism as a wicked problem, we not only uncover the reasons why students miss school, but we also address policy solutions and instructional practices, possibly stimulating a new

construction of knowledge that includes the negative characteristics undermining students' education (Milner, 2012).

This chapter provides a thorough analysis of the complex and multi-faceted nature of chronic absenteeism. The analysis includes a detailed discussion of chronic absenteeism's definition and its impact on student attendance, ultimately framing chronic absenteeism as a wicked problem. Additionally, this chapter will explore the foundational aspects of an inter-organizational networks framework so as to better understand their formation. The presentation of the networks framework sculpts how education-focused inter-organizational networks can dynamically coordinate collaborative efforts to address a wicked problem such as chronic absenteeism.

## **2.1 DEFINING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason, whether excused or unexcused (Chang & Romero, 2008). Historically, school districts have measured or reported chronic absenteeism rarely because federal and state education laws have compelled districts to measure attendance based on the school's average daily attendance (ADA), which represent the *overall attendance within a school* rather than *the attendance rates of individual students* (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Attendance Works, 2013). Hence, even in a school reporting a relatively high ADA (>90%), there still can be significant chronic absenteeism issues hidden since a small group of students may be responsible for the bulk of the absences (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In this instance, students who have perfect or near-perfect attendance

“mask” the chronically absent students, resulting in high ADA reports for the school despite the presence of chronic absenteeism (Bruner et al., 2011).

Daily attendance is a critical factor in students’ academic success. Students who attend school regularly have higher standardized test scores and graduation rates, are less likely to drop out of school, and are more likely to be positively engaged in their classrooms (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). School attendance is critical in the early grades, as all children (regardless of socioeconomic status) do worse academically in first grade if they are chronically absent in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (Bruner, Discher, & Chang, 2011). Several researchers have also reported a positive correlation between student absenteeism in elementary school and dropping out of high school (Chang & Romero, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007).

In addition to receiving fewer hours of education and performing poorly on standardized tests and in-classroom exams (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Finn, 1993; Gottfried, 2011a), students who are chronically absent have been found to have an influence on their school learning environments (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). When students who are chronically absent return to school, teachers are either ill-equipped or do not have the time in today’s high-stakes accountability era to devote additional time to help them catch up to their peers (Gottfried, 2013). Chronically absent students are likely to feel alienated from their peers and teachers due to their low attendance in school (Gottfried, 2011a), and numerous researchers have indicated that students who feel alienated in school can have behavioral issues in classrooms, disengage from instruction and learning, and feel as if teachers are ignoring them because of their chronic absenteeism (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Finn, 1989; Gottfried, 2011b; Gottfried, 2013; Johnson, 2005; Roderick et. al, 1997).

Finally (and some may argue, most importantly), chronic absenteeism can have both short-term and long-term effects on students' social, emotional, academic, and physical well-being. As students become increasingly absent from school, they become more likely to engage in illegal activities, including drug use, alcohol consumption, and other criminal offenses (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Garry, 1996; Gottfried, 2009; Hallfors et al., 2002; McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004). Involvement in these types of activities has been found to be highly correlated with school disengagement (Garry, 1996; Kearney, 2008) or dropping out entirely (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Dropping out of school has long-term effects on students as they mature, leading to an early detachment from school-based health services and potential economic, social, occupational, and marital problems in adulthood (Hibbett & Fogelman, 1990; Kearney, 2008; Kogan, Luo, Murray, & Brody, 2005; Tramontina et al., 2001). Researchers have also linked increased absenteeism to an increased likelihood of self-injury, suicide attempts, and teenage pregnancy (Almedia, Aquino, & de Barros, 2006; Hallfors et al., 2002; Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

## **2.2 ROOT CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM**

A review of the research literature has painted chronic absenteeism as a significant issue that makes a lasting impact on student achievement, school performance, and ultimately, on students' long-term academic and professional success. Before discussing interventions for addressing chronic absenteeism, a careful analysis of the root causes of the problem is necessary.

According to Gottfried (2014), the causes of absenteeism are numerous, spanning multiple levels of the education system and "zones" of a student's life. These four zones include

the following: (a) students' social, mental, and physical well-being; (b) family dynamics; (c) school environment; and (d) neighborhood context. Each zone contains *drivers*, or specific triggers, that affect student attendance and contribute to chronic absenteeism (Gottfried, 2014). These various drivers emerge across different research fields, oftentimes within research literatures that are disconnected from one another and lack cohesion in defining specific terminology (Kearney 2003; 2008). In considering the causes of absenteeism, it is important to acknowledge that they usually are comprised by an amalgamation of drivers (e.g., structural conditions such as poverty, institutional racism and discrimination, and neighborhood living conditions). In other words, zones and their drivers should be viewed as intertwined with other zones and their drivers.

### **2.2.1 Students' Social, Mental, and Physical Well-Being**

The first zone of chronic absenteeism accounts for students' social, mental, and physical well-being, which involves a student's sense of self and the actions and thoughts that can impact chronic absenteeism (Jeannerod, 2003). After reviewing the literature, this author defines the following four drivers emerged as primary to this zone: (a) student engagement, (b) mental health, (c) illicit activities and behaviors, and (d) physical health. Each of these drivers exerts significant influence on student attendance and achievement at school.

#### **2.2.1.1 School Engagement**

School attendance is one of the primary indicators for assessing student engagement (Chang & Romero, 2009; Gottfried, 2011, 2014). According to Newmann (1992), *student engagement* refers to the extent to which students display psychological, physical, and emotional

investment in their learning. While school attendance does not necessarily guarantee that a student is engaged, engaged students are more likely to be physically and mentally present, participating in class work, interacting and developing relationships with teachers and peers, and expressing value for content of the instruction being delivered (Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011; Newman, Marder, & Davies, 2003). Students who do not show up to school are likely expressing an extreme form of disengagement. Absenteeism as it relates to school disengagement is oftentimes preceded by withdrawal, academic and behavioral difficulties, general dislike for school and learning, and a poor sense of belonging (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Finn, 1989; Hess, Lyons, Corsino, & Wells, 1989; Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004; Rumberger, 1995). Disengaged students often believe that the benefits of education are not worth attending school (Marzano et al., 2011).

Another element of negative student engagement is *school refusal behavior*, defined as the act of a student choosing not to attend school and/or having problems remaining at school for an entire day (Kearney, 2008). School refusal behavior includes “extended absences from school, periodic absences from school or missed classes, chronic tardiness, and intense dread about school that precipitates future nonattendance” (Kearney, 2008, p. 452). Frequently, students who exhibit school refusal behavior and disengagement from school are neither socially nor academically involved in their education, and students who become less engaged these elements of school are likely to show increased absences (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). Decreased student engagement can indicate underlying mental health issues that, if not addressed, further influence school attendance.

While student engagement continues to be one of the strongest factors tying students to becoming invested in their schooling, the process of spawning engagement proves to be a

difficult entity for school districts and educators to conceptualize. Recent research has indicated that teachers are critical on how students perceive school (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010), and they are often not equipped with strategies for engaging students in learning, as these strategies are rarely prominent in pre- or in-service preparation (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008). As such, students who become disengaged with learning often are faced with social control strategies that rely on punitive punishments, classroom management approaches that are aimed at stopping disruptive behavior, and strategies that do not re-engage students in their learning once they become disengaged (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008).

#### **2.2.1.2 Student Mental Health**

The mental health of students is another factor associated with chronic absenteeism (Wood et al., 2012); yet, the mental health of students is not often considered as a significant influence on school attendance (Kearney, 2008). Several studies have highlighted the importance of understanding mental health issues in students and its relationship to chronic absenteeism (e.g., Brandibas, Jeunier, Clanet, & Fourasté, 2004; Kearney, 2003; Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, & Gobson, 2004). For example, studies have found that students with depressive and anxiety disorders tend to have higher rates of absenteeism (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003; Wood et al., 2012). Recognizing the significant threat that mental health can pose to student school attendance, Wood et al. (2012) examined absenteeism as *both a symptom and a consequence* for certain childhood mental disorders, finding that mental health problems occurring in one year during the middle or high school years could lead to missing a significant number of school days the following school year. Many schools are unprepared to deal with students' mental health issues and lack the necessary protocols to provide students with support and services that can improve their attendance issues (Chang & Romero, 2008).



Another psychological influence on absenteeism is *social anxiety disorder* or *social phobia*. Social phobia has been defined as exhibiting anxiety in large groups of people or performance anxiety in front of peers (Kearney, 2008; Tyrell, 2005). For students, social phobia can lead to students refusing to attend school due to a reoccurring fear or anxiety, which many spawn specific school-related phobias (Kearney, 2008; Tyrell, 2005). Students with high anxiety are likely to have phobic reactions to school as a result of inflated perceptions of threat, such as separation from parents, social evaluation, or academic difficulty (Kearney, 2003; Wood et al., 2012). Wood et al. (2012) noted that students with social phobias are not only more likely to be absent from school, but in being chronically absent, students can begin to develop a number of other mental health problems later in their adolescence.

### **2.2.1.3 Engaging in Illicit Activities and Behaviors**

Engaging in illicit activities and behaviors (e.g., illegal drug and alcohol use and sexual risk-taking) can lead to chronically absenteeism (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Flaherty, Sutphen, & Ely, 2012; Loeber & Farrington, 2000). Reimer & Smink (2005) found a significant relationship between school absenteeism, drug use, sexual activity, and other illicit activities. Additional studies have shown that students involved in illicit activities were more likely to be absent from school and were less likely to succeed academically (Godley, 2006; McCray, 2006). Students who engage in substance abuse, often show signs of conflict with teachers, disciplinary problems, lack relationships with peers, disengagement from school, and low academic achievement (Flaherty et al., 2012). In fact, Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood (1993) found that in students with more than 30 missed school days, 68% used tobacco daily, 40% abused alcohol, and 76% habitually used marijuana. Recent research has indicated similar

findings relating drug and alcohol are related to chronic absenteeism (e.g., see Engberg & Morral, 2006; Flaherty et al., 2012).

#### **2.2.1.4 Student Physical Health**

A student's physical health impacts academic performance and school attendance (Gottfried, 2014; Hodge & Vigo-Valentin, 2014; Moore, Redd, Burkhauser, Mbwana, & Collins, 2009). Physical health conditions have a direct effect on school readiness, engagement, student behavior, academic performance, relationships, out-of-school success, and school attendance (Basch, 2011; Rothstein, 2009; Swingle, 1997). Asthma, dental problems, and obesity are three significant health-related issues that can affect students' school attendance. All three of these issues are exacerbated by the environmental conditions students interact with on a daily basis (Browning & Cagney, 2002) and a student's level of access to quality health care (Mansour, Lanphear, & DeWitt, 2000).

Researchers have discovered that a student's physical health is impacted by environmental risk factors that are common in urban areas including air, traffic, and noise pollution (Hankey, Marshall, & Bauer, 2012; Kjellstrom & Mercado, 2008), dilapidated housing (Miller, 2012), and improper sanitation (Kjellstrom & Mercado, 2008). Social environment issues like poverty, income inequality, racial segregation, violence, crime, limited walking spaces, and limited access to quality foods (Hankey et al., 2012; Kjellstrom & Mercado, 2008; Lopez & Hynes, 2006) are also influential on students' physical health. These factors may lead to obesity, less physical activity, and poor overall health (Lopez & Hynes, 2006). Furthermore, low socioeconomic status students are less likely to have their physical health conditions managed due to lack of quality health-care coverage and insufficient access to primary care (Baltimore Student Attendance Campaign & Elev8 Baltimore, 2012).

Asthma is the number one cause of chronic absenteeism in students (Lear, Barnwell, & Behrens, 2008). Students with moderate to severe asthma are far more likely to miss school and fall behind academically than students who do not have asthma (“Facilities Gap,” 2007; Moonie, Sterling, Figgs, & Castro, 2006). Asthmatic low-income children are 80% more likely than asthmatic middle-class children to miss seven or more days of school each year (Rothstein, 2009). Dilapidated housing, aging schools with poor ventilation, limited air conditioning, and moldy conditions are just a few of the triggers for asthma that are more prevalent in urban areas (“Facilities Gap,” 2007; Miller, 2012). Survey data of African American parents in Cincinnati revealed that parents were concerned for the well-being of their asthmatic children because they either (a) felt uncomfortable with non-nurse school personnel giving medicine to their children or (b) felt that teachers didn’t recognize the symptoms of their child’s asthma (Toole, 2013).

In addition to asthma, a student’s oral health is a key contributor to whether or not they miss school. Students who have significant oral health problems miss more school than students who do not (Pourat & Nicholson, 2009). The U.S. Surgeon General’s report estimated that students miss nearly 51 million hours of school each year due to dental problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). In California, 504,000 children missed at least one school day in 2007 due to an oral health difficulty (Pourat & Nicholson, 2009). With nearly 59% of children experiencing it in some form, tooth decay is the most common cause of chronic disease in childhood, affecting 5 times more children than asthma, (Pourat & Nicholson, 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Children from low-income families and neighborhoods are more likely to be affected by tooth decay or other oral diseases. These children are also likely to have quality health insurance that would allow them access to dental visits for preventive checkups or corrective procedures (Jackson, Vann Jr., Kotch, Pahel,

& Lee, 2011). Therefore, students without proper dental care are more likely to miss more school days than students who can afford dental care (Pourat & Nicholson, 2009).

Finally, obesity has a significant impact on students' chronic absenteeism rates. Students who are obese tend to miss more school days than the general student population (Taras & Potts-Datema, 2005), as they are likely to exhibit other health conditions such as asthma, joint problems, type-2 diabetes, depression, anxiety, and sleep apnea (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006). A high proportion of students who are obese come from low-income neighborhoods, and as discussed earlier, these students can lack access to high-quality health care or insurance. Moreover, (Gordon, Harris, Macintosh, & Moodle, 2011) or have a significant number of food locales that do not provide fresh foods (Hillier et al., 2011; Zenk et al., 2009). Interestingly, students who receive free and reduced lunch are more likely to be obese (Grier, Mensinger, Huang, Kumanyika, & Stettler, 2007), and ironically, school lunches provided to these students have historically been unhealthy and deficient of the essential nutrients and vitamins that can deter obesity (Grier et al., 2007). Grier et al. (2007) found that obesity can be a strong indicator of chronic absenteeism, as overweight students are at increased risk for bullying, depression, and other socio-emotional health problems that can lead to them missing school.

### **2.2.2 Family Dynamics**

Structural and social inequalities faced by families in poverty and families of color that are systematically rooted in societal institutions (e.g., education, healthcare and employment) create conditions that make family background a factor in chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gottfried, 2014; Henry, 2007; Hunter, Pearson, Ialongo, & Kellam, 1998; Kearney, 2008; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Three drivers within the zone of family dynamics emerge as primary

from the research literature: (a) parental and family attitudes, (b) family size and structure, and (c) socioeconomic status.

### **2.2.2.1 Parental and Family Attitudes**

Parents and guardians exert a significant influence on how students view the importance of attending school, especially when it comes to elementary level students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Parental values and attitudes about school have been associated with parents' educational background, prior knowledge, and experiences with school (Nauer et al., 2008); expectations and aspirations for their child (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009; Brown & Iyengar, 2008); and relationship with the their child's school (Sheldon, 2007). Many parents are unaware of the importance of establishing consistent school-going behavior in the early years of their child's education. In fact, they can oftentimes view pre-K and kindergarten as extensions of day care (Chang & Romero, 2008). Parents can also be uninformed about the consequences of missing school in the early grades and its effects on their child's school attendance as they get to middle and high school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Change & Romero, 2008). However, establishing consistent routines can be difficult for some parents. Some attempts at routine may be thwarted by a parent's type of employment or working hours (Gottfried, 2014). For others, the relationship with their child may prohibit parents from being involved in their child's daily lives (e.g., custody issues) or the family's living situation may be such that a consistent routine is not possible (e.g., homelessness).

### **2.2.2.2 Family Size and Structure**

Family size and structure can be major contributors towards a student's likelihood of being chronically absent. Single-parent households are likely to have more children who are

chronically absent compared to students from two-parent households (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Gottfried, 2009, 2011a, 2014). This increased risk can be attributed to less supervision and family practices that influence missing school (Gottfried, 2014; Sampson & Laub, 1994). Larger families may have a higher likelihood of a child becoming chronically absent, as family instability and the increase in family conflict has been known to impact school attendance (Gottfried, 2014). For example, researchers have indicated that students who purposely miss school may be a part of families marked by poor cohesion, conflict, enmeshment, isolation, and detachment (Kearney, 2008, Lagana, 2004). In a 2001 study by McShane, Walter, and Rey, students themselves reported conflict at home and family separation as reasons for their chronic absenteeism.

### **2.2.2.3 Socioeconomic Status**

As indicated throughout this narrative, students living in poverty are significantly more likely to miss school than students who are not living in poverty (Kearney, 2008; Ready, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Ready (2010) found that the link between family income and students' school attendance "is the product of complex and interconnected relationships" (p. 272). It is important to note that while a student's family dynamics can contribute to whether or not they are chronically absent, families are impacted by the neighborhood, social, and economic conditions that they exist within. These conditions can exert significant influence on the family's size, structure, and socioeconomic status. Also, while chronic absenteeism tends to show up more for students who come from low socioeconomic families and urban areas, students who come from higher income neighborhoods and families also can be chronically absent due to family vacations during the school year or returning from scheduled breaks later than expected (Nauer et al., 2008). However, it remains an open empirical question as to whether school

districts located in wealthier communities indicate those instances of missing school as a student being chronically absent.

### **2.2.3 School Environment**

Recently, research has suggested that the physical and social space(s) of schools can have a considerable impact on chronic absenteeism (Balfanz et al., 2007; Henry, 2007; Soloman, 2002). A review of the literature highlighted student-educator relationships and the social and physical environments of schools as having a significant influence on student attendance.

#### **2.2.3.1 The Student-Educator Relationship**

The student-educator relationship contributes to a student's engagement with school (Marvul, 2012). Students, especially students of color, who perceive that the educators at school care about them personally and academically are more likely to thrive academically and socially and less likely to be chronically absent (Marvul, 2012). In comparison, students unable to build strong connections with school educators are more likely to experience academic failure and become chronically absent from school (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). However, caring educators alone are not enough to curb students being chronically absent (Brendtro et al., 2002; Marvul, 2012); hence, schools should look into building their social and physical environment(s) so that students are encouraged to attend school regularly (Conchas, 2001).

#### **2.2.3.2 School Social and Physical Environment**

Inadequate social and physical environments are the product of structural inequalities in society at large. When encountered in a school setting, deficient environments can be a

determinant on student attendance. Structural school factors (e.g., poor maintenance and upkeep of school grounds) have been linked with chronic absenteeism (Branham, 2004). Additionally, students may choose to miss school as an avoidant coping mechanism in chaotic, unmaintained, and unsafe schools (Branham, 2004; Wood et al., 2012). Social anxiety disorder and depression are heightened in schools where students feel stressed by environmental factors or where a high number of conduct problems occur (Ma, Truong, & Sturm, 2007). Researchers have indicated that schools lacking in violence prevention, conflict resolution, and other programs to support positive student engagement are likely to experience significant rates of chaos and stress that can result in higher rates of chronic absenteeism (Lane, Wehby, Robertson, & Rogers, 2007; Wood et al., 2012). Students who are in schools with less challenging courses, high levels of grade retention, and less positive relationships with adult educators are more likely to be chronically absent (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Lee & Burkham, 2003).

In some school environments, students avoid school because of fear of attack or harm from their peers (Kearney, 2003, 2008). Prior research has suggested that student victimization has significant impact on school attendance (Blazer, 2005). Victims of bullying display higher rates of absenteeism and are more likely to feel unsafe at school (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005). Researchers have also indicated that prior victimization by teachers and peers can lead to future student absences (Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002).

#### **2.2.4 Neighborhood Context**

Not only is the understanding of the school social and environmental factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism vital (Alspaugh, 1998), but it is also critical to acknowledge the out-of-school factors and how they are linked with chronic absenteeism (Gottfried, 2014).



Neighborhood conditions impact educational, physical, and social-emotional developmental outcomes of students (Ainsworth, 2010; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealander, 1993; Gottfried, 2014; Harding, Gennetian, Winship, Sanbonmatsu, & Kling, 2011; Lloyd, Li, & Hertzman, 2010; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Tate, Jones, Thorne-Wallington, Hogrebe, 2012). Gottfried (2014) articulated that multiple neighborhood drivers influence a student's ability to attend school regularly, including safety concerns, social norms and networks, and physical environmental issues (e.g., dilapidated housing and poor transportation options).

It is within the confluence of chronic absenteeism and neighborhood context that the inequality and sharp disparities in resources associated with segregation by place must be considered (Sampson, 2012). While the drivers identified below point to individual agency as being associated with certain neighborhood conditions that lead to chronic absenteeism, social structures within neighborhoods also yield unintended consequences that impact students' school attendance (Sampson, 2012). Harding et al. (2011) articulated that examining the the social, economic, and cultural processes that contribute to the neighborhood characteristics) is a crucial endeavor when considering the specific mechanisms that affect youth.

#### **2.2.4.1 Safety Concerns**

Students who reside in neighborhoods categorized as unsafe due to high levels of crime or danger are likely to be absent due to feeling unsafe on their journey to and from school (Kirk & Sampson, 2011; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004; Molnar, Gortmaker, Bull, & Buka, 2004; Sharkey, 2010). Neighborhood safety concerns especially impact young students who get to school either on their own or without adult supervision, as they are likely to miss school if they do not know how to manage and negotiate unsafe routes and high areas of danger between their

neighborhood and school (Timperio et al., 2006). Unsafe neighborhoods have also been shown to impact children's mental and physical health and increase their chances of experiencing violence or victimization (Rubens & Fite, 2013). Students who witness frequent acts of violence can develop post-traumatic stress disorder or exhibit biological responses that deter them from attending school (Massey, 2001, 2004).

Additionally, disparities in the aesthetic and safety-related characteristics of urban neighborhoods can make them unattractive environments in which to attend school (Neckerman et al., 2009). Vehicular traffic dangers (e.g., road potholes, missing traffic lights, one way streets, busy intersections, confusing traffic patterns, and neighborhood walkability) also factor into a student's school attendance (Kerr, Frank, Sallis, & Chapman, 2007; Timperio et al., 2006; Schlossberg, Greene, Phillips, Johnson, & Parker, 2006). Students from distressed urban communities are less likely to walk or cycle to school (Panter, Jones, Van Sluijs, & Griffin, 2010a, 2010b), especially if parents perceive that no lights or crossings are available to ensure safety (Timperio et al., 2006). Thus, students and their families become dependent on reliable transportation to school, which depending on the situation, may or may not be a reality.

#### **2.2.4.2 Community Norms and Networks**

If a community has parents who are not connected to one another, it is believed that adolescents are not presented with a consistent set of cultural ideals regarding education (Harding et. al, 2011). Parental disconnection can lead to students' negatively viewing school and the education process (Williams, Davis, Saunders, & Williams, 2002). Empirical evidence has shown that parents connected within a community can lead to more consistent monitoring

and control over their children's education-related behaviors, such as school attendance (Harding et al., 2011; Jargowsky & Komi, 2009).

Communities whose residents experience significant job losses can have detrimental effects on students' academic achievement and school attendance (Ananat, Gassman-Pines, & Gibson-Davis, 2011). While the impact of parental unemployment can have positive consequences (e.g., spending more time with children and their education-related activities), it can also have negative consequences (e.g., increasing the stress that children face daily). These negative consequences can cause children to question the value of education long-term due to watching their parent's lack of success, thus hindering educational performance (Jargowsky & Komi, 2009; Levine, 2011).

Residential instability is also a significant cause to chronic absenteeism. The lack of homeownership (Gottfried, 2014) and a neighborhood with a high number of renters (Dietz & Haurin, 2003) can lead to the formation of less established social networks (Gottfried, 2014; Rohe, Van Zandt, & McCarthy, 2002). Gottfried (2014) found that "stronger neighbor social networks have the potential to increase the likelihood that students arrive at school" (p. 4). Whether due to economic or financial insecurity or the pursuit of job opportunities in a new community, frequent moves and homelessness affect students' school attendance as the lack of a consistent residence challenges students getting to school (Gottfried, 2014). Frequent residential changes can create stress for children who face having to adjust to new living arrangements, integrating into a new neighborhood, and navigating a new school environment (Ersing, Sutphen, & Loeffler, 2009).

## 2.3 TRADITIONAL APPROACHES FOR ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

With the causes of chronic absenteeism stemming largely from pervasive societal problems, educators and policymakers have struggled with finding effective ways by which to address the issue. This section will address three current approaches to improving school attendance and the limitations of each of the current approaches. The approaches include criminalization, social-emotional interventions, and school-community partnerships.

### 2.3.1 Criminalization

Starting in the mid-1990s, the attention to crime and criminal activity was met with efforts to address crime reduction at an earlier age, therefore putting emphasis on adolescent behavior and juvenile crime (McClusky et al., 2004). As such, schools and districts around the country began implementing zero-tolerance policies to combat adolescent behavioral problems, thus eliminating students who compromised the learning environment by physically restricting them from it (Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffman, 2014). These policy efforts have been designed and implemented to curb undesirable behaviors such as illicit activities, dress code violations, class skipping, tardiness and absenteeism, resulting in an increase in the *criminalization* of students. As schools and districts began to implement more zero-tolerance policies, suspensions and expulsions became more frequent, and missing school began to become more criminalized (Monahan et al., 2014).

Hence, chronic absenteeism has been associated with and viewed as a predictor of adolescent behavioral problems, including juvenile delinquency (Archwamety & Katsiyannis,

2000; Katsiyannis, Thompson, Barrett, & Kingree, 2013; Krezmien, Mulcahy, & Leone, 2008; Petrocelli & Petrocelli, 2005). In fact, *truancy* is one of the major offenses resulting in suspension, expulsion, and adolescents being funneled into the juvenile justice system (Jones & Lovrich, 2011; Monahan et al., 2014; Puzzanchera & Hockenberry, 2013). Truancy has been defined as the accruing of excessive unexcused or unverified absences (Schultz, 1987; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Willson, 2007), and researchers have shown a strong positive correlation between truancy and juvenile delinquency (Baker et al., 2001; Benner, Stage, Nelson, Laederich, & Ralston, 2010; Berger & Wind, 2000; Gavin, 1997; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1994; Miller & Plant, 1999; Ventura & Miller, 2005; Wang, Blomberg, & Li, 2005; White, Fyfe, Campbell, & Goldkamp, 2001; Wilson, 1993; Zhang et al., 2007). With that being said, the attendance efforts of schools and districts have focused primarily on reducing truancy, and punishment associated with truancy has led to increased student exposure to the juvenile justice system (McCluskey et al., 2004).

It should come as no surprise, then, that truant students are seen as social deviants who can negatively impact the school-learning environment (Corville-Smith, 1995; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hoyle, 1998). To many educators, truant behavior is blamed on students not wanting to be at or attend school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). School leaders that embody this belief have attempted to decrease their number of truants by providing students with unidimensional remediation services (Jones & Lovrich, 2011), which lead many students straight into juvenile justice system. Many students' first experience with the juvenile justice system is often due to behaviors that are problematic but not criminal in nature, such as missing school (Baker et al., 2001; Bazemore, Stinchcomb, & Leip, 2004; Byer & Kuhn, 2003; McCluskey et al., 2004).

Criminalizing absenteeism not only punishes students, but it also impacts their parents/legal guardians (McCluskey et al., 2004). Consequences for missing school can include suspension of driver's license, an extended waiting period to receive driving permit, attendance in mandatory programs that focus on improving attendance, arresting parents/guardians for students absenteeism, and intervention programs designed to counsel parents and students on the importance of school attendance (Jones & Lovrich, 2011; Kendall, 2007; McCluskey et al., 2004). Truancy definitions vary by state and city, and the lack of a uniform definition has been considered one of the reasons that delays local and national efforts to create comprehensive initiatives, laws, policies, and practices to address truancy (Sutphen, Ford & Flaherty, 2010).

The criminalization of truancy has come under fire for its limited efficacy in reducing absenteeism and its potential unintended negative consequences. Zero-tolerance approaches and policies that are exclusively punitive and focus on criminalizing students are not effective in reducing truancy behavior (Byer & Kuhn, 2003). On the contrary, these approaches and policies increase the likelihood of students being arrested, thereby leading students to miss even more school (Monahan et al., 2014). Even many mandatory intervention programs designed to provide education, care, and social services actually employ criminal justice-type methods to deter truancy (Ovink, 2011). Ovink (2011) noted that many of these intervention programs focus on supervision, discipline, and a "crime control paradigm" that includes police detaining students around town who were not at school and confiscation of students' personal property. Instead of focusing on why students were truant or having staff personally engage with a student to determine their reasons for missing school, punishing students was the automatic response by staff involved in these intervention programs (Ovink, 2011).

Clinically, “truancy has been categorized as a kind of conduct disordered behavior along the same lines as stealing, lying, destructiveness, and cheating” (Kim, 2008, p. 869), and sadly, the number of students each year that are criminalized for their truant behavior is increasing (Puzzanchera, & Sickmund, 2008; Salsich & Trone, 2013). In recent years, criminologists and developmental psychologists have posited that the criminalization of truancy in the adolescent years leads to later adult criminality (e.g., Jones & Lovrich, 2011), with some directly implicating programs using punitive and sanction-oriented approaches (Byer & Kuhn, 2003; Sutphen et al., 2010). Until policymakers and stakeholders address truancy and chronic absenteeism with innovative approaches that deemphasize criminalizing students for status offenses, students will continue to be funneled into the criminal justice system and likely be impacted later in life as adults.

### **2.3.2 Social-Emotional Interventions**

While criminalization has been the most prominent approach to addressing chronic absenteeism since the mid-1990s (McCluskey et al., 2004), other efforts to curb the problem have focused on providing *social-emotional supports* to students who exhibit recurring school attendance problems. Indeed, many schools have developed social-emotional intervention programs to address their chronic absenteeism problem. Interventions such as School Attendance Review Boards (SARBs), individual counseling, peer counseling, family therapy, behavioral management, case management services, or tutoring services aim to provide specific support to students to prevent absenteeism (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2012; Tanner-Smith & Wilson, 2013). Other common school-based strategies include after-school enrichment activities, engaging teachers in absenteeism reduction, tutorial programs, and

structured communications with parents (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001; Grier & Peterson, 2005; Hunt & Hopko, 2009; Newsome, 2004).

The use of these types of social-emotional supports has been investigated empirically, with Hunt & Hopko (2009) describing these programs as “intensive work with students and parents to minimize environmental factors contributing to truant behavior and associated with academic problems” (p. 550). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that rewarding students for improved attendance, communicating directly with parents/guardians of absent students, providing a specific contact person for families, providing workshops for parents/guardians on improving their student’s attendance, and after-school programs were most effective at improving absenteeism rates. Counseling sessions with both families and students have also been used to curb chronic absenteeism (Railsback, 2004; Gerrard, Burhans, & Fair, 2003; Sheverbush, Smith, & DeGruson, 2000). DeSocio et al. (2007) studied a truancy intervention pilot project in an urban high school that incorporated the recruitment of teachers from within the student’s school to engage in targeted mentoring. Students with a history of fifteen or more unexcused absences from the previous school year ( $n=103$ ) were randomly assigned into the intervention group, where students receiving mentoring, or the control group where students would receive the usual school services. Results of the study found that students who were part of the intervention group had significantly fewer absences than those who were part of the control group. The study revealed that getting students to school, and keeping them there, required relationship-based intervention as soon as the school day began.

In an effort to assist positive student relationships with adults in school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Reimer & Smink, 2005), Student Attendance Review Boards (otherwise known as SARBs or student attendance teams) consisting of various school personnel, are assigned to



review student attendance records, meet with students and their families, and develop a plan to address chronic absenteeism and ways for them to attend school (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2012). These teams counsel both students and parents on school policies, provide mental health and health resources, and serve as mediators between the school, students, and families (Dupper, 2003). Mentoring has also been used an approach to ensure that students have a sustained relationship with adults in the school with the hopes of promoting student attendance (Reimer & Smink, 2005; Railsback, 2004). Without effective mentoring, absenteeism becomes a chronic pattern that can increase over time and lead to other non-positive outcomes for students (Roderick et al., 1997).

Programs designed to help students through school transitions may have the added benefit of helping with chronic absenteeism. School transitions occur when students move to a different level of schooling, with the most common school transitions happening between elementary-to-middle school and middle-to-high school. These major childhood transitions have been associated with increases in emotional, academic, behavioral, and attendance difficulties (Eccles et al., 1993; Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Programs like Check & Connect have been designed to help students attend school regularly and offer a multi-faceted approach focusing on individualized interventions and relationship building that hopefully facilitates improved attendance (Lehr et al., 2004).

The efficacy of programs such as Check & Connect seems to relate to the mantra at the heart of these types of intervention: the context of the school environment matters, and evaluating absenteeism intervention programs requires understanding “the influence of a school’s environment and its complex interaction with student-level variables and the effectiveness of interventions” (p. 299). In 2004, Lehr and colleagues studied the impact of the

Check & Connect program. In addition to direct measures of student participation (i.e., tardies) and absences collected on students who were chronically absent, Lehr et al. (2004) used measures of staff perceptions of student engagement and program effectiveness from the School Staff Feedback Survey. Results indicated that tardiness and absenteeism decreased while on-time school arrival and staff perceptions of student engagement in school increased. The decreases in absenteeism were attributed to mentors and monitors communicating and collaborating regularly with teachers, checking in regularly with students, and partnering with families to support school attendance.

While interventions like Check & Connect offer promise in curbing chronic absenteeism, there has been a lack of empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of social-emotional interventions (Sutphen et al., 2010). In their review of truancy intervention studies during the years 1990 to 2007, Sutphen and colleagues (2010) found that while there is no shortage of peer-reviewed articles describing programs and interventions to combat absenteeism; however, many of the articles are descriptive in nature, and “it appears as if nearly every school district has its own truancy program” (p. 169). Studies of social-emotional interventions tend to use one-group pretest/posttest designs or some form of limited group comparison designs (Sutphen et al., 2010). Social-emotional interventions appear to be effective on the populations for which they were intended (Baker & Jansen, 2000; Lehr et al., 2004; Newsome, 2004), but research as to the efficacy of applying those same interventions to different student populations, grade levels, or schools is limited (Sutphen et al., 2010).

Finally, social-emotional interventions assume that schools have created systems to correctly identify chronically absent students, have the capacity to implement sustainable strategies for improving attendance, and have the resources to impact all of their chronically

absent students. The reach and effectiveness of social-emotional interventions on students who choose (or are dissuaded) not to participate or are not engaged in school, remains an open empirical question.

### **2.3.3 School-Community Partnerships**

Finally, large city-wide initiatives to increase attendance and publicly promote the importance of school attendance are approaches intended to “involve a multitude of prevention and intervention strategies, and create new ways to connect schools to local resources and services” (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2012, p. 4). These types of initiatives emphasize the creation of *school-community partnerships* with the expectation that the partnerships will foster innovative policies, programs, interventions, and approaches for decreasing student absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Melaville (1998) defined school-community partnerships as efforts to create and sustain relationships among schools, districts, and a variety of both formal and informal organizations in the community. These partnerships have traditionally focused on promoting stronger parent-teacher alliances, implementing awareness programs for families on the benefits of school attendance, and targeting alliances with local organizations that can address the root causes of chronic absenteeism (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). These various types of organizations can include health providers, non-profits, faith-based organizations, homeless shelters, city agencies, state agencies, universities, foundations, public interest groups, and others (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2012). Successful school-community partnerships have greater parent involvement, which can lead to decreases in chronic absenteeism in and of itself (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). School-community partnership practices can also include

“rewarding students for good attendance, communicating with families about attendance, providing families with information about people to contact at school, conducting workshops on attendance, and providing after-school programs for students” (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 41-42).

When examining the longitudinal effects of family and community involvement activities on chronic absenteeism rate in schools,<sup>7</sup> Sheldon and Epstein (2004) found that chronic absenteeism was more problematic in large urban schools, high-poverty schools, and secondary schools. Results showed that “communicating with families about attendance, celebrating good attendance with students and families, and connecting chronically absent students with community mentors measurably reduced students’ chronic absenteeism from one year to the next” (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004, p. 51). Efforts to involve families and communities in a collaborative process to assist the school in reducing chronic absenteeism through communication practices (e.g. newsletters home, teacher and parent conferences, teacher/school staff outreach, etc.) were considered effective, resulting in decreases in absenteeism in years following implementation.

However, it has been difficult to define what constitutes the “community” for many school-community partnership programs. This difficulty arises because people often belong to a variety of overlapping communities based on geographic boundaries, group associations, income levels, and racial makeup (Brown, Crawford, & Darongkamas, 2000). In the urban context, it has been argued that “while an urban school is located in a community, it is not often of the community. Employees are rarely neighborhood residents. Many do not share the culture or race of their students...and graduates seldom hold expectations of returning to neighborhood

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<sup>7</sup> Ten schools were located in large urban areas, 9 in smaller urban areas, 11 in suburban communities and 9 in rural areas. The sample included 29 elementary and 10 secondary schools.

citizenship” (Keyes & Gregg, 2001, p. 32). Hence, it can be unclear if the community extends beyond those who have direct investment in the school (e.g. employment, students enrolled, financial, social capital, etc.). While Sheldon and Epstein (2004) recommended a comprehensive approach for reducing chronic absenteeism that involved the community, the study was vague on whom and what constitutes a “community” and the level of involvement necessary for a community to be considered an influential component of the comprehensive approach.

School-community partnerships are a good first step to addressing chronic absenteeism, as they can provide a more holistic approach than criminalizing students or providing individualized social-emotional supports. Comprehensive school-community partnerships that involve students and their families have improved student attendance (Sheldon, 2007), especially those focusing on improving attendance by addressing parent behaviors (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Monitoring students’ whereabouts, parent-child discussion about school, volunteering at school, and PTA/PTO membership were seen as important predictors of lowering school absences (Duckworth & deJung, 1989; McNeal, 1999; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Other studies investigated school-level practices that engaged the entire school community as well as outside partners in reducing chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Sending information to parents and communicating about their student’s absences has also been studied, with Roderick et al. (1997) finding an increase in parental confidence in their child’s wellbeing at school and willingness to monitor and supervise their education (Epstein et al., 2009).

In 2010, New York City schools launched a citywide, anti-truancy campaign that utilized an inter-agency effort to address chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; John W. Gardner Center, 2012). In partnership with the NYC Department of Education, various

governmental agency partners, private sector, and community partners, the campaign engaged in data collection and dissemination, creation of a mentor corps that would reach out to students, and developed strategies that would link schools to existing community resources. Balfanz & Byrnes (2013) evaluation of this interagency, school-community-partnership found that it was successful in curbing chronic absenteeism and keeping students in school. As of 2010, this instance was the only known school-community partnership addressing chronic absenteeism.

Although there have been some noted successes, several limitations exist in using a school-community partnership approach. First, many partnerships do not encompass entire schools, school districts, or communities (Sutphen et al., 2010). This inclusive approach includes implementing a wide range of involvement activities so that more families and community partners are encouraged to join the efforts in curbing chronic absenteeism (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004), and many schools and districts are unsuccessful in coordinating efforts to include family and community members (Sheldon, 2007). Additionally, school-community partnerships tend to be based on trial-and-error because school personnel often receive little or no formal training in establishing and sustaining partnerships with communities and families (Epstein, 2005, 2011; Shumow & Harris, 2000). An inability to successfully orient school-community partnerships can lead to disorganized and ineffective strategies and differences in the ways families establish home-school relationships (Sheldon, 2007).

#### **2.3.4 Moving Beyond Traditional Practices**

There are several lessons learned from these current approaches to tackling chronic absenteeism. First, criminalization has negative consequences for students, especially those living in urban communities. Criminalizing students for attendance issues can lead to the juvenile justice system,

which is often a student's first experience with the criminal system. Second, social-emotional interventions rarely address all the contributing factors, root causes of chronic absenteeism, and are hard for schools to consistently enact and sustain. As mentioned earlier, the studies that have shown positive results in this type of approach have been small in nature, and the replicability of applying social-emotional interventions at different grade levels, school settings, and cohorts of students still remains to be seen. Finally, while school-community partnerships have shown promise in addressing chronic absenteeism, questions still remain on who should be involved from the community in the partnership and what constitutes as a "true" school-community partnership. Consequently, larger school-community partnerships are likely the best bet for ameliorating chronic absenteeism, especially because they recognize and respond to the more systemic nature of the problem. There is a limited body of research that has tried to understand how these civic partnerships can be productively structured to address chronic absenteeism; however, framing chronic absenteeism as a *wicked problem* may provide a useful conceptual framework for guiding future research.

## **2.4 CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AS A "WICKED PROBLEM"**

The public administration literature defines a *wicked problem* as a societal issue that is difficult to define and solve (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The complexity of wicked problems challenges traditional hierarchical systems that attempt to define and ameliorate such problems (Weber & Khademian, 2008). At first glance, the term may seem to apply a deficit perspective to challenges found in education policy; however, wicked problems and the people that are

impacted by them are not morally wicked. On the contrary, it is the diabolical nature of the problems hinted at in the use of the word “wicked”, as such problems are not ameliorated by standard methods of resolution (Brown, Deane, Harris, & Russell, 2010; Rittel & Webber, 1973). The following sections will discuss the characteristics of wicked problems more specifically while also arguing the case for treating chronic absenteeism as a wicked problem.

### **2.4.1 Characteristics of Wicked Problems**

Examples of wicked problems are pervasive throughout the public administration and management research literature. Poverty, obesity, unequal access to health care, inequality, and environmental safety are just a few societal issues that have been labeled as wicked problems because they are complex, ill-defined, have an indeterminate scope and scale, and can be interpreted in different ways depending on one’s point of view (Agranoff & McGuire, 1998, 2004; Head & Alford, 2015; Kolko, 2012; Rittel & Webber, 1973; Roberts, 2000; Weber & Khademian, 2008). Kolko (2012) argued that wicked problems also include incomplete or contradictory knowledge, can be significant economic burdens, and are often interconnected with other complex problems (e.g. poverty and education reform). More often than not, wicked problems do not have a final solution since any resolution can generate further issues or complexity (Brown et al., 2010). These problems tend to morph with context and time (Rittel & Weber, 1973) and are reflective of unpredictable physical, social, economic, and geographic environments (Gibson, Smyth, Nayowith, & Zaff, 2013).

Looking across the research literature on wicked problems, Weber and Khademian (2008) found three common characteristics: Wicked problems are unstructured, cross-cutting, and relentless. These three components of wicked problems provide a useful lens for



understanding chronic absenteeism, as well as providing a guide for designing strategies to help address and manage wicked problems.

#### **2.4.1.1 Unstructured**

Wicked problems are said to be *unstructured* because the causes and effects are extremely complicated to identify and model (Weber & Khademian, 2008), a task which is further complicated by the fact there is typically little consensus on the problem or the solution (Head & Alford, 2015). As previously described, chronic absenteeism has many causes and researchers have identified its negative influence on student outcomes such as academic achievement, high school graduation, and learning within the classroom (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, 2013; Change & Romero, 2008; Gottfried, 2014). The multiple and diffuse causes of chronic absenteeism make it difficult to isolate critical components that can serve as guides for program or policy responses. For example, research suggests that health-related absences among chronically absent students are typically associated with asthma, dental disease, or weight management issues (Kearney, 2003; Rothstein, 2009). These health problems are related to growing up in low-socioeconomic status families, and communities with unstable housing, unreliable income that affects food decisions, and dependence on social services that are inadequate to improving quality of life (Gottfried, 2014). Once students begin missing substantial amounts of school due to health problems, they frequently become disengaged from school, fall behind academically, and remain behind due to their weak relationships with peers and teachers. Furthermore, these students can even develop psychological issues that can lead to further absences from school.

#### **2.4.1.2 Cross-cutting**

Wicked problems are *cross-cutting* because they comprise “multiple, overlapping, interconnected subsets of problems that cut across multiple policy domains and levels of government” (Weber & Khademian, 2008, p. 336). Additionally, wicked problems are not isolated incidents or one-time occurrences. Different stakeholders, policy organizations, and government entities experience the impact of wicked problems, and as such, solutions to solve them have to come from a variety of sources (Van Bueren, Klijin, & Koppenjan, 2003). The cross-cutting nature of wicked problems leads to a high degree of uncertainty about amelioration strategies because engaging stakeholders provokes conflicting values due in part to the variety of worldviews, political agendas, professional backgrounds, traditions, and responsibilities that are represented in diverse coalitions (Khademian, 2005; Van Bueren et al., 2003; Weber & Khademian, 2008).

As was mentioned in the discussion of the causes of chronic absenteeism, drivers in each zone usually comprise an amalgamation of one another. In other words, drivers such as mental health, physical health, family structure, student engagement, and others are intertwined with one another. Students who live in poor, urban neighborhoods are often discouraged from attending school due to pervasive crime and violence, low social cohesion, poor transportation, housing instability, and delinquent peer groups (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004). Exposure to such discouragement for an extended amount of time can impact a student’s mental health and perpetuate the chronic absenteeism issue (Bowen & Bowen, 1999). These drivers of chronic absenteeism implicate different policy domains, agencies, and levels of government such as health care, housing, mental health, child welfare, public housing, and transportation. Isolating chronic absenteeism as a student agency issue rather than a multi-faceted problem involving

different stakeholders would ignore the cross-cutting nature of chronic absenteeism. Targeted supports and interventions at one subset of the overall problem (e.g., violence in the community) would be similar to treating only one symptom of a deadly virus.

#### **2.4.1.3 Relentless**

A wicked problem is *relentless*, meaning that it is not likely to be solved “once and for all”, regardless of the amount of resources, authority, or expertise brought to bear on the problem (Weber & Khademian, 2008). Despite considerable efforts to solve them, wicked problems are persistent, and while sometimes they are ameliorated, these problems are never fully resolved (Head & Alford, 2015; Van Bueren et al., 2003). The consequences of wicked problems also affect other policy arenas (Weber & Khademian, 2008). Conventional structures and systems within the public sector are not designed to address the tasks of conceptualizing, mapping, and responding to wicked problems (Head & Alford, 2015), thus leading to temporary and imperfect resolutions when addressing these issues.

Chronic absenteeism will continue to be a persistent problem for a variety of reasons. Chronic absenteeism is linked with other wicked problems such as poverty, social injustice, and inadequate healthcare. By attempting to address chronic absenteeism, policies will have to tackle ‘larger’ wicked problems that encompass broader societal issues. In fact, embedded within chronic absenteeism are other wicked problems that society has consistently dealt with for numerous years. Additionally, the important role of chronic absenteeism in the crisis in urban education is largely overlooked. While research is clear on the negative academic consequences of missing school (Dryfoos, 1990; Finn, 1993; Gottfried, 2009; Lehr et al., 2003), only in the last 20 years have we come to understand the educational ramifications of chronic absenteeism for urban students (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Gottfried, 2014; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). Milner

& Lomotey (2014) argued that the challenges in urban education are contributed to factors both inside and outside of school. The causes of chronic absenteeism exist in both contexts, making it a difficult task to address and define; thus, it remains a persistent problem.

#### **2.4.2 Addressing the Problem Hidden in Plain Sight**

Chronic absenteeism can be thought of as a problem hiding in plain sight. Chang and Romero (2008) recognized that schools and districts have often overlooked chronic absenteeism. No mechanism exists at the federal or many state levels that ensures schools and districts can monitor and report on chronic absenteeism. This lack of data leads to many school districts not knowing the extent to which chronic absenteeism is a problem in any of their schools; hence, it persists an issue that is hidden in plain sight (Chang & Romero, 2008).

If Chang and Romero are correct, and chronic absenteeism is a problem hidden in plain sight, what is a conceptual tool that researchers and policymakers can use when considering chronic absenteeism? In what ways can chronic absenteeism be explained that takes into account the multi-faceted dimensions that it encompasses? And how does the conceptual tool help to organize a possible necessary policy response that can address the various dimensions of chronic absenteeism? In the United States, chronic absenteeism is a modern-day educational problem, and will require massive coordination across government, public, private, and nonprofit sectors to reduce its effect on students' academic and schooling experiences. With its complex and multi-faceted nature, chronic absenteeism is a wicked problem that demands more than what many schools and districts are designed to deliver by themselves (Kettl, 2002; O'Toole, 1997).

## **2.5 AN INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS APPROACH FOR ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AS A WICKED PROBLEM**

As mentioned above, chronic absenteeism is a wicked problem that affects education policy and practice; hence, improving student attendance is an important endeavor for schools and districts. However, traditional approaches to improving student attendance are limited and focus on either organizations working in isolation or independently of one another or organizations engaging only a few others in the work to decrease chronic absenteeism.

A wicked problem like chronic absenteeism poses a significant challenge to urban education because traditional problem-solving approaches organized through the hierarchical structures of urban school systems are not effective (McGuinn & Manna, 2013; Weber & Khademian, 2008). For example, past efforts at addressing absenteeism have focused on strengthening truancy laws and interventions (McCluskey et al., 2004), which addresses only one cause of the problem (i.e., students who *choose* to be absent from school). These approaches do not, however, address structural issues, such as housing instability, inadequate transportation, and poorly managed chronic health problems (e.g., asthma) that are beyond a student's control.

Recognizing that the causes of chronic absenteeism are multi-faceted suggests that solutions should include school systems working in partnership with a range of organizations, such as housing and transportation authorities, public and private healthcare providers, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and perhaps, universities. In other words, wicked problems demand that organizations work together and collaborate differently because these issues have not been effectively addressed through traditional and/or solitary problem-solving methods (Hoberecht, Joseph, Spencer, & Southern, 2011; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Isett, Mergel, LeRoux, Mischen, & Rethemeyer, 2011; Keast, Mandell, Brown, & Woolcock, 2004). Not surprisingly then,

current efforts to address chronic absenteeism have emphasized school-community partnerships that mobilize diverse community resources (Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). However, school-community partnerships are limited in regards to integrating community issues into the larger education infrastructure and fostering authentic forms of community engagement in the education process (Schutz, 2006).

Networks are a potential way to design and conceptualize the organizational infrastructure necessary for coordinating collaborative efforts that span public, for-profit, and non-profit entities (Popp, MacKean, Casebeer, Milward, & Lindstrom, 2013). Networks facilitate interactive processes related to sharing resources, activities, expertise, and relations that would be harder to achieve by any one organization operating in isolation (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Russell et al., 2015). Therefore, the creation of an inter-organizational network is a promising strategy for addressing the limited capacity of schools and districts to solve the chronic absenteeism problem (Baltimore Student Attendance Campaign & Elev8 Baltimore, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008).<sup>8</sup>

A network of organizations working to address the complex causes of chronic student absenteeism has the potential to support schools and districts in improving student attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2013; Gottfried, 2009; Weber & Khademian, 2008). While traditional approaches have been somewhat successful at addressing specific aspects of chronic absenteeism, a networked approach has the potential to attend to multiple causes of chronic absenteeism, engage a larger array of stakeholders in creating, disseminating, and implementing

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<sup>8</sup> Study 1 investigates a network of organizations involved in chronic absenteeism work in Western PA. The findings will determine whether or not the collection of organizations in fact form an inter-organizational network with specific features that allow it to be characterized as such. For purposes of this literature review though the term *inter-organizational network* will be used as there are specific aspects of this type of network that are important to address within the study.

policies and practice decisions, and decreasing the use of criminalization techniques to curb chronic absenteeism while improving the scale to which some of the other approaches could be attended to. This section will conceptualize the inter-organizational network perspective and provide a lens to study and implement a collaborative multi-agency approach to tackling chronic absenteeism (Podolny & Page, 1998). A networked approach is an appropriate response to a wicked problem like chronic absenteeism because networks enable the creation and spread of knowledge, interventions, and change strategies (Weber & Khademian, 2008).

### **2.5.1 Dimensions of an Inter-Organizational Network**

Over the past 20 years, the study of networks has increased as auto, film, construction, high-tech and bio-technical industries have started to incorporate more network structures to improve outcomes and outputs. Inter-organizational networks are collaborative bodies of three or more organizations working together toward a common purpose (Popp et al., 2013). Conceptually, “networks are defined by the enduring exchange relations established between organizations, individuals, and groups” (Weber & Khademian, 2008, p. 334). Networks can be seen as an arrangement of public and private organizations, agencies, and departments that have been constituted in order to facilitate collective action (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Isett et al., 2011; Provan & Kenis, 2008). Provan, Fish, & Sydow (2007) indicate that inter-organizational networks can take a variety of forms including partnerships, strategic alliances, coalitions, cooperative arrangements, or collaborative agreements. Moving away from isolated impact (i.e., the approach that often focuses on embedding problem-solving authority within a single organization), networks tend to promote collaboration and relationship building that leads to collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Overall, inter-organizational networks consist of a

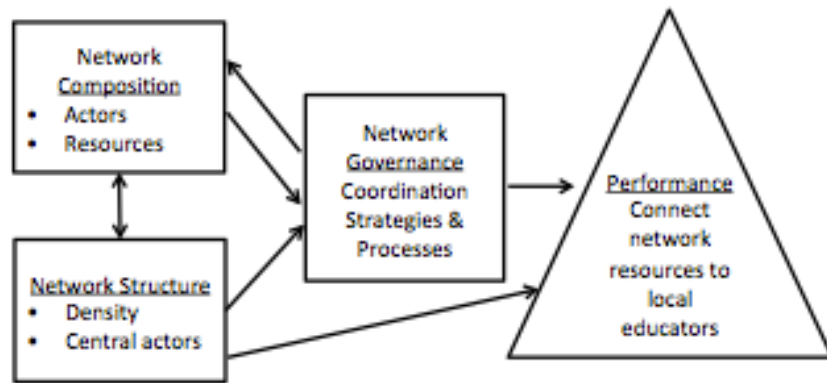
structure of relationships between actors and the meaning of those relationships (Popp et al, 2013).<sup>9</sup>

Provan, Beagles, & Leischow (2011) argued that context is a key factor in understanding the evolution of network, as the way it develops over time is dependent on the context in which it operates. Recognizing the various dimensions of a network is instrumental for understanding the nature, evolution, and overall effectiveness of a network of organizations. Russell et al. (2015) identified four primary dimensions of inter-organizational networks and offered it as a framework for understanding the effectiveness of inter-organizational networks. The *composition* of networks includes the identification of organizations and the resources they bring to the network, and network *structure* is the pattern of connections among stakeholders within a network. *Coordination* refers to the processes and strategies used to guide collective network action. It is a combination of composition, structure, and coordination that help to predict network *performance*, or the extent to which networks are able to connect resources and expertise to schools and districts, and enable organizations to enact productive practices and policies. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the dimensions that make up an inter-organizational network.

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<sup>9</sup> The term *actors* refers to either individuals and/or organizations that make up an inter-organizational network





Russell et al. (2015)

**Figure 2.** Network Characteristics and Performance

### 2.5.1.1 Network Composition

Conceptually, the composition of networks includes the organizational actors and the resources they bring with them to the network. Often, networks involve a diverse set of organizations brought together to build collaborative capacity. Building capacity among cross-sector partners enables organizations to access resources that are possibly embedded within a network (Gray, 1989; Oliver, 1990). Resources can include human capital, financial capital, knowledge, and enhanced legitimacy (Wohlstetter, Smith, & Malloy, 2005). Traditionally, governmental agencies have existed within a traditional hierarchical governance structure (Goldsmith & Kettl, 2009). Complex social issues and societal structures have limited this traditional approach and its ability to facilitate resources and expertise across agencies and outside of the public sector. However, a networked approach facilitates access to specialized technical knowledge and management expertise (Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004).

### 2.5.1.2 Network Structure

Connections within and across organizations, and the nature of those connections is an important dimension in determining the efficacy of a network. The connections between pairs of organizations can be based on formal authority (e.g., the relationship between a local educational agency and a school), voluntary collaborative relationships (e.g., a community organization collaborates with a school to provide afterschool programs for youth), or contractual arrangements (e.g., fee-for-service) with non-system actors (Isett et al., 2011). As connections manifest among organizations, varying network structures will emerge (Russell et al., 2015). One component of structure is the *degree of centralization*, which refers to the number of connections among organizations that are mediated by a central organization. Centralized organizations are key conduits for the coordination of collective action (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011; Huang & Provan, 2007), and this centralized coordination promotes system efficiency and service integration (Huang & Provan, 2007; Provan & Milward, 1995). Furthermore, centralization puts demands on central organizations to provide coordination for the network (Russell et al., 2015).

Another relevant component of network structure is the proportion of possible connections that exist among organizations, otherwise known as *network density*. Dense connections influence the distribution of information, trust, and influence among network organizations (Huang & Provan, 2007; Yamaguchi, 1994) while also serving as an indicator of network integration or cohesion (Scott, 2000). Density is a factor associated with a network's capacity to achieve outcomes (Huang & Provan, 2007), generate innovative solutions to complex problems (Considine, Lewis, & Alexander, 2009), and influence the capacity of the network to generate innovations, coordinate collective action, and sustain partner participation (Russell et al., 2015).

### **2.5.1.3 Network Coordination**

The processes and strategies employed within the network to facilitate collective action involve coordination (Kahne, O'Brien, Brown, & Quinn, 2001; Goldsmith & Eggers, 2004; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2001; Wohlstetter et. al, 2005). Solving complex issues requires that diverse actors within networks contribute to a coherent joint effort (Agranoff & McGuire, 2004; Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010). In a network context, leadership aims to foster a common vision and motivate others to engage (Eglene, Dawes, & Schneider, 2007). This vision of leadership stands in stark contrast to formal power structures, which tend to impose roles or mandate actions (Eglene et al., 2007). Large networks tend to demand centralized coordination (Provan & Milward, 1995), and researchers have suggested that complex collaborative efforts rely more on formal coordination structures than informal communication processes (Wohlstetter et. al, 2005). As such, coordination strategies are integral in achieving desired network outcomes (Klijin, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010; Meier & O'Toole, 2001). Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos (2010) described network management strategies involving connection that were associated with positive outcomes. Connecting strategies include the ability to transfer knowledge and best practice across organizational boundaries (Ferlie, Fitzgerald, McGivern, Dopson, & Bennett, 2011).

### **2.5.1.4 Network Performance**

The effectiveness of a network is conceptualized in the public administration literature as the “attainment of positive network level outcomes that could not normally be achieved by individual organizational participants acting independently” (Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 230). The range of potential outcomes of inter-organizational networks includes, but is not limited to, goal achievement, intensity of collaborative activity, and the nature of social interactions (Thomson,

Perry, & Miller, 2009). Facilitating the collective action of actors that span different policy and organizational sectors requires finding ways resources can be distributed across participants, received or accepted by participants, and moved beyond the embedded practices and identity of organizations (Spillane, 2012; Weber & Khademian, 2008).

### **2.5.2 Benefits and Risks of Inter-Organizational Networks**

Because of their broader set of resources and increased capacity, inter-organizational networks are a prime way to address wicked problems (Weber & Khademian, 2008). The benefit of an inter-organizational network is that they can attend to more issues than a single agency or silo approach when it comes to wicked problems (Keast et al., 2004). Designing and implementing policies to address chronic absenteeism has the potential to become lost within the bureaucracy of school district central offices, the day-to-day activity within schools, and the agenda(s) of specific communities. However, networks offer a collaborative advantage that allow for the inter-organizational network(s) to tackle an issue like chronic absenteeism that would otherwise get lost between traditional hierarchies and bureaucracy (Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

Researchers have found a number of benefits attributed to the inter-organizational approaching, including their abilities to do the following:

- provide access to and leveraging of resources (Bryson et al., 2006; Milward & Provan, 2006; Provan & Lemaire, 2012; Weber & Khademian, 2008);
- make efficient use of those resources (Huxham & Vangen, 2005);
- provide coordinated services (Hoberecht et al., 2011; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Provan & Lemaire, 2012);

- exert pressure on other organizations, agencies, and entities due to the diversity of network members (Provan & Lemaire, 2012);
- provide knowledge exchange (Weber & Khademian, 2008);
- influence change in traditional systems and ways of operation (Casebeer, Popp, & Scott, 2009);
- create opportunities for innovative approaches (Klijn et. al, 2010); and
- exercise flexibility in their response to dealing with unforeseen issues that could arise from addressing the wicked problem (Provan & Lemaire, 2012; Provan & Milward, 2001).

The benefits of networks, when aligned to a common purpose, provide a strategy for developing an agile organizational structure that can create change in policies and practices (Popp et al., 2013).

Inter-organizational networks have the potential to be seen as the ‘magic bullet’ to solving wicked problems (Popp et al., 2013); however, Bryson et al. (2006) found that inter-organizational networks is not effective for addressing all types of problems. In fact, the inter-organizational network approach has the potential to generate more problems, as a network of various organizations brings to light management and leadership issues that can potentially limit the overall effectiveness of the network (Huxham & Vangen, 2005; McGuire & Agranoff, 2011; Provan & Lemaire, 2012). Just like with other public policy decisions, actions, and interventions, networks can also bring to light unintended consequences that the network is ill-equipped to handle (Huerta, Casebeer, & VanderPlaat, 2006). Furthermore, inter-organizational networks unable to achieve consensus end up creating challenges to decision-making processes, structures, and outcome goals (Bryson et al., 2006). Achieving consensus is difficult because network

organizations must be willing to give up their individual autonomy, which might mean taking part in decisions that are not in the best interest of their organization (Provan & Lemaire, 2012). Time and costs (Huerta et al., 2006), building trusting relationships (Axelrod, 1984; Bryson et al., 2006), creating accountability structures (Bryson et al., 2006; Provan & Lemaire, 2012), and power imbalances (Bryson et al., 2006; Provan & Lemaire, 2012) are risks that inter-organizational networks must navigate.

### **2.5.3 Inter-Organizational Networks and Wicked Problems**

Provan & Kenis (2008) recognized that inter-organizational networks form for a variety of reasons and at their core “are seeking to achieve some end that they could not have achieved independently” (p. 240). In fact, Popp et al. (2013) suggested that the formation of inter-organizational networks exist because of a moral imperative: Societal issues such as poverty, crime, healthcare reform, and improving cannot be addressed by single organizations working in isolation (Bryson et al., 2006; Hoberecht et al., 2011; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Keast et al., 2004). This moral imperative might drive a network to leverage resources and expertise expeditiously and collaborate with the intention of solving a problem quickly (Provan & Lemaire, 2012). Therefore, networks have emerged due to a recognition that traditional, bureaucratic hierarchical organizations often fail at addressing complex issues that defy precise definitions and cut across different sectors, jurisdictions, and policy areas (Keast et al., 2004). By moving beyond traditional hierarchical, single agency, or silo approaches, inter-organizational networks are able to take advantage of a broader set of resources and increased capacity (Bryson et al., 2006; Isett et al., 2011).

Since wicked problems would require an inordinate amount of resources, time, and effort from a single agency, the inter-organizational approach appears to hold promise for addressing problems such as chronic absenteeism. Public policy researchers have suggested that networks are effective tools for working across the structural boundaries posed by wicked problems, as inter-organizational networks can facilitate cross-sector collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006; Huerta, 2006). This collaboration includes actors that represent different agencies and funding sources (Bryson et al., 2006; Huerta, 2006). In addition to working across boundaries, inter-organizational networking also promotes the engagement of stakeholders in the policymaking, program implementation, and strategy discussions necessary for ameliorating wicked problems (Ferlie et al., 2011).

In sum, inter-organizational networks are a promising organizational structure to address wicked problems such as chronic absenteeism. These networks have the potential to be superior to hierarchical and fragmented approaches when addressing wicked problems due to their flexibility, facilitation of knowledge sharing, exchanges of relevant resources, and capacity to generate innovative solutions that promote collective impact.

## **2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

By framing chronic absenteeism as a wicked problem, the discussion becomes guided by a multi-faceted approach that focuses on the root problem of the epidemic and highlights approaches that are grounded in the research literature. Anecdotally, chronic absenteeism as a wicked problem allows for the conceptually interesting investigation of whether there is even a possible approach to potentially reducing its effect on student attendance and achievement.

Particularly important for the investigation of new interventions for chronic absenteeism is the discussion of the traditional approaches that have been used thus far to address the problem . For example, criminalizing students for missing school has failed to improve overall student attendance, even if parents/guardians are also punished for their child's chronic absenteeism (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005). Specific programs, such as Check & Connect, have shown to significantly improve school attendance (Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003); however, whether these programs are transferable to other locales remain an open empirical question. Furthermore, city-wide campaigns have shown their potential to inform the community on the importance of school attendance for students; yet, the degree to which organizations are involved in these campaign efforts potentially differ based on location, history, and past involvement in other school improvement efforts. In light of the findings of prior research discussed in this chapter, Chapter 3 will set forth the methods used within this dissertation.



### 3.0 METHODS

The analysis plan for this study was built on a foundation of the research literature surrounding the use of traditional programs in addressing chronic absenteeism and the employment of wicked problems as a framework by which to examine the problem. As such, this study engaged in inter-organizational network research to analyze chronic absenteeism in the context of the Be There campaign (BTC). In recent years, networks have emerged as a way to address societal problems failed by more traditional problem-solving strategies, specifically in regards to the use of inter-organizational networks as a strategy for public administration and public sector management, (Popp et al., 2013). As research on inter-organizational networks has advanced, it has led to different ways of conceptualizing what organizations, governments, and systems should do to address complex problems, foster collaboration, and achieve intended goals (Weber & Khademian, 2008). Russell et al. (2015) revealed “there is limited research on the characteristics and structure of productive inter-organizational collaboration in education” (p. 93). The opportunity to study a network of organizations within an educational context has the potential to expand the research literature by evaluating the various types of organizational strategies interacting with traditional bureaucratic forms (Eglene et al., 2007; O’Toole, 1997; Russell et al., 2015) and providing a different framework for addressing complex educational issues.

This chapter describes the research methods, research design, and data analysis procedures used in conducting this study. Given that the BTC is only two years in existence and the Be There inter-organizational network (BTIN) has only recently emerged, this study is designed as an exploratory case study aiming to identify, describe, and map the emergence of the inter-organizational network. Also, the study aims to understand the BTC through the lens of key stakeholders who are active participants in campaign. This chapter will first explore the methods employed to understand the composition, structure, and coordination of the BTIN. Particular attention will be paid to the theoretical and empirical reasons methods were chosen to unpack the role of the BTIN in addressing chronic absenteeism. This chapter will then return to the research questions, discuss the construction of the network survey, detail data used for the social network analysis (SNA), and highlight the relevance of visualizing (i.e., mapping) the BTIN. Also in this chapter, a description of the semi-structured interviews conducted with selected organizations will be discussed.

### **3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study was concerned with understanding the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and emergent “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) that has brought chronic absenteeism to the forefront of community and education policy discussions in Pittsburgh. To this end, four basic research questions were explored:

1. What organizations are involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)?

2. In what ways are organizations connecting and collaborating to address chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)?
3. What resources (tools, expertise, interventions, etc.) exist among the network of organizations that can assist efforts to address chronic absenteeism?
4. What is the relationship between organizations and the BTC? To what extent does an attendance campaign contribute to the coordination of the network?

By addressing these research questions, this study will advance current debates about the efficacy and utility of collaborative approaches to address chronic absenteeism by presenting a case of an inter-organizational network that potentially contributes to improving student attendance.

### **3.2 RESEARCH SETTING**

The “Be There” campaign (BTC) was launched in 2013 by the United Way of Allegheny County with the intention of encouraging cross-sector collaboration to address chronic absenteeism. Initially, the BTC started as an awareness campaign to deliver a consistent message to students and the greater Pittsburgh community about the importance of school attendance. The campaign has been successful at generating community-wide discussion on the chronic absenteeism issue that has affected many students in the Pittsburgh region by combining “county-wide messaging with a community-based, data-driven approach to ensure that fewer students fall behind academically because of chronic absenteeism” (Attendance Works, 2015).

The BTC came into existence at the same time as chronic absenteeism was garnering more attention from Pittsburgh Public School (PPS). In fact, Dr. Linda Lane, superintendent of

PPS, stated that “...chronic absenteeism got my attention particularly because of all the work we’re doing with effective teaching. That goes for naught if the kids aren’t there” (Allen & Lavorini, 2013). PPS noticed that their schools looked “fine” when only measuring truancy but looked very different when measured by rates of chronic absenteeism. PPS was one of the first districts to sign on as a partner in the BTC. Allegheny County, and specifically Pittsburgh, serves as an ideal research context for investigating chronic absenteeism because the topic has become an issue of community concern. School attendance for the past several years has been addressed in ways ranging from long-standing traditional truancy prevention programs to emerging strategies involving multiple stakeholders.

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this study, the overall research design relied upon case study methods when examining the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and the emergence of the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN). The case study research method is appropriate when interactions among actors in the context are the subject of the research (Yin, 1994). Yin (1994) argued that the case study method is a strategy to explore the how, why, and what type of questions when the research has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context. Therefore, case study methods were chosen because they promoted the use of the context of the BTC to study the emergence of the BTIN in response to chronic absenteeism. When conducting these case study methods, validity was taken into consideration. Validity ensured that the theoretical framework guided the research, variables were conceptually operationalized, and data collection was transparently implemented.

In addition to case study methods, this study also employed the use of social network analysis (SNA). Network research has used qualitative data to describe and analyze networks, and Au and Ferrare (2015) articulated that education research has used theories and methods from other network research subject areas previously. Some of the previous studies that have used SNA include Hallinan and Sorensen's (1985) exploration of ability and peer group structures, Feld and Carter's (1998) study of desegregation and interracial contact, and numerous projects addressing education policy reform (e.g., Daly, 2010; Russell et al., 2015; Song & Miskel, 2007).

Finally, this study made use of qualitative research approaches. Qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis are used to explore new forms of networks and collaboration patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009). Those who use qualitative approaches to network studies do so to validate network data, describe network practices, perform network orientations and assessments, and provide insight into network impacts and dynamics (Hollstein, 2011). Also, Hollstein (2011) posited:

Qualitative approaches not only give insight into how networks work (i.e., the practices of networking), but they can also contribute to a better understanding of how networks matter and – in combination with quantitative approaches – of what mechanism and conditions figure in when producing certain network outcomes. (p. 408)

The use of qualitative survey and interview techniques employed in this research study helped to show the linkages between network structure, network actors, and possible network coordination. This study goes beyond just describing the emergent network as a result of BYC, but also artifact had selected organizations respond to the mapped network via semi-structured interviews. These

interviews gathered further insight on the BTC and possible policy changes as a result of the campaign.

The research involved two phases. First, a survey was conducted to identify organizations that were part of the emerging BTIN and establish the other organizations with whom they collaborate. Interviews were then conducted with a sample of seven organizations based upon their position in the network map and affiliation with the BTC.

Interviews are commonly used in network research (e.g., Wong & Salaff, 1998; Menjívar, 2000; Smith, 2005) and are seen as the first choice in studying actors' networking strategies and network orientations (Hollstein, 2011). Single, open-ended questions as part of standardized surveys are also common in qualitative network research (e.g. Bearman & Parigi, 2004). Interviews are typically combined with survey inquiry in network research, especially for obtaining information via name generators and name interpreters (Hollstein, 2011). As Hollstein (2011) puts it, "...method triangulation ensures the comparability of data. At the same time, it allows making substantive statements about the structure of networks that go beyond a merely metaphorical reference to the term network" (p. 412). As is the case with this study, the generated network map served as a cognitive aid in describing relationships during interviews and as a means to guide the discussion of relationships within the BTIN.

### **3.3.1 Network Survey**

Garnering network information may be obtained from archival materials, sensors, observation, or other types of sources (Butts, 2008). However, the main source of gathering information about a given network is through the use of survey techniques. A network survey was created by which a representative of an organization was asked to identify other organizations with whom they have

collaborated and worked, the type of resources that they have within their organization that can be used to address chronic absenteeism, and knowledge and assessment of the “Be There” campaign (BTC). The survey served two purposes: (1) to identify an organization’s ties with other organizations and (2) to gather information on an organization’s expertise, resources, and relationship with the BTC. The network survey employed a combination of *roster* and *name generator* instruments to gather information about organizations in the emerging inter-organizational network (Borgatti et al., 2013); therefore, the network survey allowed for representatives to generate names of other organizations not included in the provided roster list of BTC collaborators.

The roster instrument is most common in measuring educational networks (Butts, 2008; de Lima, 2010). Roster instruments typically consist of a stem question (e.g., “Please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each school district to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania”) followed by a list of names (organizations). Respondents are then asked to indicate who they have a particular relationship with, while leaving others blank (de Lima, 2010). In the network literature, the roster technique is considered to be a strong method for facilitating responses from respondents to remember (de Lima, 2010). The roster technique was not sufficient as a standalone instrument for this study because it was not known in advance the whole set of potential alters (organizations) that should be included in the network survey. Therefore, the survey also included a name generator instrument to overcome this limitation.

Name generators are questions, most often in a free-recall format, that ask respondents to identify other organizations or members of a network (Carolan, 2014). Name generators are often used in studies of egocentric networks where surveys collect information from each

respondent about relationships among a set of alters with whom the respondent has direct contact (Knoke & Yang, 2008; Marsden, 1987). For this study, the survey was designed to present multiple-name generators or several questionnaire items to uncover other organizations working on chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

In network analysis, the researcher sets limits when collecting data on social relations that may have no obvious limits (Barnes, 1979). Data collection involved relational and event-based strategies were used to understand the network. Starting with the organizations from the initial BTC organization partner list, respondents were able to nominate other organizations they felt they were connected to when it came to addressing chronic absenteeism issues. The snowball sampling method continued until the process of nominating subsided, no additional names surfaced, or all possible organizations were reached for survey completion (Frank, 2005; Knoke & Yang, 2008; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Snowball sampling usually generates strongly connected social networks (Laumann, Marsden, & Prensky, 1983). The event-based strategy bounded the network to actors that participated within a defined set of activities occurring during a specific time and place (Marsden, 2005; Knoke & Yang, 2008; Scott, 2000). Organizations involved in this study were specifically involved in activities that addressed chronic absenteeism and had some association with the BTC. While organizations could have been involved in activities related to chronic absenteeism prior to the launch of the campaign, it was important to capture the organizations working together that were specifically affiliated with the BTC.

The network survey was designed during in July of 2014 and was influenced by previous network research studies that utilized a similar approach to accessing network information (see Marsden, 2011). Also, the survey was influenced by the researcher's knowledge of the BTC; thus, for access and ease of use, the survey was designed and administered online rather than via



a paper-based survey. An online survey made it easy to distribute the questionnaire to a large number of respondents who were located at different locations and to immediately access the data generated from their responses (Pitts & Spillane, 2009).

The design of the survey went through multiple iterations during July 2014. First, survey questions were created that assisted in depicting the network, keeping respondent answer time to a minimum, and focused on respondents answering questions about their own organization and their collaborative efforts with other organizations. The survey then inquires about an organization's level of collaboration with other organizations in order to focus on connections that were understood by respondents as actually existing. Next, survey participants were asked about their knowledge of the BTC and their level of interaction with the campaign in order to gain a deeper understanding of an organization's commitment to chronic absenteeism. Finally, for each organization named as being a collaborative partner, the survey asked respondents to select the level or depth of the connection as well as name any other relationship that could possibly exist. This allowed for an examination of the strength of connections (ties) among organizations. These ties were characterized as being either (1) no tie, (2) shared information, (3) informal collaboration, or (4) formal collaboration.

After completion of the network survey draft, potential survey respondents were contacted to check their availability to take a draft version of the network survey. During the end of July and first week of August 2014, three participants agreed to take the network survey and be interviewed about their responses to the survey questions. A cognitive interview was conducted to improve the quality and accuracy of the survey instrument and analyze sources of response error (Haeger, Lambert, Kinzie, & Gieser, 2012; Willis, 1999, 2005).

Verbal probing techniques were used during the cognitive interviews (Willis, 1999). This process involved asking specific information relevant to the question respondents had just answered to the survey question. Haeger et al. (2012) proposed that the advantages of the verbal probing method are seen in the ease of training the respondent to answer probing questions and the ability for the interviewer to focus on particular areas that appear to be potential sources of response error. To address the potential bias of poor probes (per Collins, 2003), questions were developed about the network survey and the reason(s) behind subjects' responses while their survey responses were still fresh on their mind.

Interviews were audio recorded but were not transcribed. Instead, responses were organized across the three interviews that highlighted areas within the network survey that needed to be addressed. Based on the survey pilot, survey questions and survey layout were adjusted. For example, survey response spaces were expanded to allow for longer responses, options choices were deleted that were confusing, and questions were added about the BTC. The final 30 question survey was organized into three categories: (1) organization's work and knowledge on chronic absenteeism; 2) organization's connections and collaborations with other organizations; and 3) organization's knowledge and relationship with the Be There campaign.

### **3.4 PHASE 1: IDENTIFYING "BE THERE" PARTNERS**

#### **3.4.1 Participants**

With the assistance of individuals at the United Way, the researcher identified participants for the online survey. In November of 2014, the United Way compiled a list of all partners in the

“Be There” campaign (BTC) and shared with the researcher. Originally, being listed as a BTC “partner” meant that the entity had signed a “Be There” pledge card indicating that it would support the campaign; had attended or been invited to one of the convening conferences, events, or activities in the past two years; or was involved in carrying out the work around improving school attendance in Pittsburgh. The original list had a total of 514 partners. The list was edited to only include partners that represented organizations, thus excluding individuals, schools, programs within an organization, offices within organizations that did not operate with their own autonomy, and national organizations that had not contributed to clearly identified work in Pittsburgh. For organizations that had multiple partners committed to the BTC, the United Way identified the key contact that presumably knew the most about the campaign. For partners that were debatable for inclusion on the final list, the researcher consulted two staff members at the United for insight. In the end, 103 organizations were identified as BTC partners and were added to the survey based on their organizational characteristic, or type of organization. The list included school districts, charter schools/networks, educational intermediaries, private foundations, government agencies, higher education institutions, and non-profit organizations dedicated to youth development, family engagement, education, youth advocacy, faith, health and wellness, and community engagement.

### **3.4.2 Survey Administration**

The United Way provided a list of an identified staff person for each of the 103 partners as having the ability to possibly complete a survey. An initial email went out to all 103 partners to complete the online survey starting in January 2015. The email explained the study and provided a link for the survey. The survey was administered using Qualtrics, an online survey software

platform that allowed respondents access to the network survey at any time. Of the 103 organizations that were initially contacted via email, 45 completed the survey (44%). As previously discussed, survey respondents were able to indicate other organizations that they collaborated with around chronic absenteeism via name generation. Two additional organizations sent in names of organizations they worked with but did not complete the entire survey. These responses uncovered a total of 74 new organizations, and these newly named organizations were then sent an invitation to complete the survey. In the end, the researcher compiled a list of 177 total organizations affiliated with the emergent “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN).

### **3.4.3 Network Analysis**

Network analysis techniques were used to understand the emerging inter-organizational network. The idea behind social network analysis (SNA) is that a set of actors (nodes) may have relationships (ties) with one another. Networks can have many actors or just a few, and there can be one or many kinds of relations between pairs of actors. To understand a social network, a description of a pattern of social relationships is an important starting point. Ideally, we can know about all of the relationships between each pair of actors in the population.

The main goal of collaboration is to establish communication and resource links with other organizations to share resources and information about a situation (Russell et al., 2014). In the context of this study, that situation is chronic absenteeism; therefore, SNA was used to examine the ties between actors in collaboration and the emergence of a network to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. The relations between actors were just as important as the actors that they connect and the attributes of those actors (Scott, 2000); hence, the survey administered to organizations produced both conventional and network data. The conventional

data focused on the work and attributes of organizations (actors), while the network data focused on actors and relationships. Many SNA studies have investigated how an actor is embedded within a structure and how the structure emerges from the micro-relations between individual parts (Stovin & Davies, 2008; Xu & Chen, 2005).

In order to understand the pathways that actors have to one another, actor positions in networks are also useful. Known as *centrality*, actors who have many pathways to other actors may be more influential with regard to them (Scott, 2000). Actors who have short pathways to other actors may be more central in the network. The number and length of pathways in a network are important to understanding both individual organizations' constraints and opportunities, and for understanding the potential of the network as a whole (Scott, 2000).

The conceptual framework of inter-organizational networks presented in Chapter 2 guided the analysis of the research questions. Table 3 shows the dimensions of the conceptual framework, the research questions that guided its exploration, data collection method(s), and data analysis. To address the first research question (i.e., what organizations are involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County), survey responses and relevant documents that identified organizations (actors) were analyzed. All organizations that were named or generated as a new organization were organized into a matrix list format. Actors were arranged by rows and columns in a node-list data matrix that was added into UCINET SNA software. The nodelist format is the simplest format for capturing connections and actors involved in a particular network, with each individual organization representing a node in the SNA. The  $n$ -by- $n$  symmetrical matrix includes actors in the network, with  $n$  representing the number of actors.

**Table 3.** Analysis Plan of Research Based on Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework Dimension	Research Question(s)	Data Collection	
		Methods	Data Analysis
Network Composition	<p>What organizations are involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)?</p> <p>What resources (tools, expertise, interventions, etc.) exist among the network of organizations that can assist efforts to address chronic absenteeism?</p>	Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifact-based interviews	Coding of interviews and open-ended survey responses; Analysis of survey responses
Network Structure	In what ways are organizations connecting and collaborating to address chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)?	Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifact-based interviews	Social network analysis (including measuring centrality and density)
Network Coordination	<p>In what ways are organizations connecting and collaborating to address chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)?</p> <p>What is the relationship between organizations and the Be There campaign? To what extent does an attendance campaign contribute to the coordination of the network?</p>	Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and artifact-based interviews	Social network analysis; Coding of interview data

This matrix was created in Microsoft Excel and loaded into UCINET software to produce network visualization and statistics. UCINET is a comprehensive program for the analysis of social networks and other proximity data (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). The program contains several network analytic routines (e.g., centrality measures, dyadic cohesion measures, and density measures etc.), and general statistical and multivariate analysis tools such as multidimensional scaling, correspondence analysis, factor analysis, cluster analysis, and multiple regression. These network analytic routines are useful for understanding complex relationships that exist in the social world. Node attributes were gathered from survey results, which provided

additional information such as the focus and duration of each organization's chronic absenteeism work and how long they have been associated with the BTC.

To address the second research question (i.e., how organizations were connected), network centrality and density metrics were calculated employing UCINET software (Borgatti et al., 2002). Centrality is an important and commonly used conceptual tool for exploring actor roles within a network (Borgatti et al., 2013; Knoke & Yang, 2008; Russell et al., 2015). Centrality highlights prominent actors and their "visibility" to other network actors (Knoke & Yang, 2008). Also, centrality provides insight on the number of relations and the direction of those relations a given actor has within a network (Carolan, 2014; Knoke & Yang, 2008). In this study, degree centrality measured the extent to which a node (actor) connected to other nodes in the Be There network (Borgatti et al., 2013; Carolan, 2014; de Lima, 2010; Knoke & Yang, 2008; Russell et al., 2015). Degree centrality is the most frequently used centrality measure. According to Knoke & Yang (2008), actor degree centrality not only reflects each node's connectivity to other nodes but also depends on the size of the network. Therefore, the size of the network determines the maximum possible degree centrality value. Calculating for the central organizations based on the degree centrality algorithm,  $n(n-1)/2$ , where  $n$  is the number of nodes, measured the number of nodes to which a given actor was connected (Borgatti et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2015; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). For the overall network, the mean and *SDs* were calculated to identify the actors that were 1 and 2 *SDs* above the degree centrality mean-- an indicator of central actors within the network (Russell et al., 2015).

Borgatti et al. (2013) defined density as the number of ties in the network, expressed as a proportion of the number possible. Furthermore, Carolan (2014) interprets density as the probability that a tie exists between any pair of randomly chosen nodes. The advantage of

calculating density over the simple number of ties is that it adjusts for the number of nodes within a given network (Borgatti et al., 2013). The density measure is a percentage calculated from the number of ties present divided by the total number of potential ties (Carolan, 2014). Since the study was only concerned with ties that were present or absent, the density measure was calculated as the ratio of dyadic ties among alters divided by the maximum possible dyadic ties (Carolan, 2014; Knoke & Yang, 2008).

Tie strength was determined by survey responses to the four categories of connections that organizations were asked to identify about their activities related to the BTC and chronic absenteeism. In order of strength these categories were as follows: (1) have not worked together at all, (2) shared information or data but did not work actively work together, (3) worked together informally (i.e., collaborated without a formal agreement), and (4) had/have a formal partnership (i.e., Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other formal agreement). In the visual network map, the thickness of the line was used to indicate the strength of the tie between organizations.

A network diagram or map was generated using NetDraw that consisted of a set of points representing nodes and a set of lines representing connections (Borgatti et al., 2013). Poor network visualization communicates very little information or can lead to errors in the interpretation (McGrath, Blythe, & Krackhardt, 1997). Using UCINET software (Borgatti et al., 2002), additional information such as attributes of individual nodes, strength of tie characteristics, and the type of tie between organizations were embedded into the network map. NetDraw was also used to create other visual properties (i.e., shapes, sizes, and colors) that highlighted various characteristics about nodes.



The third research question asked about network resources and was operationalized by analyzing survey and interview responses that described the resources specific organizational actors have that are associated with their work on chronic absenteeism. Every organization's survey responses were coded for their resources, as responses provided pertinent information on the performance of the network. Resources were coded as follows:

- provide training for school and/or school district personnel;
- provide training for organizations (other than schools or school districts);
- develop tools such as curriculum or online modules;
- manage or oversee programs;
- research or evaluation services;
- direct services to students such as tutoring, counseling, mentoring, after-school programming, etc.;
- direct services to parents such as counseling, support groups, home visits, etc.;
- political advocacy;
- awareness building;
- money to schools and school districts related to their absenteeism efforts;
- money to organizations (other than schools/school districts) related to their absenteeism efforts; and
- provide data.

Similar to Russell et al.'s (2015) study on Race to the Top implementation networks, references to material resources had to be explicitly discussed (named) in interviews or selected in the survey. Human resources were also coded in similar fashion, with inferences being done on

descriptions of the training or service an actor would provide or their role in the development of tools (Russell et al., 2015).

The fourth research question asked about the organizations' relationship with the BTC and how the campaign contributes to the coordination of the network. Network surveys were analyzed to determine the level of relationship an organization had with the BTC. It was hypothesized that those organizations that have a deeper level of knowledge and relationship with the BTC are likely to influence the coordination of the network. Also, interviews were conducted with seven organizations to get a deeper understanding of how they viewed the campaign and its contribution to addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

It is important to note that analysis of social network data is often hampered by non-response and missing data. Numerous studies have shown the negative effects of missing actors and ties on the properties of social networks, indicating that the results of SNA can be biased if missing ties were not accounted for and only complete cases were analyzed (Borgatti & Molina, 2003; Kossinets; 2006). In SNA, two main types of non-response are possible: *unit non-response* (i.e., actors (organizations) are completely missing) and *item non-response* (i.e., data on particular items are missing). Non-responses were minimized by using partially completed surveys, which although incomplete, still provided some organizational collaborations from named or generated partners. Phone calls and emails to 37 organizations were completed during the months of May and June of 2015 to verify collaborations. During conversations or email exchanges, organizations verified current collaborations and offered new collaborations that existed. To combat the possibility of item non-response, the survey was designed so that an answer was required for each survey question before a respondent could move on to the next question.

For future analysis, employing in-degree centralization calculation that factors in the number of ties that are directed towards a given actor could be done. Future analyses could also include running the analyses differently to handle missing data; including removing nodes with missing data to see if the results are robust (Borgatti et al., 2013). Given that the response rate was 44% of the original organizations that were named by the United Way as being affiliated with the BTC, caution should be given about making judgments about the overall density or drawing conclusions about the lack of connections between many of the organizations.

## **3.5 PHASE 2: INTERVIEWS**

### **3.5.1 Participants**

The seven interview participants all occupied elite positions in the organizations they represented, with “elite” defined qualitatively as individuals high in the organization’s chain of command (as per Miles & Huberman, 1994). Table 4 presents information of the interview participants, which organization they represented, and their position at that organization. All participants had participated in “Be There” campaign (BTC) events, attended one of the BTC conferences, and had attended at least 50% of the BTC main partner meetings.

Organizations were chosen based on two selection criteria: network position and status as a main partner in the BTC. Network position was determined by degree centrality measures calculated in UCINET (Borgatti et al., 2002). The mean centrality score of the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) was 15.068 with a standard deviation was 20.188. Table 5 presents the seven organizations and their degree centrality scores. Three organizations (i.e., the

**Table 4.** Organizational Roles of Interview Participants

Organization	Organizational Role
A+ Schools	Researcher
Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU)	Director
Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT)	Director
Department of Human Services (DHS)	Director
Office of Child Development (OCD)	Director
Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)	Director
United Way of Allegheny County	Project Manger

Department of Human Services, Pittsburgh Public Schools, and United Way of Allegheny County) were chosen because they had degree centrality scores that were greater than two standard deviations above the mean. These three organizations occupied central roles within the BTIN, and it was important to capture their perspective, as they were likely to be leading and coordinating BTC activities. Also, these organizations had more connections to main partners affiliated with the BTC. A+ Schools, Allegheny Intermediate Unit, and the Office of Child Development were selected for representation in interviews because they all had degree centrality scores that were greater than one standard deviation above the mean. These organizations are influential in Pittsburgh due to the reach of their resources, membership, and ability to disseminate information to stakeholders, community members, schools, and families. While they did not have many connections, the Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) participated in the interview process because they are a main BTC partner. CONNECT's perspective on the BTC and the BTIN was important to capture as an organization with low levels of involvement in the actual campaign that nonetheless occupies a position of authority.

**Table 5.** Centrality Scores of Organizations with Participating Interviewees

Organization Name	Degree Centrality Score
A+ Schools	53 <sup>+</sup>
Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU)	38 <sup>+</sup>
Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT)	11 <sup>*</sup>
Department of Human Services (DHS)	111 <sup>++</sup>
Office of Child Development (OCD)	55 <sup>+</sup>
Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)	81 <sup>++</sup>
United Way of Allegheny County	84 <sup>++</sup>

*Note.* The Be There Network exhibited a mean score of the centrality measure of 15.068 ( $SD=20.188$ ). \* denotes less than one standard deviation below the centrality mean of the overall Be There network; + denotes more than one standard deviation above the centrality mean of the overall Be There network; ++ denotes more than two standard deviations above the centrality mean of the overall Be There network

### **3.5.2 Interview Procedure**

During the summer of 2015, semi-structured and artifact-based interviews (per Kvale, 1996) were conducted with the seven representatives from key organizations within the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN). These interview methods were chosen because they are an appropriate approach for obtaining information from elite individuals within an organization. The interview format allowed for the interviewer the opportunity to control the interview setting, interpret complex questions for the interviewee, probe for further clarification, evaluate the validity of the information, provide artifacts (i.e., the network map) to elicit participant reaction(s), and ensure that the interviewee considered each question seriously. Interviews helped to clarify and expand on answers given on the network survey, offer interviewees the opportunity to discuss the “Be There” campaign (BTC) at length, and obtain responses to the map of the BTIN. Participants were sent transcripts for any additional corrections or clarifications. The interviews generated 140 pages of text.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with one staff person from each of the seven identified organizations. These interviews lasted between 30-70 minutes, with an average time of around 40 minutes. Before conducting the interviews, participants received an email explaining the purpose of the study, information about participant confidentiality, and the interview questions. Interviews began with several open-ended questions about the participant's organization and its current endeavors in addressing chronic absenteeism. These questions were intentionally asked to provoke discussion, but also served as key data points for understanding the organization being interviewed. A voice recorder device was used to capture the interviews and the researcher took handwritten notes during the interview. Following each interview, recordings were uploaded to Verbalink for transcription.

### **3.5.3 Interview Protocol**

Interviewees were asked 28 open-ended questions about their work to address chronic absenteeism, the "Be There" campaign (BTC), the generated network map based on survey results, resources and activities identified within the online survey, and their overall assessment of the campaign. Appendix B contains the complete interview protocol.

### **3.5.4 Interview Analysis**

Interviews were analyzed in conjunction with the data garnered from open-ended responses to from the online survey from each respective organization. First, interviews were read through to identify themes pertaining to categories found in the online survey, which were as follows:

- work and knowledge on chronic absenteeism,

- connections and collaborations with other organizations, and
- knowledge and relationship with the BTC.

These categories served as a guide to examine coherence across themes. Transcribed interviews were uploaded into Dedoose, a qualitative coding program, and a codebook was created around the three themes. Guided by the conceptual framework and interview protocol, a grounded theory protocol was used in order to analyze earlier-collected data while continuing to collect data (e.g., Charmaz, 2006). An initial list of themes was generated during the only round of open coding. Patterns across these themes were examined across the seven interviews. Table 6 presents the key analysis codes and definitions.

**Table 6.** Key Analysis Codes and Code Definitions for Interview Data

Analysis Code	Code Definition
Chronic Absenteeism	Definition or measurement of chronic absenteeism
Connections	Formal or informal to other organizations
Orgs	Identifies organizations involved in campaign or in network
Products	Physical materials present that advertise or otherwise promote the BTC
Relationship Building	Communication with organizations on chronic absenteeism/BTC
Resources and/or Activities	Describes what an organization is doing, has, or can contribute
Role of Be There Campaign	How the BTC contributes to addressing chronic absenteeism
Role of Main Partners	Describes what main BTC partners contribute to addressing chronic absenteeism and the overall campaign
UW Convenes	The role of United Way as a convener to spearhead the campaign against chronic absenteeism
Zones of Chronic Absenteeism	Describes one of the four root causes (zones) of chronic absenteeism (i.e., students' physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being; family structure and dynamics; school physical and social environment; neighborhood context)

### **3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Information regarding this study's focal points and methods was submitted to and approved by University of Pittsburgh's Institutional Review Board. To attend to ethical considerations, the researcher emailed all respondents (interviews and survey) ahead of time and reminding them that their participation in the study was voluntary. For the semi-structured interviews, all seven interviewees consented to participate. The United Way was instrumental in sending the survey out to potential organizations, providing relevant documents, and offering insightful information when necessary. The United Way was updated on progress of the study monthly, and it was agreed upon that a final policy brief would be provided to the United Way at the conclusion of the study.

### **3.7 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

The study, while investigating the network of organizations and their connections to one another as it relates to addressing chronic absenteeism, does not explore the aspect of trust that exists between actors within a network. Barrera and Buskens (2009) have acknowledged the relevance of trust for cooperation within networks. Also, a prominent social mechanism that allows organizations to increase trust is partner selection (Slonim & Garbarino, 2008). According to Ashlock, Smucker, Stanley, and Tesfatsion (1996), partner selection is not only a way for organizations to make preferential choices, but it also provides an incentive for cooperating organizations to be reliable and committed to others so as to avoid social isolation and improve trust among organizations. This study does not investigate the reasons behind why certain



organizations work together and others do not, recognizing that the organizations are loosely connected to one another through their association with the “Be There” campaign (BTC). Understanding the trust between organizations could provide more information as to why certain organizations were working together, the degree to which organizations were willing to implement BTC strategies and best practices, and the organizations’ level of commitment to addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

Finally, the low response rate to the online survey (44%) is a limitation of the study and does not allow for a complete and “closed” network picture. Some organizations did not respond to the survey, stating that they were not only focused on the chronic absenteeism issue, were not sure why they were named as a partner in the BTC, or had only done a few things related to the campaign and did not really see themselves as a full partner. The design of the survey had a specific focus on chronic absenteeism, with questions asking about organization’s work around addressing chronic absenteeism and their connections with other organizations based on their work towards improving school attendance. If survey questions were broader and asked more about an organization’s work to improve the educational experiences of students (i.e., with chronic absenteeism as a part, but not the focus of, the entire survey), it is possible that the response rate would have been higher. Future analysis of this network should not include organizations that declined to complete the survey because they indicated that they are either not involved in chronic absenteeism work, only attended a limited number of BTC events, or are no longer engaged with the campaign.

### **3.8 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented briefly the following: research questions and sources of information, description of the research site, data collection, and analysis techniques used in the study. This section also described the purpose of the application of social network analysis (SNA) to identify central organizations and the types of relationships between these organizations. The chapter also provided information about the interviews, codes used to analyze interviews, and limitations of the study. The findings and analyses of the study are presented in the following chapters.

## **4.0 RESULTS: ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

The purpose of this study was to explore the network of organizations involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh, focusing on the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and the emerging Be There inter-organizational network (BTIN). This chapter presents results of the analysis and interpretation of the social network data. The findings will be organized according to the following key themes: diversity of organizations addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh, a network of collaboration to address chronic absenteeism, and the role of main partners in the BTIN.

### **4.1 DIVERSITY OF ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

Pittsburgh has a rich array of organizations that are working on the chronic absenteeism issue. 103 organizations were identified as original partners who had signed on to support and participate in the “Be There” campaign (BTC). As outlined in Chapter 3, organizations were sent an invitation to complete a survey which entailed identifying organizations with whom they collaborated. Organizations that responded to the survey identified 74 additional organizations addressing chronic absenteeism through the BTC, resulting in a total of 177 organizations in the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN). Table 7 indicates the number of Be There organizations as sorted by organizational type to illustrate the level of diversity.

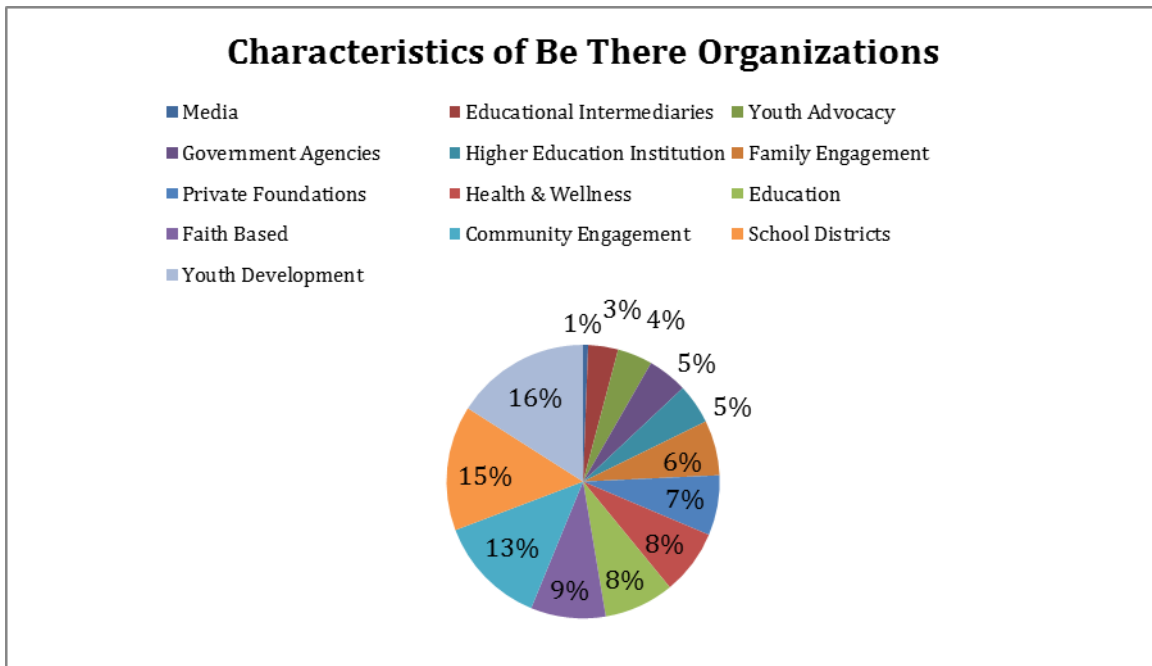
**Table 7.** Organizations Participating in the “Be There” Inter-Organizational Network

Organization Type	Number of Official “Be There” Organizations as of October, 2014 ( <i>n</i> =103)	“Be There” Organizations Identified by Survey Data ( <i>n</i> =74)
Community Engagement*	14	10
Education*	13	2
Educational Intermediaries	7	-
Faith Based*	7	8
Family Engagement*	6	5
Government Agencies	9	-
Health & Wellness*	1	12
Higher Education Institutions	2	6
Media	-	1
Private Foundations	5	7
School Districts and/or Charter Schools/Networks	16	11
Youth Advocacy*	3	4
Youth Development*	20	8

*Note.* \* denotes nonprofit organizations; expanded table is available in Appendix C.

#### 4.1.1 Organizational Characteristics

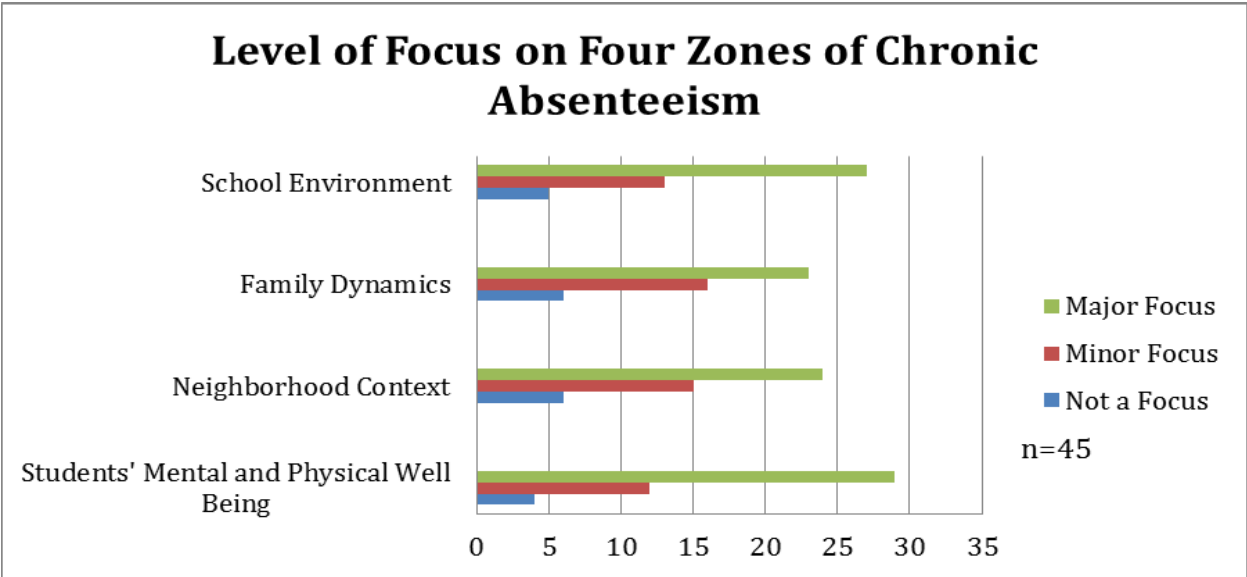
The 177 total organizations identified as being part of the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) consisted of the following types of organizations: 16% were youth development non-profits, 15% school districts, 13% community engagement non-profits, 9% faith-based non-profits, 8% education non-profits, 8% health and wellness non-profits, 7% foundations, 6% family engagement non-profits, 5% higher education institutions, 5% government agencies, 4% youth advocacy non-profits, 3% educational intermediaries, and 1% media. Figure 3 shows the representation of organizations by characteristics. Pittsburgh is known for its range and number of non-profits that support different activities, organizations, and events (Schmitt, 2012); thus, it was not surprising that 65% of the organizations involved in the BTIN were non-profits.



**Figure 3.** Characteristics of “Be There” Organizations

## 4.2 CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM FOCUS

A survey question asked organizations to indicate their level of focus around each of the four zones of chronic absenteeism as described in Chapter 2 (i.e., students’ physical and mental health, neighborhood context, family dynamics, and school environment). The majority of the respondent organizations (64.5%) indicated that *students’ mental and physical well-being* was the major focus of their chronic absenteeism efforts; however, school environment, family dynamic, and neighborhood context were also seen as major areas of focus by some organizations. The responses to the question on an organization’s level of focus around the four zones of chronic absenteeism are summarized in Figure 4. These results should be interpreted with caution given that it only reflects the focus of the 44% of organizations in the network that responded to the survey.

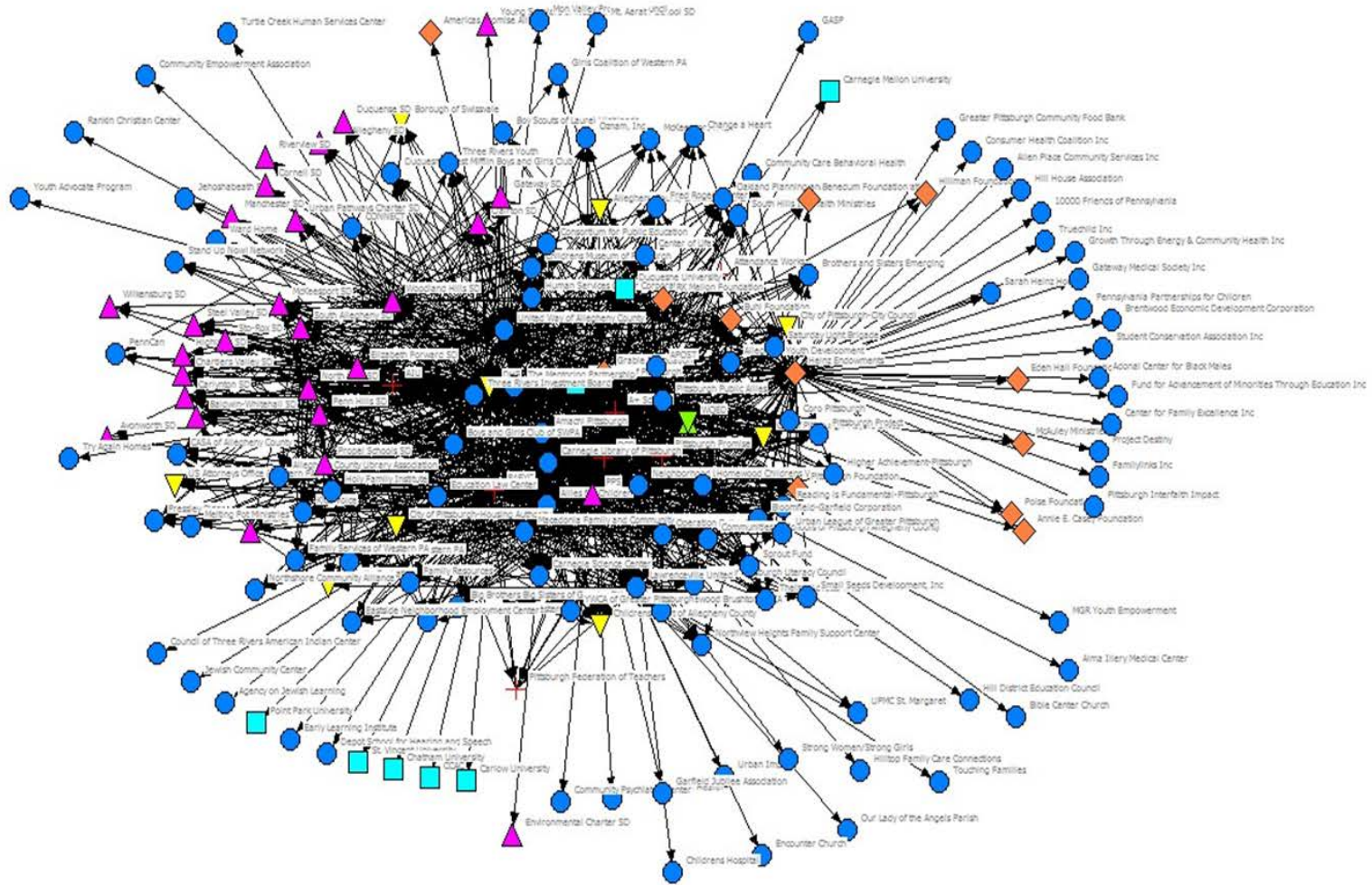


**Figure 4.** Level of Focus on Four Zones of Chronic Absenteeism

Overall, organizations responded favorably to having at least a minor focus around each of the four zones of chronic absenteeism. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, organizations incorporated numerous strategies and best practices in order to tackle the chronic absenteeism issue, and these strategies addressed each of the four zones of chronic absenteeism.

**4.3 A NETWORK OF COLLABORATION TO ADDRESS CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN PITTSBURGH**

Social network analysis (SNA) allowed for the mapping and measuring of relationships between organizations. On the network map (Figure 5), organizations are represented as nodes, while the



**Organization Type**

▲ School Districts

● Nonprofits

■ Higher Education

◆ Foundations

+ Educational Intermediaries

▼ Government Agencies

◆ Media

**Figure 5. “Be There” Inter-Organizational Network**

lines demonstrate a collaborative relationship between the nodes. As explained in detail in Chapter 3, UCINET (Borgatti et al., 2002) was used to calculate centrality (degree and betweenness) and density in order to understand an actor's number of ties to other actors and the proportion of all ties that could be present respectively.

It is important to note that the size of the network is critical to the structure of organizational interactions because of the resources and capacities that each organization (actor) has for building and maintaining collaborations. As a network of organizations gets bigger, the proportion of all of the ties that could be present (density) will fall. Usually, the size of a network is indexed by counting the number of nodes. In any network there are  $(k*k-1)$  unique ordered pairs of actors, where  $k$  is the number of actors. Therefore, in the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) of 177 actors, there were 30,800 possible logical relationships with directed data. If the data had been undirected, or symmetric ties, the number would have been 15,400 (half) since, for example, the relationship between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the United Way would be viewed as the same as the relationship between the United Way and DHS. The number of logically possible collaborations then grows exponentially as the number of actors increases linearly. For networks the size of the BTIN, it is useful to examine maps that graph the nodes and their relationships. The BTIN map is represented in Figure 5. A key is provided below the figure for symbol reference, and colors are connected to the organizational characteristic (nonprofit, school district, foundation, etc.).

The BTIN map allowed for a number of observations critical to this study. First, there were a number of actors (177), and all of them were “connected” to at least one organization. However, not every possible connection was presented, resulting in gaps between non-redundant contacts or *structural holes* (Burt, 1992). Also, there appeared to be some differences among the



actors in how connected they are (e.g., compare Macedonia FACE to Try Again Homes, both nonprofit organizations). Some actor's connections were likely to be reciprocated (that is, if A shares information with B, B also shares information with A), but due to survey responses, actors were identifying more organizations that they collaborated with than they were being named as a collaborating organization. As a result of the variation in how connected organizations are, whether the ties are reciprocated, and survey response rate, some actors may be at some "distance" from other actors. The network map identified groups of actors who differ in this regard. For example, DHS, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), The Mentoring Partnership, and the United Way occupied central positions within the network while Hill House Association, Youth Advocate Program, Encounter Church, and Urban Impact were located on the outside or periphery of the network.

With more collaborations, maps may not be very helpful; however, in the case of the BTIN map, careful examination of the map can be very useful when getting an intuitive grasp of the important features and collaborations within a network of organizations. Examining the network map can give a good intuitive sense of what is going on, but the descriptions of what is seen can be imprecise. To get more precise by applying algorithms and calculating the mathematical measures of network properties, it is necessary to work with an adjacency matrix that provides numerical representations for the types of connections that exist between organizations (Carolan, 2014).

#### **4.3.1 Degree Centrality**

This study sought to gain a better understanding of the organizations and the relationship between organizations that play a central role in the "Be There" campaign (BTC). One of the

methods used to understand the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) and the organizations that comprise it was to evaluate the location of actors in the network. Network location was measured by finding the centrality of an actor. These measures helped determine the importance, possibly even the influence, of a node in the network. Centrality measures were used as a tool for identifying key organizations in the BTIN (Borgatti et al., 2013). Actors who have more ties to other actors may have higher coordinating or convening responsibility. Also, those actors that have many ties may have access to, or be able to draw upon, more of the resources within the network.

Degree centrality measures the number of ties of a given type that an actor has. In the BTIN, the Department of Human Services (DHS), Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), Heinz Endowments, Mentoring Partnership, and United Way visually appeared to have the most total connections or ties, thus allowing them to occupy central locations within the network. UCINET (Borgatti et al., 2002) was used to do the counting, and some additional calculations and standardizations. Table 6 highlights the central organizations that were at least one standard deviation above the mean ( $SD=20.188$ ;  $M=15.068$ ) as calculated by Freeman’s degree centrality.

Freeman’s degree centrality measures identified that DHS (actor #21) and PAEYC (actor #40) had the most ties to other organizations (111 and 93, respectively). The results indicated that these two organizations could be the most influential in the BTIN and could activate and distribute network resources to a number of other organizations. Interview data revealed that the main partner organizations (which includes both DHS and PAEYC) tend to be highly involved in the work to lower chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. DHS had data-sharing agreements with 19 school districts, provided social services to over 60,000 Allegheny County residents, and worked

**Table 8.** Freeman’s Degree Centrality Measures as Sorted by Degree

Organization	Actor Number	Degree
Department of Human Services (DHS)	21	111.000
Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC)	40	93.000
Heinz Endowments	43	87.000
The Mentoring Partnership	69	85.000
United Way of Allegheny County	4	84.000
Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)	10	81.000
Pittsburgh Public Allies	66	68.000
Grable Foundation	24	62.000
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh	18	60.000
Three Rivers Investment Board	176	58.000
Office of Child Development	1	55.000
Woodland Hills School	38	53.000
A+ Schools	19	53.000
University of Pittsburgh	13	53.000
Amachi Pittsburgh	54	50.000
Homewood Children’s Village	15	43.000
Lawrenceville United	101	42.000
Neighborhood Learning Alliance	11	41.000
Pittsburgh Promise	16	39.000
Elizabeth Forward SD	30	38.000
Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU)	22	38.000
Macedonia Family and Community Enrichment Center	17	36.000

with over 500 organizations across all their programs. Similarly, PAEYC had a large network of early childhood providers that they support, and they exhibited considerable influence across Pennsylvania as it relates to early childhood education.

In addition to DHS and PAEYC, Heinz Endowments (actor #43) and The Mentoring Partnership (actor #69) were two main partner organizations in the BTIN, each possessing unique qualities that allowed them to be pivotal organizations in the chronic absenteeism work happening in Pittsburgh. Heinz Endowments was one of the major funders of education initiatives in Pittsburgh, coincidentally funding many of the partners in the BTC. The Mentoring

Partnership, like PAEYC, had an extensive mentoring and after-school programming network as well as considerable influence throughout the state of Pennsylvania. Both of these organizations were tied to other organizations that may not focus solely on chronic absenteeism but do engage or orient their services towards youth. Finally, the United Way of Allegheny County (actor #4) spearheaded the BTC and collaborated with many of the organizations listed to make school attendance a priority.

Interesting, the centrality measures highlighted a main partner organization with a centrality score one standard deviation below the mean: The Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) had a total of 11 ties to other organizations in the BTIN. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, CONNECT was an organization that did not focus on education issues, but due to its affiliations and partnerships with municipality governments in the region, it was an important member of the BTIN. CONNECT lacked the ties and connections to organizations that work mostly with youth and in education; however, they were an important partner in the BTC's county-wide messaging and partnership building goals.

### **4.3.2 Betweenness Centrality**

Betweenness centrality views an actor as being in a favored position to the extent that the actor falls on the geodesic paths between other pairs of actors in the network (Borgatti et al, 2013). In other words, the more organizations depend on one organization (i.e., the coordinating organization) to make connections with other organizations, the more power that organization likely has in the network. UCINET (Borgatti et al., 2002) can be used to locate the geodesic paths between all pairs of actors and count up how frequently each actor falls on each of these

**Table 9.** Betweenness Centrality

Organization	Actor Number	Betweenness
Department of Human Services (DHS)	21	3226.729
Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC)	40	2243.310
United Way of Allegheny County	4	2096.316
Heinz Endowments	43	1595.180
Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS)	10	716.116
Office of Child Development (OCD)	1	614.734
Woodland Hills School District	38	439.505
Lawrenceville United	101	329.926
Pittsburgh Public Allies	66	287.066
A+ Schools	19	280.915

pathways. If the number of times that an actor appears “between” other actors is added up, we get the measure of actor betweenness centrality. This measure can be normalized by expressing it as a percentage of the maximum possible betweenness that an actor could have had. Results for members of the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) are presented in Table 9.

Results revealed a great deal of variation in actor betweenness in the BTIN ( $M=77.409$ ,  $SD=361.066$ ). The Department of Human Services (DHS, actor #21), Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC, actor #40), United Way (actor #4), and Heinz Endowments had betweenness scores greater than three standard deviations above the mean. Clearly, there was a structural basis for DHS, PAEYC, United Way, PPS, the Office of Child Development (OCD), and A+ Schools to have high betweenness scores, as they served as main partners on the “Be There” campaign (BTC) committee. The Heinz Endowments served as a funder for many organizations; hence, they often were a mediator of relationships between organizations that were not connected to one of the main BTC partners.

### 4.3.3 Density

Density refers to the number of ties in a network and is expressed as a proportion of the observed number of ties to the total number of possible ties. According to Borgatti et al. (2013), density can be interpreted as the probability that a tie exists between any pair of randomly chosen nodes. In other words, network density is the degree of interconnectedness of network organizations, with high density reflecting a network in which many organizations are collaborating with one another and low density reflecting a network in which few are collaborating. In social network analysis (SNA), density scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores reflecting networks of higher density. In a network in which no organizations were collaborating with one another, the resulting network density would be 0. In a network in which all organizations were collaborating with one another, the density would be 1. The results of the density measure are captured in Table 10.

The “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) had a total number of 1,555 collaborations for an overall density of .05. This low density score indicated that 5% of possible connections among actors were specified in completed network surveys. While one could interpret the density measure as the “Be There” campaign (BTC) possibly not reaching the level of connections necessary to promote the campaign fully, the results should be interpreted cautiously: Missing data likely contributed to the low density score. With only a 44% survey

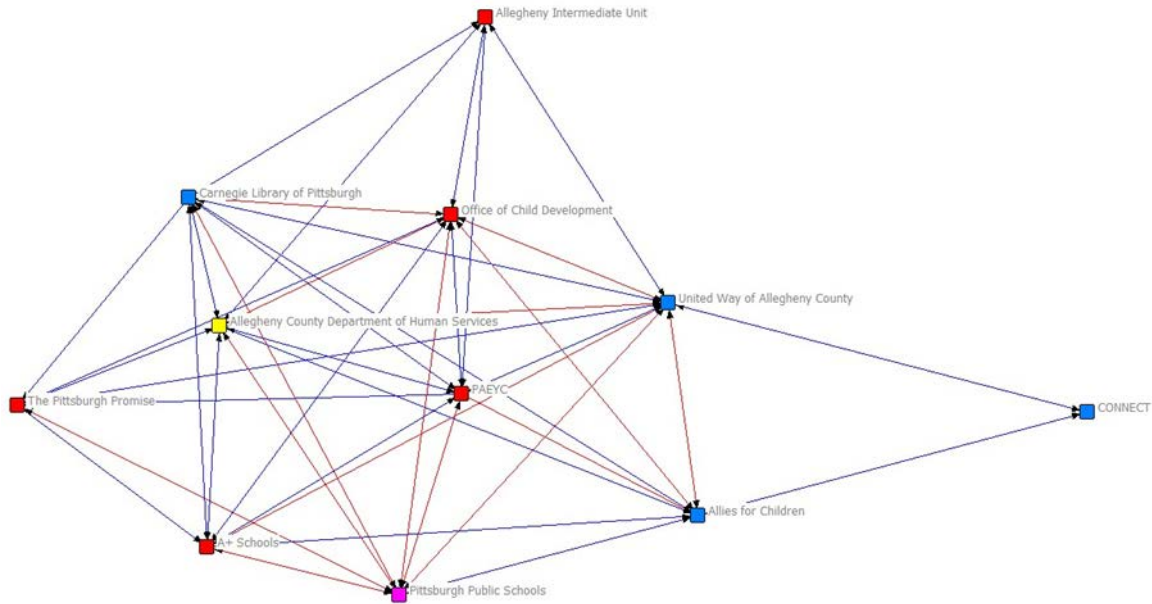
**Table 10.** Density of the “Be There” Inter-Organizational Network

	Density	Number of Ties
“Be There” Network Connections	0.0505	1555.000

completion rate and surveys not being completed for newly named organizations, the density score should be seen as a starting indicator of where the BTIN stood at the time of this study. The potential exists for a higher density score as more surveys are completed and new connections are established between organizations. It is helpful to remember that the BTC was only in its second year of implementation at the time of this study. More organizations were signing on to partner in the campaign monthly, and school districts were continuing to make chronic absenteeism an important issue. Additionally, local and national funding sources had just started to invest money into the campaign. In the future, it would be likely to expect a rise in BTIN density measurements.

#### **4.3.4 “Be There” Main Partner Organizations**

A+ Schools, Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU), Allegheny Department of Human Services (DHS), Allies for Children, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT), Office of Child Development (OCD), Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), Pittsburgh Promise, Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), and the United Way of Allegheny County encompassed the “main” partners of the “Be There” campaign (BTC). At the time of this study, these partners met monthly to discuss chronic absenteeism data, activities their individual organization had undertaken over the past month to reduce chronic absenteeism, and future activities, events, and direction of the campaign. Meetings also included conversation about future campaign efforts, marketing and advertising strategies, coordinating future BTC conferences, and analyzing targeted schools where attendance challenges, resources, or attendance activities are happening.



**Figure 6.** “Be There” Main Partners Network

Figure 6 represents the inter-organizational network of the main BTC partners. Squares represent one of the main partners. Blue squares are nonprofits, red squares are education intermediaries, purple squares are school districts, and yellow squares represent government agencies in the above network map. The lines above represent the type of connection, with tie strength represented by color. Blue lines represent informal connections, and red lines represent formal partnerships.

The network map of the BTC main partners allows for a number of perceptions. First, all of the BTC main partners were “connected;” yet, not every possible connection was present, and structural holes existed. For example, CONNECT was not connected to the Pittsburgh Promise, while the AIU was not connected to Allies for Children. Additionally, the network map revealed that some main partners who are critical to the coordination of the BTC were not connected to one another. As such, main partners that were not connected to other main partners might be



losing out on potential collaborations that could extend the BTC's reach and ability to raise awareness on attending school regularly. Despite lacking some key connections between main partners, connections were classified as formal or informal, indicating that organizations have intentionally made efforts to form collaborations that can assist in reducing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. Also, main partners were engaging with each other in ways that can help carry out the goals of the BTC.

Main partners discussed their level of engagement with other main partners and the BTC during the monthly meetings. These meetings were seen as an important place to get information about what other partner organizations were doing and as an avenue for seeing the impact the campaign was having in Pittsburgh. Additionally, organizations could learn about future events that could impact them or opportunities to get involved with future activities. As the representative from DHS described these meetings, "there is a lot of collaboration around the types of services that can be offered through [the] different organizations to affect the kids in which they serve." The representative from CONNECT agreed, explaining that the meetings were a place "where we promote their [Be There] events for them when they ask us to." The OCD representative saw the meetings as representing a great example of what can happen when organizations come together around a common cause: "There is enough representation from a broad mass that we have an inroads to sometimes the crux of the issue. And I think for the most regard, the eleven [main partners] is a good planning group...and it's a group that I think is going to continue to come together."

Each of the main partners had different areas of expertise and focus areas that allowed them to tackle the chronic absenteeism issue from various angles. For example, OCD had a successful back to school campaign (i.e., "Ready Freddy") that encouraged parents and students

to enroll and show up for the first day of kindergarten. The Pittsburgh Promise instituted an attendance measure in its requirements for potential scholarship recipients, and Allies for Children conducted a thorough study of Pittsburgh crossing guards that generated discussion around transportation changes, crossing guard professional development, and revisiting the placement of crossing guards in some of the most critical areas of the city. Additionally, the United Way and PPS partnered together to host attendance challenges in schools that have high chronic absenteeism rates. In order to analyze chronic absenteeism data that will inform future policy directions on school attendance, PPS had data sharing agreements with A+ Schools and DHS. These efforts on behalf of main partners were different approaches that have been undertaken to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

#### **4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, survey results were presented and organized around key themes that emerged. First, a discussion of the different types of organizations that make up the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) highlighted the number and organizational characteristics that encompass the network. The discussion then shifted to where organizations focus their efforts as it relates to the four zones of chronic absenteeism. It was found that most organizations at least have a minor focus in each of the four zones. The inter-organizational relationships were mapped using UCINET. Organizations such as Department of Human Services, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, and the United Way occupy central locations within the BTIN. Central organizations in the BTIN tended to be main partners in the “Be There” campaign (BTC). The main partners contributed to the coordination of the BTC, as evident by their

attendance at monthly meetings, collaboration with other main partners, and carrying out their own activities and work to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. The next chapter will be a discussion of those activities and the resources that were found in the BTIN based on the social network data.

## **5.0 RESULTS: RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADDRESSING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

Entities involved with the “Be There” campaign (BTC) not only represent different types of organizations, but they also have a vast amount of resources and activities that they use to combat chronic absenteeism. This chapter reports on resources and activities to address chronic absenteeism available within the Be There inter-organizational network (BTIN). First, the chapter will discuss briefly how resources and activities were defined in the study. Then, the different resources and activities within the BTIN will be presented. Finally, the chapter will provide interview data in regards to strategies and best practices organizations engaged in to improve student attendance.

### **5.1 IDENTIFYING AND CLASSIFYING NETWORK RESOURCES**

Russell et al. (2015) provided a guide for how to operationalize network resources and activities. In their study of Race to the Top applications, Russel and colleagues (2015) coded relevant documents for descriptions of resources that specific organizational actors would bring to states’ education reform networks. A list of ten possible resources that organizations could bring to the network were derived from their coding scheme. This study relied upon some of Russell et al.’s (2015) coding categories, tailoring definitions of codes when applicable to the specific issue of

**Table 11.** Activities and Resource Codes

Activity and Resource Code	Code Definition
Awareness Building	Engage in activities that brings attention to the chronic absenteeism problem in Pittsburgh
Develop Tools*	Involved in the development or sharing of any tools to reducing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. This can include curriculum, modules, toolkits, etc.
Direct Services to Parents	Provide services to parents such as counseling, support groups, home visits, etc.
Direct Services to Students*	Provide services directly to students such as tutoring, counseling, mentoring, etc.
Manage or Oversee Programs*	Oversee or manage programs that focus on chronic absenteeism
Money to Organizations*	Provide money or material support to organizations that are not schools or districts
Money to Schools & Districts*	Provide money or material support to schools and/or districts
Political Advocacy	Engage in policy change
Provide Data*	Provide or share data
Research and Evaluation*	Conduct research or evaluation
Training to Other Organizations*	Sharing expertise by providing professional development to organizations that are not schools or districts
Training to Schools & Districts*	Sharing expertise by providing professional development for school level personnel (e.g. teachers & principals) and/or district level personnel (superintendent, area principals, central office staff, etc.)

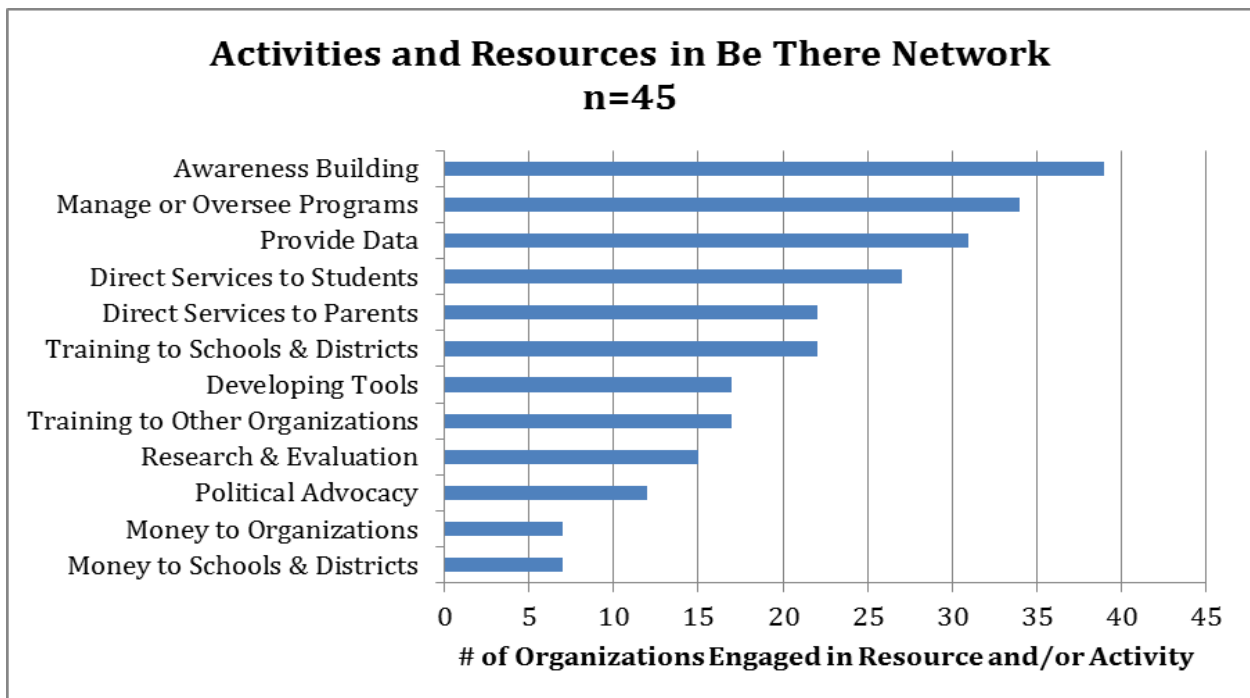
*Note.* \* indicates that the Activity and Resource Code was adapted from Russell et al. (2015).

chronic absenteeism. In addition to Russell et al.’s codes (2015), the author created codes that were relevant to the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and the resources and activities happening in Pittsburgh. Table 9 provides the entire activities and resource codes used in this study. The activities and resource codes were used in the survey that organizations completed, which asked for a binary answer (yes or no) to “whether or not your organization engages in the following activities in order to address chronic absenteeism.”

## 5.2 DIVERSITY OF ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES IN THE “BE THERE” NETWORK

Organizations that have signed on to partner with the “Be There” campaign (BTC) have a wide variety of resources and expertise that could be leveraged in the emerging “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) to reduce chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. Survey results provided a glimpse into the different activities and resources used by organizations to address chronic absenteeism. Figure 7 illustrates these results.

As can be seen, more organizations were engaged in awareness building activities than any other type of activity or resource. This finding was not surprising, considering that the main goal of the BTC was to raise the Pittsburgh community’s awareness on chronic absenteeism and the importance behind students to attending school every day. Organizations engaged in these



**Figure 7.** Activities and Resources in “Be There” Inter-Organizational Network

awareness building activities were supporting the goals of the BTC, helping to gain other organizations as partners, and assisting in spreading the message of campaign in the Pittsburgh community.

When engaging in awareness building work, money becomes an important component. Signs, posters, pamphlets, materials, professional development, staff, and other possible goods and services must be paid for. Money to organizations, and money to schools and districts had the lowest counts according to survey results. This finding indicated that the BTIN did not include a large representation of organizations that provided money or monetary support. While survey completion was at 44%, a quick glance at either the BTIN map or the list of organizations that are involved in the BTC exposed that there were few organizations providing monetary resources within the network. In fact, local and national businesses who could invest in the BTC or other organizations involved in improving student attendance in Pittsburgh schools were missing completely from BTIN. The financial community was also nonexistent in the BTIN. With increasing national attention on educating America's future workforce, it was surprising that financial institutions were not more involved in the BTC.

The BTIN was also lacking in organizations who engaged in political advocacy. While it could be contributed to the lack of understanding or knowledge around chronic absenteeism or perhaps to the different measures, tracking mechanisms, definitions, and ways of thinking about student attendance that exists among different districts, only 12 organizations reported engaging in activities related to political advocacy. Via open-ended survey responses, several organizations reported that parents were their main advocates for encouraging the benefits of consistent attendance or engaging school and district personnel to address chronic absenteeism through relevant policy changes.

Overall, awareness building, managing or overseeing programs, providing data, and giving direct services to students and parents were reported as the primary activities and resources used by organizations in the BTIN. Money and political advocacy had the lowest number of responses, indicating that perhaps the BTC has not engaged with organizations that could provide money or political advocacy support. Alternatively, these resources could have been overshadowed by awareness building being at the forefront of the newly established BTC and BTIN agendas. Hence, there is the possibility of a connection between the goals of the BTC and what organizations are doing to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

### **5.3 ORGANIZATIONAL TYPE ASSOCIATED WITH ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES**

Arranging organizations by type allows for visualizing the different activities and resources these organizations are involved in when it comes to addressing chronic absenteeism. This arrangement exposed some of the connections that exist within the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) and illustrated how certain types of organizations engage in different activities and resources to address chronic absenteeism. Table 12 displays the percentage of activities and resources by organizational type in the BTIN. Similar to the results provided earlier, the most common activity all organizational types were engaged in was awareness building, and the least common activity involved providing money to schools, districts, and other organizations.

The majority of school districts in the BTIN had their strongest connections to the Department of Human Services (DHS). This strong connection is due to these school districts



**Table 12.** Activities and Resource Percentage by Organizational Type

Organization Type	<i>n</i>	Awareness Building	Develop Tools	Direct Services to Parents	Direct Services to Students
Educational Intermediaries	6	100%	50%	50%	8%
Government Agencies	2	100%	50%	50%	100%
Higher Education Institutions	1	100%	0%	0%	0%
Media	1	100%	100%	0%	0%
Nonprofits*	19	89%	32%	47%	63%
Private Foundations	3	67%	0%	0%	0%
School Districts	13	77%	46%	69%	92%

Organization Type	<i>n</i>	Manage or Oversee Programs	Money to Organizations	Money to Schools & Districts	Political Advocacy
Educational Intermediaries	6	50%	0%	0%	50%
Government Agencies	2	50%	50%	50%	100%
Higher Education Institutions	1	0%	0%	0%	0%
Media	1	100%	0%	0%	0%
Nonprofits*	19	79%	16%	16%	37%
Private Foundations	3	33%	100%	67%	0%
School Districts	13	100%	0%	7%	15%

Organization Type	<i>n</i>	Provide Data	Research & Evaluation	Train other Organizations	Train Schools & Districts
Educational Intermediaries	6	100%	67%	50%	67%
Government Agencies	2	50%	50%	50%	50%
Higher Education Institutions	1	100%	100%	100%	100%
Media	1	0%	100%	100%	100%
Nonprofits*	19	68%	21%	47%	32%
Private Foundations	3	0%	0%	0%	0%
School Districts	13	77%	31%	15%	69%

*Note.* The organizational type “Nonprofits” includes advocacy, community, education, faith, family, health, and youth nonprofits.

having a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) with DHS that enables data sharing on a range of issues (e.g., student achievement, school attendance, housing, child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health services). Therefore, it was not surprising that 77% of school districts reported that providing data was an activity they were engaged in when it comes to addressing

chronic absenteeism. For many of these school districts, the DHS data sharing agreement allowed them to not only have their student data analyzed and reported back to them, but it also provided a way to track students who receive public benefits, mental health services, or assistance from the child welfare system, all of which are services under DHS jurisdiction. The MOU also helped to launch research and studies to understand chronic absenteeism within individual schools in specific districts.

The “Be There” campaign (BTC) has been able to engage non-profits, thus resulting in 89% of non-profits reporting awareness building as an activity in which they participated. Many of the non-profits in the BTIN were connected to the United Way, and a quick internet search revealed that many of these agencies worked, collaborated, and engaged in the same issues, attended the same events, and reached out to many of the same stakeholders and community members. Non-profits comprised the majority of the BTIN and had the highest number of responses to the network survey ( $n=19$ ). As a result, the BTIN had a high concentration of organizations who relied on outside funding and donations in order to engage in their daily activities. Combined with the earlier realization that the emerging BTIN lacks in partners who are in a position to provide monetary support, this finding has implications for the future of the BTC.

#### **5.4 EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES**

The activities and resources embedded in the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) allow for the “Be There” campaign (BTC) to engage schools, students, and families on improving school attendance. During participant interviews, it became apparent that the

successful strategies and best practices focused on one or more of the four zones of chronic absenteeism (i.e., students' physical, emotional, and mental well-being; school environment; family structure and dynamics; and neighborhood context). Indeed, the BTC partner organizations were actively attempting to address these zones through strategies and best practices. The following discussion highlights a sample of the activities and resources organizations have implemented, utilized, or experienced. The discussion is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all the activities and resources interviewed organizations provided during interviews; rather, it will reveal how activities and resources have the potential to span the four zones of chronic absenteeism and offer perspectives on the best way to reduce chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

#### **5.4.1 Department of Human Services: A Focus on Attendance**

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for providing and administering publicly funded human services to Allegheny residents. DHS provides resources including information exchange, prevention, early intervention, case management, crisis intervention, and after-care services. DHS has a unique relationship with school districts, community organizations, housing authorities, and other service providers, as it provides many of the welfare and social services accessed by many people throughout the county. As it relates to chronic absenteeism, DHS has data sharing agreements with 19 school districts in Allegheny County. In this arrangement, the school district shares data with DHS, and DHS links student-level data with services that students may also be receiving through DHS. Overall, DHS plays the role of the service provider. As indicated during the interview with the representative from

DHS, “we’re dedicated to meeting the needs of human services, particularly the county’s vulnerable population...which would include chronic absenteeism prevention work.”

DHS has long stood as an advocate for school attendance. In fact, one of DHS’s first initiatives was a pilot project called *Focus on Attendance*. In this program, two staff members of DHS worked in two different PPS schools. According to the DHS representative, Focus on Attendance was described as providing “prevention and divergent services to students and families to improve school attendance, overall wellbeing, and reduce the number of referrals to child welfare.” Focus on Attendance targeted younger students in order to identify attendance problems early and respond with services to address the issues that were causing a student to miss school. According to the interview, those working with the Focus on Attendance program found that it was important for DHS to get prevention and divergent services to families earlier in the school year, as opposed to waiting until kids were chronically absent from school before providing an intervention.

DHS staff members who were working with Focus on Attendance were getting to students by the third absence, and were reaching out to positively support them regularly attending school again. Based on their success with Focus on Attendance, DHS will unveil a new service to support schools in their chronic absenteeism efforts in the 2015-2016 school year. As stated by the DHS representative:

*[DHS] will develop and implement a county-wide strategy and interventions to improve educational and life outcomes while supporting cross-system stakeholders in the effort to inform policy and procedure around poor school attendance. A bunch of words to mean that [DHS] will support the entire process, across system stakeholders from schools,*

*magistrates, children’s court, child welfare system, community agencies, and schools to look at policies and procedures around school attendance.*

This new support service was created because DHS learned that different levels of the educational and government system were not communicating with each other. According to the interviewee, one frustrating example would occur when “schools wouldn’t communicate with magistrates,” which lead to confusion, missed opportunities, and students failing to receive proper services and interventions. Coordinating services for students and their families is one way Focus on Attendance and the DHS has engaged reducing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

#### **5.4.2 Office of Child Development: Support to Targeted High Chronic Absenteeism**

##### **Schools**

The Office of Child Development (OCD) serves as one of the key intermediary organizations in the “Be There” campaign (BTC) main partner group. Affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh, OCD is a university-community partnership dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth, and families. According to the representative interviewed from OCD, the organization functions as a “middle point between university knowledge and community-based efforts.” OCD was one of the first organizations in Allegheny County to recognize the importance of measuring, tracking, and combating chronic absenteeism. As was revealed by the OCD representative:

*So I believe it was about five years ago that our office [began] an eight-year-long project that looked at factors that impact kindergarten and success in kindergarten. [OCD] completed hundreds of shadowing of home visits and family support center based programs. At the same time, [we did] a thorough review of the literature as to what are*

*the influences that impact success in kindergarten. When we began tracking kids in targeted schools through [their] kindergarten year, we found a variable that we hadn't really known of at the time, but the literature was emerging on it, which was chronic absence.*

This OCD finding was significant and timely. The emergence of chronic absenteeism in the research literature began during 2008 when Chang and Romero released their ground-breaking report on the importance of attending school every day, and offered the commonly used definition of chronic absenteeism. OCD's discovery of chronic absenteeism impacting kindergarten attendance in Pittsburgh coincided with chronic absenteeism's appearance in the research literature.

OCD soon thereafter began to formalize their efforts around the chronic absenteeism issue, focusing on a particular group of schools that had high rates of chronic absenteeism. The OCD representative explained:

*We wanted to see, could we do something just within a couple of schools to see if we could reduce the chronic absenteeism rates in the schools with the poorest attendance. And so that's when we started to do phone calls to parents through the kindergarten year. So any time a kid would miss a day of kindergarten, one of our AmeriCorps members who we hired, would call the family. And through that we were able to log 1,000 phone calls the first year and kind of put into compartments what types of reasons families were identifying. And in the first years we did this we saw chronic absence drop almost in half in the schools where we targeted phone calls.*

Similar to the Department of Human Services, OCD also realized that connecting with families had the potential to reduce the effects of chronic absenteeism on students. This recognition

helped to tailor their strategies and interventions that would help to improve school attendance in their targeted schools.

### **5.4.3 Pittsburgh Public Schools: Educating Teachers and Leaders on Chronic Absenteeism**

Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS, [www.pps.k12.pa.us](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us)) is the largest school district in Allegheny County with an enrollment of 25,504 students. PPS has close to 2,000 teachers working within the 54 school buildings that span many diverse neighborhoods within the city. African-American students make up the majority of the student population (55%), and 71% of all PPS students qualify for free/reduced lunch. The district has been a revolving door of education reforms, initiatives, and mandates for the past several years, and in the last two years, PPS recognized that many of its schools had a chronic absenteeism problem. As such, PPS was one of the first partners to sign onto the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and has been a key stakeholder since its inception. PPS partnered with the United Way in 2014 to target selected BTC schools. These schools received strategic programs, initiatives, supports, and resources to help improve their student attendance numbers and ensure that students are “being there” during the school year.

In the passage below, the interviewed representative from PPS reveals one of their strategies on training teachers about chronic absenteeism. The PPS representative reflected:

*We’re trying to really educate counselors, teachers and really interns too to understand what the definition of chronic absenteeism is, how to access the data that we have to analyze student attendance and really just bringing it [chronic absenteeism] to the forefront.*

In recent years, PPS has attempted to shift the thinking around student attendance from truancy to chronic absenteeism. Problem-solving strategies to truancy have traditionally relied on punitive and compliance approaches. In PPS, these were often narrow set of strategies, implemented by a small subset of district actors (Allen & Lavorini, 2013). With a focus on chronic absenteeism, PPS recognized that training its educators was an important approach to preventing poor student attendance and improving attendance. Professional development has included attending the past two United Way conferences on chronic absenteeism, trainings delivered by Attendance Works to PPS teachers and principals, sharing chronic absenteeism data with A+ Schools and the Department of Human Services, and working with schools on developing their own attendance improvement plans.

## **5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter provided findings on the activities and resources embedded in the emerging “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN). The majority of BTIN organizations reported that they engage in awareness building activities to address chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, awareness building is one of the key goals of the “Be There” campaign (BTC). Organizations that are engaged in awareness building as an activity highlights that the BTC’s goals and messaging are reaching partner organizations and encouraging them to build awareness with other organizations and communities. This awareness building also presents the potential for more connections and new organizations to emerge in the BTIN.



## **6.0 RESULTS: THE ROLE OF THE “BE THERE” CAMPAIGN**

In just two years, the “Be There” campaign (BTC) had a significant impact across Allegheny County, serving as a catalyst for bringing chronic absenteeism to the forefront of conversation amongst the education community and the community at large. Many school districts were implementing BTC attendance challenges in schools, public and school buses were advertising the campaign’s messages, and organizations were collaborating together to improve school attendance throughout the city. Despite being a relatively new campaign, the BTC has generated local and national attention, garnering a mayoral proclamation, recognition from the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) Board of Directors, and accolades from both Attendance Works and America’s Promise. Additionally, BTC staff have lead national webinars on the importance of school attendance. As the BTC expands its reach, activities, and programming into other school districts for the 2015-2016 school year, an analysis of how the BTC is perceived by its partners can offer insights on what is working with the campaign.

This chapter presents data collected from open-ended survey responses and interviews to provide insight on the BTC’s main partners’ perception of the campaign’s role in addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County. This chapter also provides findings related to some of the tangible products of the BTC and how the campaign was both formally and informally connecting partners to carry out activities related to improving school attendance.

## **6.1 “BE THERE” AND ALLEGHENY COUNTY**

The “Be There” campaign (BTC) a county-wide school attendance effort spearheaded by the United Way of Allegheny County. The campaign is a partnership effort that focuses on mobilizing school and community providers to give opportunities to students and families to improve school attendance by utilizing positive messages, targeted resources, and interventions geared to motivate students and provide better communication with families. Since its launch in 2013, the BTC has engaged over 500 partners who support the efforts of the campaign. Nineteen school districts and over 100 organizational partners have educated the community on the chronic absenteeism issue, supported methods that will lead to improved school attendance, and promoted a positive school attendance culture across Allegheny County. Working with Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) during the first year of the campaign, the BTC was able to support schools across the district in improving attendance. As a result, 45 of 49 schools that partnered with the campaign were able to improve their school attendance and reduce their chronic absenteeism rates.

## **6.2 RAISING AWARENESS**

One of the primary goals of the “Be There” campaign (BTC) was to raise awareness of the importance of students regularly attending school and provide information about the effects of chronic absenteeism on student learning and achievement. Data revealed that organizations saw the campaign as being successful in raising awareness, especially as it relates to the conversation around chronic absenteeism in the past two years. As highlighted in Chapter 5, many

organizations' resources and activities focused on raising awareness as it relates to improving school attendance. In campaigns concerning an important issue, awareness building is usually done through creative messaging or providing materials that can connect with the targeted population (Griffey, Piccinino, Gallivan, Lotenberg, & Tuncer, 2015). While the BTC used these strategies to raise awareness about chronic absenteeism, the campaign had also invited other organizations to undertake their own efforts to raise awareness. As the examples below show, organizations saw the campaign as a successful way to not only raise awareness but also support efforts that could lead to improving student attendance.

### **6.2.1 United Way: The Importance of a Central Message**

The United Way of Allegheny County is a non-profit organization that operates numerous programs, convenes local community members and organizations around important causes, and is one of the highest earning charities in the country. The United Way sees itself as a change agent that is invested in embracing new initiatives and forms of engagement to service the entire community. The United Way spearheaded the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and expanded its staff over the past two years in order to implement the many activities and outreach that the campaign requires.

The United Way representative emphasized how important the organization viewed raising awareness about the chronic absenteeism issue. When asked to elaborate on why raising awareness on chronic absenteeism was important, the interviewee stated “it is an easy piece that is also easily forgotten because you don’t really think about it.” This statement was indicative of how the area’s attendance issues have been handled in the past: Historically, Pittsburgh and the majority of school districts in Allegheny County have thought about, measured, and discussed

attendance in other ways, but not in terms of chronic absenteeism. Until two years ago, the majority of families, students, teachers, school administrators, and community stakeholders were unaware of chronic absenteeism, its definition, and that it represented a more complete and personal indicator of student attendance risk. The United Way representative reflected on the importance of communicating with people about the importance of chronic absenteeism by sharing:

*I think the biggest thing is once you can convince somebody of the importance of why they want to focus on chronic absenteeism, which actually isn't that hard when you start just pulling out the research and the numbers, and talking about the betterment of a student's education, it's just helping them to really brainstorm around their own resources on how to do things.*

Hence, the United Way viewed involvement in chronic absenteeism reduction efforts and communicating about the importance of getting students to “be there” in schools as a means to improve student academic outcomes. Also, the interviewee from the United Way saw raising awareness as uniting different organizations working with youth to “brainstorm around their own resources on how to do things.” This approach shed light on the United Way’s, and to a some extent the BTC’s, desire to build community partnerships that could lead to improvements in student attendance.

The United Way launched the campaign with a simple message: *Be There*. The message served as a way to enlist the community and organizations that serve youth to make attendance a priority. The idea behind the BTC was to present a positive message to students throughout Pittsburgh without using threatening language or the risk of punishment(s) for not attending school that were inherent to more traditional approaches to handling chronic absenteeism. The

campaign's message of "be there" aligned with the research the United Way and other partners had realized through the research literature, which indicated that one of the strongest indicators of success is showing up for school every day (e.g., Chang & Romero, 2008). In Pittsburgh, data showed that one of the greatest barriers to achievement was chronic absenteeism. Therefore, the United Way in collaboration with its partners decided to raise awareness about the effects of chronic absenteeism and why it was a barrier to school success for students.

In this passage, the United Way representative discussed the importance of raising awareness around chronic absenteeism:

*I think the first thing with chronic absenteeism is obviously just raising awareness about why it's important. I think that's an easy piece that is also easily forgotten because people don't really think about it. And parents can't fix things if they don't know that it's an issue. So number one priority is bringing awareness of it and giving helpful ways to go about changing it.*

The interviewee continued to discuss that despite the fact that data was showing that a number of Pittsburgh's students were chronically absent, chronic absenteeism was not an issue at the forefront of education discussions in the city. As such, the United Way decided to embark upon a campaign that emphasized a central message that defined what chronic absenteeism was, highlighted its effects on student achievement, and underscored the importance of "being there" at school every day.

One of the ways in which the United Way promoted awareness was by developing various materials that would help to spread the BTC's message throughout Pittsburgh. As the United Way representative stated:

...we have tons of messaging materials. We have a “Did You Know” factsheet specifically made for parents to explain really briefly why it’s important to show up for school and giving them actionable steps on how to do that. We have student commitment forms, we have parent commitment forms, we have posters, we have parent letters that schools can send home. We have little cards that we made for teachers to write to their students when they are not there. It’s kind of all across the board but we do have, I would say dozens of materials that we can give out.

As an example of just one of these campaign resources, Figure 8 shows a postcard that gives information about the BTC and some of the main partners involved in its efforts. BTC messages have been posted on city buses, billboards, schools, community organizations, local businesses, and sporting events. The purpose of these messages was to not only show the importance of regular school attendance, but to also get other possible stakeholders aware of the BTC and possibly signing on to be a partner with the campaign.



Figure 8. “Be There” Campaign Post Card

## **6.2.2 Allegheny Intermediate Unit: Creating a Positive Culture towards Regular School Attendance**

The Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) provides specialized services to the 42 school districts within Allegheny County. Operating as one of the 29 Intermediate Units across the state of Pennsylvania, the AIU employs more than 1,800 educators at 411 sites and operates 10 family centers. Also, they offer multiple programs and services for young children, students, and adults. The AIU houses many programs and offices that provide multiple opportunities for outreach that could potentially impact students in Pittsburgh. The interview with AIU focused on the importance of their early childhood programs tackling the chronic absenteeism issue.

Both the Head Start and the Pre-K Counts program were operated out of the AIU. Head Start is in each of the 42 school districts in Allegheny County, while Pre-K Counts is in selected school districts. Both of these programs serve about 2,000 children, with 1,558 students in Head Start and 251 students in Pre-K Counts. Similar to the Department of Human Services (DHS), the AIU has recognized the importance of supporting families and in the upcoming 2015-2016 school year will begin rolling out their Early Head Start Families program that will provide resources and services for up to 68 families. As indicated by the interviewed representative, the AIU viewed these programs as important to reaching children and their families early: “So we’re reaching pregnant moms and their infants, transitioning them to Head Start or Pre-K Counts before they’re ready for kindergarten. So it’s really catching that birth through preschool [age range].” Reaching students before they get to kindergarten age was indicated a priority at the AIU. Since the AIU has the Head Start program in each school district in Allegheny County, the representative reasoned that the AIU provided “a great opportunity for those children and families to see school actually before their child starts kindergarten.” Research has shown that

students who have positive early experiences in school are likely to complete high school (Barnett, 2008; Chang & Romero, 2008). Therefore, the AIU was connecting with students and their families early in order to promote regular school attendance.

As one of the few organizations that have been with the “Be There” campaign (BTC) since its inception, the AIU was at a distinct advantage to see the change in school districts since the campaign’s launch. As the AIU interviewee stated, “I couldn’t give you a ballpark figure of a percentage, but compared to two years ago it’s made a large impact”, and this has been seen in that “school districts are really promoting it [Be There] and it’s become a culture in the schools.” This new “BTC culture” in schools that emphasized the importance of raising awareness around regular school attendance can be seen in how schools and districts were approaching their relationship with local magistrates.

By state law, students who were chronically absent had citations filed with a magistrate judge. These judges, 42 in Allegheny County alone, could then set a fine of up to \$300, order community service, or order up to five days of jail for parents of chronically absent students under the age of 13. According to the AIU representative, this mandate had led to frustration and confusion, as punishment and enforcement had differed pending location due to differences in how school districts measure and report attendance. Therefore, some students and their families were likely to be punished more harshly for being chronically absent than others based on where they live. However, as a result of the BTC, the AIU representative explained that “they [schools] want to know how they can work better with the magistrates...the schools are trying to work with the magistrates to see what else can be done to positively influence kids to come to school.” Punishing families through fines or jail time, especially families that are already struggling financially, has been discounted as a likely way increase children’s school attendance; hence, the



BTC spawned the impetus for many school districts to improve the relationship between schools and magistrates. According to the AIU interviewee, regular meetings between schools, school district officials, and magistrates were happening across the county in order to design interventions geared towards positively supporting families to ensure their children are attending school regularly. While the BTC was not the only reason why schools and magistrates began having conversations and designing less punitive interventions to improve student attendance, the campaign shifted the thinking around how to curtail chronic absenteeism.

### **6.2.3 Department of Human Services and A+ Schools: Communication**

Prior to the implementation of the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and the release of student absenteeism numbers from Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), the conversation around chronic absenteeism was barely happening in Pittsburgh. In fact, as a representative from the Office of Child Development (OCD) reflected on the dearth of conversation about the topic prior to 2013, stating, “no one in the community even knew what chronic absenteeism was.” Two years after the initiation of the BTC, chronic absenteeism had become a central topic among many stakeholders in various education circles, with research and data collection seen as a priority. As the representative from A+ Schools revealed:

*The Be There campaign has done an incredible job of raising awareness within public education circles about chronic absenteeism. I mean, I hear it being talked about at schools, in community meetings, you know places that are education related. It’s just become a regular part of the lexicon and the conversation. And I’m sure that people have been aware of it, you know, prior to Be There. But I think Be There really brought it into*

*the public eye and helped to focus the district's [PPS] energy on coming up with solutions to absenteeism in our schools.*

A+ Schools acknowledged the BTC as being the catalyst to sparking community interest in the chronic absenteeism issue.

The BTC's role as catalyst to addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh was not only indicated by main partner organizations, it was also made evident through artifact review. In September of 2013, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ran a three-day series of articles specifically focused on school attendance (see Chute & Niederberger, 2013). These articles represented the first time that the major local paper had spent extensive pages to discuss school attendance in the city and county. It is certainly not coincidental that these series of articles were printed just a few weeks after the launch of the BTC.

According to the representative from the Department of Human Services (DHS), the past two years has seen organizations getting involved in tackling chronic absenteeism. The representative largely attributed this increased involvement as a result of the communication efforts of the BTC surrounding the importance of being in school. During the interview, the DHS representative emphasized that "Be There is raising the awareness to all of our cross-system stakeholders, not just schools but out into the entire community." The BTC, and in particular the United Way, raised awareness about chronic absenteeism in a novel way, described by the DHS interviewee's statement that "we haven't had an organization bring all system stakeholders together in an effort to raise awareness about a certain topic, something as important as school attendance." Additionally, the DHS representative expressed, "They're [United Way] raising awareness that I think would take a very long time to do in a county as big as ours. So I think they play a very big role in addressing chronic absenteeism."

The insights provided by representatives from A+ Schools and DHS highlighted the importance of the BTC's role in raising awareness and how it was sparking community communication and action around chronic absenteeism. Furthermore, stakeholders were wanting to get involved with the campaign because the outreach was strong and the communication effective at highlighting an important education issue with implications for the entire Pittsburgh community.

### **6.3 CONNECTIONS AMONG ORGANIZATIONS**

A second finding that emerged from the data highlighted the idea that the “Be There” campaign (BTC) compelled organizations to work together. As discussed in Chapter 4, connections with other organizations can be viewed either as informal or formal. It is through these connections between organizations that BTC partners discussed chronic absenteeism, designed strategies, and implemented actions. As the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) map pointed out, organizations in Pittsburgh were working with one another in order to improve school attendance. The United Way played a crucial role in providing opportunities for organizations to establish connections. Even though connections existed among different organizations with various characteristics and linchpins, the BTIN united over the issue of addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh.

### 6.3.1 Formal Connections in the Emerging Inter-Organizational Network as a Result of the “Be There” Campaign

In this study, signed MOUs, contracts, or other official agreements between organizations represented formal connections. Survey results revealed that the majority of organizations across the Be There network were connected formally to at least one other organization. Table 11 presents the centrality measures of the *formal* connections within the “Be There” inter-organizational network ( $M=5.011$ ,  $SD=9.548$ ). The organizations that were at least one standard deviation above the mean are presented in Table 13. The Heinz Endowments (actor #43) had the most formal connections in the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN), and in referring back to Figure 5, it served as a connector “hub” for many of the organizations that are on the periphery of the network. The same can be said about the Grable Foundation (actor #24), who

**Table 13.** Centrality Scores for the Formal Connections with in the “Be There” Inter-Organizational Network

Organization Name	Actor Number	Degree
Heinz Endowments	43	67.000
Grable Foundation	24	55.000
Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC)	40	48.000
Pittsburgh Public School (PPS)	10	45.000
Department of Human Services (DHS)	21	41.000
The Mentoring Partnership	69	33.000
United Way of Allegheny County	4	25.000
University of Pittsburgh	13	24.000
Three Rivers Investment Board	176	19.000
Amachi Pittsburgh	54	18.000
Lawrenceville United	101	17.000
Homewood Children’s Village	15	17.000
Office of Child Development (OCD)	1	16.000
A+ Schools	19	16.000
Boys and Girls Club of Western PA	56	15.000
Pittsburgh Public Allies	66	15.000

also funded a number of nonprofits within the BTIN and Pittsburgh community. Many of the Department of Human Services' (DHS, actor #21) formal connections were through data sharing agreements with school districts throughout Allegheny County.

Several interview questions asked organizations to respond to the network map showing only formal connections between organizations (Figure 9). Interviews highlighted the importance of funders to help support organizational activities. As the representative from the Office of Child Development (OCD) mentioned:

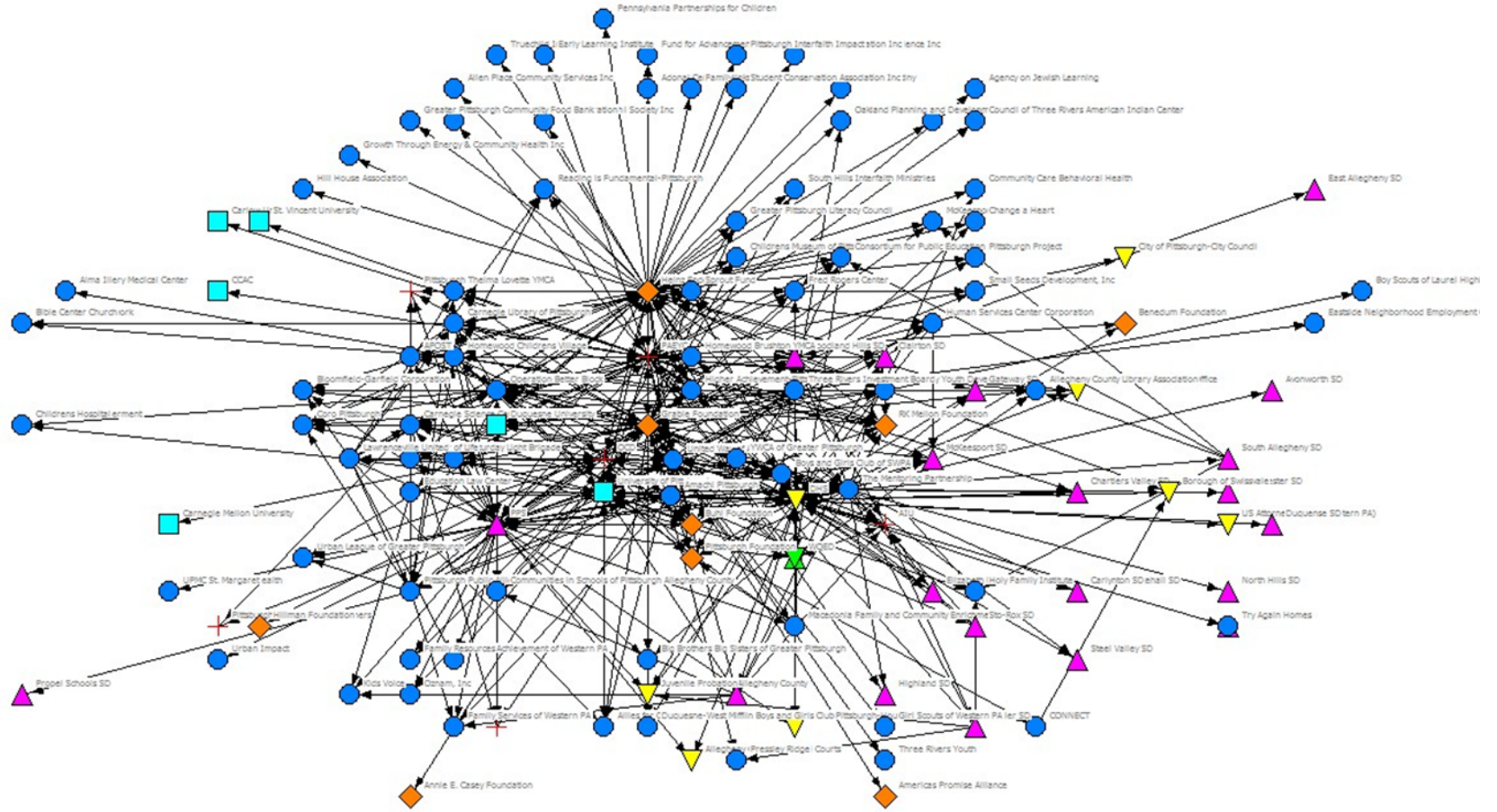
*So that is to a degree our role is to find and work at the ground, but then inform funders.*

*I think one of the things that our office does is educate those that are giving in the philanthropy world about the trends and the core issues about the work we do.*

The representative from the Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) also stated that “funders help in carrying out our work that helps us connect deeper with municipalities.” It was not surprising to the majority of interviewees that funders were more “central” in the version of the network map that showed only formal connections. As was previously mentioned, most organizations in the BTIN were non-profits, with many of them receive their funding from foundations located in Pittsburgh.

### **6.3.2 United Way as a Convener**

Interview data revealed the important role that the United Way played when it came to the “Be There” campaign (BTC) and getting organizations to collaborate with one another. The *United Way as a convener* was an important theme that emerged from several of the interviews. First, the United Way representative viewed their role as a convener of “community members, families, and schools all around the issue of chronic absenteeism to try to come up with a way to



**Organization Type**  
 ▲ School Districts  
 ● Nonprofits

■ Higher Education  
 ◆ Foundations

+ Educational Intermediaries  
 ▼ Government Agencies

◆ Media

**Figure 9.** “Be There” Inter-Organizational Network Map (Formal Connections)

really change it.” In fact, the United Way’s mission statement reads even reflects their idea of being a convener of resources:

*United Way of Allegheny County is a change agent and efficient community fundraiser that improves lives by addressing critical community needs. By convening diverse partners and investing in programs and people to advance solutions, United Way creates long-lasting change and helps children and youth succeed, strengthens and supports families by promoting financial stability, ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable seniors, assists people with disabilities, and provides information and referral sources meeting basic needs for residents of Southwestern Pennsylvania.*

It is in this mission statement that we see that the United Way has oriented its organization as a community convener. As the interviewee with the United Way revealed:

*[We are] convening people with the same passion, with the same knowledge of the issue, and also introducing them to other people that they may have not met before or other resources that they may not have had access to before. All under the Be There umbrella.*

The United Way saw the BTC as a way to rally organizations, particularly those that focus on youth, around the central issue of chronic absenteeism that was impacting a large proportion of students in Pittsburgh. As stated by the Office of Child Development (OCD) representative, “the United Way and the respect that organizations have for them and the respect that we have for them as a convener helps.”

This opinion was echoed in the A+ Schools representative’s assessment of the BTC’s annual conference. The campaign’s annual conference had been a large convening of many local and national organizations, partners, and individuals who were interested and invested in addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County. The annual conferences invited speakers,

offered workshops, and provided networking opportunities for organizations to strategize collaborative partnerships and chronic absenteeism reduction solutions. According to the interviewee from A+ Schools:

*Bringing people together for the conference shores up a lot of positive support and kind of the support and encouragement that's needed to continue the work. Being in a room full of people who really care and seeing that and people who sort of have that effort attitude. You know that we can get better. We can look at our challenges as opportunities for coming up with solutions. And I can speak for some of my colleagues that these types of rallying events are also important to them. It's great for meeting people, making connections and collaborating for the work.*

As the A+ Schools representative explained, the BTC has been a great rallying point for organizations to come together and work on an important educational issue. The annual conference has served as a catalyst for learning about best practices and launching new ideas that could help improve student attendance in Allegheny County. The United Way has been the organization in Pittsburgh to not only raise the chronic absenteeism issue, but also gather community stakeholders together.

The interviewee from the United Way expressed surprise over some of the formal connections that the network analysis revealed, stating:

*This map is interesting because some of these I would think that by the formal relationships they are not talking about Be There specifically. They are talking about the United Way of Allegheny County. So formal relationship of United Way of Allegheny County, to me, means that they are receiving grant funding from us, or have been participating in our RFP process that goes out every three years. An example of that*



*would be Operation Better Block and Homewood Children's Village. I work with them informally as Be There, but they are also being funded by the United Way through other grants.*

This representative's revelation was important because it further cemented the role the United Way plays as convener in many of its endeavors. Beyond the "Be There" campaign (BTC) and its focus on chronic absenteeism, the United Way convenes and connects a diverse array of organizations to champion and fund its causes. While an organization might not have a formal connection to the BTC due to its formal connection to the United Way, the BTC could still capitalize on these connections to spread the message about school attendance. The United Way showed that it is a convener in Pittsburgh with the potential to draw other organizations to the campaign through its large web of existing connections.

### **6.3.3 CONNECT: "Be There" as a Way to Connect to Local Municipalities**

The Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT) is an organization that promotes cooperation and collaboration between Pittsburgh and 38 other municipalities that comprise the region's urban core. CONNECT is housed at the University of Pittsburgh, and its mission is to bring together municipalities to identify common public policy challenges and advocate for collective change that benefits all municipalities. CONNECT is one of the main partners in the "Be There" campaign (BTC), but it is the only organization without an explicit education component to their organizational activities. The CONNECT representative described their organizational role as follows:

*What we do is we provide a forum for local governments that are operated in the region's urban core to collaborate on a variety of issues. So our membership includes the city of*

*Pittsburgh and we're now up to 39 municipalities. So 38 municipalities that surround the city, and we get them all together to talk about issues they're facing and to identify areas of concern that they potentially could help each other with and we could help them with. So we work in a number of different policy areas including light, transportation, emergency medical services, utilities, infrastructure, and education a little bit.*

While CONNECT does not have an explicit focus on chronic absenteeism, they were still approached by the United Way to be a part of the campaign. This connection was due to a recognition on the United Way's part, as the CONNECT interviewee put it:

*So I think that they [Be There/United Way] wanted to include—even though education is not our focus, they wanted to include an organization that works in policy and then also has a bit of a broader reach than lots of organizations that work just in smaller areas.*

In their work, CONNECT has recognized the disconnect that exists between school districts and local governments. However, the BTC has served as a way to involve organizations that do not normally focus on education to be aware of the issue of chronic absenteeism. As the representative from CONNECT explained:

*Be There has been, for me, an easy way to bring up an issue that affects everyone because there's no way that a school district that's struggling doesn't affect the municipality that's trying to sell houses in the school district. Be There has allowed me to go to our municipalities and say look this is something that you guys can do to support your schools.*

The CONNECT representative went on to discuss the BTC as a way to get local government agencies that are normally concerned about sewers, local infrastructure, or transportation issues to think about chronic absenteeism and the potential it has to impact their own municipalities.

## 6.4 TANGIBLE PRODUCTS

While a brief discussion of the messaging and advertising associated with the “Be There” campaign (BTC) as it related to awareness building was discussed earlier in this chapter, a final finding related to the tangible products as a result of the campaign. These products have centered on improving specific schools’ attendance, or spreading the message of the BTC and the effects of chronic absenteeism on students. The attendance challenge toolkit represented two years of hard work put in by the United Way and the BTC to make school attendance a priority, as well as the willingness of organizations to get involved in improving school attendance in Pittsburgh.

### 6.4.1 An Attendance Challenge Toolkit to Promote School Attendance

After realizing the impact the “Be There” campaign (BTC) was having in communities, schools, and school districts and fielding many requests for BTC activities, messaging, and strategies in schools and communities around Allegheny County, the United Way decided to create a *Be There Attendance Challenge* toolkit in 2014. According to the United Way representative, the attendance challenge was an event that encouraged students to come to school every day for a set period of time, rewarding students for regular attendance. The toolkit was created to be a positive intervention that promoted school attendance instead of a punitive response to chronic absenteeism. In fact, the BTC has promoted activities and interventions that are proactive and promote a positive message to students about regular school attendance. As the United Way representative described:

*One of the biggest resources we provide is the attendance challenge toolkit. So one of the ways, as I mentioned we try to get schools involved, is to just help them throughout*

*attendance challenges in different forms in their schools. And as simple as it sounds you challenge students to come for a certain amount of time. If they come to school every day for that amount of time we help the school or neighborhood provide or plan some kind of event for those students (United Way Interview).*

The United Way's toolkit not only gets the message of the BTC out to schools, parents, and students, but it also provides a guide for taking actionable steps to address chronic absenteeism in schools. In fact, for many schools and school districts in Allegheny County, connecting to the BTC and United Way has usually been through wanting to host or have support in executing an attendance challenge.

These attendance challenges have been a success, especially in the Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS). According to the representative from the Department of Human Services (DHS), attendance challenge toolkit and attendance challenge events have received positive feedback, stating, "the response I'm getting from schools whenever they participate in a challenge, and how excited the kids are and the pictures that they share about the kids being excited about coming to school. It's a really big deal." One reason for the positive reaction to the attendance challenges was attributed to the support the United Way provides to schools that are wanting to implement a challenge. The United Way provided a staff person to help in coordinating the event and training school personnel on successfully executing an attendance challenge. While the toolkit provided all the information necessary to put on an attendance challenge in a school, the United Way has willingly committed staff to schools that put on the challenge. Not only has the toolkit served as a tangible product of the BTC, but it has also helped to facilitate and strengthen connections between schools, school districts, and the United Way.

## **6.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter examined the role of the “Be There” campaign (BTC) in creating formal connections among organizations, broadcasting a county-wide message about the importance of attending school, and launching a successful attendance challenge toolkit. Overall, foundations have played an important role in connecting organizations to the BTC, even though there are no foundations represented as main partners in the campaign. However, the United Way’s role as convener assisted in connecting organizations to the BTC, thus centralizing partners around the message of regular school attendance for all students in Pittsburgh. Interviews revealed how the campaign is changing the culture in schools and districts when it comes to chronic absenteeism bringing chronic absenteeism to the forefront of discussions about education in Pittsburgh.

## 7.0 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study posed four main questions:

1. What organizations are involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)?
2. In what ways are organizations connecting and collaborating to address chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County (Pittsburgh)?
3. What resources (tools, expertise, interventions, etc.) exist among the network of organizations that can assist efforts to address chronic absenteeism?
4. What is the relationship between organizations and the Be There attendance campaign?  
To what extent does an attendance campaign contribute to the coordination of the network?

These questions lead to four primary findings:

1. Organizations involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh were diverse and represented different organizational characteristics;
2. Organizations were connecting informally and formally to address chronic absenteeism;
3. Activities and resources (e.g., awareness building and managing programs) had the potential to expose the “Be There” campaign (BTC) to more potential partners; support

schools, districts and other organizations in reducing chronic absenteeism; and get the word out to the Pittsburgh community on the importance of school attendance;

4. The BTC facilitated events and activities that allowed organizations to get involved in the campaign.

This final chapter will discuss each of these findings and consider their implications. It will conclude with some final thoughts about the increasing focus on chronic absenteeism and directions for future studies.

## **7.1 DIVERSITY OF ORGANIZATIONS COMPRISE THE EMERGING “BE THERE” INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORK**

Perhaps this study’s bedrock finding is the emerging inter-organizational network in Pittsburgh focused on chronic absenteeism. Recall that the conceptual framework for this study articulated the importance of network composition as a way to understand the actors and resources that makeup an inter-organizational network (as per Russell et al., 2015). In the case of the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN), 177 organizations were named as being affiliated with the “Be There” campaign (BTC). Despite a low survey response rate (44%), data did indicate that other organizations beyond those originally named by the United Way ( $n=103$ ) were connected to other organizations in the campaign. Also, BTC partners represented different organizational types (see Table 5 and Figure 3). Non-profits represented the majority of organizations in the BTIN, which allows the campaign’s message about school attendance to reach different communities and people.

## **7.2 ORGANIZATIONS CONNECT TO ONE ANOTHER TO TACKLE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

Not all organizations identified in the Be There inter-organizational network (BTIN) were formally connected to other organizations. However, 33% of all BTIN ties were formal partnerships (518 formal connections, compared to 1,555 total ties in the BTIN). Foundations represented funding sources for many non-profits, and findings indicated that non-profits were the most likely to be connected to foundations in the BTIN. Hence, formal connections were primarily found to the Heinz Endowments or Grable Foundation. While one cannot be certain if the monetary support received by organizations in the BTIN was being allocated strictly to school attendance issues and strategies, findings highlighted the important role that foundations played in the BTIN despite not being considered one of the main partners in the “Be There” campaign (BTC). Also, school districts were connecting with the Department of Human Services (DHS) through a data sharing memorandum of understanding (MOU). This MOU was assisting districts and partnering organizations in combating chronic absenteeism in their schools. The data sharing agreements between DHS and districts has the potential to support districts in better understanding and addressing the chronic absenteeism problem in their schools.

## **7.3 AWARENESS BUILDING ASSISTS WITH THE GOALS OF THE “BE THERE” CAMPAIGN**

The “Be There” campaign (BTC) has been able to get the message about the importance of school attendance out through a very strategic, catchy, and importantly timed campaign. Also,



the campaign benefited from many organizations in the “Be There” inter-organizational network (BTIN) that undertook awareness building as an important strategy for getting other organizations involved in addressing chronic absenteeism. In just two years, the BTC has had 103 official partners pledge to be involved in the campaign. Interview data revealed that the conversation about chronic absenteeism was happening in many education and policy circles because of the awareness the BTC has brought to the Pittsburgh community. Organizations were involved in awareness building by installing BTC chairs in public places around the city that symbolize chronic absenteeism in local schools; advertising through posters, billboards, and flyers; and involving their stakeholders in BTC activities and meetings.

#### **7.4 “BE THERE” CONVENING PARTNERS TO ADDRESS CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM**

The “Be There” campaign (BTC) has been effective at convening partners to address chronic absenteeism through many of its events, meetings, and activities that take place at local schools. Convening partners also created collaborations between organizations, and allowed for organizations to tackle the issue of chronic absenteeism together. As discerned from the interviews, the BTC was the first campaign focusing on student attendance for all school districts in Allegheny County. While many of the resources and organizations were located within the urban core of Pittsburgh, neighboring school districts were still connecting to other organizations as a result of the campaign. The annual meeting was one such example of a convening event where organizations across the county gather together to learn from each other as they work on school attendance issues.

## 7.5 IMPLICATIONS

### 7.5.1 Chronic Absenteeism Research

The “Be There” campaign (BTC) and emerging network provide insights on how other cities could potentially address chronic absenteeism in their local schools. Most studies on positive approaches to chronic absenteeism have looked at the school-community partnership or the adult-student mentoring relationship as examples of how to reduce chronic absenteeism in schools. The BTC has shown how a network approach involving multiple organizations representing different organizational types has the potential to be a viable, expedient strategy for curbing chronic absenteeism in communities. The campaign has incorporated aspects of the school-community partnership and the adult-student mentoring partnership to improve school attendance. The BTC has embraced these approaches and paired them with school-based strategies and an effective messaging strategy that is impacting chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. While exploring the impact of the campaign on chronic absenteeism in the county was beyond the scope of this investigation, this study provides suggestive evidence that awareness of the issue is rising in the city. Also, the BTC can exemplify positive strategies that can help improve school attendance to other communities that engage in excessive punitive practices to address chronic absenteeism. Furthermore, studies that have narrowly concentrated on the implementation of only one-on-one strategies, school-based strategies, or the school-community partnership have overlooked the potential of inter-organizational networks to facilitate not only the above mentioned strategies, but also to generate other practices that could help in chronic absenteeism reduction. This study implies that organizations working together around a common issue can be more effective than organizations working in isolation.

The urban education literature has been sparse in its discussion of chronic absenteeism as being tied to what happens in urban schools, communities, and environments. In the future, studies that focus on the urban education context should take into account chronic absenteeism and focus on the factors that prevent students from getting to school. Conceptualizing chronic absenteeism as a wicked problem allows for shifting the focus away from the will or desire of students to get to school and instead begins to address the structural and systemic issues that prevent students in urban areas from attending school regularly. Research that is conducted in urban environments should discuss and investigate chronic absenteeism and the role it has in perpetuating urban inequalities and inequities as it pertains to urban schooling.

### **7.5.2 Implications for the “Be There” Network: Involving Other Organizations**

This research is valuable to education stakeholders and policymakers as they work with community organizations to address chronic absenteeism. This study exposed the number of non-profits and school districts that compose the Be There inter-organizational network (BTIN). Many of these non-profits have focused their work around youth, and it was likely these organizations are involved in other education endeavors within Pittsburgh. The “Be There” campaign (BTC) has connected well with non-profits, especially those whose services have a youth focus to them. However, out of the 177 organizations in the BTIN, not one is labeled as representing the Pittsburgh business community. Six Fortune 500 companies have headquarters in Pittsburgh, with an average revenue of 12.5 billion between them. Furthermore, only the University of Pittsburgh and one of the UPMC hospitals were mentioned as being involved in the BTIN. UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh are two of the top employers in Allegheny County, with a workforce that exceeds over 50,000 every year. Designing inter-organizational

coordination that focuses on targeting businesses within Allegheny County can help to generate funding to the BTC, potentially create more formal partnerships between organizations, and provide an untapped market where the campaign has not reached. Also, local businesses could play a pivotal role in broadcasting and supporting the BTC's message. Barbershops, beauty salons, nail shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and local mom-and-pop shops are ideal locations in communities of color for reaching students and their families about the importance of attending school regularly. In East St. Louis, a predominantly Black community, local barbershops are becoming places for patrons to get STD prevention and awareness materials, meet with medical doctors, and get tested. The BTC could use a similar model to not only get the campaign's message out, but also when partnering with local businesses to be involved in addressing chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. Capacity must be built within the BTIN and the United Way to be able to effectively build connections with businesses that may not have direct connections with education initiatives or organizations.

### **7.5.3 High School Chronic Absenteeism**

Findings from this study also carry implications for organizations that are implementing strategies and practices to reduce chronic absenteeism in Pittsburgh. Over the past two years, the "Be There" campaign (BTC) has largely addressed grades Pre-K through 8. Messaging, targeted schools, and programming have mainly focused on getting students to regularly attend school early in their academic career. While research suggests that early interventions will lead to less problems later on for students (Chang & Romero, 2008), there is still a significant lack of effort and resources towards the high schools in Pittsburgh when it comes to chronic absenteeism. Currently, there is one model high school in Pittsburgh that has implemented strategies and

activities to improve its school attendance rates. However, the efforts in this school are led by school personnel who are personally interested and invested in chronic absenteeism and school attendance.

As evident by the network analysis, several of the organizations that occupy central roles within the network (e.g., PAEYC, OCD, AIU) have been targeting their chronic absenteeism reduction efforts towards younger students. In the future, the BTC should attempt to address the challenge of getting high school students to “be there” at school when they have the option to “not be there.” Targeting families and parents of younger children makes sense, as for the most part, parents still exert considerable control over whether their child attends school or not; however for high school age students, more efforts and strategies should be generated and implemented around the other three zones of chronic absenteeism (e.g., student’s physical, social and mental well-being; school environment; and neighborhood context). This finding suggests that efforts to forge more activities and resources at the high school level are needed in order to ensure that a student’s consistently hears and understands the importance of regular school attendance throughout their time in school.

#### **7.5.4 Future Research**

While this study investigates a nuanced approach to addressing chronic absenteeism, its conclusions are not to be generalized to other settings. The case study and qualitative design yielded important considerations for other city-wide efforts for reducing chronic absenteeism, but it did not offer empirical evidence about the impact of this inter-organizational network strategy on improving school attendance. Future researchers can extend this work by examining the Be There inter-organizational network (BTIN) over time to track its sustainability, impact,

and expansion (or reduction). Understanding the BTIN over time can help researchers understand the efficacy of county-wide attendance campaigns and their potential to sustain the involvement of multiple stakeholders around a common theme. While this study's data collection was spread out over eight months, it was not designed to gather longitudinal information about processes and outcomes that inherently change over time. Therefore, studies documenting the inclusion and attrition of organizations over time in the "Be There" campaign (or campaigns like it) could provide more robust claims about the role of inter-organizational networks, attendance campaigns, and connections that exist during network transformations. Further, studies that follow the impact of the network into schools would help researchers to understand the performance of an inter-organizational network when it comes to addressing a wicked problem. This kind of research can ask school leaders, teachers, and students to identify their connections to organizations working in or with their school on school attendance, perceptions of the network, and the overall efficacy and potential of the campaign. Finally, comparative studies of different county-wide chronic absenteeism strategies would be beneficial in future chronic absenteeism studies.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **NETWORK SURVEY**

Over the next several pages, this appendix will introduce the network survey used to collect data for this survey via Figure 10. More information regarding the survey and data collection can be found in Chapter 3.

## Background of Study

Thank you for agreeing to take this survey. Our goal is to learn about the efforts of organizations in Western Pennsylvania to address chronic absenteeism. This survey is ***not evaluating the effectiveness of your organizations or its administrators, and only I will have access to your individual responses***. The results of the research will provide findings on how organizations are connected and providing resources to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western PA.

Completing this survey indicates your consent as a participant in this study insofar as your responses will be analyzed. Participating in this study is voluntary, and all data collected will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions you can contact me at [jdc63@pitt.edu](mailto:jdc63@pitt.edu). I appreciate your time in responding to this survey.

Joshua Childs  
Doctoral Student, Learning Sciences and Policy  
University of Pittsburgh

## Demographic Questions

This section will ask a few demographic questions about your organization and your position within the organization. The data will provide some background information for the study.

Your Name

Name of the organization you work for

Position and/or Title in Organization



## Information on Activities of the Organization

This next section focuses on the activities of your organization in addressing chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

### Your Organization

Briefly describe how your organization is working to address chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please indicate whether or not your organization engages in the following activities in order to address chronic absenteeism

	Yes	No
Provide training for school and/or school district personnel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide training for organizations (other than schools or school districts)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop tools such as curriculum or online modules	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manage or oversee programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research or evaluation services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct services to students such as tutoring, counseling, afterschool programming, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct services to parents such as counseling, support groups, home visits, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political advocacy/awareness building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Money to schools and school districts related to their absenteeism efforts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Money to organizations (other than schools/districts) related to their absenteeism efforts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please list any other activities not listed earlier that your organization engages in to address chronic absenteeism.

There are many factors or conditions in a student's life that may contribute to whether or not they are chronically absent from school. Please indicate the extent to which your organization has focused on the following conditions in your work to address chronic absenteeism.

	Not a focus	Minor focus	Major focus
Students' mental and physical well-being	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Families' social lives and dynamics (e.g. parental support, family structure, SES, attitudes toward education)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School environment (e.g. student-teacher relationships, social and physical school environment)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community and Neighborhood context (e.g. safety, transportation, physical environment such as housing and sidewalks)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How long has your organization been working to address chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania?

	1-2 Months	3-6 Months	6-12 Months	1-2 Years	2+ Years
Length of time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Organization's work with other organizations

The following set of survey questions will ask about your organization's work with other organizations. Please note that organizations are categorized by **type** of organization based on researcher's interpretation.

### Other Organizations-School Districts

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **Intermediate, SCHOOL DISTRICT, and/or Charter School** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **SCHOOL DISTRICTS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together informally (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had/Have a formal partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Baldwin-Whitehall School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Carlynton School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chartiers Valley School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clairton School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elizabeth Forward School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gateway School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Highland School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manchester School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
McKeesport School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Penn Hills School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pittsburgh Public School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
South Allegheny School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Steel Valley School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sto-Rox School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Urban Pathways K-5 College Charter School	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Woodland Hills School District	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in school district name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in school district name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in school district name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in school district name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in school district name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Educational Intermediary

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **EDUCATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **EDUCATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Allegheny Intermediate Unit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A+ Schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attendance Works	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pittsburgh Promise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University of Pittsburgh-Office of Child Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Private Foundations

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **PRIVATE FOUNDATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the

end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Buhl Foundation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grable Foundation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Heinz Endowments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pittsburgh Foundation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RK Mellon Foundation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Other Organizations-Government Agencies**

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **GOVERNMENT AGENCY** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **GOVERNMENT AGENCIES** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Allegheny County Department of Human Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allegheny County Criminal Courts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Borough of Swissvale	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Court of Allegheny County	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
City of Pittsburgh-City Council	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
City of Pittsburgh-Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Authority	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
City of Pittsburgh-Mayor's Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Juvenile Probation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
US Attorney's Office (Western PA)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Click to write Statement 14	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Other Organizations- Youth Development Non-Profit Organizations**

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Allegheny Youth Development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time (APOST)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Amachi Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Boys and Girls Clubs of SWPA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Boy Scouts of Laurel Highlands	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brothers and Sisters Emerging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Duquesne-West Mifflin Boys and Girls club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Girl Scouts of Western PA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/Ajax.php?action=GetSurveyPrintPreview&T=37GkS2>

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Girls Coalition of Western PA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homewood Brushton YMCA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Junior Achievement of Western PA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
McKeesport YMCA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ozanam, Inc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pittsburgh Public Allies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pressley Ridge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thelma Lovette YMCA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Mentoring Partnership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Three Rivers Youth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Family Engagement Non-Profit Organizations

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Family Resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family Services of Western PA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Macedonia Family and Community Enrichment Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Northview Heights Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/Ajax.php?action=GetSurveyPrintPreview&T=37GkS2>

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Support Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small Seeds Development, Inc	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ward Home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in organization name below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Education Non-Profit Organizations

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **EDUCATION NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **EDUCATION NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Allegheny County Library Association	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Carnegie Science Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Museum of Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consortium for Public Education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fred Rogers Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Higher Achievement-Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homewood Children's Village	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Neighborhood Learning Alliance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
PennCan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading is Fundamental-Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Saturday Light Brigade	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Youth Advocacy Non-Profit Organizations



For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **YOUTH ADVOCACY NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **YOUTH ADVOCACY NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Allies for Children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
CASA of Allegheny County	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kids Voice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Faith Based Non-Profit Organizations

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **FAITH BASED NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **FAITH BASED NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Center of Life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change a Heart	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holy Family Institute	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jehoshabeath Eli	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Melting Pot Ministries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pittsburgh Project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
South Hills Interfaith Ministries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Health and Wellness Non-Profit Organizations

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **HEALTH AND WELLNESS NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **HEALTH AND WELLNESS NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

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	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Community Care Behavioral Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Community Engagement Non-Profit Organizations

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communities in Schools of Pittsburgh Allegheny County	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coro Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eastside Neighborhood Employment Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human Services Center Corporation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lawrenceville United	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Northshore Community Alliance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oakland Planning and Development Corporation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Operation Better Block	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sprout Fund	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stand Up Now! Network	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
United Way of Allegheny County	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Other Organizations-Higher Education Institutions

For each organization listed below, please indicate the extent to which your organization has worked with each **HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION** to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Please add other **HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS** not listed by clicking underneath **other** at the end of this section

	Have not worked together at all	Shared information or data but did not actively work together	Worked together <b>informally</b> (collaborated without a formal agreement)	Had a <b>formal</b> partnership (MOU or other formal agreement)
Duquesne University	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University of Pittsburgh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in the name of the higher education institution below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in the name of the higher education institution below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in the name of the higher education institution below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in the name of the higher education institution below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please indicate by writing in the name of the higher education institution below) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Which units within University of Pittsburgh have you partnered with (check all that apply):

- School of Education
- School of Social Work
- Athletics Department
- Click box below to write in another unit within the University of Pittsburgh
- Click box below to write in another unit within the University of Pittsburgh

### Be There Attendance Campaign

This section asks about your organization's involvement with the **Be There** attendance campaign; an effort spearheaded by the United Way of Allegheny County to address student chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Has your organization signed the **Be There** pledge which essentially means that a representative from your organization has attended various **Be There** activities, received **Be There** materials, etc. Also, indicating that you are willing to be a partner in the decreasing the chronic absenteeism movement.

- Yes  
 No

Is your organization a member of the advisory committee for the **Be There** attendance campaign?

- Yes  
 No

In what ways do you think the **Be There** attendance campaign contributed to reducing chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania?

In what ways (if any) has the **Be There** attendance campaign supported your organization's efforts to address chronic absenteeism in schools and districts?

### Integrated Data System

This section will ask about if and/or how your organization uses data in its efforts to address chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania.

Does your organization **use** data from the **Department of Human Services Data Warehouse**?

- Yes  
 No

**What kind of data does your organization use from the Department of Human Services Data Warehouse?**

- Child Welfare  
 Behavioral Health Sciences  
 Homeless Services  
 Aging Services  
 Corrections  
 Public Schools  
 Birth & Death Records  
 Food Stamps  
 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and/or Supplemental Security Income  
 Public Housing Units

**Does your organization use data from the Pittsburgh Neighborhood and Community Information System (PNCIS)?**

- Yes  
 No

**What kind of data does your organization use from the Pittsburgh Neighborhood and Community Information System (PNCIS)?**

- Housing Vacancies  
 Tax Delinquency  
 Property Ownership  
 Property Assessment  
 Property Foreclosure  
 Crime  
 Housing Sales  
 Elections  
 Land Use  
 Building and Property Records

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the University Center for Urban and Social

Research (UCSUR) are currently coordinating a collaboration that brings together human services client records from the DHS Data Warehouse with property and community conditions from the Pittsburgh Neighborhood and Community Information System (PNCIS). This process is being undertaken to bring together an expanded Integrated Data System (IDS) that will be able to provide data on the multiple factors that affect chronic absenteeism.

Are you aware of this effort to create an Integrated Data System?

Yes

No

In what ways (if any) do you anticipate an Integrated Data System will support your organization's efforts to address chronic absenteeism in schools and districts?

### Block 11

Thank you for agreeing to take this survey. The results of the research will provide information on the network of organizations, how those organizations are connected, how the resources they are providing to reduce chronic absenteeism in Western PA.

If you have any questions you can contact me at [jdc63@pitt.edu](mailto:jdc63@pitt.edu). I appreciate your time in responding to this survey.

Joshua Childs  
University of Pittsburgh

**Figure 10.** Network Survey

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS**

#### Introduction:

- [Read introductory/consent script]
- [Receive consent for recording.]
- 1. [Give overview of my background/study background.]
- 2. Please provide an overview of what your organization does.
- 3. Describe what your organization is doing to address chronic absenteeism.
- 4. What do you think are the best ways to address chronic absenteeism? Do you think other people in your organization have the same theory about how to address chronic absenteeism?

#### Be There Campaign

1. What are some of the biggest challenges related to addressing chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County? What have you found to be the most successful strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism?
2. How would you describe the Be There campaign and its role in addressing chronic absenteeism?

3. To what extent do you think the Be There campaign has raised awareness of chronic absenteeism in Allegheny County? How has the campaign done this (i.e., how has had it had an influence)?
4. What are the tangible products, activities, or resources that are a result of the Be There campaign?
5. In what ways has the Be There campaign rallied organizations around the issue of chronic absenteeism?
6. To what extent has the Be There campaign impacted school districts and schools on their chronic absenteeism efforts?
7. Sounds like you think the campaign is (or is starting to) improve (or raise awareness around) chronic absenteeism in the county. Are there ways in which the Be There campaign could change or extend its activities in order to effectively reduce chronic absenteeism?
8. What role have the ten main partners played in the Be There campaign?
  - a. Follow up probe: To what extent and how are the main partners contributing to the coordination of the campaign?
9. How have the main partners involved other organizations in the campaign?
10. How do people in your organization think about what it would mean for the campaign to be successful?
11. What role does Be There have in framing the educational policy discussion in the next five years in Allegheny County? In other words, what do envision as the future direction for the campaign?



12. To what extent does your organization have a say in shaping the future direction of the campaign?

### Social Network Map

One of the goals of the Be There campaign is trying to foster collaboration among organizations of different types that will work together to address chronic absenteeism. This collaborative effort could be thought of as a network that links participating organizations to work together. The survey that you completed helped me to map the network and I'm going to show you that map now and ask you a series of questions. [Show Network Maps]

Explain network --- each org is dot, the lines represent a type of relationship b/w orgs – color coded key for relationships. Color coded – different types of orgs...

1. Please review the network map of the Be There organizations in front of you. What is your initial reaction to this picture of the Be There network? What do you notice? Were you surprised by anything you saw?
2. How would you strengthen the ties among organizations within the network? How would you improve the involvement of organizations in the network?
3. Point out their position in the network and whom they are shown to be tied to. Then ask:
  - a. How does the network map capture your organization's role in addressing chronic absenteeism in Western Pennsylvania?
  - b. Pick your closest partners and tell me about how you work together to address chronic absenteeism?
  - c. Does the map seem to identify the organizations you communicate with or work with the most?

- d. How do you see your formal relationships with organizations contributing to the campaigns goals? Please describe to the extent to which each one of the organizations that you are formally connected to being able to contribute to the overall goals of the campaign?
  - e. How do you see your informal relationships with organizations contributing to the campaigns goals?
4. [Need to show them some data on the resources embedded in the network???] Show them and explain representation then ask:
- a. What do you notice? Is this surprising in any way?
  - b. How do you think the resources embedded within the network contribute to the network being able to carry its work to reduce chronic absenteeism?
  - c. Are there resources the network needs to connect to further its work? (Anything missing)
5. What is your overall level of confidence in the network of organizations being able to support and execute the goals of the campaign?

## APPENDIX C

### COMPLETE LIST OF “BE THERE” ORGANIZATIONS

**Table 14.** Organizations Participating in the “Be There” Inter-Organizational Network: An Expansion of Table 5

Organization Type	Number of Official Be There Organizations as of October, 2014 ( <i>n</i> =103)	Be There Organizations Identified by Survey Data ( <i>n</i> =74)
Community Engagement*	14 (Bloomfield/Garfield Corp., Communities in Schools-Pittsburgh, Coro Pittsburgh, Eastside Neighborhood, Employment Center, Human Services Center, Lawrenceville United, Northshore Community Alliance, Oakland Planning and Development Corp., Operation Better Block, Sprout Fund, Stand Up Now! Network, United Way of Allegheny County, Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh)	10 (10,000 Friends of PA, Allen Place Community Services, Inc.; Brentwood Economic Development Corporation, Community Empowerment Association, Garfield Jubilee Association, Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Hill House Association, Pittsburgh CONNECT, Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, Turtle Creek Human Services Center)

**Table 14** (continued)

Education*	13 (Allegheny County Library Association, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Science Center, Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh, Consortium for Public Education, Fred Rogers Center, Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, Higher Achievement, Homewood Children’s Village, Neighborhood Learning Alliance (NLA), PennCan, Reading is Fundamental-Pittsburgh, Saturday Light Brigade)	2 (Fund for Advancement of Minorities through Education, Inc.; Hill District Education Council)
Educational Intermediaries	7 (A+ Schools, Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU), Attendance Works, Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT), Pittsburgh Promise, Office of Child Development (OCD))	-
Faith Based*	7 (Center of Life, Change a Heart, Holy Family Institute, Jehoshabeath Eli, Melting Pot Ministries, Pittsburgh Project, South Hills Interfaith Ministries)	8 (Agency on Jewish Learning, Bible Center Church, Encounter Church, Jewish Community Center, Mt. Ararat Baptist Church, Our Lady of the Angels Parish, Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact, Rankin Christian Center)
Family Engagement*	6 (Family Resources, Family Services of Western PA, Macedonia FACE, Northview Heights, Small Seeds Development, Inc.; Ward Home)	5 (Center for Family Excellence, Inc.; Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, FamilyLinks, Inc.; Hilltop Family Care Connections, Touching Families)

**Table 14** (continued)

Government Agencies	9 (Allegheny County Criminal Courts, Borough of Swissvale, Children’s Court of Allegheny County, City of Pittsburgh-City Council, City of Pittsburgh-Housing Authority, City of Pittsburgh-Mayor’s Office, Department of Human Services (DHS), Juvenile Probation, U.S. Attorney’s Office)	-
Health & Wellness*	1 (Community Care Behavioral Health)	12 (Alma Illery Medical Center, Children’s Hospital, Community Psychiatric Center, Consumer Health Coalition, Inc.; Depot School for Hearing and Speech, Early Learning Institute, Gateway Medical Society, Inc.; Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP), Growth Through Energy and Community Health, Inc.; Mercy Behavioral Health, Truechild, Inc.; UPMC St. Margaret)
Higher Education Institutions	2 (Duquesne University, University of Pittsburgh)	6 (Carlow University, Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham University, Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC), Point Park University, St. Vincent College)
Media	-	1 (WQED-TV)
Private Foundations	5 (Buhl, Grable, Heinz Endowments, Pittsburgh Foundation, RK Mellon)	7 (America’s Promise, Annie E. Casey, Benedum, Eden Hall Foundation, Hillman Foundation, McAuley Ministries, Poise)

**Table 14** (continued)

School Districts and/or Charter Schools/Networks	16 (Baldwin/Whitehall, Carlynton, Chartiers Valley, Clairton, Elizabeth Forward, Gateway, Highland, Manchester, McKeesport, Penn Hills, Pittsburgh Public, South Allegheny, Steel Valley, Sto-Rox, Urban Pathways, Woodland Hills)	11 (Avonworth, Cornell, Duquesne, East Allegheny, Environmental Charter, North Hills, Propel Schools, Riverview, Shaler, Wilkensburg, Young Scholars of Western PA)
Youth Advocacy*	3 (Allies for Children, CASA of Allegheny County, Kids Voice)	4 (Education Law Center, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, Student Conservation Association, Inc.; Youth Advocate Program)
Youth Development*	20 (Amachi Pittsburgh, Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time (APOST), Allegheny Youth Development (AYD), Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boy Scouts of Laurel Highlands, Boys and Girls Club of Western PA, Brothers and Sisters-Emerging, Duquesne/West Mifflin Boys and Girls Club, Girl Scouts of Western PA, Girls Coalition of Western PA, Homewood-Brushston YMCA, Junior Achievement of Western PA, McKeesport YMCA, Oznam, Inc.; Pittsburgh Public Allies, Pressley Ridge, The Mentoring Partnership, Thelma Lovette YMCA, Three Rivers Youth, YWCA of Greater Pittsburgh)	8 (Adonai Center for Black Males, MGR Youth Empowerment, Mon Valley Providers Council, Project Destiny, Sarah Heinz House, Strong Women/Strong Girls, Try Again Homes, Urban Impact)

*Note.* \* denotes nonprofit organizations

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