

**Using Motivational Interviewing to Improve Parent Engagement in Student Attendance
Improvement Conferences**

by

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This dissertation in practice focused on the use of Motivational Interviewing in the school environment between school staff and families. More specifically, this program evaluation sought to see if the use of Motivational Interviewing by school staff could improve parent participation rates in student attendance improvement conferences (SAICs). Motivational Interviewing is an evidence-based practice to help people prepare for a change in behavior (Herman et al., 2014). Parents assert they would be more involved in school functions if they genuinely felt more welcomed by school personnel (Sheldon, 2007). Thus, the hypothesis of the program evaluation was that Motivational Interviewing might be a systematic strategy school personnel could use with families to improve building rapport and communication. The following questions guided this study. 1. Through professional development sessions, did staff learn the basic tenets of Motivational Interviewing techniques? 2. What content is most difficult for school staff to master? 3. Do school staff feel more confident collaborating with families after receiving training in motivational interviewing techniques? 4. Compared to prior semesters, did more families attend SAICs once training began? 5. Once trained, did staff report changes in family engagement during SAICs?

Participants in this study included four school personnel who frequently communicate with families regarding student attendance. The participants completed a three-module professional development course. Participants completed pre- and post-quizzes after each module, and quiz

results were analyzed for content mastery. Participants also completed surveys regarding their comfort level using Motivational Interviewing, which were analyzed for growth. The study established that all participants mastered the content taught during the professional development modules, and all participants rated growth. Findings from this small sample and the limited-scope study showed that the professional development did improve educators' skills with Motivational Interviewing but did not necessarily improve family participation in SAICs.

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1.0 Introduction to the Problem of Practice

Problems of Practice are defined by Minthrop (2016) as "a problem for which a remedy is urgently sought that can be locally implemented" and are helpful in helping organizations engage in the process of improvement science (p. 23). This dissertation in practice identifies a problem of practice relevant to a specific public-school district named herein as Kinzler School District. This section also identifies the urgency of the problem of practice by discussing the broader context of the concern. Additionally, this section analyzes the root causes associated with this problem of practice and offers a potential solution to the problem of practice.

1.1 Problem of Practice Identified

A problem of practice is that fewer parents participated in school attendance improvement conferences (SAICs) in the 2018-19 school year (50%) compared to the 2017-18 school year of 71%. There is a significant concern if this trend continues because there is a direct correlation between a student's attendance rate and parental involvement (Sheldon, 2007). Pennsylvania statute requires SAICs for habitually truant students, which is defined as being absent three or more days unlawfully. When parents do not participate in a SAIC, an attendance improvement plan is developed without their insight, feedback, and buy-in. Truancy is a risk factor for becoming a high school dropout (De Witte, 2014). Additionally, the PA Department of Education includes school districts' attendance rates in the published Future Ready Index for public viewing.

The problem of practice related to improving parent participation in SAICs addresses various aspects of the organization but can be measured by Mintrop's criterion (2016). The identified problem of practice demonstrates urgency and has devastating consequences (increased truancy) if the problem is not addressed. Additionally, this problem of practice is forward-looking and is designed to stop current problematic trends. Finally, there are procedures in place and resources dedicated to this effort, as evidenced by a full-time person whose job is to improve students' attendance, so this problem is feasible, strategic, and tied to a specific set of practices.

1.2 Naming the Actionable Problem

It is an accepted fact in education that students' success in school is correlated with family involvement, including favorable attendance rates. For example, Gonzalez-DeHass (2003) summarizes his research study examining factors contributing to student success by stating, "Parental involvement has been positively related to high school students' academic achievement, time spent on homework, favorable attitudes toward school, less likelihood of high school dropout, and academic motivation" (p. 86). Additionally, the federal government requires a school district to use Title I. funding for parent engagement activities, which demonstrates that family involvement is a value accepted among society and educators (Sheldon, 2007). Finally, the research demonstrates that schools with specific family engagement programs have higher attendance rates. For example, Sheldon's research showed that student attendance increased by 0.5% in schools that formally adopted The National Network of Partnership Schools Program

(2007), and Epstein's study showed an increase of 2.7% when schools had an active written plan to involve families (2002).

1.3 Organizational System Description

A key feature of Improvement Science methodology is that the problem of practice is tied to a single system that produces the outcome. According to Bryk et al. (2015), "it is hard to improve outcomes when we do not fully appreciate how our educational systems operate to produce the results we currently observe" (p. 84). This section provides a description of the system to which the identified problem of practice is connected.

1.3.1 The Description of the Organization

Kinzler School District is a small school district in Pennsylvania. During the 2020-21 school year, it served 1,568 students (52% male and 48% female) according to the Future Ready PA Index (PA Department of Education, 2020). In addition, this source reports that 95.8% of the student population is white, 34.3% are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 20.3% of the students receive special education services (PA Department of Education, 2020). During the 2018-19 school (the last year in which traditional attendance was tracked prior to COVID-19), the district's attendance rate was 74%, while Pennsylvania published that the average attendance in the Commonwealth was 68% for the same year (PA Department of Education, 2020).

1.3.2 The Organization's Design to Facilitate the Problem of Practice

Based on the PA School Code, the organization has a detailed board-approved policy and procedure document that specifies how to track student attendance daily and manage steps to secure support and, if needed, discipline for habitually truant students from school. In addition, the district's board policy outlines clear, specific steps and assigns a truancy officer to oversee the implementation of this plan.

There is support within the system to address the stated problem of practice, especially since the district must improve its attendance rates to comply with state and national government goals. Locally, the district also recognizes there are complex reasons contributing to chronic absenteeism. In addition, the district prides itself in caring for each student and for the provision of supports to meet their needs. Therefore, there is little pushback to addressing this problem of practice. The most significant force resisting change is competing factors because the system has been operating in crisis mode since the pandemic began; more than 30% of the community does not have access to broadband internet, and there has been a significant turnover in the administrative team.

1.4 A Connection Between the System, Problem of Practice, and Root Cause Analysis

The district or system must improve its student attendance numbers to comply with goals set forth by both the state and federal governments. Moreover, as an educational institution, Kinzler School District recognizes that absenteeism impacts the system's ability to carry out its mission and meet its student growth goals. Additionally, because there is a direct correlation

between parent participation and student attendance, it stands to reason that the district needs to improve its relationship with families and increase parental involvement to improve student attendance. Therefore, the system recognizes that the identified problem of practice is urgent and relevant, which are critical factors of a problem of practice, according to Mintrop (2016). Others have confirmed the fishbone's identification of barriers and root causes in the system through the use of empathy interviews, a semi-structured interview, an analysis of documents, and a force field analysis.

1.5 Fishbone: A Root Cause Analysis

One part of the process improvement process is to conduct a root cause analysis (Mintrop, 2016). Root cause analysis has been defined as "The process of identifying causal factors using a structured approach with techniques designed to provide a focus for identifying and resolving problems" (Doggett, 2004, p. 2). The fishbone diagram is one tool practitioners can use when conducting a root cause analysis. This fishbone exploration identifies root causes associated with the problem of practice that fewer parents participated in school attendance improvement conferences (SAIC) in the 2018-19 school year compared to the 2017-18 school year. The following root causes have been identified as reasons for reduced parental participation after surveying the literature, reflecting on past conversations with families and colleagues, and asking why.

1.5.1 Selection of Big Headers in Fishbone Diagram (Appendix A)

Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) listed ten specific barriers to parent involvement in school settings, so that article became a starting point in choosing headers for the fishbone diagram. However, because a problem of practice needs to be relevant and urgent to a specific organization, some of the challenges listed in the article did not seem applicable to Kinzler School District or connected to the particular topic of attendance improvement meetings and were eliminated from further consideration. A second source then validated the remaining referenced barriers before being listed in the fishbone diagram as a big header.

1.5.1.1 Identified Root Causes (Appendix A)

The following root causes have been identified as reasons for reduced parental participation. The root causes have been determined by surveying the literature, reflecting on conversations with families and staff at Kinzler School District, and asking why.

1.5.1.2 Barriers to Meetings

Schools often schedule meetings in their buildings during typical daylight hours, which creates barriers for families to attend. In addition, school meetings may conflict with parents' work schedules, and some families do not have transportation to the school building (Hornby, 2011). Families may also not have access to childcare, and bringing babies and toddlers to meetings can cause added stress, as evidenced by families discussing this hardship when attending meetings.

1.5.1.3 Parent Comfort

Families report that attending school meetings can be an uncomfortable experience, especially if parents had negative experiences in school themselves (Sheldon, 2005). Parents may also feel intimidated attending a conference by themselves or with only their spouse, especially when there are several school personnel in the room, and this uncomfortable feeling is compounded when there is a language barrier or school personnel use vocabulary that a parent does not understand (Sheldon, 2007).

1.5.1.4 Values

The premise of an attendance improvement conference is to strategically improve attendance. Admittedly, though, such is a goal that is contingent upon all team members valuing school attendance. If families do not share the value of needing to have strong attendance, they will not see the worth of the meeting. Parents, like all humans, also must prioritize their use of time and resources; sometimes, a parent may value the meeting but may choose not to attend because of conflicting or competing priorities (Herman, 2014).

1.5.1.5 School Personnel

Epstein's (2007) research study revealed that teachers admitted to not always valuing parent input or genuinely wanting families to attend meetings. Additionally, Gonzalez-DeHass (2003) reported that families reported being interrupted, talked to condescendingly, and never being spoken to during meetings other than a simple greeting at the beginning.

1.5.1.6 Poor Outcomes

Truancy is a complicated problem with many root causes, and improving school attendance is not typically an easy task (Epstein, 2002). Nevertheless, meetings are often scheduled frequently, and most of the conference is focused on reviewing the data about the problem and discussing the current interventions rather than brainstorming new strategies. Also, this writer has had conversations with colleagues and families about how schools often threaten legal charges against families, which sends a mixed message when inviting parents to become partners in solving a problem.

1.5.1.7 Documentation Barriers

There are extensive paperwork requirements in hosting a student attendance improvement conference, and professionals have reported to this writer that the paperwork becomes so burdensome that the team becomes focused on the to-do list rather than engaging in meaningful conversation about the individual students' strengths and needs. The paperwork may also result in the meeting not being productive and having poor outcomes.

1.6 Frame the Actionable Problem

School attendance must be the responsibility of the entire district and the community at large, collaborating with many stakeholders. For example, the United States Department of Education's Attendance Toolkit (2015) states, "Work together as a community so that everyone feels responsible for successfully addressing underlying causes of chronic absenteeism." (p. 17). However, in the narrow scope of solving the identified problem of practice of declining parent

participation SAICs, the supervisor of special education and truancy officer are the primary leaders.

1.6.1 Criteria for Solving the Problem

One solution to improve parent participation in SAICs is to train the faculty who participate in SAICs with families to use Motional Interviewing techniques. In doing so, families will experience more relevancy and increase engagement. Motivational Interviewing is an evidence-based practice to help people prepare to change behavior. Herman (2014) states that motivational interview has two goals. "The first one is to find a way how to increase motivation; the second one is about committing" (p. 23).

1.7 Summary of Findings

The PA Department of Education requires schools to hold a Student Attendance Improvement Conferences (SAICs) to develop an action plan once a student misses six or more school days in a current school year. Parents and students are encouraged to attend these meetings and to assist with developing strategies to improve attendance. Nonetheless, at Kinzler School District, parent participation in these meetings is declining. After examining the context of Kinzler School District and the root causes of the identified problem, it can be concluded that the identified problem of practice is that fewer parents participated in school attendance improvement conferences in the 2018-19 school year than in the 2017-18 school year is an urgent, relevant problem.

2.0 Literature Review

School attendance is monitored closely because it is a predictor of a student's success. Truancy is related to many risk factors, including high school dropout rates, juvenile delinquency, and mental health concerns (Nolan et al., 2013). In addition, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015) said, "Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that youth are headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, and/or educational failure." Furthermore, one study followed students into adulthood and examined a group of fifty-year-olds; students, classified as truant in high school, were convicted of crimes at the rate of 50.1% as an adult, which is significantly higher than those classified as truant those who had regular attendance. Those who attended school regularly were charged as adults with a crime rate of 30.2% (Rocque et al., 2016). Alternatively, students who demonstrate strong school attendance have motivation, persistence, and self-discipline (Shepherd, 2005).

2.1 School Attendance: A National Perspective

Truancy rates are challenging to characterize for at least three reasons. One, each state delineates truancy differently. Secondly, since the definition of truancy varies when data are reported to the federal government, the information is reported inconsistently (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2005). Thirdly, studies often point out self-reports from students, and those numbers have variance (Vaughn et al., 2013).

The United States Department of Education (USDE) (2019) notes that one in six students missed fifteen or more school days in the 2015-16 school year. In reviewing other data tables published by the USDE, this number has increased annually since the 2010-11 school year. The USDE further indicates that truancy increases as students become older. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) confirms the USDE's claims by also reporting that the average daily attendance rate in the United States was 93.1% in the 2007-08 school year and decreased to 90.9% in the 2011-12 school year. In addition, the NCES discusses higher attendance rates in elementary students than secondary students (n.d.).

2.2 School Attendance: A Commonwealth Perspective

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) publishes the Commonwealth's attendance figures via the Future Ready Index. During the 2018-19 school year, PA indicated the statewide regular attendance average as 85.7%, which means 14.3% of the students were described as having chronic absenteeism due to missing eighteen or more days in a 180-day school year. PDE calculates all days in which instructional hours are lost as absent, including excused absences such as educational trips, out-of-school suspension, and medically excused absences in its attendance rate.

The PA Legislature has recently revised the Commonwealth's truancy laws. In October 2014, the House of Representatives adopted a resolution to direct the State Joint Commission and an Advisory Committee to study the issue of truancy and dropout. Based on the State Joint Commission's 2015 report and recommendations, Act 138 of 2016 was approved on November 3, 2015. The act aims to reduce truancy and improve attendance by naming attendance issues and

intervening as soon as they begin. Interventions include sending a warning letter to parents after the first unexcused absence and holding a school attendance improvement conference after three unexcused absences. Finally, truancy charges are filed after six unexcused absences. The new legislation defines habitual truant as six or more unexcused absences. In addition, the Public School Code of 1949 was again updated for the 2020-21 school year to revise the compulsory age of attendance within the Commonwealth. Compulsory school attendance for Pennsylvania requires students ages six to eighteen to attend school. Although kindergarten is not mandatory in Pennsylvania, students can enroll in kindergarten as early as age five (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1949).

2.3 School Attendance: A Local Perspective

This dissertation in practice closely examines Kinzler School District, a rural district in Pennsylvania. The attendance statistics for the two elementary schools and middle school included in this district show that the average attendance rate was higher than the state average of 85.7% for the 2018-19 school year, as evidenced as being reported as 88.8%, 87.5%, and 81.2% respectfully per the PA Future Ready Index. However, the high school was below the state average, denoted as 73.5%, as reported by the PA Future Ready Index.

The 2019 PA Youth Survey, conducted by three PA governmental entities, showed students' perception of the importance of school. This school district's local county data show similar trends to the previously acknowledged national figures. In addition, secondary students seem to value school less than elementary students, and the number of students reporting they like being in school declines yearly (Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 2019). The figure below summarizes the youth's responses in 2015, 2017, and 2019 (Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 2019).

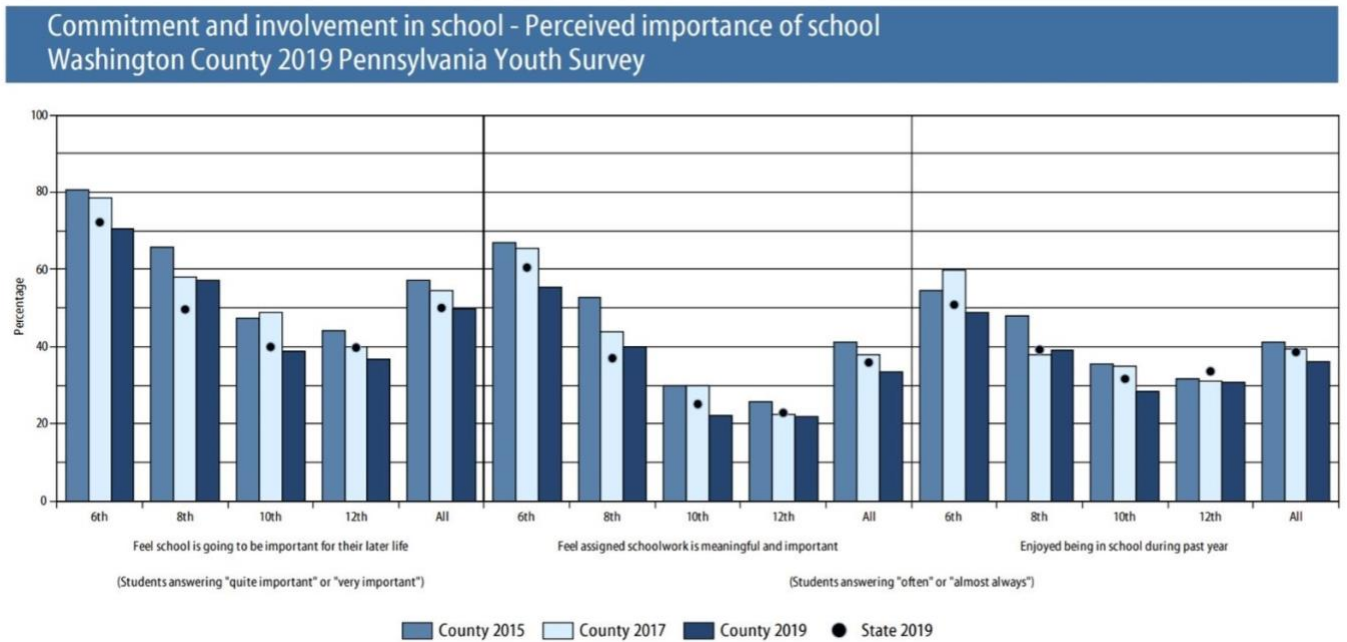


Figure 1. Youth's Responses (Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, 2019)

2.4 Literature Review's Key Questions

Nationally, five million to 7.5 million students are chronically absent each school year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Students who are chronically absent miss valuable instructional and learning time, impacting their academic achievement, engagement in school, and social

development. Not only do unlawful absences affect students in the setting, but they, likewise, directly affect students' lives outside of school. For instance, students labeled as truant are at a greater risk for unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal behavior, and instability in the home (Sutphen et al., 2010). Thus, the community suffers from an unskilled workforce (Lamdin, 1996).

Therefore, this literature review is guided by the following questions.

1. Why is student attendance important?
2. What does the literature say about the relationship between parent participation and chronically truant students?
3. What strategies does the literature say can be used to increase and improve parent participation in schools?

Rich discussions around school attendance include specific key terms that should be explained to ensure clarity. The following section will define these technical terms to provide context and consistency.

2.5 Glossary of Key Terms

Below is a list of key terms and their definitions, along with commonly used acronyms, that will be used throughout this literature study.

1. **Truant**- The PA Department of Education defines a child as being truant "if the child is subject to compulsory school laws and has incurred three or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year.

2. **Habitually Truant**- The PA Department of Education defines a child as being truant "if the child is subject to compulsory school laws and has incurred three or more school days of unexcused absences during the current school year.
3. **Chronic absenteeism or chronically truant**- students who miss more than ten percent of school days in one year; in the Commonwealth of PA, this would be eighteen or more school days in a 180-day school year.
4. **Unlawful Absence**- The PA Department of Education defines any child's absence as subject to compulsory school laws not excused by the local school district's policy.
5. **PDE**- Pennsylvania Department of Education
6. **USDE**- United States Department of Education
7. **SAIP**- Student Attendance Improvement Plans
8. **NCES**- National Center for Education Statistics

These key terms provide an overview of concepts which will be discussed in this literature review. The guiding question regarding the importance of student attendance will be examined first.

2.6 The Importance of Student Attendance

Student attendance and truancy have been the topic of many research studies. School attendance impacts students both within the school environment and in the community in addition to as a student and into later years as an adult. This section will delve into how school attendance impacts students.

2.6.1 Impact Within the School Environment

The impact of school attendance on a student's success within the school environment is related. Research has shown that when students are chronically absent within grades kindergarten through third grade, they are at higher risk of dropping out of high school (Chang & Romero, 2008). Moreover, students with high truancy rates in kindergarten exhibit lower levels of academic readiness beginning in first grade, and students lag significantly behind peers in literacy and mathematics (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012 and Ready, 2010). Consistent school attendance results in higher standardized test scores and graduation rates (Balfanz, 2012). Equally important, a study has shown that chronic absenteeism at the beginning of a school year can predict ongoing chronic absences throughout the rest of the school year (Olson, 2014).

Students who miss instructional time also achieve lower rates of academic gains than their peers who attend school regularly, students who are labeled truant negatively impact their school learning environments (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Students absent from school often state they are not welcome in the classroom by their peers and teachers (Gottfried, 2011), which leads to decreased engagement, less positive relationships, and sometimes behavior concerns (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). In addition, teachers have mentioned that they do not feel like they have the time and resources to help students make up the missed instruction. The teachers sometimes resent the additional work caused by a student being absent regarding providing makeup work, grading papers on a different timetable, and proceeding with a lesson when they know they do not have the foundational skills (Bruner, 2011).

It is hard to determine if poor attendance is a root cause of academic struggles or if students face academic challenges because they are absent frequently. Students who become behind in their coursework or struggle with content are more likely to be truant due to feeling

frustrated (Teasley, 2004). Conversely, students who are absent unlawfully for other reasons miss academic instruction and begin to grapple with mastering grade-level content (Reid, 2006). No matter the reason for the absenteeism, chronically absent students struggle academically.

2.6.2 Impact Outside of School

In addition to academic challenges, the research shows that students who are chronically absent face challenges with their social, mental, and physical health as well. Students who experience high truancy rates are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior, including theft, drug use, vandalism, alcohol consumption, and other criminal offenses (Baker, 2001). Moreover, additional studies have shown that chronically absent youth from school are more likely to participate in criminal activity as an adult (Nolan et al., 2013). Students' mental well-being is negatively affected by chronic absenteeism since researchers have linked high truancy rates to self-injury and suicide attempts (Bruner, 2011). The prevalence rates of students who have mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety, are much higher in students who are chronically absent (Ishak & Fin, 2015). Finally, students who experience higher truancy rates are more at risk for obesity, teenage pregnancy, and other physical health concerns (Eaton et al., 2008).

2.6.3 Summary and Synthesis

The literature consistently shows that students who are chronically absent face challenges inside and outside of school. Students lag behind peers academically on standardized tests and curriculum-based assessments, and youth allege they do not report as strong of a connection to

peers and teachers. Students who experience truancy also struggle with mental health and physical health concerns at higher rates than peers who regularly attend school. Students labeled as truants often drop out of school more often and become involved in the court system as well.

As evidenced by many research studies, school attendance is inarguably vital to students' success within the school environment and in the community. The statistics show chronic absenteeism is a prevailing problem despite numerous conversations concerning data and interventions being executed. Nevertheless, truancy rates have not improved even though the problem has clearly been labeled and identified alarming risk factors.

Consistent school attendance is critical for students' success within the school building and in the community. Truancy as a youth is also a risk factor for challenges as an adult. One protective factor that helps refrain from chronic absenteeism is parental involvement.

2.7 The Relationship Between Parent Participation and Chronically Truant Students

Parent participation in the truancy process is vital to solving the problem. When school personnel understand parents' perspectives, root causes will be more keenly identified. This next section will examine the family's values, attitudes, and typical characteristics of students who struggle with truancy.

2.7.1 Parents' Values and Attitudes

The research focused on truancy typically looks at three different environmental factors- schools, community, and family. Much weight is given to the family's influence on a student's

attendance. Some studies have implied that family support is the most significant factor, especially at the elementary grade levels (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Morrisey, 2014; Reid, 2006; Shepard, 2004). Parental values and attitudes about school have been associated with parents' expectations and aspirations for their children, including student attendance (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009). Another researcher found the parents' negative attitudes towards the education system, lack of guidance or supervision, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, and a lack of knowledge of the truancy laws to be common characteristics among students who are truant (Teasley, 2004).

One author (Reid, 2006) classifies parents into four categories when describing parents' attitudes towards addressing school attendance issues.

1. Parents are committed to students attending school no matter the circumstances.
2. Parents who are overprotective of their children encourage children to attend school only when circumstances are ideal and quickly make excuses for students not to attend if there are challenges.
3. Parents who view themselves as helpless to deal with poor attendance or are unconcerned about managing poor attendance.
4. Parents who will not engage with school or community personnel to acknowledge truancy comprise the last category.

Families may view kindergarten and first grade as optional extended daycare services (Chang & Romero, 2008). As a result, parents may not fully understand the connection between developing the habit of attending school regularly as a young child to increased attendance and lower the high school dropout rate as an older student (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In addition to parents not connecting attendance at a younger age with building solid habits, parents may not

realize the strong correlation between younger students' attendance with learning how to read (Chang & Romero, 2008). Many parents begin giving older students more independence. The increased independence may include children waking and readying themselves for school. Parents then may not be aware a student was absent from school until the absence occurred. One study of the public schools in Baltimore in 2001 cited that 27% of high school parents did not know their child had a school attendance problem until a letter from the school was mailed home (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003). In addition, the parents sometimes charge older students to miss school to earn income for the family, provide childcare for younger siblings, or aid with managing other family affairs (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009).

2.7.2 Common Characteristics of Families with Children Experiencing Truancy

As one would expect, students who experience truancy and their family situations are dynamic; one cannot broad stroke any type of label and accurately describe all families who have children who are chronically absent. Nevertheless, the literature has shown a few key features describing most families with chronic children cited as truant yearly. First, families living in poverty are significantly more likely to have children who miss school than students who are not living in poverty (Ready, 2010; US Department of Education, 2015). Ready (2010) reported that the connection between family income and students' school attendance "is the product of complex and interconnected relationships" (p. 272). Secondly, family size and structure can contribute to a student's likelihood of being chronically absent.

Similarly, single-parent households are likely to have more children who are chronically absent compared to students from two-parent households (Gottfield, 2013). In addition to studying single-parent households, another study found that 14 percent of the youth classified as

truant lived with both biological parents. Furthermore, 35 percent of the youth lived with their biological mother only, and 34 percent lived with their biological mother and another adult (US Department of Education, 2015). Lastly, families who relate to the community tend to have higher attendance rates, evidenced by participation in community events, owning a house versus renting, or living at the same address for more than five years (Henry, 2007). In addition, families with consistent, reliable transportation of their own without having to depend on public transportation also have higher attendance rates (Wallace, 2017).

Wallace (2017) conducted a study in which she interviewed 22 parents/guardians to gain their perspective on why their child was classified as chronically absent and what support they needed to increase school attendance. This study highlighted how mental health impacts students' absences, which is essential because researchers have not named this root cause in many other literature sources. In addition, school avoidance can be a precursor to a mental health diagnosis and is frequently more complex to address than a diagnosis of physical illnesses (Wallace, 2020). Wallace's (2017) interviews also highlight that parents know their children well and are cognizant if they wake up struggling emotionally and could negatively impact those around them; in those cases, families sometimes intentionally choose to keep their students home from school for the safety and comfort of everyone involved. Furthermore, if families are in conflict with other families and children in the neighborhood and community and do not trust the school to appropriate intervene, parents may sometimes consciously choose to keep their child home from school until the situation is resolved (Wallace, 2017).

2.7.3 Summary and Synthesis

Truancy is a complex issue that cannot be understood by one perspective or solved by one modality. Researchers often examine truancy by exploring the school, community, and family environments, and many studies have shown that the family environment is the most influential sphere. Parents' beliefs affect their children, and if parents value education in a traditional school environment, their children's attendance is higher than parents who do not share that value. The literature has shown that families from lower socioeconomic statuses, single-parent homes, and more transient families have children who experience chronic absenteeism more often than students of higher economic classes, children raised by biological parents, and families rooted in their communities. Furthermore, families have shared barriers to attendance include mental health issues, transportation challenges, and concerns regarding interactions with other children and school personnel.

The education system cannot easily address a family's socioeconomic status, family origins, or housing situations. However, schools can intentionally help understand parents' values and belief systems. Once there is a better understanding of parents' feelings and attitudes, education personnel can offer tools to reduce barriers, provide education to correct misconceptions, and align a student's experience in school to a family's priorities. In addition, when parents feel connected and experience open communication, they become more engaged with the school's goals; thus, the parent's engagement allows for more regular attendance for the student.

Because parental engagement is paramount in student attendance, the next section will consider strategies to increase and improve parent participation in schools.

2.8 Strategies to Increase and Improve Parent Participation in Schools

This section will first define parent involvement and engagement. It will then share strategies the research suggests on how schools can increase parent participation. Lastly, this paper will discuss feedback provided by families regarding parent engagement.

2.8.1 Definition of Parent Participation and Engagement

Recently, some researchers have delineated a difference between parent participation and parent engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The two phrases will be used interchangeably for this discussion. The federal government explains in the No Child Left Behind Act as, "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] § 6319, 2002). Moreover, Epstein & Sheldon (2002) uses a broader definition by citing, "parents working with schools in an effort to improve the development of their children. Engagement or involvement implies shared responsibility that links community agencies and schools to include parents in meaningful ways to actively support their children's learning and development" (p. 308).

Epstein (1984) further expands the definition of parental involvement in a six-part framework. The framework components are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaboration. The chart below, compiled by Smith et al. (2011), summarizes the framework and provides specific examples of each component.

Table 1. Epstein's Model of School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Type	Description of Type	Examples
Type 1	Parenting- Basic obligations of families	Providing children with basic needs such as health and safety
Type 2	Communicating- Basic obligations of schools	Communication between school and family such as memos, phone calls, report cards, and parent-teacher conferences
Type 3	Volunteering- Involvement at school	Volunteering at the school to assist teachers in the classroom or attending school events
Type 4	Learning at home- Involvement in learning activities at home	Helping children with homework
Type 5	Decision-making- Involvement in decision-making, governance, and advocacy	Serving in a parent-teacher association (PTA), on committees, or in other leadership positions
Type 6	Collaboration with the community- Collaboration with community organizations	Making connections with organizations that share responsibility for children's education, such as afterschool programs, health services, and other resources

Parent involvement rates will be higher when parent engagement is looked at from a broader perspective than interacting directly with school personnel. School personnel cannot assume parents are not involved because they are not physically at the school or communicating directly with educators. Many parents provide more support for their children's schooling than school personnel perceive based on the visibility of the parents (Walker et al., 2018). Educators must remember that parents can be involved in their child's education even if they are not physically attending school functions or communicating directly with teachers. Parents may choose to be involved by helping children with homework, driving to extracurricular activities, and supplementing the school curriculum with family activities and traditions (Pena, 2010).

2.8.2 Strategies Identified by Researchers to Improve Parent Participation

Much research has been conducted on improving parent participation in the education process since parental involvement is an imperative key for student success. Researchers have identified the following strategies to increase parent participation.

First, a school's strategic plan can address parent engagement systematically (Pena, 2010). This plan must train teachers on how to collaborate with parents in a culturally relevant manner and allocate time for teachers to plan and organize parent activities.

Secondly, educators should regularly collect updated parental preferences about the time, format, and language they prefer for communications (Robertson & Finnerty, 2020). Schools should allocate resources to ensure the communication occurs in the parents' preferred manner.

Thirdly, educators may consider creating a plan to communicate consistently with parents. Research states that school-to-home communication should be timely and frequent and include quality content (Pena, 2010). In addition, communication regarding students' progress should be shared with families regularly, and educators can guide how to create learning opportunities at home (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020).

Finally, social networks have been studied to increase parent involvement as well. Social networks can provide a means for information to be shared among parents in formal and informal ways. According to Sheldon (2002), parent social networks can be viewed as social capital and a resource to encourage social relationships among parents. Ultimately, parents influence other parents to participate (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020).

Parent training to offer families resources and specific strategies have shown to be effective in increasing parent participation. The effectiveness of these workshops depends on the topic and the families' background (Robertson & Finnerty, 2020). Parents benefit from training

to build their capacity to advocate for their children (Kelly, 2020) and provide opportunities for parents to network with other families (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Kelly (2020) further advocates for programs that provide information on how best to support student success. The literature has shown that parents will more likely attend these workshops when schools meet a family's basic needs during the training through incentives such as providing a meal, discounts from community businesses, or paying stipends to attend (Aguilar, 2021).

Educators can strategically reduce many common barriers to parent participation in meetings by offering to meet outside of regular school hours, providing transportation for families to come to the school or a neutral location, and offering school personnel to travel to the parent. In addition to these strategies mentioned above, educators can provide childcare or create an environment where young children feel welcomed at meetings by providing toys and safe spaces.

2.8.3 Strategies Identified by Parents to Improve Parent Participation

Parents want to feel more welcome in schools (Aguilar, 2021). Parents repeatedly express that they feel schools are cold towards parents and perceive teachers feel threatened by parents' presence (Pena, 2010). Parents expressed that they feel more comfortable when schools have open-door policies for parents to participate in classrooms and obtain needed information from school personnel (Aguilar, 2021). Wallace (2017) also lists factors that parents/guardians identified that would help them to improve their students' attendance as "increased communication about absenteeism and family issues, expressed compassion and interest in reasons why students are absent, and specific provisions to help children make up missed instruction and school assignments."

Some parents desire to be more involved but do not know how to. However, parents have shared that when they are provided specific examples of supporting school initiatives at home or are given individual invitations to events, they feel more engaged (Walker et al., 2018).

Parents likewise say that communication from school personnel is essential to helping them feel connected to the school (Epstein, 2001). For instance, when families receive regular progress reports on grades and behaviors, information on what is being taught in the classroom, and strategies for reinforcing concepts at home, parents feel more confident in helping students with homework and studying for tests (Walker et al., 2018). In addition, parents find a video or a phone conference helpful alternatives to in-person meetings to accommodate work schedules (Aguilar, 2021). In addition to flyers and memos being sent home with children, parents also have shared that they prefer texts and emails as reminders about upcoming school events or expectations for parents, such as returning permission slips and helping with a project at home (Aguilar, 2021).

2.8.4 Summary and Synthesis

Parent involvement is often described as two-way communication between families and schools. However, educators should be mindful of families that support school initiatives in other ways, such as helping with schoolwork at home and providing resources for extracurricular activities.

The research offers many strategies to improve parent participation in schools from researchers' and parents' perspectives. Parent engagement begins with effective communication in parents' preferred language, mode, and time. Additionally, parents feel more comfortable participating when provided with resources and are given specific directions on how to be

involved. Educators should have a systematic plan to partner with families, and this should strategically ensure that schools are welcoming to families by being culturally relevant and readily accessible to parents. Parents are influenced when they have the opportunity to interact with other parents. Lastly, parents appreciate it when educators provide multiple ways for them to participate, including during various times of the day.

In almost all situations, parents participate in their children's school experiences to the best of their ability. However, educators may cite lower parent participation rates because parents may describe their participation differently than school personnel. When educators are more receptive to broadening their definition of parent participation and listening and implementing feedback directly from parents, this expectation gap can be diminished.

Parents recognize that their children spend most of their waking hours in school, so they naturally have a curiosity and a genuine interest in their child's experience at school. However, some families may appear not to be as directly involved because their cultural belief is that educators are the experts in school, and parents respect the educators by not interfering. Alternatively, many parents have expressed that they genuinely do not know how to be involved and would be eager to participate if given more direction, support, or explicit invitations on how to be more engaged.

Primary sources are typically preferred sources of information in research. However, families are the primary source when exploring how to increase parent participation in schools. Consequently, educators must be mindful to ensure ongoing effective communication with parents. In addition, parents are critical stakeholders when writing strategic plans to ensure systematic parent engagement is part of the school culture.

The literature has helped help to understand why school attendance is essential, the relationship between parents and chronically truant students, and strategies that can be used to increase parent participation. A summary of the literature explores questions that remain, and a proposed study will follow in the next section.

2.9 Summary of Findings

This literature review considered three research questions. First, we probed why school attendance is essential. The literature overwhelmingly showed that students who were absent from school faced challenges not only in the school environment but often in the community and home as well. For example, students who experienced truancy are at greater risk of dropping out of high school and struggling with maintaining a job as an adult. Additionally, students with high absenteeism rates have more physical and mental health concerns than peers who regularly attend school.

Secondly, this literature review analyzed the relationship between parent participation and chronically truant students. Much of the research shows that parents strongly influence children's attendance through the parents' belief system and family and household structures.

Lastly, this literature review examined strategies that can be used to increase and improve parent participation in schools. Parents and the research alike emphasize the importance of schools welcoming parents and that school personnel must build positive relationships with parents. In addition, most parents want to be involved. For this reason, parents prefer when educators provide specific opportunities for parental involvement and provide resources to parents to better support students at home.

2.10 Questions that Remain

The literature explains the importance of parent involvement in schools globally and its positive correlation with student attendance. Moreover, the literature provides thorough strategies on how to increase parent participation in schools. One of the most effective strategies is to increase quality communication and rapport building; however, there seems to be a gap in the literature: A specific evidence-based method that addresses the need to engage parents in dialogue and build rapport directly was not found.

The literature also discusses a direct correlation between a parent's values and beliefs about school and a child's attendance. When schools meet the meaningful needs of a parent, their child's attendance increases. The research identifies concerns parents have with schools along with identifying specific barriers. The research frequently states that school personnel should also partner with parents to reduce these barriers. However, researchers have not identified an evidence-based practice to structure these partnerships and conversations.

Therefore, this study will address the gap in the literature, which advocates for school personnel to communicate with parents without recommending the use of a specific evidence-based practice. The PA Department of Education requires schools to hold a Student Attendance Improvement Conference (SAIC) to develop an action plan once a student misses six or more school days in a current school year. Parents and students are encouraged to attend these meetings and to assist with developing strategies to improve attendance. Nonetheless, at Kinzler School District, parent participation declined in the 2018-19 school year compared to the 2017-18 school year.

2.11 Motivational Interviewing: A Possible Solution

It is hypothesized that if school personnel used Motivational Interviewing techniques when communicating with parents about attendance concerns, parents would participate in the SAIC more often. Motivational Interviewing is an evidence-based practice to help people prepare for a change in behavior (Herman et al., 2014). Motivational Interviewing has two goals. Herman et al. (2014) specify the goals as, "The first one is to find a way how to increase motivation; the second one is about committing" (p. 8).

Parents argue they would be more involved in school functions if they genuinely felt more welcomed by school personnel (Blondal, 2009). Thus, Motivational Interviewing may be a systematic strategy school personnel can implore to improve building rapport and communication with families. Miller and Rollnick (2014) explain the tenets of Motivational Interviewing using the following three statements (p. 25).

1. MI is a guiding style of communication that sits between following (good listening) and directing (giving information and advice).
2. MI is designed to empower people to draw out their own meaning, importance, and capacity.
3. MI is based on a respectful and curious way of being with people who facilitate the natural process and honor client autonomy.

The study will begin by training school personnel who participate most often in conversations with parents about attendance in the techniques of Motivational Interviewing. These school personnel will use Motivational Interviewing to build rapport with parents and empower them with attendance improvement initiatives. The SAIC will be structured so that

Motivational Interviewing will be employed when the team identifies root causes and plans attendance improvement efforts.

3.0 Methods

My theory of improvement plan identified a problem of practice relevant to a public school district referred to as Kinzler School District in this paper. The plan closely examined the theory of improvement by describing the problem of practice, identifying changes that could result in improvement, and describing how one would know the change is an improvement. Additionally, a driver diagram was closely examined, including an aim statement, identifying the primary and secondary drivers, and analyzing potential system measures. Lastly, this section also discussed the theory of improvement by identifying a change idea, describing the study sample, and outlining the methods.

The problem of practice was that 21% fewer parents participated in school attendance improvement plan conferences (SAICs) in the 2018-19 school year than in the 2017-18 school year. During the 2017-18 school year, 71% of parents participated in the SAIC, whereas in the 2018-19 school year, only 50% of parents participated. There is a significant concern if this trend continues because there is a direct correlation between a student's attendance and parental involvement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007). In addition, the Pennsylvania statute requires SAICs for students who are habitually truant. When parents do not participate in a SAIC, an attendance improvement plan is developed without their insight, feedback, and buy-in, which reduces the plan's success. Therefore, this theory of improvement was designed to improve parent attendance at the SAIC.

3.1 Driver Diagram

A driver diagram is a visual depiction showing the relationship between the project's overall aim, the primary drivers that contribute directly to achieving the aim, the secondary drivers that are components of the primary drivers, and specific change ideas to test for each secondary driver. For example, the figure below shows a driver diagram for the problem of practice, and each part is explained below.

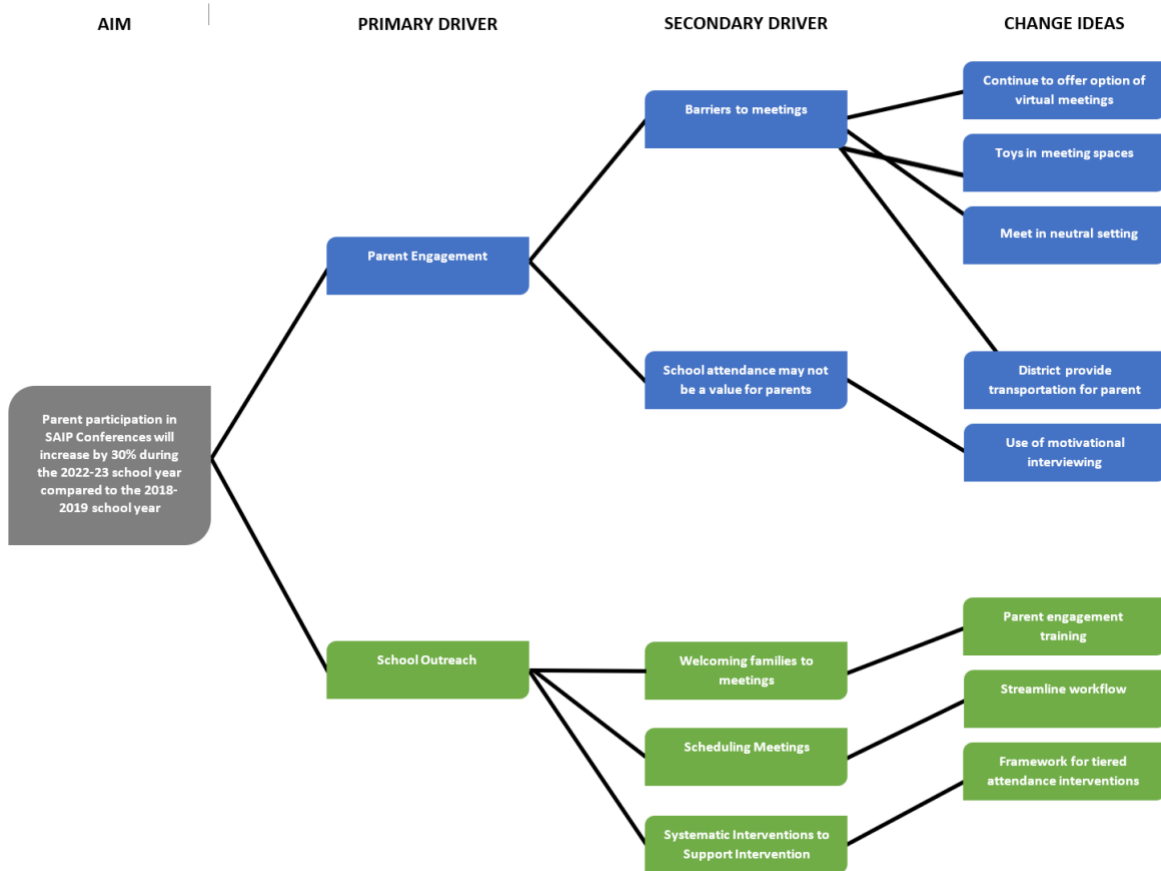


Figure 2. Driver Diagram

3.1.1 Aim Statement

Parent participation in SAICs will increase by 30% during the 2022-23 school year compared to the 2018-19 school year.

3.1.2 Primary Systems Drivers

The primary system drivers are identified as parent engagement and school outreach. When parent engagement improves, parents will be more willing to participate in school conferences, including meetings about student attendance. Additionally, when school personnel collaborate more effectively with families, parent engagement in attendance meetings will be positively impacted.

3.1.3 Secondary Systems Drivers

The secondary system drivers are described as opportunities for change. The diagram lists specific secondary drivers, and a discussion follows below regarding some of those drivers.

3.1.3.1 Barriers for Parents: Scheduling, Transportation, and Childcare

Schools often schedule meetings in their buildings during typical daylight hours, which creates barriers for families to attend. In addition, school meetings may conflict with parents' work schedules, and some families do not have transportation to the school building. Families may also not have access to childcare, and bringing babies and toddlers to meetings can cause added stress.

3.1.3.2 Parents' Values

The premise of an attendance improvement conference is to strategize to improve attendance. Admittedly, though, that is a goal driven by valuing school attendance. If families do not share the value of needing to have strong attendance, they will not see the worth of the meeting. Parents, like all humans, also must prioritize their use of time and resources; sometimes, a parent may value the meeting but may choose not to attend because of conflicting or competing priorities. Additionally, parents sometimes charge older students to miss school to earn income for the family, provide childcare for younger siblings, or aid with managing other family affairs (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009).

3.1.3.3 Welcoming Families to Meetings

Epstein's (2007) research revealed that teachers did not always value parent input or wanted families to attend meetings. Furthermore, Gonzalez-DeHass (2003) reported that families described being interrupted, talked to condescendingly, and never being spoken to during meetings other than a simple greeting at the beginning.

3.1.3.4 Systems in Place Do Not Support Improvement

Truancy is a complicated problem with many root causes, and improving school attendance is not typically an easy task (Epstein, 2002). Nevertheless, meetings are often scheduled frequently, and most of the conference is focused on reviewing the data about the problem and discussing the current interventions in place rather than brainstorming new strategies. Also, schools often threaten legal charges against families, which sends a mixed message when inviting parents to partner in solving a problem. As a result, the meetings frequently do not offer feasible and effective changes that help improve attendance.

3.2 Change Idea

My aim statement comprised two problems – improving student attendance and parent engagement. Therefore, one change idea will not entirely change the system and produce the desired results. However, one part of the system that can be influenced is helping school staff receive training so that they are equipped to have more productive, collaborative conversations with parents and families.

Motivational Interviewing is an evidence-based practice to help people prepare for a change in behavior (Herman et al., 2014). Parents assert they would be more involved in school functions if they genuinely felt more welcomed by school personnel (Sheldon 2007). Thus, Motivational Interviewing may be a systematic strategy school personnel can implore with families in order to improve building rapport and communication. Motivational Interviewing requires school personnel to work collaboratively with families and show them compassion and unconditional positive regard. School personnel engaged in reflective listening so families could experienced being listened to carefully. Throughout the Motivational Interviewing, families were empowered to make decisions rather than schools providing solutions that may not apply to the family's values, interests, or locus of control. Miller and Rollnick (2014) explain the tenets of Motivational Interviewing using the following three statements (p. 25).

1. MI is a guiding style of communication that sits between following (good listening) and directing (giving information and advice).
2. MI is designed to empower people to draw out their own meaning, importance, and capacity.
3. MI is based on a respectful and curious way of being with people who facilitate the natural process and honor client autonomy.

The study began by training school personnel who participate most often in conversations with parents about attendance in the techniques of Motivational Interviewing. These school personnel used Motivational Interviewing to build rapport with parents and empower them with attendance improvement initiatives during all interactions they had with families regarding attendance. These interactions included, but were not limited to, phone calls checking in on a students' whereabouts, conversations following up on attendance letters mailed, informal conversations at the school when parents pick students up early or drop them off late, and during other meetings such as IEPs, 504s, health plans, or parent-teacher conferences. Additionally, the SAIC became structured so that Motivational Interviewing would be employed when the team identified root causes and plans attendance improvement efforts.

The school truancy officer and building administrators communicate with families by letters, emails, and phone calls when students are absent from school. However, school staff believed parents may choose to not participate in SAICs because families feel defensive and believe the meetings will be a discipline meeting rather than a collaborative problem-solving meeting. It was hypothesized if the school staff used Motivational Interviewing techniques during these precursor meetings, then families may trust that the more formal attendance meeting would be an extension of these previous conversations; the goal would be to problem-solve and provide support rather than be punitive in nature.

3.3 Intervention

One school truancy officer and three building administrators, who most frequently discuss attendance issues with families, participated in a hybrid training regarding the use of

Motivational Interviewing techniques in the school. First, participants completed an asynchronous model independently, and then the group came together for two half-day in-person synchronous trainings. The synchronous and asynchronous modules were based on Herman, K., Reinke, W. M., Frey, A. J., & Shepard, S.A.'s 2014 book, *Motivational Interviewing in Schools: Strategies for Engaging Parents, Teachers, and Students*.

For the asynchronous Module 1 session, staff participating in the training read selected information (pages 3-9, 13-19, 20-31, and 36-69) from Herman et al.'s book. Participants completed graphic organizers to capture their learning, and supplemental materials about Motivational Interviewing, including a PowerPoint, also accompanied the learning in Module 1. While studying this part of the book, participants learned about active listening strategies and the four processes of Motivational Interviewing. See Appendix B for the outline and accompanied worksheets of this professional development module.

For Modules 2 and 3, which were synchronous learning experiences, participants read Chapter 3 of Herman et al.'s book beforehand (which focuses on change theory) and also jigsawed parts of the reading in small groups during the training sessions. Module 2 covered the material in Chapter 4 of Herman et al.'s book, and Module 3 covered the content on pages 157-161, 169-178, and 185-189. Topics from these reading passages included Motivational Interviewing with families, the process of Motivational Interviewing, implementing Motivational Interviewing, and learning and teaching Motivational Interviewing. Additionally, during the modules, participants role-played various Motivational Interviewing skills and reviewed supplemental materials. See Appendices C and D the outline and accompanied worksheets of these professional development modules.

By completing the book study and participating in the three modules, participants were expected to be able to meet the following learning targets.

1. I can define what Motivational Interviewing is.
2. I can identify when I can use MI strategies.
3. I can list and describe the four processes of MI.
4. I can list the OARS strategies that can help me actively listen.
5. I can facilitate the values sort activity with families.
6. I can demonstrate the four processes of MI.
7. I can solicit information from a family member to better understand their goals and values.

After the school staff were trained, they began using Motivational Interviewing techniques when interacting with families, and the SAIC became structured with a protocol using the tenets of Motivational Interviewing.

3.4 Evaluation Questions

Specifically, this program evaluation determined answers to the following questions.

1. Through professional development sessions, did staff learn the basic tenets of Motivational Interviewing techniques?
2. What content is most difficult for school staff to master?
3. Do school staff feel more confident collaborating with families after receiving training in motivational interviewing techniques?
4. Compared to prior semesters, did more families attend SAICs once training began?

5. Once trained, did staff report changes in family engagement during SAICs?

3.5 Study Sample/Population

School staff who assist with the attendance improvement efforts in the Kinzler School District were the main participants in this study. Specifically, this was the truancy officer and three assistant principals. The superintendent made this a required professional development for these staff.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

There were two types of data collection methods during this study. This section will describe the kind of data that were collected, how the data were collected, identify the measures used, and describe how the data were analyzed.

3.6.1 Evaluation of Data through Quizzes (See Appendices E, F, and G)

First, data were collected to measure the effectiveness of the professional development training on Motivational Interviewing. This data measured the following research questions.

- Through professional development sessions, did staff learn the basic tenets of motivational interviewing techniques?
- What content is most difficult for school staff to master?

The data were collected and analyzed in the following manner.

1. Participants were given a quiz before starting each professional development module.
2. The professional development module was taught.
3. Participants took a post-quiz.
4. I received the quizzes without any identifying information on them and scored the quizzes after each module.
5. I then compared the pre and post-quiz scores to determine if the participants in the professional development learned key concepts.
6. I listed all scores from the quizzes in an Excel worksheet without any names.
7. The individual questions on the post-quiz were also analyzed for mastery and error patterns. If any participant missed a question, the content relating to that question was retaught in the next module.

The content of the quizzes measured basic tenets of motivational interviewing through true/false questions, open-ended questions, and multiple-choice questions. The quizzes are Appendices E, F, and G.

3.6.1.1 Evaluation of Participants' Confidence through Rating Scales (See Appendix H)

Secondly, data were collected on the participants' confidence in interacting with families to see if a change had occurred due to the training on Motivational Interviewing via surveys. The surveys addressed the following research question.

- Do school staff feel more confident collaborating with families after receiving training in Motivational Interviewing techniques?

The data were collected and analyzed in the following manner.

1. Participants completed a paper survey before the initial training, after each of the three modules, and four weeks after completing the third module.
2. Participants made up a number they listed as the participant ID and used this participant ID each time they completed the survey. The anonymous participant ID allowed me to compare the surveys conducted at various intervals but kept the data de-identified.
3. I analyzed the data using Excel spreadsheet. The data were examined for trends collectively among the group of four participants in addition to each participant's individual answers. The content of the survey measured skills directly taught in motivational interviewing using a Likert scale. Participants were also asked to measure their confidence in building rapport with parents. Additionally, participants were asked to measure their confidence in using the skills of engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning taught in motivational interviewing. The survey is Appendix H.

3.6.1.2 Evaluation of Families' Attendance and Engagement at SAICs through a Survey (See Appendix I)

Thirdly, a survey collected data on families' attendance and engagement at SAIC. This data measured the following research questions.

- Compared to prior semesters, did more families attend SAIC once training began?
- Once trained, did staff report changes in family engagement during SAICs?

The data were collected and analyzed in the following manner.

- Beginning in the fall of 2022 and before the professional development for motivational interviewing began, the truancy officer completed a survey after each SAIC to establish baseline data. This survey was conducted via paper initially and is Appendix I. It asked the following three questions.

Did at least one family member attend the SAIC?

Yes

No

If at least one family member attended the SAIC, how did the family member attend?

In person

Via audio only

Via video and audio

If at least one family member attended the SAIC, on a scale of 1-5, how much did the family participate in the conversation regarding identifying root causes of truancy?

1. Only answered closed ended questions

2. Shared when asked direct questions

3. Offered affirmation or agreement with what was being said

4. Dialogued back and forth with minimal prompting

5. Fully engaged in the conversation with no prompting, may have asked questions

1 2 3 4 5

This same survey continued to be completed by the truancy officer after each SAIC during the professional development and four weeks following the third module.

The survey does not have any identifying information.

Using an Excel spreadsheet, the data were analyzed to determine if the change intervention impacted family participation and engagement by comparing the baseline data to the data collected during the intervention and post-intervention.

4.0 Findings

This program evaluation sought to answer five questions by administering quizzes and surveys. This section summarizes the data related to these program evaluation questions in addition to providing a summary of the results of the quizzes and surveys that helped answer the questions.

4.1 Program Evaluation Question #1: Through professional development sessions, did staff learn the basic tenets of Motivational Interviewing techniques?

Four participants participated in the book study. Each participant voluntarily completed a pre-and post-quiz accompanying each of the three modules. The participants' mean scores from the quizzes were as follows (Appendices E, F, and G):

Table 2. Quiz Results

	Pre-Quiz	Post Quiz	% Change
Module 1 (Appendix E)	56%	96%	+40%
Module 2 (Appendix F)	43%	86%	+43%
Module 3 (Appendix G)	68%	100%	+32%

All items missed on the post-quiz were reviewed during the next module and re-tested during Module 3's post-quiz. All participants scored 100% on the post-quiz for Module 3, which demonstrates staff were able to learn basic tenets of Motivational Interviewing techniques.

4.2 Program Evaluation Question #2: What content is most difficult for school staff to master?

An item analysis was conducted with the post-quizzes. The most missed questions were as follows:

- What does OARS stand for? (Module 1)
- Define LEAP Communication Skills. (Module 1)
- List a Values question. (Module 2)

The content that relied on technical language related to Motivational Interviewing seemed most challenging for staff members, especially if the question was asked in an open-answer format rather than multiple choice or true/false.

4.3 Program Evaluation Question #3: Do school staff feel more confident collaborating with families after receiving training in motivational interviewing techniques?

All four participants, who completed the book study, voluntarily completed a survey measuring their confidence level in collaborating with families. These surveys were administered before the training occurred, after completing each of the three modules, and four weeks following the completion of the training (Appendix H). The survey used a Likert scale of 1-5, with each number corresponding to the following scale.

- 1 – never confident
- 2 – rarely confident
- 3 – sometimes confident
- 4 – often confident
- 5 – always confident

The mode of the participants' responses to the survey is listed below.

Table 3. Survey Results

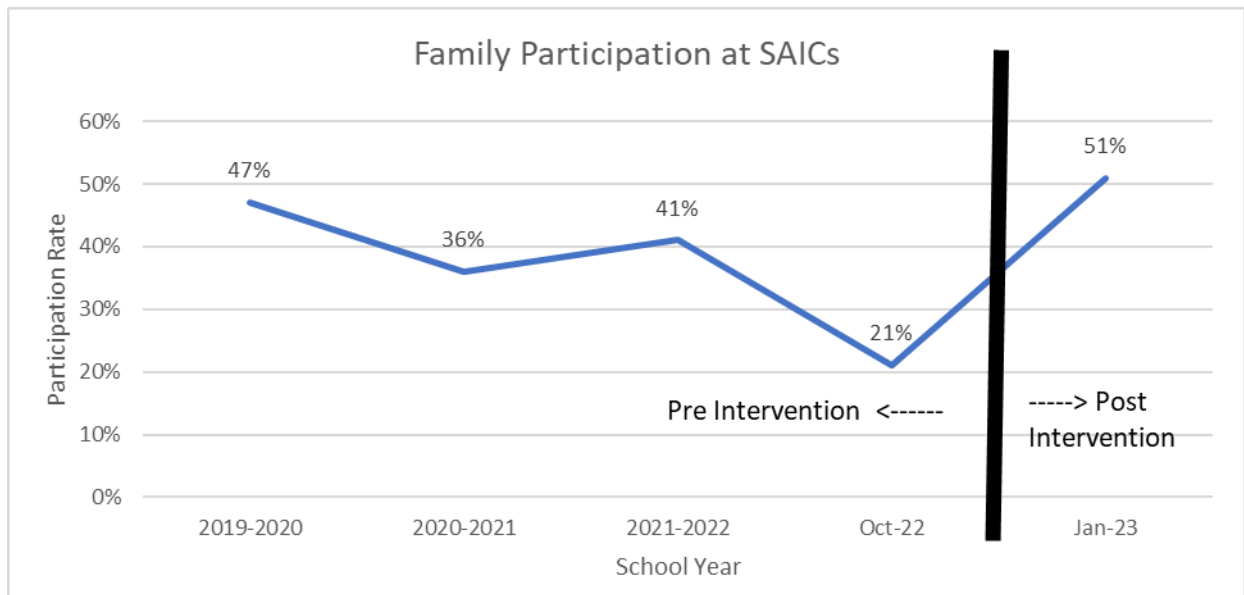
	Pre Intervention	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Post Intervention	Change between Pre and Post Intervention
How often do you feel confident about your skills in building rapport with a parent?	3	3	3	3	4	+1
Engaging in MI means establishing a working relationship. How often do you feel confident about your skills in engaging?	2	2	3	3	4	+2
Focusing in MI means defining a clear goal or objective. How often do you feel confident about your skills in focusing?	2	2	2	3	4	+2
Evoking in MI means identifying why a change needs to occur. How often do you feel confident about your skills in evoking?	1	2	2	2	3	+2
Planning in MI means developing a plan of commitment. How often do you feel confident about your skills in planning?	1	1	2	3	4	+3

Staff members who completed the survey showed their confidence rose in all areas when comparing the first survey administered before the book study began and the last survey administered four weeks after the conclusion of the book study.

4.4 Program Evaluation Question #4: Compared to prior semesters, did more families attend SAICs once training began?

Data were collected from October 2022 on parent participation at SAICs before the intervention began and compared to the data collected in January 2023 after the book study concluded. Families who participated in the SAICs were different pre and post intervention. However, the use of motivational interviewing techniques began with families during initial phone calls to discuss attendance matters and to invite parents to the SAIC meetings beginning in November 2022. The results were as follows:

Table 4. Family Participation at SAICs



There was an increase in parent participation in SAIC meetings this school year (2022-

23) after completing the book study and staff implementing Motivational Interviewing techniques. However, parent participation, when compared to prior school years, did not increase substantially. For example, the parent participation rate in the 2018-19 school year was 50% and measured at 51% for January 2023. After the COVID pandemic, parent participation decreased. In the 2019-20 school year, SAIC meetings were held through February 2020, and the parent participation rate at these meetings was 47%. During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, the parent participation rates were 36% and 41% respectively.

4.5 Program Evaluation Question #5: Once trained, did staff report changes in family engagement in SAICs?

The truancy officer completed a brief survey following each SAIC measuring family engagement (Appendix I). Data were compared from October 2022, which was before the intervention began, to November and December 2022, which was during the intervention. Data were also compared to January 2023, which was following the intervention. Parents' participation in the conversation regarding identifying root causes of truancy was rated from 1-5 using the following scale.

- 1 - Only answered closed-ended questions
- 2 - Shared when asked direct questions
- 3 - Offered affirmation or agreement with what was being said
- 4 - Dialogued back and forth with minimal prompting
- 5 - Fully engaged in the conversation with no prompting, may have asked questions

The data collected are displayed in the table below.

Table 5. Family Engagement Survey Results

	# Families who participated in a SAIC	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4	Score 5	Mean Average
October 2022 (Pre-Intervention)	3	0	1	1	1	0	3
November/December 2022 (During Intervention)	11	0	3	2	2	4	3.6
January 2023 (Post Intervention)	19	0	1	4	6	8	4.1

The truancy officer did observe an increase in parent participation in identifying the root causes of truancy. Family participation was ranked a Likert score of 3 pre-intervention in contrast to 4.1 post-intervention.

4.6 Summary

This program evaluation successfully collected data to answer all five of its guiding questions. Staff who were trained in Motivational Interviewing successfully learned content, and they each reported feeling more confident in implementing Motivational Interviewing skills to better collaborate with families. Additionally, the content that staff struggled to learn was identified so that it could be retaught, and all staff showed they mastered the content as evidenced by scoring a 100% on the post quiz during Module 3. Also, the truancy officer rated families' engagement during SAICs to be higher after the intervention was implemented compared to before the professional development began. Lastly, although there was a slight increase in families attending SAICs during this school year, there was not a meaningful increase when compared to the 2018-2019 school year. However, when compared to years following the

pandemic, there was an increase. In the 2019-20 school year, SAIC meetings were held through February 2020, and the parent participation rate at these meetings was 47%. During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, the parent participation rates were 36% and 41% respectively.

5.0 Discussion and Implications

The results of the program evaluation questions were addressed in Section 4. This section includes a discussion of key findings and anecdotal findings in addition to recommendations for future professional development.

5.1 Key Findings

This study provided key findings educators can consider when trying to improve family attendance and participation at Student Attendance Improvement Conferences (SAICs). This section will discuss those findings.

5.1.1 Staff Growth

The four staff who participated in this program evaluation reported they felt more confident in engaging, guiding, evoking, and planning with families after completing the three-module professional development on Motivational Interviewing. The research states families have asserted they would participate in school functions more often if they felt genuinely welcomed (Sheldon, 2007). Staff reported the use of Motivational Interviewing techniques to help provide a framework for welcoming families. Consequently, this professional development helped change the school staff's practice so that families can be more welcomed.

Additionally, all staff scored 100% on the post quiz after Module 3. This quiz covered content from Modules 1, 2, and 3. Within each module, the staff showed growth as well when scores were compared from the pre-quiz to the post-quiz. Therefore, all four staff demonstrated they learned the content covered in the professional development.

5.1.2 Changes in Family Engagement During SAICs

Prior to staff completing the Motivational Interviewing professional development, the truancy officer rated most families' engagement in SAIC meetings as sharing only when asked direct questions or providing agreement with what school staff stated. However, after the staff completed the training modules, the truancy officer rated more parents engaged in the meetings as evidenced by them dialoguing back and forth with minimal to no prompting and even asking questions. The data collected in this program evaluation shows the use of Motivational Interviewing techniques by school staff may increase family engagement.

5.2 Anecdotal Findings

5.2.1 Staff Reports

The staff who participated in the professional development reported a positive experience. They believe they are better equipped to help others embrace change now that they are trained in Motivational Interviewing. The staff further report their relationships with parents and teachers are now more collegial in nature and that they feel like decisions are made as a team

and not in silos. Staff stated that prior to learning the framework of motivational interviewing, they always wanted to partner with families but did not necessarily have confidence or specific strategies to do so. They report now the framework of Motivational Interviewing has helped increase their confidence in interacting with families. They further state they now have strategies available to them to facilitate open-ended conversations, which are solutions focused.

5.2.2 Truancy Officer

The truancy officer appreciates the structure of the SAIC meetings now, especially with the incorporation of the Motivational Interviewing techniques. She believes the agenda creates a framework to identify the root causes of attendance concerns and empowers families and students to be part of the solution. She further reports that before adopting this agenda, the conversation at the SAICs typically focused on the problem of truancy rather than creative problem-solving. Before, she most often proposed solutions, and families would state they were in agreement. Now that the agenda with the incorporation of Motivational Interviewing is being used, families are more likely to offer suggestions; this shows families have more buy in.

5.2.3 Families

Families reported they enjoyed the discussions in the SAIC meetings. One family member commented that they typically feel like they are lectured at during school meetings, but they felt comfortable sharing at this meeting. Another family member reported they appreciated being able to participate in a conversation that was solutions-focused rather than only talk about the problem.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Practice

An essential aspect of Improvement Science is to reflect on one's results and make changes for the future (Mintrop, 2016). This section provides a discussion regarding recommendations for improvement.

5.3.1 Train Additional Staff Members

There seems to be improvement regarding engaging families in richer conversations when staff employ Motivational Interviewing techniques. Given the positive reports from the staff and families who experienced the Motivational Interviewing techniques, the district should consider training additional staff members in Motivational Interviewing.

Despite the demands on school administrators and special education teachers (Kelly, 2020), district personnel have asked to be trained in Motivational Interviewing. The administrators who participated in this training found it so valuable they have called for ongoing training and have stated they would like to learn more advanced skills. Moreover, the special education teachers have requested to be trained in Motivational Interviewing because they believe this will help them at their Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meetings.

5.3.2 Follow Up Professional Development

Quality professional development should not be "one-and-done sessions" but should have ongoing follow-up so that practitioners can continue improving their skills. These follow-up sessions do not need to necessarily be formal trainings but can be informally reviewed during

staff meetings, newsletters, and even one-on-one conversations sessions among teachers and administrators.

5.3.3 Shift from Asynchronous to Synchronous Learning for All Modules

The professional development was completed in three modules. The first module was completed asynchronously, and the second and third modules were completed synchronously. Participants informally reported they preferred the synchronous sessions and thought it harder to learn the new concepts through the asynchronous module. Therefore, if resources allow, it may be best to offer the training synchronously. If that is not possible, additional supports should be added to the first module to help convey the information more clearly. The participants informally reported the role play activities during the third module were the most helpful part of the training, so other role play opportunities may want to be considered.

5.4 Summary

Training school personnel in the use of Motivational Interviewing showed favorable results as evidenced by staff who expanded their skill set and families who began participating in meetings more meaningfully.

Staff engaged in only ten hours of professional development in Motivational Interviewing with these outcomes.

- Staff's confidence in collaborating with others grew.
- Families felt more welcome at the school meeting.

- Families reported they were active, equal team members at the school meeting.
- The truancy officer observed families participated more actively in the meetings and dialogued back and forth with minimal to no prompting.
- The truancy officer reported the agenda change utilizing the Motivational Interviewing techniques resulted in richer conversations that were more solutions oriented.
- More families participated in the SAIC meetings compared to the two years since the COVID pandemic.
- Other staff have requested to be trained in Motivational Interviewing due to hearing the positive results the training has had on their colleagues.

6.0 Conclusions

Improving school attendance has been a popular topic in education for at least two decades (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). As discussed earlier in this paper, regular school attendance directly correlates with students graduating, having job placement as an adult, and refraining from legal troubles; therefore, school attendance is a meaningful conversation. Nonetheless, because it is such a complex issue, an intervention has not been identified that has helped improve truancy rates long term (Mallet, 2016).

Many truancy interventions are put in place without input from families. When school staff use Motivational Interviewing, families are more engaged in the conversation and become part of the designers of the solution. One family member, who experienced Motivational Interviewing during a SAIC meeting, reported, “I have always been told I am part of the school team but never felt like a team member. Today, I felt like an equal team member.”

Motivational Interviewing is a powerful tool in empowering families and readying them for change. I hope this dissertation in practice will inspire educators to remove barriers that prevent families from re-engaging in their children’s education.

Appendix A Fishbone Diagram for Improvement Science Root Cause Analysis

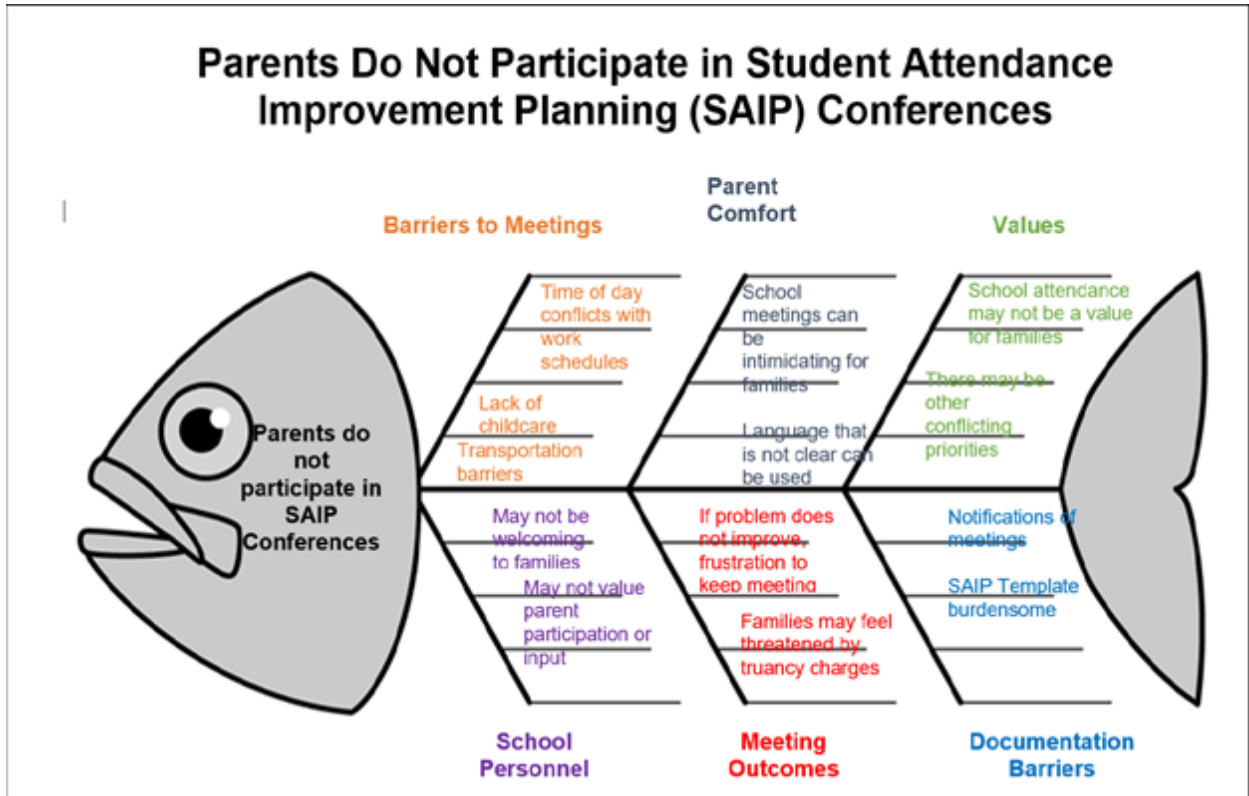


Figure 3. Fishbone Diagram

Appendix B Professional Development Module 1

Motivational Interviewing in Schools

Module 1 (asynchronous): Overview of MI

November 2022

Textbook:

Herman, K., Reinke, W. M., Frey, A. J., & Shepard, S.A. (2014). Motivational interviewing in schools: Strategies for engaging parents, teachers, and students. Spring Publishing Company.

Learning Targets:

1. I can define what motivational interviewing is.
2. I can identify when I can use MI strategies.
3. I can list and describe the four processes of MI.
4. I can list the OARS strategies that can help me actively listen.

Procedure:

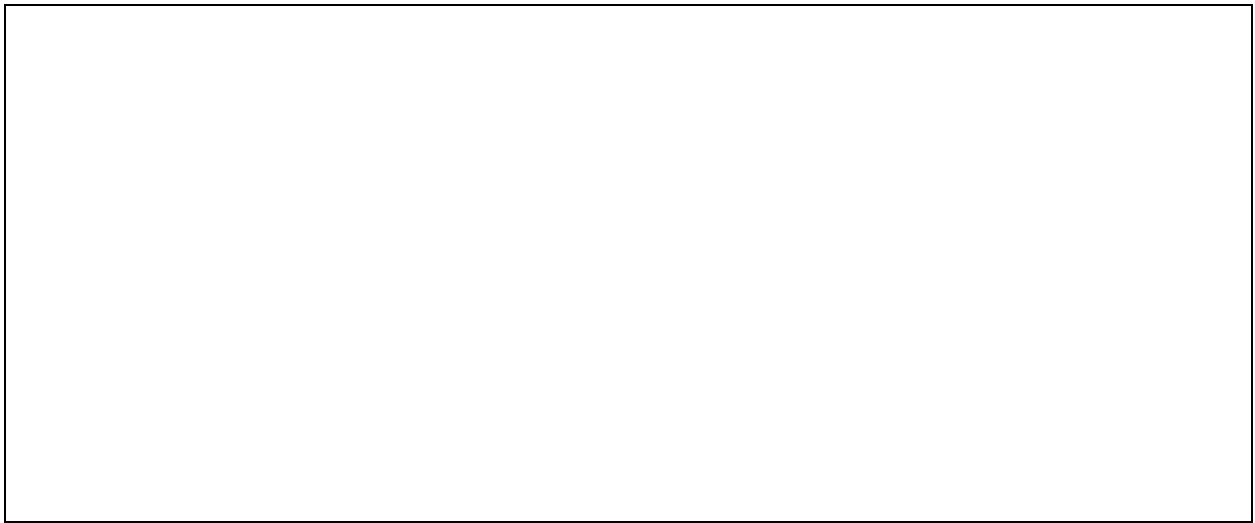
1. Complete Pre Test
2. Complete the K and W columns of the KWL Worksheet
3. Read Pages 3-9 and 13-31
4. Fill in L column of the KWL Worksheet
5. Reflect on own professional practices and experiences with this information by completing I used to think. . .Now I think Protocol/Worksheet.
6. Read Pages 39-69; complete 4 Processes of MI Graphic Organizer while reading
7. View and Listen to Module 1 PowerPoint Presentation
8. Complete the L column of the KWL Worksheet; star items in the W column that you still want to learn more about.
9. Complete Post Test

KWL Worksheet

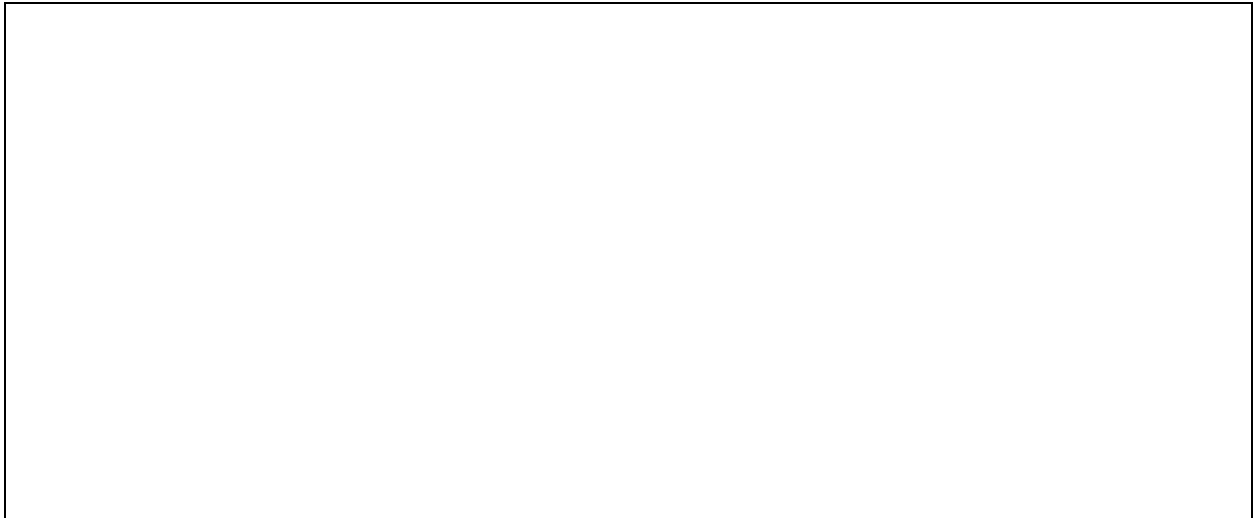
K- what I know about MI	W- what I want to learn about MI	L- what I learned about MI

I used to think. . .Now I think
Pages 20-31

I used to think

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their initial thoughts.

Now I think

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their current thoughts.

4 Processes of MI Graphic Organizer

Pages 36-69

Process	Purposes	Strategies	Takeaway Notes
Engaging			
Guiding			
Evoking			
Planning			

Appendix C Professional Development Module 2

Motivational Interviewing in Schools

Module 2 (live): Application of MI with Parents

December 2022

Textbook:

Herman, K., Reinke, W. M., Frey, A. J., & Shepard, S.A. (2014). Motivational interviewing in schools: Strategies for engaging parents, teachers, and students. Spring Publishing Company.

Learning Targets:

1. I can facilitate the values sort activity with families.
2. I can demonstrate the four processes of MI.
3. I can demonstrate the OARS strategies that can help me actively listen.

Procedure:

1. Complete Pre-Test
2. Re-teach information from Module 1 as needed.
3. Discuss and debrief the “I used to think. . .Now I think” activity from Module 1.
4. Review and Revise 4 Processes Graphic Organizer completed in Module 1 in pairs and comparing to [this resource](#).
5. Play Quizlet as a refresher to Module 1 content.
6. 4 groups jigsaw Chapter 4
 1. Group 1: pages 74-80 Engaging
 2. Group 2: pages 81-84 Focusing and Values Sort
 3. Group 3: pages 86-96 Evoking
 4. Group 4: pages 96-98 Planning
7. Discuss the 4 processes of MI pertaining to engaging with parents using attendance meetings as the case study; refer to graphic organizer from Module 1.
8. Values Sort Activity as a group (pages 100-101)
9. Introduction of SAIC Meeting Agenda
10. In groups of 3, role play an attendance meeting using the SAIC Meeting Agenda followed by a debrief discussion.
 1. Person A- school personnel/facilitator
 2. Person B- parent
 3. Person C- observer- after the role play is done, Person C shares observations and provides coaching to Person A. Person C helps facilitate the debrief discussion.
11. Switch parts and complete the role play/debrief discussion two more times so that everyone plays each part.
12. Complete Post Test

4 Processes of MI Graphic Organizer

Pages 36-69

Process	Purposes	Strategies	Takeaway Notes
Engaging			
Guiding			
Evoking			
Planning			

SAIC Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions
 - a. Name
 - b. Role
 - c. List one strength of student/family
2. Review data; correct any information if needed
3. Gauge family's interest
 - a. How important would you say it is for *student's name* to improve their attendance? On a scale from 0-10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important, where would you say you are?
 - b. Why are you at a X and not zero?
 - c. What would it take for you to go from X to a (higher number)?
4. Identify root causes of truancy
5. Brainstorm solutions
6. Gauge family's comfort with solutions.
 - a. How confident are you that you will meet this goal? On a scale from 0-10, where 0 is not at all confident and 10 is extremely confident, where would you say you are?
 - b. Why are you at a X and not zero?
 - c. What would it take for you to go from X to a (higher number)?
7. Review action items, time table, and who is responsible for each action item by completing the SAIC template.
8. Set a check in date.

Motivational Interviewing in Schools

Module 3 (live): Implementation of MI

January 2023

Textbook:

Herman, K., Reinke, W. M., Frey, A. J., & Shepard, S.A. (2014). Motivational interviewing in schools: Strategies for engaging parents, teachers, and students. Spring Publishing Company.

Learning Targets:

1. I can solicit information from a family member to better understand their goals and values.

Procedure:

1. Complete Pre Test
2. Reteach information from Module 2 as needed.
3. Read pages 157-161
4. Complete Activity 1 on page 1 of [this resource](#)
5. Role Play and practice using Handout 7.1 (pages 191-192) in small groups.
6. Jigsaw pages 169-178 in groups
7. Group 1: pages 169-172
8. Group 2: pages 174-175
9. Group 3: pages 175-178
10. Complete Activities 6 and 7 on pages 4 and 5 of [this resource](#)
11. Review [MI Reminder Card](#) together
12. Read pages 185-189
13. Role play a SAIC meeting without using MI techniques; role play using MI techniques.
Discuss the differences between the two conversations.
14. Role Play and practice using Handout 7.7 (page 200) in small groups.
15. Complete Activity 8 on page 5 of [this resource](#).
16. Complete Post Test

Appendix E Module 1 Quiz

Module 1: Overview of Motivational Interviewing Pre/Post Module Quiz

Date:

Participant Code:

True/False: On a personal level, we know that changing a behavior is not often as easy as simply wanting to do so.

True False

True/False: A basic tenet of Motivational Interviewing is that people are less likely to do things they say they will do than things they are told to do.

TrueFalse

A valid reason a person might not have for not talking about change is the person offering to listen has

Predetermined that the person has no interest in changing

Competing or incompatible agendas

Low expectations that involvement will actually help

All of the above

Which one of these is not part of the Unified Theory of Behavior Change?

Expectancies

Behavior

Social norms

Attitudes

Define LEAP Communication Skills

List 2 strategies the authors share to access the most engaging families

Fill in the blank: MI begins with the _____ that how one _____ with others strongly influences one's _____ and can be used to maximize _____ outcomes.

True/False: A key assumption of MI is that the more a person expresses language in favor of changing, including intention and commitment to do so, the more likely one is to change.

TrueFalse

True/False: MI only works separate from the context of a collaborative relationship.

TrueFalse

Name the 4 processes of MI.

OARS can be used to facilitate the engaging process. What does OARS stand for?

O
A
R
S

Select all that apply. Which of the following represent the spirit of an MI approach to dealing with behavior change?

Fostering partnerships

Persuading with logic

Providing compassion

Promoting ideas

Demonstrating acceptance

Directing the conversation

Judging proficiency

Maintaining evocation

Module 2: Specific Applications of Motivational Interviewing in Schools

Pre/Post Module Quiz

Date:

Participant Code:

The research states parents of students classified in these categories are least likely to participate in school meetings.

Students with diverse backgrounds and behavior problems

Students identified with an IEP or 504 plan

Students with medical needs

Students with diverse backgrounds or low economic status

Name 1 of 3 of the authors' lessons to be mindful of when working with families.

True/False: During the engaging process, school staff should engage in social conversation with families, which is the same as small talk.

True False

List a Value Question.

True/False: It is essential to distinguish between behaviors the parent has control over and those they do not have control over when brainstorming strategies to resolve an issue.

True False

Fill in the Blank: Using importance and _____ rulers are useful MI techniques to help wrap up the conversation.

Strategy

Confidence

Values

Behavior

True/False: Providing one solution rather than a menu of options for how a goal might be met makes it more likely a parent will follow through with a plan.

True False

Module 3: Monitoring Implementation Quality
Pre/Post Module Quiz

Name the four processes of MI.

OARS can be used to facilitate the engaging process. What does OARS stand for?

A coach's expectation of a parent's ability to change does not affect whether change occurs.

True False

If a parent resists talking about behavioral change, direct confrontation and persuasion are necessary.

True False

Readiness to make change is the parent's responsibility – no one can help the parent until the parent decides one is ready.

True False

Proficiency in MI requires the coach to use more reflections than questions.

True False

An indication of a successful motivational interview is the amount of change talk produced by the parent.

True False

Differentially responding to change versus sustaining talk is only necessary during the final phases of a motivational interview.

True False

Define LEAP Communication Skills.

List a Values question.

Staff Confidence in Collaborating with Families

This survey will be completed by the participants of the training on motivational interviewing before completion of the first module, at the end of the first, second, and third modules, and six weeks post-completion of the third module.

Date:

Participant Code:

Please rank responses using a scale of 1 – 5, with each number corresponding to the following scale.

- 1 – never confident
- 2 – rarely confident
- 3 – sometimes confident
- 4 – often confident
- 5 – always confident

How often do you feel confident about your skills in building rapport with a parent?

1 2 3 4 5

Engaging in MI means establishing a working relationship. How often do you feel confident about your skills in engaging?

1 2 3 4 5

Focusing in MI means defining a clear goal or objective. How often do you feel confident about your skills in focusing?

1 2 3 4 5

Evoking in MI means identifying why a change needs to occur. How often do you feel confident about your skills in evoking?

1 2 3 4 5

Planning in MI means developing a plan of commitment. How often do you feel confident about your skills in planning?

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix I Survey 2

Truancy Officer Post Conference Survey

This survey will be completed after each SAIC by the Truancy officer.

Date:

Grade of Student discussed:

Did at least one family member attend the SAIC?

Yes

No

If at least one family member attended the SAIC, how did the family member attend?

In-person

Via audio only

Via video and audio

If at least one family member attended the SAIC, on a scale of 1-5, how much did the family participate in the conversation regarding identifying root causes of truancy?

1. Only answered closed ended questions
2. Shared when asked direct questions
3. Offered affirmation or agreement with what was being said
4. Dialogued back and forth with minimal prompting
5. Fully engaged in the conversation with no prompting, may have asked questions

1 2 3 4 5

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